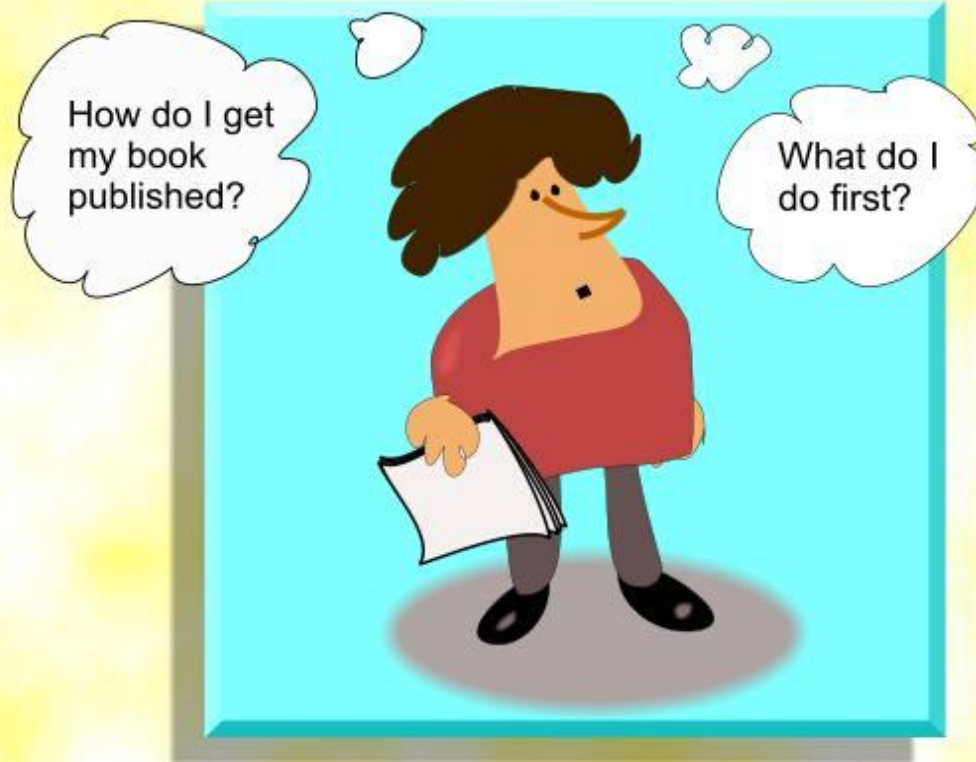


I WROTE A CHILDREN'S BOOK...

Now What???



A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO CHILDREN'S BOOK PUBLISHING

How to get started as a children's book author
What publishers want - and what they don't want
How the publishing business works
Tips for submitting your manuscript
Two questions to ask yourself
What an agent can and can't do for you
Income opportunities freelancers often overlook
Self-publishing - pros and cons

MIKE ARTELL

I wrote a children's book...Now what?

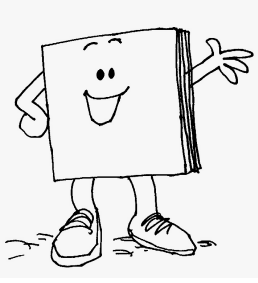
*Expert tips and proven techniques that will improve your chances
of being published and help you survive until you do.*

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By award-winning children's book author and illustrator

Mike Artell

Intro



No marketing program in the world is going to save a poorly written book. However, many well-written and well-illustrated books end up in the reject pile in the editor's office or in the remainder bins at the bookstores because they were marketed poorly. Even sadder is the fact that many talented writers never make a living at their craft because they never learn how to market *themselves* as well as their books. This book will help you avoid those mistakes.

I based the information in this book on two publishing laws I've learned from many years experience:

1. If you want a publisher to give you money for what you write or draw, then you must "market" your work to that publisher and to the people who buy the publisher's books.
2. If you are fortunate enough to have your book published, ***you must assume all the responsibility*** for marketing your book.

I've been in the publishing business full time since 1987. I started out as a freelance cartoonist and moved on to doing work-for-hire cartoons for a number of book publishers. My first children's books were published in 1991. As of this writing, I've had more than 35 books published. Thanks to my background in sales and marketing, the generosity of some very talented people and years of hard work, I've learned a lot about how to get my books published and how to survive as a self-employed author and illustrator. I wrote this book because I want to share some of what I've learned with you.

Understand this: **No one can guarantee your success.** That's why I didn't title this book, "How to get your children's book published." Because NOBODY can guarantee that you're going to get your children's book published. Becoming published is not like baking a cake - Just because you follow all the instructions doesn't mean you're going to be successful. It's a good idea to read several "how to become published" books so you'll know the basic rules and I encourage you to do so but even if you do everything the books tell you, you still may never convince a big-time publishing house (or even a "little-time" publishing house) to publish your book. But don't let that discourage you. Even though there are no guarantees, **you can radically improve your chances** of being published (and even making a living writing books) by thinking like a "marketer" as well as a writer.

I know the tips and techniques in this book will improve your chances of becoming a published author. I also know they will help keep you off the emotional roller coaster on which most writers are stuck. And once you've become a published writer, this

book will give you ideas for ways to leverage your success so that you can supplement your writing income with writing-related tasks.

Good advice can save you time and tears, but ultimately, it will be **your** talent, **your** enthusiasm, **your** creativity and **your** persistence that will make it happen. Don't ever forget that. It's not up to your spouse, your parents, your editor, your agent, your publisher, your local bookstore owner or this book to make you a success. It's up to you.

So...do you still want to learn how to market your book and yourself? Good! Let's get started.

Chapter 1

It's mostly marketing

I held a variety of jobs after graduating from college, most of which had one thing in common: they involved marketing and sales. Selling taught me how to prospect for new business, how to handle rejection and how to be persistent. Marketing taught me how to look at the big picture and how to create products and services that met the needs of my customers. I learned a lot in those jobs and I consider my skills as a salesman and marketer to be as important to my success as my writing skills.

When I began to freelance full time, I applied my sales and marketing skills to my new career. I already knew how to identify my markets, determine what the needs of the markets were, and provide a unique set of products and services that addressed those needs – all of which are the essence of marketing.

I still made many of the same mistakes most aspiring authors & illustrators make, but I took a “business” approach to my writing and that made the difference. For example, one of the things I did when I started freelancing was to spend much more of my time in the reference section of my local library than at my word processor or drawing table. I camped out in the children’s section of the library and read all the latest children’s books. I noted which type of books each publisher produced. I asked teachers and librarians what kind of books kids were reading and what kind of books THEY would like to see published for kids. I visited bookstore owners and spoke with book reps. I found out what people were buying and why. I asked questions about how publishers chose books and how the book business worked.

I still laugh when I think about what people must have thought when they saw a grown man (me) reading intently at a kiddie-sized table surrounded by dozens of children’s books. What I was doing (and continue to do) was gathering market information. I was looking at all the other “products” on the market and I was trying to figure out how I could make my “product” competitive and unique. I was not thinking so much like an author or an illustrator as a “marketer.” My techniques paid off. As this book goes to press, I’ve had more than 35 books published by some of the biggest publishers in the business.

Two big questions

If you’re writing books to **sell**, I suggest you begin by asking two questions: “Who am I writing for?” and “What do they want?” This is a little tricky because children’s book authors/illustrators must please a number of audiences. These audiences include:

- The child who reads the book
- The adult who buys the book
- The bookstore owner who stocks the book
- The publisher who invests money to publish the book

Note: this is only a partial list. Often distributors and other “middle men” have a role to play in the marketing of the book as well. Each of the people in the distribution chain has a different motivation for investing in your book.

Most aspiring children’s book authors/illustrators only think of the child when creating their book. That’s sweet, but it’s not smart. Why? Because before any child ever sees your book, an editor must acquire it, a publisher must publish it, a bookstore owner must decide to stock it, and an adult must choose your book from all the other books on the shelf.

In order to be successful you will have to learn to market yourself and your talent. You’ll have to become “marketing savvy.”

If this sounds a little too mercenary and “money grubbing” to you, I understand. Perhaps a little explanation of the book business would help. Read on.

The business of books

Your goal should always be to create wonderful books for children. I’m proud of my work and I’ve gotten many wonderful letters and emails from parents, teachers and kids telling me how much they love my books. Each year, I visit more than 50 schools across the U.S. where I share my books with kids and teachers and help kids understand just how talented and creative they are.

Many books have won awards and my local chapter of the International Reading Association recognized me for my contribution to literacy. Each year, I am honored to serve as the general session speaker at many literacy and educational conferences. I believe I have a responsibility to create wonderful books that entertain, inform and inspire my young readers. But in addition to creating wonderful books, I’m also trying to create wonderful books **that sell like hot cakes**.

Writing and illustrating books is, after all, what I do for a living. It’s not a hobby. It’s not an avocation. It’s how I pay my bills. I don’t take myself very seriously, but I take my work as a writer and speaker VERY seriously. My livelihood depends on it. If you’re serious about making a living (or even a serious income) as a writer, then you need to understand that publishing is a business.

Remember what I said at the beginning of this book...if you just want to write children’s books, then write them. **But if you want somebody to give you MONEY for you for what you write, then you must understand that you’re involved in a business relationship.** Like every other business, the publishing business has rules that you must follow, rules that you must occasionally break and rules that you must rewrite. The trick is to know which rules are which.

Try answering these questions:

- What is your attitude about business?
- How much do you know about business in general?

- Have you ever started a business?
- How do you feel about selling and sales people?
- Have you ever sold anything?
- Have you ever been in charge of promoting a product or service that was sold nationwide?

Were your answers mostly negative? Unfortunately, many creative people see sales and marketing people as money-grabbing crooks that don't care about anything but making money. When "creative" people visualize the typical salesperson, they often envision a loud, aggressive, backslapping bore that is trying to get them to buy a product or service they don't want.

Is that how you feel? If so, you may be disturbed to learn that we are all (YOU TOO!) salespersons. That's because selling is communication, just like writing. You may be "selling" your point of view, your know-how or your experience, but if you're a writer you've got to "sell" your reader if you want them to read what you've written. Now, here's the kicker: a successful freelancer must be more than a sales person; He or she must also be a "marketer."

Sales...Marketing... What's the difference?

In case you don't know the difference between Sales and Marketing, I'll give you a couple of quick definitions.

Sales is the process of identifying the needs of a prospect and determining which of your products or services meets those needs. The next step is communicating the benefits of your product or service in a way that your customers can appreciate. The final step is to move the customer to take some action (place an order). Selling can be done face-to-face as in a retail environment or it can be done via direct mail, over the internet or through television/radio advertising. That's sales in a nutshell.

In college, we "business types" called the sequence of events in the typical sales cycle, "AIDA." That acronym stood for Attention, Interest, Desire, Action. In every sales situation, you begin by getting someone's attention, then you pique their interest, fan the flames of desire for whatever it is you're selling and then get them to take action.

Everyone uses this sales cycle – and not just to sell products and services. Kids use it when they want a new video game:

Child: Mom! Mom! Mom!

Mom: Geez! Stop shouting! What is it? (The child now has Mom's ATTENTION)

Child: It's Unholy Bloody Massacre, that new video game I was telling you about.

Mom: You've already got too many video games and besides, they're too expensive.

Child: No fair! You said I could have a new video game if I got a good report card and I did. And look...It's on sale! (Mom is now INTERESTED. She can make good on her promise and do it at a discount.)

Mom: Wouldn't you rather look around a little and see if there's some other toy you might like better?

Child: No! Mom, really. If you get me this game, we can check out and go home. I won't ask you to wait while I look at all the other stuff. (Mom likes the idea of leaving ASAP. She's ready to check out and go home. She is feeling DESIRE).

Mom: (Sigh) All right. Put it in the basket. Let's just go. (Mom ACTS).

You can find similar examples of the sales cycle in any situation where people are communicating and attempting to get something they want or avoid an unpleasant situation.

Sadly, selling has gotten a bad rap. Selling is NOT trying to trick or bully somebody into purchasing something they don't want. It's not exaggerating the benefits of a product or service then leaving the customer holding the bag. Real sales people are true professionals. They spend most of their time doing the "up-front" work of qualifying their prospects.

Marketing is more comprehensive than sales. Marketing concerns itself with all the actions necessary to move an item or service from the producer to the ultimate user. Those actions include marketing research, product design, packaging, advertising/promotion, distribution, sales, customer service and much more. Marketing (when done correctly) will also generate ideas for the new products and services that people want.

If you're a writer of children's books you go through a sales cycle too. To an aspiring writer, the "selling" phase includes the query letter, the book proposal, the manuscript submission and the contract negotiations with the publisher. You must get an editor's attention, create interest in your manuscript, get the editor to want to go to bat for your manuscript, and then get the publisher to publish your book.

Marketing for writers/illustrators includes researching what kind of books the public is buying, investigating what kind of books different publishers are publishing, reviewing the publisher's latest catalog, visiting publishers web sites for up-to-date publishing industry information, brainstorming ways to leverage book ideas (e.g. spin-off products, etc.) and taking an active role in the promotion of your book after it's published.

Occasionally, I'll run across an author or illustrator who knows something about selling, but most don't know beans about marketing.

Do this.

Before you submit your manuscript to a publisher, do some marketing. In fact, do some marketing before you ever start writing your book. Do the “up front” work. Know your market; know your publishers.

Don't do this.

I've read many, many manuscripts written by people who have no idea what publishers or book-buying public are looking for. They write a story about something cute their pet did and assume that book buyers will eagerly pay money to read about it. They don't check beforehand to see if there's already a similar book on the market or if the publisher they're sending it to has ever published a book about cute pets. It never occurs to them that the book buyer's pet might do the same thing – only cuter. They may use language that talks down to the young reader, or language that is so formal and stiff (especially dialogue) that it sounds like a Victorian novel. Worst of all, they may write something that sound preachy, pedantic or condescending.

Many talented writers and illustrators make the mistake of submitting their work randomly to publishers in the hope that they'll stumble upon a publisher frantically searching for a writer with their unique style. Is it any wonder that these writers never get published and eventually become frustrated and discouraged? They're relying on LUCK and luck is a very fickle publishing partner. Sure, you'll need a little luck to be successful, but don't RELY on it.

I'll talk more about what to do after you're published, but first, let me give you another piece of advice. If you're fortunate enough to have your work published, don't assume anyone (agent, publisher, etc.) is more interested in marketing your book or artwork than you. Those other people are busy reading, editing and championing manuscripts. They certainly want you to be successful, but they will have little inclination to help you market your work. Believe it or not, your book is probably not their highest priority. Sorry, but that's the truth. More about this later.

Chapter 2

The cold, hard facts

**Cold, hard fact #1:
It takes time.**

I've heard stories of lucky writers who wrote a terrific, best-selling children's book on their first attempt at writing. I couldn't be more delighted for them. I don't *know* any of them, and I'm not sure they really exist, but the thought makes me happy.

Most of the writers and illustrators I know had to work long and hard before they were published. They got reams of rejections and spent weeks, months, YEARS honing their writing and marketing skills. Aspiring writers often have a romantic image of the way a book goes from a manuscript submission to a completed book. This romantic view is what I call *The Freelancer's Dream*. It goes like this:

Step 1. I write a children's book.

Step 2. All my friends tell me they love my story so I mail the book to a major publisher. An editor calls me immediately and breathlessly offers me a publishing contract with a huge advance.

Step 3. My book is immediately published and sells like hotcakes. The publisher's Author Appearance Coordinator works non-stop booking public appearances for me. People flock to my book signings hoping for a chance to touch the hem of my garment.

Step 4. The royalty checks start rolling in. I order the Lexus. What the heck...I order two Lexi.

Step 5. I meet Oprah. She likes my book so much, she cries. She gives everyone in the audience a copy – everyone in the VIEWING audience.

Step 6. People write and tell me how my book has changed their lives. I achieve celebrity status.

The Wake Up call

Yoo-Hoo! Dream's over! Here's a (slightly exaggerated) glimpse at how things *really* work:

Step 1. First, you study the market and you find out all you can about the children's book business. You find out what's being published and by whom and you study each publisher's catalogs and web sites to get a feel for what they're interested in.

Step 2. You write a great book. That part is easy, right? (ahem).

Step 3. You submit query letters or copies of your manuscript to a number of publishers based on the instructions in their manuscript submission guidelines.

If you have chosen to send your manuscript to publishers who do not accept simultaneous submissions, you must wait while each publisher, in sequence, considers your manuscript (Note: Styrofoam will biodegrade before most of these publishers will respond to you).

Step 4. An editor with some political clout within the publishing company sees your book as a potential big seller (and career booster) for him or her. Forsaking hundreds of other submissions, this editor brings your manuscript to an Acquisition Meeting.

Step 5. Your editor is able to convince the Sales, Editorial, Finance, and Production (and other) skeptics that your book is worth publishing. If the stars are aligned correctly and the publishing company hasn't been acquired by a major entertainment industry conglomerate in the last 8 hours, your book will be chosen for publication.

Step 6. You wait an inordinate amount of time while the publisher's attorneys prepare a very one-sided contract that assumes you are desperate to have your book published. Since you ARE desperate, you negotiate contract terms and conditions with the publisher. These negotiations consist of you saying "O.K." and signing the agreement.

Step 7. The editor requests a few "minor" changes to your manuscript. These minor changes require you to rewrite your book. In a gesture of magnanimity, the editor allows you to retain the spelling of your surname on the cover. Everything else has to be rewritten.

Step 8. The publisher schedules your book for publication. In order to save money, the actual printing and binding will take place in a country that is in political turmoil. The result is that the text on pages 28 through 52 is printed upside-down and the flaps on the lift-the-flap pages will neither lift nor flap. Your editor sends you an email explaining that these are common problems and they'll correct them in the next printing.

Step 9. After enough time passes for several species of reptiles to evolve into birds, your book will hit the bookstores. At this point, you may safely assume that your publishing house has spent its entire marketing budget on the corporate officers' trip to the Bologna Book Fair and Wine Tasting. The money that was budgeted for the promotion of your book will be spent on cannoli and Chianti thus leaving you to do your own book promotion at your expense. More about promotion later.

Step 10. Since most publishers publish twice a year, your book will have 6 months to become a bestseller. After that, the publisher will publish its books for the new season. Your publisher's efforts toward helping your book "make it" will consist of a 1" x 2" picture of your book somewhere in the bowels of the spring or fall catalog.

Step 11. If your book becomes a gigantic bestseller, you become the darling of the publishing world (see The Freelancer's Dream above). Your editor will begin pressuring you to write a sequel that is a photocopy of your original book with the exception of some updated adjectives and character names. If your book merely sells

well, or (heaven help you) sells not so well, the people in the editorial and (especially) promotions department will be stricken with a form of amnesia that renders them unable to recall ever having heard of you. If you appear at the publisher's offices, you'll be required to wear a bell around your neck and shout, "Unclean! Unclean!" as you sit in the lobby.

What are your chances of being published?

The short answer is: slim. It varies by publisher, but based on info I've gotten from editors, major publishers publish approximately one book for every thousand manuscripts they receive. That'sum... about one chance in a thousand. Better than the lottery, but not a sure thing by any measure. But hey, don't be depressed Buck-O. In spite of the publishers' best efforts, thousands upon thousands of new books actually are published every year. Many of those books are written by first-time authors!

Here's more good news...small, innovative publishing companies are springing up all the time. They often address niche markets and they're looking for talented writers with a fresh approach. If you've got a special slant or style, your chances of being published will be vastly improved.

Please understand this point. The odds of having your children's book published and getting paid for it are very small, but that should not stop you. If you have a wonderful story to tell or information to share, then tell it and share it. Writing is an honorable profession, but it's also a wonderfully creative act even if you never are published or paid for your work. Do it because it's something you love to do.

Cold, hard fact #2:

Publishers only publish books if they think they can sell a lot of them.

You probably thought publishers publish books because the books are well written. Or maybe you think they publish books because they think the writer has a wonderful heart or because the writer has a long list of credentials. Nope. The truth is ***most publishers choose to publish the books they publish because (and only because) they believe that they can sell a lot of them.***

How many times have you flipped through a children's book in a bookstore or library and said to yourself, "This is pathetic! How in the world did this get published"? I do it all the time. The book may be poorly written or terribly illustrated, but if it's selling well, you can bet that the publisher is going to keep it in print and the bookstore will keep it on the shelf.

The prime example of this phenomenon is "celebrity" books. I won't mention names, but with few exceptions, the ability to act, sing or excel at sports appears to preclude the ability to craft a well-written children's book.

Keep in mind is that I didn't say publishers don't want well-written books by thoughtful writers. They do. But the purpose of a publishing company is to provide

readers with books. At some point in the distribution process SOMEBODY has to pay for the books that are written, edited, laid out, printed and distributed. The buyer might be an individual reader or it might be a local library system but the books must be SOLD to someone. If readers don't buy large numbers of the publishers' books, the publisher will eventually go out of business.

YOU may be a writer, but the publisher is a BUSINESSPERSON. And as such, he/she has to make a reasonable profit or he/she will be out of a job. Most of the publishers I know have a deep personal interest in getting a regular paycheck. That means they're going to publish books that they believe will sell.

I know some of you are protesting that there are small, artsy presses that are not "bottom line" oriented. That's true and aspiring writers should be aware that those publishers exist. If you write avant garde poetry or some other unusual type of work, those presses might be just what you're looking for. This book is not for those writers. This book is a guide for aspiring writers interested in the mainstream children's book market.

O.K. Everybody stop!

Catch your breath. You probably realize by now, this is not a book about how to be a better writer or illustrator. I assume that you're already a terrific writer or illustrator and that the quality of what you're submitting to publishers is equal to or better than what other writers and illustrators are submitting. This book is about how you can improve your chances of being published and make a LIVING as a writer or illustrator.

Two goals

This book has two goals: The first is to help you understand the importance of considering the publisher and book-buyer's needs before you ever submit your manuscript. Remember, I said earlier that after you've identified your market, you must determine what that market's needs are. If you are an agented writer, your agent can help you. Otherwise, you're going to have to do all of your own marketing research. The market research never stops, and you'll be responsible for doing it.

The second goal of this book is to give you some ideas for making a living as a writer while you're waiting for those big, fat royalty checks to start rolling in.

You CAN become published and you CAN make a living as a writer. Always remember that. To do so, you must spend a healthy portion of your time thinking like a publisher and a book buyer. Here are some ideas that will help.

How to create books that publishers want to publish

The publishing industry is huge and it contains hundreds of genres and market areas. Before you begin writing, it's important to decide which group of readers you're targeting. Are you writing non-fiction books for elementary school-aged children? Are you writing "series" books for Young Adults? Do you write folk tales in rhyming verse?

Begin by deciding who your readers are, then decide which publishers would be interested in your work.

Find out what kids are reading. Read PUBLISHERS WEEKLY (available online at www.publishersweekly.com) to see what's happening in the publishing business.

Does it make you uncomfortable to “gather information about your market?” Do you feel like you're doing something sneaky or dishonest? Is a little voice whispering that you're doing something you shouldn't? Don't feel that way. It is perfectly reasonable and right to find out how this business works and why people are buying books. You're not being sneaky. Everyone has access to this information – that's why it's so easily available. You wouldn't feel bad about getting information about a city and its schools and neighborhoods before you move there. It's the same thing with marketing research. You're trying to get the “lay of the land” before you commit.

Remember that your goal is not to crank out schlock that publishers and consumers can be tricked into buying. **The goal is to create wonderful books that sell well.** Both elements of that goal statement are important:

The goal is to...

1. create wonderful books
2. that sell well.

You've already spent countless hours working on your manuscript. Now its time to work just as hard on marketing it. Getting information on your markets will benefit you (saving you time and frustration), the publisher (they won't have to read manuscripts that don't address the interests of their readers) and the readers (you'll get them the book their looking for much faster). Everyone wins.

Where to get information about your markets

Now that you understand how important it is to get information on your markets, where do you find that information?

If you live in New York City and have a best friend who is an editor of a major children's book publisher, gathering marketing information is easy. Just tap into your buddy's network. Unfortunately, most of us don't have a buddy in the business. We have to gather market information from other sources. Here are a few sources of I've found very helpful:

The Internet

The Internet is the most valuable source of marketing information in the world. The Internet is an integral part of our lives. We use it to shop, to do our banking and to email every dumb joke we hear to all of our friends.

I'll give you an example of just how valuable a research tool the Internet has been to me. When I was writing my book, *STARRY SKIES*, I needed information about the radio telescope in Arecibo, Puerto Rico. I went to my local library and was able to find some sketchy background information, but I needed some specific questions answered. So I went home, logged onto the Internet and did a search on the words "radio telescope" and "Arecibo, Puerto Rico."

The telescope's web site came up, complete with an email address. I emailed my questions to the scientists at the telescope and they responded within 24 hours with the exact information I needed.

Naturally, you have to use good judgment when using a tool as powerful as the Internet and email. You don't want to annoy people with issues that you could resolve easily by searching another site or two. However, when it comes to finding out almost any bit of information on almost any subject, you just can't beat the Internet.

Because the Internet is so open and accessible, a lot of what is portrayed as "fact" is just junk. When I'm researching material for one of my non-fiction books, I make sure that the source is reliable. Government and university sources can usually be trusted. Radical political or religious groups cannot. Think before you write. Be sure that the information you're including in your book is solid.

The communications capabilities of the Internet are also impressive. During the time I was writing that same book (**STARRY SKIES**), I emailed my ideas and comments to my editor and the book's designer (and they to me) regularly. When it came time to submit the final manuscript, I emailed it as well. Although we live in three different cities, we were able to coordinate the entire development of the book without any person-to-person meetings and with very few phone calls.

Recently, I purchased a graphics tablet and began using it to draw cartoons and illustrations on my computer screen. When I've tweaked the images to my satisfaction, I save them as JPEG files and email them to my publisher with the manuscript. No paper, no ink, no paint.

I've created several books and had them published without ever meeting the editor or the art director and without mailing or FedExing anything to anyone. We did it all over the Internet.

We live in amazing times.

Search engines

Although the amount of information on the Internet can be a little intimidating, my best advice to you is to jump right in. Using your favorite search engine, do a search on the words "children", "books" and "publishers." Recently, I tried this with a few of the search engines I use regularly and received several million hits from each search engine.

In reality, not all of those hits are publishers' sites. Some are magazine or newsletter articles containing the three words, "children", "books" and "publishers." But you can bet that a large percentage of those sites will either be publishers' sites or will contain valuable information about children's book publishers.

There are many different search engines and directories on the Internet. Each one has its strengths and weaknesses. If you want to check out a variety of search engines on the web, simply go online and do a search on the phrase, "search engine." You'll have lots to choose from. Try each one of them out, and then pick the ones you like best and add them to your list of favorite sites.

Just about every publisher has a web site, even the small publishers. Spend some time visiting publishers' sites. Check out their online catalogs. Try to determine if there is a pattern in what they're publishing. Do they like "talking animal" books? Are they big on "spiritual" books? Do their books appeal to a certain age group or ethnicity?

If a publisher's catalog doesn't include any lift-the-flap toddler books (and that's what you write), then don't submit anything to that publisher before you write a query letter asking if they would be interested in seeing your lift-the-flap manuscript or artwork.

Ezines, Blogs, Podcasts and Newsletters

There are also some good online electronic magazines, blogs and newsletters about the publishing industry. Here are some:

http://chickenspaghetti.typepad.com/chicken_spaghetti/

<http://www.write4kids.com/>

<http://www.justonemorebook.com/>

<http://www.cynthialeitichsmith.com/>

<http://childrensbookradio.com/>

Writers' magazines

The various "hard copy" writers' newsletters and magazines can also be good sources for market info. There are many to choose from. Here are just a few:

Writer's Digest - <http://www.writersdigest.com/GeneralMenu/>

Writer's Journal - <http://www.writersjournal.com/>

The Writer - <http://www.writermag.com/>

I always like to find a brand new magazine or newsletter in my mailbox, but these days information moves at the speed of light and these hard copy publications tend to be less current than the information on web sites. Still, it's probably a good idea to subscribe to at least one writer's magazine or newsletter.

Directories

If you want to dig into some directories, the best are **Writer's Market, the Artist's Market, The Poet's Market** and **The Children's Writers and Illustrators Market**. These are big, thick books that contain more information than any writer/illustrator could possibly absorb in a year (they're published annually). I like the **Children's Writer's and Illustrator's Market** best because it "zeroes in" on the publishers that I work with most often.

In addition to all the "market" information, these books also have information about how to submit your work to publishers, how to negotiate contracts, what kind of tax rules apply to freelancers and much more.

While these "Market" books are great resources for established writers and illustrators, they're even more valuable for the aspiring writer who has no idea how to get started in the publishing business. And to tell you the truth, I just like the idea of having an industry reference book on my shelf for those times when I need to check an address or contact name. Most public libraries have current copies, but you'll probably want to buy a copy of your own. Check with your local bookstore.

Writers Groups

I'm sure there are local writers groups that are very helpful for aspiring writers, but I haven't had much success with writer's groups. In my experience, they tend to be "whining" sessions. "The publishers are so inconsiderate." "I can't believe what the editor said to me..." Waa! Waa! Waa! Sure, it may all be true, but whining about it doesn't get you any closer to being published. If you decide to become part of a writer's group, be sure that the people in the group are going to be a source of encouragement and inspiration to you. Don't let them drag you down.

There are also writers chat groups online where aspiring writers can share information about publishers that are actively looking for new material. Rather than list any here (the Internet changes too fast), just go to Google and do a search on the words, "writers," "chat," and "rooms."

You can also go to MSN.com, Yahoo or other search engine and click on "GROUPS." From there, you can do a search on the word, "WRITERS" and you'll find lots of writers' info and chat rooms.

Conventions, conferences and workshops

Conventions and conferences are also good place to gather marketing info. I live near New Orleans, which is a big convention town, so I'm fortunate to have a number of

major book-oriented groups hold their conventions here regularly. These conventions are great opportunities to see what kind of materials the publishers are publishing and to talk with industry personnel about what they see on the horizon. These conferences and conventions also have sessions for writers and illustrators on a wide variety of subjects. If you make one or two of the big conventions each year, you'll be "mining" the information you gather for weeks.

Libraries and bookstores

Most of the larger public libraries have Children's Librarians (aka Media Specialist). If you run across a good Librarian/Media Specialist, you've found a great resource. These people know books and they know kids. Talk with your local Children's Librarian/Media Specialist about the books kids are checking out. Ask how they decide which books to include in their collections. That will give you a hint as to the kinds of books you should be writing. Don't forget to ask about new upstart publishing companies that might be looking for manuscripts to fill-out their list.

Next to the Internet, school librarians/media specialists and teachers are my best sources of information about kids and books. They work with kids everyday. A teacher or school librarian/media specialist that is enthusiastic about your work can spread the word very quickly. Many of the most famous "series" books gained a lot of their early momentum from kids and teachers sharing books with their friends at school, not because of any marketing help the publisher provided. School librarians and teachers are aware of new trends and can supply you with a lot of good info.

Your local bookstore owners can also be a great source of information regarding book-buying trends. Unfortunately, many of today's "big box" mega-bookstores are staffed by well-meaning (but clueless) sales people who haven't been trained and don't know Dr. Seuss from Dr. John. They won't be much help. You're better off talking with the owners of small, independent bookstores. These people know books and they know what their customers are looking for. They're a dwindling species, but they're always glad to talk about books.

Writers' Organizations

There are some wonderful writers/illustrators organizations that provide their members with timely info on markets and techniques for becoming better writers and illustrators. The best in my opinion is The Society of Children's Books Writers and Illustrators. This organization has chapters all over the U.S. The SCBWI chapters usually have at least a few (and sometimes many) published writers and illustrators in their membership and these people can be a great resource for one-on-one advice. Log onto www.scbwi.org and see if there's a local chapter in your area. If there is, join it.

**Cold hard fact #3:
You must learn to live with rejection.**

Sometimes, regardless of how carefully you study and address the needs of your market, your manuscript or artwork will be rejected. Wait a minute...did I say "sometimes?" Make that, **ALMOST ALL OF THE TIME** your manuscript or artwork will be rejected. The good news (yes, there is good news) is that the rejections may not have anything to do with the quality of your work or even the needs of the market.

It's a numbers game

Never forget that you're always playing a numbers game. The "numbers" I'm talking about include the huge numbers of submissions, both solicited and unsolicited, that publishers receive each year. The "numbers" also include the decreasing numbers of small bookstores that are in business. The "numbers" also include the decreased numbers of publishers willing to try something new.

Consider this: It costs almost nothing to enter the freelance writing/illustrating business and everyone who has ever owned a puppy thinks he or she has a wonderful idea for a book. If you want to be successful, you're going to have to figure out what your target market wants and makes you and your writing/illustrating unique. Then, you're going to have to "sell" that uniqueness to a publisher. Figuring out what makes your work unique (i.e. developing your own "style") will take time. Don't let that discourage you.

Technology has sped up every aspect of our lives. Television commercials used to last one minute. Then they became thirty seconds long. Today, fifteen-second ads are not uncommon. This has helped to make our society impatient. This impatience – this desire to have everything NOW! – can work against you.

Accept the fact that your success is going to take time. Inevitably, if you keep studying your markets and creating products (books) that your market wants, you **MUST** succeed.

The truth is that manuscripts are often rejected for reasons over which writers have no control. For example, if you're a children's poet, the publisher you send your manuscript to may be up to its ears in rhyming verse. In that case, your manuscript will be rejected. The rejection doesn't mean your poetry is bad; your submission was rejected because the publisher was overstocked with rhyming verse.

Another publisher may have a moratorium on talking animal stories and your book is about Vinnie the Verbose Viper. As soon as the editor sees that your story involves a talking critter, he/she will send it back to you. It's not personal; it's just a bad "fit" at that moment.

Query letters can help you avoid some of this kind of frustration, but most publishers' real needs are hard to identify.

The editor who reads your manuscript also plays a big part in this little drama. Even though your story is perfect for a particular publisher, the editor that is championing your manuscript at the acquisition meeting may not have enough internal political influence to push it through the acquisition committee. There may be competing manuscripts championed by editors that are more influential. Those editors will get publishing priority. It stinks, but it happens.

As with most businesses, there is political maneuvering in the publishing world. You can avoid some of the political junk by working with smaller publishers. Smaller publishers won't give you as big an advance as larger publishers, but they'll be a lot easier to work with. You'll get to know your editor and he/she will be much more willing to offer advice. I usually suggest that aspiring authors forego the "big guys" and submit their manuscripts to smaller publishers. Readers don't care who published the book; they only care about the content. As long as a publisher can get your book on the store shelves, it doesn't matter how big a publisher it is.

In the end, you may never find out exactly why a particular publisher rejected your manuscript. As gamblers know, the "house" always has the advantage, but you can increase your odds of being published you study the game and learn how it is played.

The Secret

I will now share with you the most insightful bit of advice you'll find in this book. It's a secret so powerful and so profound that most aspiring authors and illustrators never fully grasp its meaning. Close your eyes. (Nope, that won't work...now you can't read) O.K., close one eye. Breathe deeply. Ommmmm...Are you ready? Here is the most insightful and profound thought in this book:

Don't quit.

Don't quit. Don't quit. Don't quit. Let me say it again, "Don't quit." Did you expect something more profound? Sorry. That's as profound as it gets. The fact is there are tons of talented writers out there. Some of them have excellent marketing skills yet they spend tons of time and marketing themselves and their work with little success.

In addition to being talented and clever, you also have to be persistent. Most people never get published because they become discouraged and quit. They have the talent and they understand how the business works. They just don't have the persistence.

When you receive a cascade of non-stop rejection slips, it's easy to become discouraged. You wouldn't be human if it didn't bother you a little. You have to dig deep and find reasons to persist. You have to discover (or create!) ways to avoid becoming disillusioned. You must become unstoppable.

Remember (and here's more good news), *there is no failure in this business*. There is plenty of rejection, but there is no failure. If you keep writing and submitting your work, if you keep improving your skills and developing your knowledge of the markets, you will inevitably learn what you need to learn. At some point, your timing will be

perfect and you'll connect with the right publisher who will have a need for what you've written. That's not just warm and fuzzy, feel-good optimism. It's the truth.

When a baby begins to walk and he or she falls, we don't call the child's inability to walk "failure". When a major league baseball player fails to get on base 60% of the time he comes to bat, we don't call that "failure" either. In fact, a .400 average will probably win you the batting title. Learning to walk or learning how to hit a fastball doesn't happen overnight. It takes time and diligence. It takes skill and determination. The same thing is true of getting published.

The six-call average

When I made my living as a salesman, I learned that it typically took six sales calls on a customer before that customer purchased anything from me. Were those first five sales calls wasted? Of course not. In those first five sales calls, I formed a relationship with the prospect. I learned how the prospect ran his/her business. I found out who the key players were. Inevitably, I became a resource for the prospect. The prospect began to see me as someone who could help him/her actually MAKE money.

Instead of bemoaning the fact that 99% of what you're sending out gets rejected, work on improving your marketing skills and learn to do a better job of identifying publishers that are more likely to publish your manuscript. Find a way to be unique, clever, fresh and MARKETABLE.

Sleeping above Santa

Occasionally, it's hard to be certain that you've succeeded in publishing. Sometimes even **after** you have a contract, you may find that success has eluded you. It happened to me. Here's the story.

I sent some art samples to a major trade book publisher and explained that I'd like to illustrate the classic children's story, 'T'WAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS in my "torn paper" technique. The art director had me jump through the compulsory hoops, but bye-and-bye we negotiated a contract. The publisher gave me a small advance and I began to work on the project.

It didn't take long for me to realize I was in over my head. The art director was very demanding and the project required much more work than I had anticipated. It took me about 4 months (working part time) to complete the project, but I consoled myself with the knowledge that I would be getting royalties that would more than compensate me for my efforts.

Just as I was almost finished illustrating the book, the art director phoned me and explained that the company had decided to "change directions" and that they would not be publishing my book. She said the good news was that I was free to sell my book to another publisher and they would even let me keep my little advance (Gee thanks). I was so disgusted that I shoved the entire Christmas project under my bed.

About two years later, I signed with an agent and I mentioned to her that my wife and I had been sleeping above a complete set of illustrations for a 'T'WAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS.

She got very excited and asked me to send her color copy samples of the art. She took the samples to several publishers and soon landed us a contract. The publisher even added some "glow in the dark" ink on the pages to make the torn paper illustrations more attractive. The book was quickly named a "Pick of the Lists" by **Publisher's Weekly** and was used by the cast of the (now defunct) television show, FULL HOUSE during their Christmas show. It also sold very well.

My book **PETITE ROUGE - A Cajun Red Riding Hood** was ranked #5 among the Top 76 children's books for the year 2001 by the American Booksellers Assn. It won a number of other awards as well and has become a musical production that is being produced by theatre companies across the U.S.

When I originally wrote PETITE ROUGE, I began submitting it to all the big publishers. Every publisher that saw it rejected it. I believed in my story, so I decided to do an end run around the publishers. Rather than self-publish the book, I went into a studio and made an audio recording of me reciting the story with a Cajun accent. I sold the audio version of the story whenever I did any public speaking. Only after I had sold many copies of the audio recording did I self-publish a paperback version of the book. After I had sold most of the first printing of the book, my agent sent a copy of the book/audio combo to Dial Books and they accepted it. The entire process took me more than eight years. EIGHT YEARS!

The point here is that the publishing business is, by its nature, a roller-coaster ride. Sometimes the roller-coaster ride can take years. Can you be persistent? Can you "hang in there" when things are not going well? If you can't find a way, can you make a way?

Do you believe in what you're writing? Do you REALLY think it's good? Do you just KNOW that kids will love it? If so, then you owe it to yourself and to your book to use all your creativity, cleverness and persistence until you get it published.

Cold, hard fact #4:

If you fall in love with your manuscript, you'll end up heartbroken.

Many aspiring authors fall in love with their manuscript. They continually revise it, "tweak" it and show it to their friends until they have a huge emotional investment in the manuscript. I'm guessing you know at least one person who has spent years working on one children's book manuscript. That person might even be you.

Here's the problem with falling in love with a manuscript: as you continue to submit the manuscript to publishers and it continues to be rejected (which is the nature of the business, remember?), it's easy to become disenchanted with the whole idea of being published. I mean Geez... how much rejection can a person take? Who needs

the grief? There's a good chance that you'll begin to doubt your ability to write and eventually you'll give serious consideration to giving up.

The Cure

There is a cure for *amor d'manuscript*, and that cure is simple: **write something new**. There's nothing like a new project to reinvigorate you. In fact, you should regularly challenge yourself to write several new books or stories (or at least outlines) in a month or six weeks.

Even if what you write during these little "challenge" periods isn't your best work, it'll refresh your mind and renew your enthusiasm. Try writing some poetry. Alternatively, if you're a poet, try writing prose. Do a magazine article. Create some greeting card text. Write a limerick or a joke. Write an essay. Step outside of your comfort zone.

People who exercise regularly know that they have to vary their exercise routine from time to time to avoid boredom and to work different muscle groups. They have to cross-train. It's the same with writing or illustrating. You need to stay fresh.

Is that all there is?

Ask yourself, "Do I only have one story to tell? Do I believe there's only one book inside of me?" Your answer will probably be, "Of course not!" You're a creative genius! Instead of refining your one manuscript or piece of art *ad nauseum*, give it one last edit, kiss it goodbye, put it in the mail and get to work on something new. It will refresh your mind and renew your enthusiasm for writing.

Surprisingly, you may find that you actually get a fresh insight into your original manuscript by working on something new. It's happened to me more times than I can say. Just remember, **never, never, never** invest your hope or self-esteem in a single manuscript.

Cold, hard fact #5: Showing your manuscript to your friends is a waste of time.

Unless your friends own publishing companies, stop showing them your manuscripts and asking for their opinions.

Here's why: In all of recorded history, no friend has ever looked at another friend's manuscript and said, "You know, I read your manuscript and frankly, it stinks! I can't imagine why anyone would want to publish it."

Your friends know that if they said something like that, you'd never speak to them again. Friends are not objective; some of them would tell you your grocery list is wonderful writing. Relatives are even less honest. Except spouses. Spouses can often be brutally honest, God bless 'em.

Does it REALLY matter if your friends or relatives say your manuscript is wonderful? Sure, it feels good, but will their kind words bring you even one step closer to getting published? Nope. All their opinion does is massage your ego. There's nothing wrong with that, and if you're in a slump - what the heck - show your manuscript to a kind soul and sit back and soak in the praise. Just remember that what the friend says doesn't matter from a publishing point of view.

That cold, cruel editor may not tell you that your manuscript stinks, but he/she won't fib to you to make you feel better either. What that editor has to say might bruise your ego, but it'll be honest. Remember, publishing is a business. Say it over and over again: Publishing is a business. Publishing is a BUSINESS.

The exception

Although I think it's generally a waste of time to show your manuscript to non-publishers, there is one group of non-publishers who can be a valuable source of feedback and will gladly tell you what they think of your manuscript. Those people are young children in a classroom.

If you think editors are tough, try running your story past a classroom full of sugar-stoked second-graders. Have another adult (their teacher, the librarian/media specialist, an aide, etc.) read the story to the children while you sit in the back of the room. Don't tell them you're the author. Just let them react naturally to the story.

If they start looking up and counting ceiling tiles a few minutes into the story, it's a good bet that your story needs some more work. On the other hand, if they sit attentively during the story and then shout those magic words, "READ IT AGAIN!", then you can be pretty certain you've got a winner.

Once again, your anonymity is important. If they know you wrote the story, they may respond politely to avoid hurting your feelings.

To sum it all up: show your work to editors, not to friends or relatives. From a business point of view, editors' opinions are the only ones that count anyway.

It will be easy to tell which of your friends really did like your book after it's published. The ones who truly liked it will show up at your book signings and buy some copies.

Chapter 3

The 4 ways publishers say, "No."

Publishers generate far more rejection slips each year than books. I am the recipient of my share (and several other writers' shares) of rejection slips. Some people save them; I don't. I don't need reminders of rejection.

Based on my years of being rejected more times and ways than I care to count, here are the most common ways I've found that publishers say, "No."

No #1.

"You're wonderful, your manuscript is wonderful, and I really, really wish we could publish your book, but we can't".

This most rare rejection consists of a personal letter written to you by the editor explaining in detail why he/she has decided to "pass" on your manuscript. This letter won't pay any bills, but you will have the satisfaction of knowing that the editor actually knows who you are and he/she will probably take a very close look at your next submission. You won't get many of these kinds of rejections, so follow-up quickly with more submissions to this editor (this is another good reason to have several projects in the "pipeline" at once!).

No #2.

"No, but keep sending us stuff like this. You're on the right track."

This rejection consists of a form letter rejection slip with a short, handwritten note in the margin from the editor encouraging you to try again. This generally means your manuscript didn't get too far along the approval process, but the editor liked your work. Keep sending this editor stuff. And do it soon.

No #3.

**"Dear (name):
Thanks, but no thanks."**

This is by far the most common type of rejection. It is commonly a simple form letter or half sheet ("We didn't want to waste a whole sheet of paper on you.") of paper with a curt statement of fact - "Your submission doesn't fit our current needs blah, blah, blah" - and no personal note. Expect lots of these. The rejection is not personal. Don't try to read any hidden meaning into the rejection slip. Just file it, grumble, and move on.

No #4.

" Submission? What submission?"

This is rare, though not unheard of. After waiting several months for a reply to your submission, you call the publisher. When you finally get connected to the Associate Aide to the Deputy Under-Assistant Para-Editor tells you they have no record of your submission and they're not even convinced you actually exist.

On more than one occasion, after I had waited many months for a response, I contacted an editor and left a message requesting info about the status of my manuscript. Several weeks later after receiving no reply, I wrote a letter to the editor; Still no reply. After trying three or four times to get someone to give me some information about my manuscript, I simply gave up. On one of these occasions, I was inquiring about a manuscript that an editor **requested** me to send to her. Was I ticked-off? Yep. Nevertheless, the fact is that once you mail your manuscript or sample artwork to a publisher, about all you can do is cross your fingers and wait. That's why it's so important to work on a number of projects simultaneously.

I told you a story earlier of how bad things can happen even AFTER you get a contract. Here's another example: I once got a contract to write and illustrate a book for an early childhood educational publisher. I did all the illustrations in full color and sent them to the art director. Several weeks later, I got a very sheepish call from one of the editors confessing that they had received my artwork but they had lost it. They had turned the place upside down and simply couldn't find it. Although they paid me to redo the art, it wasn't half as much fun to do the same drawings and paintings the second time around.

If a editor claims that he/she has no record of your submission, go ahead and mope a while, then get back in the saddle and take heart in the knowledge that there are hundreds of other publishers eagerly (ahem) awaiting your submissions.

Cold, hard fact #6: An agent will not solve all of your problems.

"Gee, if I only had an agent, I could spend my time writing and he/she could deal with those pesky publishers and take care of all that marketing and contract stuff I hate to do."

Do those words sound familiar? Most of us have said those exact words to ourselves. Unfortunately, it ain't gonna happen. Agents can help you negotiate the details of a contract, but what makes them most valuable is their ongoing relationships with (and immediate access to) editors at major publishing houses. An agent can help, but if you place the responsibility for your success in the hands of any agent, you're setting yourself up for some big disappointments.

Agents in a nutshell
(or Nuts in an agent shell)

You must understand what motivates an agent. An agent is paid a percentage of your advances and royalties (15% is typical), and until he or she gets you a book deal, that agent makes no money from his or her relationship with you. If you've ever worked as a straight commission salesperson, you'll understand a little of what it's like to be an agent.

An author with a successful track record will find that agents are happy to talk about representing you. Everybody likes to be associated with a winner. On the other hand, if you're an unpublished author, an agent has to decide whether to spend a lot of time and money marketing you and your work to the various publishing houses. He or she has to do a lot of "missionary" work just to introduce your work to the editors and that can be very expensive for the agent.

Agents are a little like bankers. If you REALLY NEED money, most bankers are reluctant to lend it to you. However, if you have plenty of dough, lenders are falling at your feet. Think of agents as bankers and yourself as the person who needs the loan.

Agents take on "unknown" talent very reluctantly. In fact, if you're an "unknown" author or illustrator and some agent seems overly eager to represent you, a red flag should go up in your brain. Be very careful of entering into agreements with this kind of person and find out exactly how they plan to be of service and what it's going to cost you. Because it will cost you something.

How I found my agent

Here's how I found my agent, Ina Kahn. After I had had about seven books published by a small educational publisher (I started with a small publisher first), I decided that I needed an agent to help me break into the "big time." My first step was not to look through Literary Marketplace or other directories as most authors would do, or even to search the Internet. My first step was to call some of the editors I had met.

I figured that editors knew who the best agents were so I asked the editors I knew to recommend two or three agents that they respected and with whom they liked to work. By doing this, I avoided the possibility that I would become associated with an agent that the editors distrusted or disliked. This decision had nothing to do with my ability as a writer; I was thinking like a marketer. My "editor-oriented" approach to "agent hunting" probably saved me years of disappointment and lost time. And it ensured that I would get an agent who was well-thought-of by the editors with whom I wanted to work.

If you don't know any editors attend a meeting of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. They often have editors and/or agents as speakers and they are happy to talk (briefly) with you. More about SCBWI later.

After I got some names from the editors, I culled other agents from the Literary Marketplace directory. I ended up with 20 potential "matches" and mailed each agent a personal letter with samples of my work. About 12 agents responded. I talked with each of them on the phone and chose three that I thought were best for me. I then booked a flight to New York City and met with each of the agents in person.

The first two agents I met with were very nice and very professional. I had a nice, leisurely lunch with one and met with the other in her opulent office. The third agent and I had a hard time getting together because she was constantly out visiting editors. We kept leaving messages for each other on our answering machines (this

was before everybody carried cell phones). When we finally did meet, it was in a hotel lobby in between two sales calls she was making.

Guess which agent I chose? For me, the choice was easy. I wanted the agent who was actually out knocking on doors and meeting with editors. My decision proved correct. Since we began working together, my agent has gotten several lucrative book contracts for me with large publishing companies.

When it comes time for you to pick an agent, I suggest you ask people whom you respect for the names of reps that are honest, professional and busy.

Do your part

Should you be lucky enough to find a good agent, think of him or her as your personal sales rep. Like any sales rep, an agent needs a good product (your book) to sell and a supplier (you) who is willing to work with the customer (the editor) to solve the customer's needs.

You can't just dump a bunch of manuscripts on your agent and instruct him or her to "find a publisher" while you sit back waiting impatiently for a contract. You'll have to help your agent by submitting manuscripts that are fresh, interesting and well written. It should be your best work and you need to submit a steady supply of it if you want your agent to stay interested in marketing you.

You should always pass-on to your agent any helpful industry information you pick up at conferences and from other authors. And you should always be open to new book ideas your agent suggests. Keep your agent posted on any personal appearances you schedule. If your local newspaper, radio or TV station interviews you, send a copy of the article or recording to your agent. It can be a valuable promotional tool.

You can help yourself and your agent by building your relationships with editors. Drop them a congratulatory note if they are promoted or recognized in some way and thank them when they have shown you some consideration. If you're in town, arrange an appointment to say hello.

Don't just place the responsibility for these things in the hands of your agent. An agent can only do so much. You still have to do your part.

Chapter 4

Your publishing partners

If you want to be a self-employed author or illustrator, you must truly understand the relationship you have with the publishers, booksellers and the book buying public. Each has different needs and a “marketing savvy” author or illustrator will consider all of them.

Publishers

You (and other authors/illustrators) provide publishers their means of doing business. You are their raw materials provider. You’ve probably never thought of yourself like that before, but the analogy is a good one.

It’s important to understand what sort of “raw materials” a particular publisher needs before you ever submit your work. You can see why; if you don’t research your customer’s needs, you’ll end up like the guy who tried to make a living selling tomatoes to NASA. NASA has many needs, but tomatoes are not one of them. (Note: Please don’t write and tell me NASA needs tomatoes for its food service department. The point is, tomatoes are a small item in NASA’s budget). If you try to sell the wrong “raw materials” to your customer, you will only waste your time and theirs. Even the best quality products aren’t interesting to people who have no need for them.

Unfortunately, that’s what’s happening in the publishing business. Too many aspiring writers are submitting inappropriate manuscripts to publishers. Many publishers are overwhelmed by the number of submissions and have stopped accepting unsolicited manuscripts. They simply don’t have the time to slog through it all. When you submit a manuscript, make sure you’ve done your marketing in advance. Don’t waste your publishing partner’s time.

When you sign an agreement, your publisher will take your “raw material” and add value to it by editing it, printing it and packaging it attractively. Then, the publisher will promote your book and distribute it via a number of distribution channels (directly to book stores and schools, via book distributors, online, etc.). In essence, the publisher refines and transforms your raw material (manuscript) into something for which someone would be willing to exchange money.

You can see that there’s a lot of “teamwork” involved. Writers need publishers, but publishers also need us. Don’t forget that. Be good team member, but don’t forget that what you do individually is vital to the success of the team.

Booksellers

Your relationship with booksellers is a little more complicated. If you’re famous, the booksellers see you as a means of promoting the product in their stores (and promoting the stores as well). If you’re not famous, the booksellers will have some interest in you (there’s still something magical about being a “published” author), but if your book is not selling well, their interest will only be casual. After all, there are many published authors out there.

Most bookstores will be happy to arrange a book signing at their store. A book signing doesn't cost the bookstore owner much if anything and it generally brings in extra business. Bookstores will work with you to set up a time and date for the signing and will provide you with a stack of your books and a small table at which you can sign.

My own experience with book signings has been very mixed. About 80% of the time, my book signings bomb. There are a number of reasons for this (I like to think none of them involve me personally), but it mainly revolves around celebrity and promotion (or lack thereof).

If I happen to be signing books in a city or area where people know me and my books, the book signing will usually go very well. If not, then I'm likely to find myself sitting behind a card table in a small corner of the bookstore smiling weakly as people slip by while trying not to make eye contact.

Over the years, I've learned that I stand a better chance of having a successful book signing if I work with independent bookstores. Independent storeowners generally have a list of regular customers that they contact prior to each book signing, so there's a good chance that some percentage of those regular customers will come down and buy a book while you're there.

The big chain bookstores are less predictable. They depend on "walk in" customers and the only promotion they generally provide is to have one of the part-time clerks write something like "Book signing today" on a piece of poster board and then have the clerk tape it to the store window or place it on an easel near the front door. Whoop-de-do.

Having said that, I should mention that there is one kind of book signing that is almost always successful - That is a book signing that takes place at a school. More about this later.

Book buyers

For the book buying public, your contribution is something quite different. Believe it or not, you don't provide them with a book; what you provide them with is the **product** of your book. The product of your book will fall into one of three categories: information, entertainment or inspiration.

The book-buying public is eager to trade a portion of their income for your book, **but only if they perceive your book as being of greater value than the money in their pocket**. If they do not perceive that value, they will keep their money or they will spend it on a different product or service. Or they won't spend it at all. That's how the free market system works.

Even though the publication of your book may be a major event in your life, the general public is not impressed. They're too busy taking their kids to soccer practice, dealing with goofy bosses and trying to figure what they're going to make for dinner. To help the sales of your book, you'll have to send out news releases to the media,

book yourself on radio and TV shows, arrange school visits, speak in public and generally promote the heck out of your book. I'll give you some more ideas about promotion later in this book.

Chapter 5

**Income opportunities most
freelancers overlook**

As a self-employed writer or illustrator, you will always want to stay on the lookout for opportunities to be paid for your work. Here are some ways I've found to bring in some cash and keep your skills sharp while you're waiting for those big royalty checks to start rolling in:

Write magazine articles

In addition to writing books, you can stay busy and keep your skills honed by writing magazine articles for some of the myriad of trade publications that are published every month.

I'll give you an example of how this worked for me. Since I visit a lot of schools each year, I thought it would be a good idea to contact some of the publications directed at PTO/PTA groups. I looked at their various web sites and chose one to contact.

I sent the editor a letter telling him about an article that I wanted to write for the magazine. He liked the idea and within a couple of weeks, I submitted the article to the publication.

Although I didn't get any money for the article, here's what I did get:

- My words, cartoons and 3 full-color pictures of me spread across 4 pages of the magazine. This magazine was distributed to thousands of PTO groups. (How much do you think it would have cost me to send a 4-page full color mailer to those PTO groups?)
- A "blurb" at the end of the article describing my new book, and information on how to contact me for school visits including phone, email address and web site.
- Permission from the editor to reproduce the article and distribute it freely (I agreed to give the magazine a credit).
- An ongoing agreement to create a cartoon for each issue of the magazine. Contact info will be included with each cartoon.

Couldn't you do something similar? You bet you could! Have you written a story? What was it about? Can you connect any of the characters or situations in the story to a publication? Example: If your story was about a girl in Civil War times who helps to hide a runaway slave, you could write articles for any magazine that is concerned with:

Girls
Civil rights
African Americans
American History
Self-help

The South
or a hundred other related topics.

Trade publications (magazines for specific industries or groups, like education, business, science, etc.) are terrific income opportunities because they address the interests of a targeted readership. That gives you an opportunity to slant your writing or illustrations to appeal to a specific group. And slanting (sometimes called “focus”) is a key to getting published. Most trade publications are also published monthly, so that gives you 12 chances each year to sell your work.

Don’t “pooh-pooh” the trade magazine market. There are lots of them and they pay real money and/or give you real marketing value. For instance, there are dozens of magazines geared to rural residents. If you grew up in a rural area and now live in a big city, you might write about your childhood on the farm. Alternatively, you could write about your transition from the country life to the city life (and back?).

And while you may not want to brag to your friends about your article that appeared in Today’s High Tech Goat Breeder Magazine, that article gave you an opportunity to get your work published and get paid for it. Besides, you never know who’s reading that publication; it may be someone who is in a position to hire you for another, more prestigious writing assignment.

Ezines and newsletters

There are tons of web sites, blogs and newsletters that are constantly looking for freelance writers. Like “hard copy” publications, these electronic publications address the interests of virtually every human interest from Aardvarks to Zebras. At the end of any article you write, the publishers let you include a little blurb about yourself, which can include your name, phone number, web site address and/or email address. The pay (if any) is negligible, but at worst, it’s free publicity and adds another publication to your writing credits.

You can find a lot more of these free publications online by doing an Internet search on the words, “ezine”, “blogs”, “newsletters” and similar keywords.

Public Speaking

There is no better marketing tool for writers than public speaking. If you’re a writer, you ought to be speaking regularly at schools, educational conferences, libraries, museums and civic groups. Speak to any group that will let you speak and (if you have them) sell your books afterwards. It will make a huge difference in your income and your recognition as an author.

Some creative people find public speaking easy and fun. Others would prefer to have surgery in a third-world country without anesthesia. I’m not going to tell you that you’ll never make it in publishing if you don’t speak in public, but I will tell you that you’ll miss myriad opportunities to make money and sell books if you avoid public appearances.

A “real live” author

You don't have to be a great orator. If you've been published, you have instant credibility as a speaker. By “published”, I mean that someone has taken your words or pictures and distributed them widely in some sort of publication. It doesn't matter how small or obscure the publisher; it doesn't matter how narrow or arcane the subject matter. It doesn't even matter if you were paid for your work. Once you've been published, you can legitimately and proudly refer to yourself as a published writer or illustrator. After that, you can begin leveraging your experience as a writer/illustrator by sharing your experience with others.

Your speech does not have to change people's lives. You're creative and those whom they consider “creative” fascinate people. They often see creativity as a gift rather than a skill that has been developed and nurtured through hard work. They want to know how you get your ideas and what books you liked as a child. They want to know how you do what you do.

You don't have to start your speaking career by delivering the keynote address at the American Library Association annual conference. You can talk to your local Rotary or Kiwanis Club at their next luncheon meeting. The small town I live in has a Newcomers Club that is always looking for speakers. Church groups and service organizations are also eager to hear from local authors. If you don't feel comfortable calling yourself an “author,” use the term, “writer.” It's still pretty impressive.

Most communities also have local (or nearby) chapters of national educational and literacy associations. These include the Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA), the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and the International Reading Association (IRA). If you write for children, you should be offering your services as a speaker to the local and state (and national!) chapters of these organizations.

Once again, the Internet can be a big help here. Just do a search on any of those groups' names and you'll be whisked to the organization's web site. Usually, there's a chapter list with names and addresses. If you can't find the info you're looking for, contact any school principal and he or she will be able to tell you how to contact the local group.

What do I say when I speak?

When you speak, just talk about what you do. Bring samples of your work. Do a short reading. Tell the group some of your experiences. Share your frustrations, your successes and your techniques. Tell them how you were published. Tell them what you're working on.

For years, I was convinced that my presentations had to be very informative and edifying. My wife, who has much better insight into these kinds of things than I, tried to explain to me that what people REALLY wanted to know was how I found a way to

make a living as an author and illustrator. I could not believe that people would really be interested in hearing about me. But my wife was right. That's EXACTLY what people wanted to hear...my personal story. The want to hear YOUR personal story too. Tell them the obstacles you had to overcome. Tell them about helpful people you met along the way. Talk about the lessons you learned.

At some point in your children's book writing career, you're going to want to start speaking at schools. There are tens of thousands of schools in the United States and many of them invite authors and illustrators to visit each year. Most libraries have summer reading programs and they always like to have authors and illustrators speak there too. You may have to do some "freebies" until you get your "act" together, but as you develop your speaking skills at schools and libraries, the word will spread via the teacher grapevine that you're available to speak. When you speak at schools, always bring plenty of your books to sell.

Involve your audience

When speaking at schools and libraries (or anywhere else for that matter), you MUST involve the audience in your presentation. How you do that is up to you (you might ask a teacher friend for suggestions), but the one big "no-no" is to stand in front of a group of kids for 45 minutes and just talk. There's nothing a kid hates more than to sit still while an adult yammers on. They'll get bored in the first 3 minutes and you'll be left with 42 minutes of chaos. It doesn't matter how brilliant you are or how interesting your subject matter is. Kids have been brainwashed to pay attention for the amount of time between television commercials. That's about eight minutes. In order to keep them focused for eight minutes, TV has some pretty riveting images and sound. If you don't have riveting images and sound as part of your presentation, don't talk for anywhere close to eight minutes. Talk for two or three minutes then shift gears and involve the kids in some activity or responsive action. Ask them questions and ask them to offer their answers. Ask them to guess something about your book or you personally. Have them DO something.

Do the same if you're speaking to adult audiences. If you yammer on, they won't become chaotic, they'll just fall asleep.

Try this: If you're a writer, choose some kids from the audience and let them read some lines from your book aloud. You might also have some of the kids act it out as you read it. If the text is "predictable", have the kids finish the sentence for you.

Ask questions that require them to respond as a group. Have a contest. Have them provide sound effects at different points in your presentation. Do whatever you have to do to keep them involved.

The nice thing about speaking at educational meetings and schools is that the two start to "feed" off each other. Teachers and principals who hear you speak at educational meetings will invite you to their schools to speak. Teachers who hear you speak at schools will invite you to speak at their educational meetings. If you bring some of your books, you can sell them and autograph them after your presentations.

Self-publishing

Sometimes authors and illustrators get so tired of being rejected by big publishers that they decide to self-publish their work. In my experience, self-publishing is profitable only if you are an active public speaker. Here's why: if you regularly address groups and organizations, you can always sell your self-published book/s in the back of the room following your presentations. The bigger the group, the better chance you have of selling something (assuming your presentation is decent).

Distribution is the key

If you are not an active public speaker and you self-publish your book, you're going to have to find some way to distribute your books. **In fact, the biggest mistake most self-published authors make is failing to take into account the logistics of DISTRIBUTING what they publish.**

Think about it, anybody can write a story and take it down to the Ye Olde Quicky Print Shoppe and get it reproduced and bound. That's the easy part. After you spend the money creating a book, how do you get it in front of the book-buying public? Most naïve self-publishers assume that they can just take a handful of their books down to the local bookstore and put them on the shelf. That may occasionally happen, but think about what happens if you put six of your books on the shelves of five different stores all across town. If your books start to sell, Bookstore #1 is going to want you to send six more books immediately. Bookstore #2 might only need three books. Bookstore #3 doesn't need any new books, but they want you to come replace the two books that were soiled during shipment. Bookstore #5 needs four more books yesterday, etc. etc.

If your book sells for \$10.00, you're going to have to sell it to the bookstore owner for \$5.00 or \$6.00. If it cost you \$3.00 to produce, you have to begin asking yourself just how much running around town and restocking bookshelves you want to do for \$2.00 or \$3.00 per book. It's just not worth your time. Plus, it takes away time from your writing.

If you do a lot of public speaking, the self-publishing picture looks a little brighter. Let's say you address a group of 100 people. Assuming you do a good job of presenting, my experience is that approximately 10% of the people in the room will want to buy your self-published book. That means you'll probably sell 10 books.

If you sell the book for \$10.00 directly to the book buyers, you won't have to discount it 40% or 50%. That means you're now making \$6.00 or \$7.00 per book versus \$2.00 or \$3.00. If you speak for 30 minutes and sell 10 books, you've made a profit of \$60 bucks. Not bad for 30 minutes work. If the group you're addressing pays you a small honorarium, so much the better. Even if they don't pay you, you'll probably get a free chicken dinner. Maybe the local newspaper will come and take your picture – good publicity!

Ebooks

Ebooks can be an effective way to get your manuscript into print. They're not exactly self-published, but they're close. If you write primarily to massage your ego, e-books may not be your cup of tea, but if you write for a living, it's certainly a viable option.

Each eBook publisher has its own way of working with authors. Rather than try to explain the varieties of ways eBook publishers work, my best advice is for you to log onto the Internet and do a search on the word, "e-books" or "ebooks." You'll get several hundred thousand hits, which should provide enough information for just about anybody.

An eBook publisher will charge you some (usually) modest upfront fees. Then, the eBook publisher will showcase your book on its website. The eBook publisher will also assign an ISBN number to your book and will make it available to distributors such as Ingram. You'll get a much larger royalty percentage than you would get from a traditional publisher and you won't have to invest a lot of upfront money in printing because eBooks are printed at the time they are sold.

Most eBook publishers provide some basic marketing services, but as with any publisher, the responsibility for marketing your book will be up to you.

The bottom line is, whether you print 3,000 copies of your book at the local quick-print shop, or work with an eBook publisher, don't publish your book until you have a plan for distributing it.

The Personal Sentiment market

The personal sentiment market includes greeting cards, coffee mugs, plaques, bookmarks, posters, key chains and other items typically found in gift stores. If you're good with a quick quip, witticism or clever saying, this just may be your market. The pay varies widely, but there are a number of companies in this market (especially greeting card companies) that are willing to pay you royalties for what you write. There are a bazillion companies in this category. You can find some of them in directories **like The Children's Writers and Illustrator's Market** or you can (once again) do an Internet search.

Local newspapers and magazines

Your local newspaper might be a good source of income if you can write short "human interest" stories and take photographs to go with them. You might even approach your local newspaper editor with the idea of writing a regular column.

When I first started freelancing, I was really scrounging for work, but it never occurred to me to contact my local newspaper. One day, I saw a small ad in the newspaper's classified section describing a temporary, part-time position for a writer/photographer. I answered the ad and got the job. All I had to do was interview a number of local business owners about their businesses and take a few photos.

The job only lasted a couple of months, but the money I was paid got me over a rough financial spot. Moreover, I was able to make another entry on my list of writing credits.

Live performances

Have someone perform one of your stories as a one-act play or put some of your words to music and record it.

A few years ago, I got a phone call from a "talented drama" teacher at a local middle school. She had purchased a copy of my self-published version of **PETITE ROUGE** and wanted to know if her students could perform the story as a play. Naturally, I was delighted to say, "Yes." My wife and I attended the performance and were seated right up front. What a thrill to see kids performing my story before a live audience!

Years later, Dial Books for Young Readers published PETITE ROUGE and it became an award-winning book. A theatrical company licensed the rights to produce a musical play for kids based on my story. The play is now being produced by other children's theatre groups across the U.S. and London.

Your manuscript may also work well as an audio book. This doesn't require a sophisticated studio setup. Just get a good microphone and record yourself reading your story. Buy some labels at your local office supply store, make a couple dozen copies and bring them with you whenever you speak. You may be surprised by how many of them you'll sell. And the profit margin is great!

This isn't just theory

I have suggested these "alternative" income sources because at one time or another over the years I've tried each one of them. I didn't always do them because they were my life's goal as a writer, but because they kept me self-employed and enabled me to continue writing and drawing until I could build enough momentum to pick the work I wanted to do.

If you want to be paid for your work as a writer, you have to be flexible, opportunistic, persistent and clever. There are many opportunities to stay busy if you're willing to dig for them...or create them yourself.

Get on the web

You need a web site. It doesn't need to be fancy and it doesn't need to be extensive, but you need to have a presence on the web. If you're short on cash, there is a lot of free web space available. Your web site may have some ads on it, but that's the price you'll pay for not paying any price. Most of the people that provide free web space also provide you with a very simple set of software tools for creating your web site.

Why do you need a web site? For the same reason you need a business card. It's a way for people to know what it is you do and how to contact you. It can save you a lot of time and postage. People can print out full color info about you directly from your web site. If you had to provide the information via snail mail, it would involve color copies, postage, time, etc.

Your web site should have your name, contact info, email address and a VERY short bio. You can put a brief sample of your writing there as well. A photo of you is necessary even if you don't think you're photogenic.

After you've built your web site, do a search on "search engines." Click on some of those search engines and look for the words, "add a web site," or "suggest a web site," or "add URL." Click on that link and fill out the online forms provided with your info. This will make it possible for your web site to pop up as one of the choices when people are searching for authors or illustrators.

Visit other authors' web sites and offer to exchange links with them. I used a "freebie" AOL web site for years and got many thousands of dollars of business from it. A web site gives you credibility even if it's a "freebie." Get a web site of your own and use it to promote your books and your speaking. At this writing, www.GoDaddy.com will host a web site for around \$10 per year. Even a starving writer can afford that.

You can do it!

Writers write because they have something to say; they have a story to tell or information and experiences they want to share. If you love to write, don't let anything stop you from writing. Don't judge your talent or ability by how much money you make doing it. Do it because you love it.

You will achieve your goals and find satisfaction to the degree that you are able to satisfy the goals and needs of your publishing partners. That's because you are on this earth to be of service.

You can write great books. You can create a demand for your work. You can succeed in this business. You can do it!

I wish you peace, happiness and best sellers.

About the Author



Mike Artell is an award-winning children's book author, illustrator and television cartoonist. Mike's books include nationally recognized lift-the-flap board books for small children as well as humor, how-to and non-fiction books for older children. Mike has also written and illustrated teacher and parent resource books on subjects as diverse as ecology, parties, drawing and young authorship. In addition to his work as an author and illustrator, Mike also has extensive experience as:

A professional musician, storyteller, newspaper editorial cartoonist, magazine and greeting card writer and cartoonist, keynote speaker for major educational conferences, marketing consultant/board member for several high technology companies and host of his own television cartooning show.

Each year, Mike shares his books and his writing/drawing techniques with more than 12,000 students at 50+ schools across the country. In addition, each year Mike writes and illustrates 2 books, conducts 6 teacher workshops, addresses 10 educational conferences and visits 6 public libraries.

Many of Mike's books have been award-winners including The Read Aloud Book of the Year (National Association of Elementary School Principals), The Louisiana Young Reader's Choice Award, Top 76 Children's Books by the American Bookseller's Assn., and Best Science Book For Children by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Mike's books have also been named "Pick of the Lists" by Publisher's Weekly, "Top 100" by Curriculum Administrator Magazine and "Teacher's Choice" by Learning Magazine.

For complete information about Mike Artell's books, videos, school visits, professional development workshops and conference presentations, visit:

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