

Cooperative Publishing - working with the writer

From a series of online articles written for *The Crafty Writer*

By John Köehler

Editing

In the beginning after we sign the writer, we treat the writer as a business partner. Not as some dolt who knows nothing about publishing, but as the creator and expert of the work who NEEDS to know how publishing works. Because guess what? The more the author knows, understands and GETS about the entire process, the better they will be able to promote their work.

We are writers and published authors, so it is easy for us to “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Let’s start with editing.

The cooperative way to deal with an author when it comes to editing their work is to include them in the process. You heard right. But it doesn’t always happen that way. After all, the publisher has the right to take the manuscript, have their way with it and never let the author see it until the first ARCs (Advanced Reader Copies) come out. Some publishers do that. But why on earth would you do that when the best expert of the work is the author?

We start by having our Executive Editor or editor have a conversation with the author about the work. This discussion comes after a read through and study of the manuscript, so that the editor is familiar with the work and has done a strategic and tactical fly over to the point where they can see the problems, the strengths and weaknesses of the entire manuscript.

That conversation should be open and honest, friendly and constructive. The author is not some chump going to school and the editor the learned professor, after all. At the same time there is no question that the editor is in charge of the editing and will make any and all final calls when they are needed. Sometimes they are. But usually they aren’t, because

the editor’s goal is to be cooperative and achieve consensus where possible. If the writer is smart enough to turn 100,000 words into a work of art, they are smart enough to participate in the editing.

The editor may ask the author to make some changes prior to the editing. This may be cuts, development of a character, additional dialog, or anything that the editor needs done and requires the expertise of the author. Again, the author is the best expert of the work, so where possible we will go to the expert. Usually they are happy to work on polishing the piece, and love the cooperative process of editing.

Typically our editors edit in MS Word, and use the Review process with Track Changes turned on, so that the author can see where the work is edited. In addition to changes and edits, the editor can add questions and comments. The author can then go through the work step by step and SEE the editing. With the editor in the role of cooperative coach, the editing process becomes a learning process for the author, and the net effect is to create a better and more readable manuscript.

Not to mention a happier author!

Design

A publisher has the right to essentially do as they please with regards to the creative development of the editing and the design of any given book. But as we established, it is advantageous to the publisher to have the author involved with all stages of the creative process of preparing the book for publication.

The cover is typically the first design element considered. We want to know exactly what the author is thinking about their cover. True enough they are usually not award-winning

designers as we have on our team, but they know their book. Often an author will have a very specific idea of what they want and in many cases come to the table with a design in hand.

Of the 50 or so books we've published, we have rarely used a design offered by an author. Which sounds like it contradicts my point about keeping the author involved, but it doesn't. The original thoughts and desires of the author may play into a design the publisher comes up with, and for us, it usually does.

We ask authors to not only tell us their written thoughts and share any sketches they have, we ask them to show us 3-4 book covers they like and why they like them. Once again, this is not intended to get the author to do the publisher's job, but to establish a criteria and general consensus on style and look. For our designers, this gives us much more to work with, and also increases the likelihood we are going to ding the bell and create a cover that is perfect for the manuscript, and gives the author buy in.

This does not mean that we limit ourselves to the covers we are shown or the written concepts that are shared—on the contrary. They are all a jumping off point. Sometimes the winning cover comes directly from that process. Sometimes the design team will diverge completely away and try something new and decidedly different than what the author is thinking. Whatever it takes, we do.

We tell our authors that they will be a part of the process, but that when it comes to making creative decisions, it is not longer about them, or us, but it is all about the work of art that we are creating. The cover, like the editing, must be the best cover for the book we are producing. Period. That is a good way of reminding them that while we insist on working collaboratively, it is not their call: if in fact a creative call must be made due to lack of consensus, the publisher will make the call. Regardless of the collaboration and cooperative spirit of the endeavor, there can only be one boss! Surprisingly we rarely have an issue with covers and usually achieve consensus with the author.

Design cooperation extends into the layout of the text.

The author will review the layout top to bottom, including title page, legal page, acknowledgements, etc. There are usually fewer issues or decisions on the text. Lastly comes the cover spread, showing the back cover, spine and front cover.

Design cooperation extends into other items such as tip sheets, author signing posters and the like. Regardless of the design element, if it is related to the book, we want the author's eyes on it. Because, like editing, the more eyes the better, and the more likely the author will get behind the book, own it completely and engage readers through promotions and marketing.

Marketing

We see book marketing as a 3-legged stool, every leg critical:

The Author – we teach our authors the basics of what we like to call Guerilla Marketing, based in part on Jay Levinson and David Hancock's book, *Guerilla Marketing for Writers*. It starts with social media. Facebook is still the king of social media. Creating an author fan page is important. Twitter is another component of social media that the author can use. You Tube is a terrific tool to use with author's videos talking about the book, book trailers, and so forth. LinkedIn is a professional site to consider as well, as the profession of writing or the title of Author is a legitimate business to promote.

A good author website is critical. We recommend using Word Press, as it is easy to use, free, and has built in blogging. You want to be sure to cover the basics of any author site: Author's bio, excerpts, contact, other books, etc. You can also add things such as audio readings and Buy the Book pages. Your website is the quarterback of all your social media, and should link to Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, blogs, You Tube or any other media you are engaged in. The more cross-linking you do, the higher your site and brand will climb in the search engines.

We also teach our authors the basics of working with the media, including radio, TV and print. One of the keys to this is to make sure you have a non-fiction hook, meaning a

story angle that will interest the media. If your novel is about a runaway teenager living on the streets of Austion (Anonymity), you can offer yourself as an expert on a terrible problem facing our country and talk about your work with homeless shelters, etc.

The Publisher – The publisher starts with doing the best creative development and preparation of the book, meaning the editing, proofreading and design possible. We also build a flyer or “tip sheet” that is based on the marketing and sales information of the title. This same information is uploaded to the title management system of our distributor, Ingram Publisher Services.

We also buy at least one domain name related to the book and point it to the book page on our website. On that page we put buttons to buy from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Books a Million, Powell’s Books and Indie Bound. It is never a good idea to only put Amazon on your site, as you are leaving out many other booksellers who will also make your title available. We also add a synopsis, author’s bio and an excerpt. Everything they need to get a first look at the title.

We also provide Marketing Mastermind sessions with our authors, which train them on the guerilla marketing elements I’ve mentioned above, and gives them countless tips, ideas and recommendations on how to proceed spending little money, as well as offering them the option of advanced promotional help from book publicists and marketing companies.

The Distributor – Finally there is the distributor. They work with the publisher to populate all the selling and marketing information about the title on to their site and distribute it to their clients, the booksellers. Their sales team gets behind the titles that read well and have a good marketing plan. They create catalogs that list the titles and distribute them to the booksellers. They maintain book inventories and a complex distribution system. They charge the publisher for printing and other book related fees, and also pay royalties to the publisher, who then passes that on to the author.

And don’t we love royalties!

The best advice for writers and wannabe authors is to do your homework and formulate a marketing plan that is part of your book proposal. Think of yourself as an entrepreneur, a businessperson, and you will be better prepared and more likely to attract the interest of a publisher. You start with a great book and you finish with a great marketing plan.



John Köehler is the author of 5 books, including his latest, *Billy Blue Sky*. He is the founder and publisher of Köehler Books, and was the 1991 Boomerang World Champ. Visit his website: www.jlkoehler.com

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- Marketing Mastermind to help you plan and execute
- Discount for authors copies



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