

How to Create a Killer Title For Your Book

Contributed by
Monday, 30 April 2007
Last Updated Monday, 30 July 2007

Most book titles suck. They're boring and too much like every other title. Peter Bowerman, a frequent contributor to Write and Publish Your Book has some great advice on how to strike gold with your book title.

How to Create a Great Title For Your Book

Tell Your Reader Whatâ€™s In It for Them!

Some time back, I got an email from an ebook author who wanted a blurb for his upcoming writing title. I couldnâ€™t help but notice that his title seemed a bit weak. The book was about getting past the obstacles that most fiction writers encounter on the way to finishing their books. The original title was:

Writing Your Novel: A Quick and Easy Guide to Getting It Done

It needed to be more dynamic. Hereâ€™s what I came up with:

UNSTUCK! Kick Down Those Roadblocks and Finish Your Novel Now!

Now, someone can look at the title and know instantly what the book is about and the benefits theyâ€™ll get from reading it.

If youâ€™re writing non-fiction, your title and subtitle are as crucially important as your great-looking cover. And in many respects, a title is similar to a corporate tagline, something I have a good bit of experience through my commercial writing career. Letâ€™s look at some famous taglines:

GE. We bring good things to life.

Delta. Weâ€™re ready when you are.

Avis. We try harder.

Microsoft. Where do you want to go today?

Virginia is for lovers.

What do they all have in common? Theyâ€™re promises. They tell you what you can count on. Same with a brand. Think Dove soap. Tiffanyâ€™s. Mercedes-Benz. IBM. Any doubt as to the promise in those brands? Keep this in mind as you create your book title.

Promise, Then Elaborate

When I created my title, I kept in mind the promise, and I say I could have done a lot worse than The Well-Fed Writer (a detailed how-to guide on starting a commercial writing business â€” writing for corporations, where the income potential money was FAR greater than typical freelance writing).

I then used the subtitle to reinforce, clarify, elaborate on the promise of the title. I went with: Financial Self-Sufficiency as a Freelance Writer in Six Months or Less – an additional promise in its own right. Don't make readers wonder what your book is about; have them "get it" right away from the title and subtitle. A good rule of thumb on titles vs. subtitles? If the title you come up with sounds more explanatory than catchy (and is more than 4-5 words, max), it's probably a better subtitle.

It all comes down to benefits. Good title/subtitle combos tell readers what's in it for them, why they should bother picking up the book in the first place.

Another Case Study

In another case, I was hired to mentor a new self-publishing author, an ad industry veteran who'd written book on creativity. While he wanted to tap my expertise on a variety of nuts and bolts issues, in his mind, his cover artwork was nailed down, and title was set:

The Field Guide to Creativity:

One Path And 101 Pointers For Discovering Fresh Ideas

Well, when I told him his title needed work, he wasn't exactly overjoyed. I must confess, I felt a bit like the parent telling his daughter that, despite the fact that the wedding is two weeks away, invitations sent, and caterer, florist, photographer and band paid for, I thought her intended betrothed is a loser and it's not too late to call it off. Here was a book – a really good, interesting, valuable and yes, creative book – purporting to help people be more creative, and its title simply wasn't.

He took my advice, revisited the idea, he and I and a bunch of his friends (via email) brainstormed a bunch of jazzier titles, and here's what he ended up with:

ZING! Five Steps & 101 Tips for Creativity on Command

Know what the #1 best-selling trade paperback of 2002 was, according to Publishers Weekly? A cookbook! And one that sold 1.8 million copies. Title: The Fix-It and Forget-It Cookbook: Feasting With Your Slow Cooker. (Authors: Dawn J. Ranck and Phyllis Pellman Good). Now is that a promise or what?

PMA member Peter Bowerman, a veteran commercial freelancer and self-publishing coach in Atlanta, is the author of the award-winning Ben Franklin finalists, The Well Fed Writer (Book-of-the-Month Club selection), and its companion volume, The Well-Fed Writer: Back For Seconds, both commercial freelancing standards. The above is an adapted excerpt from The Well-Fed Self-Publisher: How to Turn One Book Into a Full-Time Living, coming in 2006. www.wellfedwriter.com.

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11/08/06

I am the self-publishing author of The Well-Fed Writer titles (both self-published, and which have yielded 50,000 copies in print and provided me with a full-time living for five-plus years). I just released The Well-Fed Self-Publisher: How to Turn One Book into a Full-Time Living. (I say all this just to give you some context...).

I have a short article on how to create powerful book titles for non-fiction work (I come from a sales and marketing background and bring that orientation to the discussion). It's roughly 750 words and is an adapted excerpt from my new book. It includes some specific strategies as well as several mini-case studies. Interested in taking a look?

Thanks!

PB