

# How to Write & Publish your business book

**1: Do it. Simply do it.** You have got some great ideas which could help an audience, perhaps create a whole new field and change the world. There's a book (or more) in you. But what is it? And how does it get done? We'll address those essential questions soon, but before that, (1) *the challenging news*; it has never been tougher to get your book accepted. The landscape of publishing has clearly been changing for years but recessionary forces have made it a nightmare for most publishers to support 'new' books. (2) *The good news*: the combination of easy to use software, short digital runs and on-line marketing has brought unprecedented power to the finger-tips of you, the author. So for now: simply focus on what your book would be. **Do It. Simply Do it.**

**2: Understand why. And why not.** You're going to create this business book. You're going to manifest your ideas. But first, may I suggest the following are not good motivators for your work. Firstly, *the money*. Especially in the business arena very, very few authors make enough money to give up their day job. So you probably shouldn't plan to do so either; long-term you'll be happier with that knowledge. It does help tremendously if your day-job aligns with your writing which is why the *consult/teach/write* triangular model is so popular as it is self-feeding and reinforcing and funding. Secondly: *ego*. If uppermost in your thoughts is how you will be 'wined and dined' at the best restaurants by your agent/s, invited onto the best talk-shows and millions will be offered to turn your 'Strategic Marketing the Yoga Way' into a film script... well, how can I put it: you will be distracted and not produce your best work. Write the damn book and see what happens after that. So what are the many great reasons for producing the book you ask? Patience. Tomorrow. **Understand why. And why not.**

**3: Because It Is There.** So you know you are not doing it for the money. Nor to massage your ego. So why? It will clarify your thinking. You can have taught leadership for a decade, but putting those wandering workshops, those 1h lectures into the structured written form can only improve the quality of your future work. It will help build your personal brand. What are you about? What are your passions? Your book can help define you to an audience many of whom will never get a chance to meet you in person. It's a great calling card. Forget all those brochures; just give them your book. It earns you money (not much, probably, as we have discussed) while you are sleeping and the more of those you can get the better. It will make it easier if you: want a job in the academic world; want to become a conference speaker or wish to impress people at parties. Because it is there. Like mountains for climbers: it's in you. It's simply got to be done. **Because It Is There.**

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**4: So, what do you write about?** That shouldn't be a problem. It mustn't be a problem. You must **want** to write about something. Making it a marketable idea, driving out the words, getting a publisher, achieving decent sales so you can get a second book deal. Yes, those are reasonable problems. But. But: you must want to write about something. Books can (and clearly are) written on topics as varied a 'work-life balance' and 'hypnotic leadership' but they rarely gel with an audience and are very hard work for the author. No: you must have a passion about your subject. It's not enough as we will see. But it is the essential start: what's yours? **So, what do you want to write about?**

**5: The Title Is It.** If you want a serious publisher to support your book idea, then the submission must appear to be one to sell plenty of books. That's the bottom line. As one publisher once said to me: "*I don't care whether they read them or not: I just want them to buy them*". Your passion is essential and the start but it isn't enough. I strongly suggest that before pitching, you work on your title. Let's say your chosen book is on Time Management. Are there plenty of books on this subject? Yes. Can the world take a few more? Surprisingly, yes. Essentially we have an insatiable thirst for this topic. So your subject doesn't have to be obscure but you do need to help your potential readers feel this is a special book on time management, a *fresh* angle, something *different*. *Four Hour Working Week* by Tim Ferriss was a very bold re-positioning of the whole time management field. A more traditional but great title was *Do It Tomorrow* by Mark Forster. More on this in future posts. For the moment you need to pin down the title. **The Title Is It.**

**6: The Critical Title.** With my **Instant MBA**, whether or not you have one or are studying for one, it captures the desire we all have: instant knowledge. We know it's not possible but the idea is attractive. All can be clarified in the by-line and blurb. Covey's **Seven Habits of Highly Effectively People** was apparently not a title his publishers wanted to use, it seeming long and clumsy. With hindsight, it is perfect. By-lines are increasingly the norm and can help a very brief/bold/dramatic title. With my **Being the Best** I would now have added a by-line *Being the Best Version of You*. **Get a Life** for work-life balance worked very well. **The 4h Work Week** by Tim Ferriss is superb: it's what we'd all like, the precise number adds credibility. So: over to you, what's your passion and how do you encapsulate it in an appropriate title with maybe a by-line? **The Critical Title.**

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**7: The Content Question.** You've got a working title; it may change of course as you get into the body of your writing and *no doubt your publisher will have a say* but for the moment that is sorted. Now you need content. You need quality and quantity. A Stephen King novel is about 180,000 words. Your business book can be half that, maybe even as little as 60,000 words but it has got to feel 100% value. Why? Funnily enough it's more important for subsequent sales; as the great travel writer Bill Bryson responded when asked *whether he was worried about sales of his new book on science* he responded that it was not this book he had to worry about, but sales of the next book. In the past publishers were better at checking this issue but have recently become seduced by the magic dust of the world of the blogger. Some books are now appearing which should have stayed as a blog post. Seth Godin has several excellent books behind him but Tribes is not one of them; whether or not you agree with the concept he proposes, observe what reviewers on amazon.com feel of its worth.

**A blog post does not make a book.** A series might: most of **The Long Tail** by Chris Anderson was created on his blog before going to print. So in summary: you now need to check that your idea (encapsulated in your title) has sufficient content and value.

**8: Your Product.** Theoretically, it's traditionally been the case that with a work of fiction you write it and then submit it, certainly until you are established enough to get requests for your sequels. With a business book, the tradition was to pitch an idea and get commissioned to write it. Times change and times are tough especially for publishers and especially if it is your first book. Assume you will need to write it before serious interest. And this of course is no bad thing: the writing process will really clarify your thinking which may have an impact of positioning, title... and it will enable you to stand out in the slush-pile of 500 word summary suggestions which simply imply yet another book on presenting skills. Yep, start writing the product. How? Plenty of help coming up.

**9: Generating The Words**, 1. Decide a timetable and a word goal. This is critical. You are not a full-time writer: you have a demanding day job and a family. Without a timetable you will not find the time. Are you better first thing or late at night? Could you use some of the week-end? Could you use some of your lunch-break? Could you write on the train? Don't be too precious about needing long periods of time. Twenty minutes on the train could bash out (as we will see) 500 good words. And number of words/day? Set an initial goal of 1000 words/day. *You need a timetable; make it happen.*  
*Draw it up now.*

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**10: Generating the Words, 2.** Sit at your PC and remove all distractions bar cup of coffee and glass of water. Your simple goal: drive out words to hit your personally agreed target. Do not leave your working area until you have done that; **simply make it a case of personal honour**. Remove all distractions: switch off mail, your phone, close down distracting side-bars. Have in mind: write and edit later. In your first few sessions you will probably be outlining: chapter headings and sub-headings within those chapters. Case studies you wish to use. For your business book starting to differentiate between a concept (e.g. *that leadership starts with self*), examples (e.g. *of a local small business owner*) and actions to be taken (e.g. *get a 360 degree feed-back review to audit your personal leadership style*.) What mix do you wish your book to have? You can plan it, or you can just write and see what appears. However it is probably worth making sure you do have all three elements although not equal in volume of words, of course, necessarily. **So, start driving out the words**. TBC.

**11: Generating the Words, 3.** Just as a good radio DJ has his or her listener in mind, you must have your reader in mind. You are not writing to impress. **You are writing to help them**: with leadership, time management, organisational development, strategy, whatever. So make it easy for them. Make it simple but not simplistic. The latter is critical: the real value you can bring in your book is your expertise, your depth of knowledge. But the reader wants that in distilled form; for your book to be success it must have **wisdom in handy form**: the typical business person reader no longer has the time nor inclination to study to get value. Keep that in mind. Now: back to the keyboard. Have you hit your target today? Sunday? So what?

**12: Generating the words, 4.** You're unlikely to generate a perfect set of words, first pass, of course. So at regular intervals you will need to **edit your text so far**. Once again, this is best done to a rhythm i.e. will you do it at the end of every session or at the start or will you have special editing days? As you edit you are looking for the basics such as spelling errors which the checker can't identify, confusing sentences and, as you progress your text, inconsistencies and/or errors. The more you edit, the more familiar you become with your text which is good news in that you should have an excellent overview in your mind. It is also bad news in that it becomes increasingly difficult to be your own critic.

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**13: Generating the words, 5.** You need a critic/editor. Ahh, you say. *But isn't that what a publisher provides?* Yes, but only when you have made it through all their hoops of approval; clearly the better your submission is at the start, the better your chances. Also in yet another cost-cutting measure that most publishing houses are making, there are not so many editors available. If your manuscript appears to be a great state already that's got to be a big plus. So: who can be your supportive critical eye? A colleague? A friend? Family? Look for someone who can tell it straight, has a feeling for the market you are aiming for and is willing to put the time in. And you: take the comments and act upon them.

**14: Generating the words, 6.** If you need support with the actual writing, then read and absorb my **writing101** on my blog: [www.nicholasbate.typepad.com](http://www.nicholasbate.typepad.com).

**15: Review time.** There are so many (especially) great things about Saturdays for writers. More writing, clearly. More of your own special coffee obviously. But most of all, you have some time to review progress. How are we doing?

1. We've started. We're to be congratulated and after almost a year of talking, we have got the book started.
2. We're totally pragmatic about why we are doing it. Because it is in us and has to come out. Because it is there.
3. We've stopped worrying about what is 'fashionable' at the moment or is a 'sure-fire' winner. We are writing about a passion.
4. We've got a great title.
5. And are confident that there is sufficient quality content.
6. And now you are fingers to the keyboard every day, driving out the words.
7. Not accepting any melodrama about writer's block.
8. Awesome: you're on plan.

**16: Publishing Your Book, 1.** We're assuming you're writing away, driving out the words and have reached a stage where you are confident that you have a robust book appearing. It's time to start thinking about a publisher. So let's get the bad news out of the way: it has never been tougher for publishers and consequently authors, especially aspiring ones. Books are simply not selling in the volumes that are needed to sustain the traditional publisher business model. Partly this is 'the recession', of course but also it is a result of the way in which we all get the information we need; the book becoming a smaller part of the mix. We're going to look at strategies to beat that publisher reluctance to take you on. TBC.

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**17: Publishing Your Book, 2.** You need some **target publishers**. Forget the big names for the moment; we will add those to the list, eventually. But first get down to your favourite book-shops and the business section of your chosen shops and look for publishers who (a) seem to have consistent shelf presence (b) are publishing in your area or connected to your area (c) are producing attractive books of which you would be proud. Put together a 'hit-list'. Now add any big brand name publishers you like to consider. Now go on-line and search for publishers in your chosen area. Next: how to approach the list. TBC.

**18: Publish Your Book, 3.** It may well be your baby. It may well be the biggest potential breakthrough in business publishing since *In Search of Excellence*. But. But. It's still a product and it needs to be sold to your publisher who needs to be convinced that it can be sold to 1000s of readers. So you need to start assembling your pitch letter. This needs to be as 'hardcore' as you can make it. Cut the emotion and social grease. Give them numbers and USPs. How many will it sell? Why do you believe that? What is special about it? Who will it appeal to? How can you help with the promotion? Can you make any guarantees? Will your name as an author be a pull in itself? Take a day out from your writing and editing and have a go. I'll give you some examples in a next post. TBC.

**19: We writers love Saturdays.** More writing, clearly. More of our own special coffee obviously. But most of all, time to review progress. How are we doing?

1. We've started. We're to be congratulated and after almost a year of talking, we have got the book started.
2. We're totally pragmatic about why we are doing it. Because it is in us and has to come out. Because it is there.
3. We've stopped worrying about what is 'fashionable' at the moment or is a 'sure-fire' winner. We are writing about a passion.
4. We've got a great title.
5. And are confident that there is sufficient quality content.
6. And now you are fingers to the keyboard every day, driving out the words.
7. Not accepting any melodrama about writer's block.
8. List of target publishers we will approach.
9. 'Pitch' letter' for our product: the manuscript.

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Check you've got all of those assembled. Coming up we will address:

- example pitch letters
- handling the meeting with the publisher
- do you need an agent?
- and if you can't get a publisher?

**20: Publish Your Book, 4.** So how did it go? The pitch letter? Here's a review:

Para 1: Introduce yourself: name and expertise. Make the expertise as measurable as possible. Numbers of years in role, numbers of clients, numbers of readers of your blog etc etc. That's what your publisher is reading: numbers which turn into sales.

Para 2: What you have produced and why. *Although you recognise the leadership market has been well-addressed... you feel ...that your angle etc.* You must have a/some USPs. The weaker your USPs, the stronger must be your personal brand and vice-versa.

Para 3: What you enclose (full/part manuscript). What stage you are at (finished, 6 more months). What you would like (initial meeting, telephone conversation).

Part 4: How to get hold of you. Clear and easy.

Now take your hit-list of publishers and check out their web-sites for how they prefer submissions. Most will still be the traditional way by post: follow their instructions, keep a record and send off with some kind of recorded delivery. Some will be electronic with boxes to complete; work hard to make sure all your information from your covering letter is in there and make sure you keep a copy of what you say.

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**21: So the pitch letters are in to your chosen publishers.** What next? Well, in the film version you will get twenty rejections and then an intelligent publisher will recognise your brilliance and give you the publishing deal of the century. In fact: you will hear nothing. Perhaps the odd 'no thanks', but essentially nothing. Why? Because publishers are depressed at the state of their industry and are into zero risk lock-down. Being new: you're risk. So you are going to have to take the pitch to the next level: the follow-up call. You're going to ring the person you wrote to and try and get a meeting. We'll go into the mechanics of the call in a future post but for the moment understand there are two people involved: your contact and his/her assistant. Do not assume the assistant is not worth speaking to. Far from it. Those with experience will in fact decide who their boss sees in person. So for now: make sure you have got the best name (from the web-site) who decides new commissions and their assistant if possible. TBC.

**22: Ringing to get a meeting. Make sure you have a name and a number of the person who commissions or their assistant. Your goal is to get a meeting with them as they have ignored your pitch letter so far.** Why have they ignored it so far? Either (1) they haven't got around to looking at it or (2) it doesn't appeal. Either way that isn't good enough for you; you reckon if you get in front of them you can change their mind. To do that you'll need to handle two main deflections: 'we see no appeal in your book' and/or 'we don't have time to consider it at the moment'. The latter is easier. Reduce the pressure by setting up a longer term appointment, as in 'I understand you don't have time now. What about something late in January?' The first you must have an answer to, not just for this meeting but for your book to sell anyway: **what is your angle?** Now: make those calls and handle those deflections.

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## 23: Final Review Before The Big Push:

1. We've started. We're to be congratulated and after almost a year of talking, we have got the book started.
2. We're totally pragmatic about why we are doing it. Because it is in us and has to come out. Because it is there.
3. We've stopped worrying about what is 'fashionable' at the moment or is a 'sure-fire' winner. We are writing about a passion.
4. We've got a great title.
5. And are confident that there is sufficient quality content.
6. And now you are fingers to the keyboard every day, driving out the words.
7. Not accepting any melodrama about writer's block.
8. List of target publishers we will approach.
9. 'Pitch' letter for our product: the manuscript.
- 10 Follow-up telephone call and handling deflections.

Coming up we will address:

- handling the meeting with the publisher
- do you need an agent?
- (and if you can't get a publisher?)
- promoting the book upon publication.

**24: The Meeting With The Publisher.** You want: *a deal to publish*. **They want:** *confidence that (1) you can produce the book and (2) it will sell in quantity*. So prepare for the meeting with the latter two points in mind: be confident with examples and be prepared to show extensive samples of your writing so far. And any evidence of where you feel the book will make sales (e.g. large clients you might have).

**But, but, but.** In your desire to get a deal ensure you do check:

1. the contract (it will be standard, but it's worth reading and asking questions).
2. the control you will have over your idea.
3. timescales for production.
4. any promises they are making over publicity.

It's worth summarising 2, 3, 4 in a simple e-mail as they are unlikely to be included in the contract. Doing this now will save a lot of heart-ache and heated calls with your publisher later.

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**25: They all say no.** You've pitched. You've chased on the phone. You've had meetings. But they have all said: no. What's to be done? Well, of course it is worth considering their feed-back. Do they maybe have a point? *Is it too much a clone of 100s of other Time Management books out there? Is it too much of a niche market?* Consider and then if you are ready to proceed you have four options:

1. to see if one of your publishers will go ahead if you remove most of the risk by guaranteeing purchase of some of the print run i.e. you effectively have to sell a percentage of the books yourself (or they sit in your garage);
2. you use a vanity publisher;
3. you self-publish;
4. you use one of the new options such as blurb.com.

**26:** So one option if you have been given a **consistent 'no'**, is to come to a deal with your publisher to reduce the risk for them. Although clearly all publishers are looking for the next hot best-seller they also love 'steady sellers' in their back-catalogue... convince them that your book is one of these by committing to the sale of some of the initial print run. How many is that? Depends but can be fewer books than you think with new short digital print runs. So now your problem becomes how can you sell that 1000/2000 books you have committed to... But it's an option which many, many authors have tried successfully over the years to tip the balance and get publication.

**27: They said no: you have three other options.** You could use a **vanity publisher**. In essence these will publish anything and that is their only real benefit. They have no real interest in working with you to edit the book to make it more readable nor positioning it to make it more marketable. You'd be better off *self-publishing*. This does give you the advantage that the design can be your own and of course digital printing allows cost-effective short print-runs. I self-published Blackberry Fool because the design was so critical and no publisher wanted to make it so picture rich. And now there is Blurb.Com. The site will explain all, but essentially free down-loadable software allows you to design your own book which you can then sell through the blurb book-store. In the next post we'll consider the pros and cons of the various approaches in more detail and how to market your book. This is essential if you do not have a mainstream publisher but actually is also pretty important even if you do. TBC.

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**28:** The pros and cons summarised. With a mainstream publisher. Pros: access to the book-shop channel (but don't over-estimate this; book-shops are fussier and fussier about new authors), professional guidance such as editing, proofing etc. Cons: possible loss of control of 'your baby'. Vanity publishing. Pros: you'll have a real book for your shelf and your friends. Cons: no access to professional marketing channels. Little professional help with structure of book, expensive, limited scope on design. Self-publishing via a local printer. Pros: all control is yours; can be as 'designed' as you like, can do a very small print run. Cons: cost, lack of access to main book channels, distribution and supply logistics. Self-publishing e.g. blurb.com. Pros: great software and support and selling channel. You can produce a very professional product. Cons: no easy access to main book channel nor to Amazon.

**29: Whether or not your book is published by a main-stream publisher** you will need to get behind your book. And don't look enviously at the big-budget business books: you'd be tied into 30 radio station appearances which may not seem that much fun after the first few... The important point is you must sell your book. Perhaps buy some and send them out to those who could influence... Blog it. Ask people to review it. Encourage those who say it's good to do an amazon review... Let's be clear: unless your book is one of those rare word-of-mouth phenomena (e.g. Tim Ferriss) it'll need a push. Even Covey's 7 Habits took a little time to get to critical mass.

### **30: So you're done. To recap:**

Hopefully you are now regularly writing and starting to approach publishers. Remember:

1. Start.
2. Be totally pragmatic about why you are doing it. Because it is in you and has to come out. Because it is there.
3. Stop worrying about what is 'fashionable' at the moment or is a 'sure-fire' winner. You must feel passionate about your writing.
4. Get a great title. That helps you focus, too.
5. Check that there is sufficient quality content and your 'book' is not just a 'puffed up' blog post.
6. Now get your fingers to the keyboard every day, driving out the words.
7. Do not accept any melodrama about writer's block.
8. Assemble a list of target publishers you will approach.
9. Prepare a 'pitch letter' for your product: the manuscript.
10. Be prepared to make a follow-up telephone call and handling deflections.
11. Handling the meeting with the publisher: focus on what you want.
12. There are alternatives if no mainstream publisher will handle you. And they are not lesser options.
13. You must promote your book.
14. Now, what about book 2?

# How to Write & Publish your business book

## **Nicholas Bate CV**

Nicholas Bate is passionate about supporting people to ensure they realise and release their true and full potential.

After a career in sales and marketing in the IT industry, culminating in leading sector marketing for Research Machines, Oxford, UK Nicholas launched Strategic Edge. A small, premium consultancy, Strategic Edge specialises in creating long-term leadership competitive advantage for its clients including: Barclays, IBM, Marks & Spencer, Microsoft and Warwick University amongst others. Nicholas earned a degree in Chemistry and carried out research in the field of Molecular Biophysics at Magdalen College, Oxford University and is an NLP Master Practitioner, MBTI (levels 1 and 2) accredited and a qualified (PGCE) teacher. As well as instigating the Strategic Edge research programme, he has spent time studying with many of the recognised practitioners in the fields of business and personal development. A pioneering 'thought leader', Nicholas has introduced and worked with his clients on a range of vital concepts. He was one of the 'first to field' with such important concepts as work-life balance; think global, act local and in his book of January 2008 was one of the first to call and recognise the severity of the 2008/9/10 recession.

Consistently rated as an inspirational yet highly pragmatic speaker, Nicholas teaches around the world (UK and continental Europe; USA and Canada; Asia) and is particularly skilled at working in an experiential and engaging manner. He works as a coach to many senior people in the industry.

He is the author of nine acclaimed books:

**Being The Best:** how to realise and release your true potential

**Get A Life:** how to achieve the work-life balance you are seeking

**JfDI: Just Do It:** the definitive guide to enabling your vision

**Unplugged:** the time for personal re-invention is now

**Beat the Recession:** a blueprint for success in tough times

**Have it your way:** how to influence

**Instant MBA:** MBA thinking, quickly.

**Blackberry Fool:** how to use the clever device with intelligence

**How to Sell and Market your Way out of this Recession**

He has an active and inspirational yet highly practical blog with a world-wide following.

Nicholas is a visiting lecturer at Warwick University Business School, teaching on the full-time, part-time and IBM specific MBA programmes. His specialist areas are leadership and entrepreneurial thinking.