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## My Publishing Journey: Seven Books, Five Publishers (Including Myself)

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It's been quite a wild ride: seven books, three traditional publishers, three self-published, and one that this author is co-publishing with a subsidy press. He's learned a lot about what to do and what not to do, and how to chart a successful course using nontraditional approaches. What better way to learn about publishing than from an author who's tried nearly every approach available.

### My Publishing Journey: Seven Books, Five Publishers (Including Myself)

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It all started back in 1979. I was working as a manuscript reader for a prominent New York literary agent. He had co-authored a long-ago book about nuclear power, which had influenced me years earlier when I was researching a school project. It was in part due to him that I became a safe energy activist. In fact, I was writing a column for a local monthly about why nuclear power didn't make sense.

In the aftermath of the accident at Three Mile Island, the agent landed a contract to revise and update the book. Knowing my interest in the subject, he threw the job to me. I was 22 years old and recently out of college, where I'd studied journalism. He paid me a very tiny flat fee—and I was glad not to be getting royalties, because the publisher (Stackpole) made an absolute hash out of the book. Stackpole replaced a provocative and alliterative title (*Perils of the Peaceful Atom*) with the bland *Nuclear Lessons*...removed the one chapter that contained truly original material...and priced the book twice as expensively as the definitive book on the subject.

So next time around, I decided I could do better myself. But I hadn't done my homework. I made almost every production mistake possible, and ended up with a mis-sized, poorly printed, horribly designed book whose pages fell out. Ugh!

In 1990, I began seeking an agent. In 1991, I found one, and she quickly sold *Marketing Without Megabucks: How to Sell Anything on a Shoestring* to Simon & Schuster. During contract negotiations, I asked for clarification on the length of the manuscript, which was specified as a number of pages. I wanted a number of words. I was told "write what you need, don't worry about it."

But when I turned in the book, the word came back, "this is too long and we can't find any fat to cut. Please chop out 80 pages" at no additional compensation. Grrrr!

Worse, there was basically no marketing support. They got me about 12 reviews (two of them significant) and exactly two radio interviews, and reimbursed me a few bucks for postage to send and mail press releases that I wrote to a mailing list that I developed. Two years later, S&S sold all remaining copies back to me, at cost, and discontinued the title—which I started marketing and selling on my own.

The best part of that whole experience was a rights sale. It's really spiffy to pull a book in Korean off the shelf to show

someone and tell them, "I wrote this." And yes, having a major publisher does open some doors.

I wrote six more proposals for the agent who'd sold MWM; she turned them all down. Then I found another agent, who liked the idea for *The Penny-Pinching Hedonist: How to Live Like Royalty with a Peasant's Pocketbook*, but wasn't able to sell it.

So I published it myself in 1995, but this time, I read the books, joined the discussion lists, set up a website and newsletter to support the book, and actively courted the media. And thus, after numerous print and radio interviews, I became the go-to guy on having fun cheaply, and eventually sold through the run (I now sell it as an e-book, having cut the price in half).

Walking the floor of Book Expo of America in 1998, I was looking for a company that might want to republish *Hedonist*. Instead, a chance conversation with an exhibitor led to the deal for another marketing book, *Grassroots Marketing: Getting Noticed in a Noisy World*, which was published by Chelsea Green (a mid-sized publisher in Vermont) in 2000.

Working with Chelsea has been a wonderful experience, except that the advance was tiny. Even negotiating the contract went smoothly. I loved working with their editorial, design, and marketing people, felt supported and validated as an author, and was very pleased when this became my first domestic book to earn out its advance and generate royalties, after about four years.

But even though some publishers were interested, I wanted to self-publish my next book. First of all, *Principled Profit: Marketing That Puts People First* contains cutting-edge thinking that I believe can change the world, and I wanted to be in control. I did not want to risk having an outside publisher dilute my ideas. And, with Enron and other business scandals erupting all over the newspapers, I wanted to get the book out fast. I wrote the first word in August, 2002 and completed a draft by December; the book was published just six months later. As a self-publisher, I could arrange for several simultaneous workflow patters that would have normally been done in sequence. So, for instance, I was getting endorsements while editing and design were being done.

After years of absorbing everything I could from experienced self-publishers, I'd learned a few things. *Principled Profit* was profitable the day the presses rolled, thanks to a 1000-copy pre-publication sale. It's been resold to publishers in Mexico and India. It won one award and got honorable mention in another. It has over 70 endorsements, 55 of which were included in the galley and the book—including major names like Jack Canfield, co-creator of the phenomenally successful *Chicken Soup* series. And it's gotten significant reviews, including *Publishers Weekly*.

I've even used the book to set up an ethics pledge campaign (and hopefully sell a few books at the same time), at <http://www.business-ethics-pledge.org>

My seventh book, *Grassroots Marketing for Authors and Publishers*, will be published early in 2007, in a joint arrangement. At this year's Book Expo, I suggested to an Infinity executive that the company might want to buy copies for all its authors—a special sale of the sort that made my earlier book profitable ahead of printing. Was I amazed when that executive came back to me with an offer to be my publisher, with a financially irresistible offer!

But I didn't want to only publish with Infinity. After all, since my last book has come out, I've expanded my services for authors from just copywriting and marketing consulting to actually helping others get published. I know full well the plusses and minuses of every approach. At the same time, I had never done a book with a subsidy publisher—and subsidy-published authors are one of the audiences for the book. Publishing with Infinity would give me more credibility with those

authors. So we're doing it together, with two ISBNs and two distribution systems. I'll let Infinity handle the bookstore market, where I don't do much. And I'll keep the other markets I've built up over the years. At the very least, it will be an interesting experiment.

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Marketing consultant, copywriter, and book publishing coach Shel Horowitz's latest book, *Grassroots Marketing for Authors and Publishers*, can be previewed at <http://www.grassrootsmarketingforauthors.com> For information on his other books, or his affordable, effective marketing services, please visit <http://www.frugalmarketing.com>