

# How to Write a Winning Book Proposal

Contributed by Sid Smith  
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The top two reasons your book proposal will succeed or fail. Last year I wrote a book proposal for a first-time author that netted her a \$30,000 advance. The editor at Wiley & Sons said that it was "the best book proposal he'd ever seen." Aside from thinking that I'm a major braggart, you may be wondering what it was that made this proposal so great. Today I'm going to spill some of the beans. Why Some? Hey, a man's got to eat, and there's good soup a-cookin' on the stove that you'll hear about later.

The top two reasons your book proposal will succeed or fail

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The number one reason a book proposal is successful

A major reason for the success of this proposal is also the primary reason any book will succeed or fail: having a clearly identified target market.

Far too often I hear people say that "this book is for everyone." Guess what? Nobody's going to buy it, especially publishers. Publishers want to know that your book is targeted to a well-defined population who also happens to crave whatever it is you've written.

Here are some examples of well-defined target markets:

- Pug (dog) owners
- Model car enthusiasts
- High school age girls
- Over 50, out of shape ex-athletes
- Pregnant women

Here's a few examples of poorly defined target markets:

- Business people
- People who want to move to the next level in their lives
- People who want to be happy
- People who want to be rich

Now you may be thinking, "Yes, but doesn't having a broader audience mean more sales?"

The answer is an unequivocal and definite NO. However, you can start with a broad audience and narrow it down. For example, instead of "business people," how about "marketing managers for high tech companies" or "the small business owner who needs more clients."

I worked with another client last year who insisted on having a broad focus. I reluctantly obliged her fancy. The last I

heard, she was still looking for an agent who'd take her otherwise well-written (if I do say so myself) proposal.

Too broad = death of the proposal.

The number two reason a book proposal is successful

Do you like marketing and sales? If not, you'd better start changing your tune if you want an agent or publisher to accept your proposal. The proposal I wrote had a killer book marketing section. I won't take all the credit for this because I couldn't write what the author wouldn't commit to doing (and she is, with much success).

You need to spend almost as much time on your marketing proposal as you do on your sample chapters. Sure, they want to know that you can write. More importantly, they'll want to know that you can sell the darned book.

{quotes}Publishers are in the business to make money, and if you're not willing to get out there and promote your book, they won't give you an ounce of attention.{/quotes} A winning proposal outlines the specific steps you'll take to sell your book, including how many sales you expect from each tactic you identify. Again, you have to be willing to do these things, and not just stuff your proposal with marketing tactics you pulled from a few books.

Aside from writing a good book, if you put most of your attention toward clearly identifying your target market and developing a comprehensive plan to sell to that market, you'll be in very good shape. This won't guarantee that you'll sell your proposal, but at least you'll stand a fighting chance over those who want to "reach everyone."

Good luck and good writing.