

**B**uild a Better Business Book is the first accessible and comprehensive guide for authors who want to create impact. Learn how to refine your idea, choose a publishing model, and research, write, publish, and promote a book that matters. Includes advice on how to collect and write case studies, plan your book as a project, structure compelling chapters, and launch your book to maximize your sales, revenue, and influence. Features *writing and publishing secrets* from some of the world's most successful business authors.

“Priceless advice from a business book nerd, destined to save authors time, money and heartache. Anyone who is smart and generous enough to take on writing a business book needs to read Josh’s book asap.” – *Seth Godin, author of This Is Marketing*

“Josh is the architect behind the blueprint for success in this industry.” – *Scott Stratten, coauthor of UnMarketing and five other bestselling business books*

“I am going to scream about it from the mountaintops”

MITCH JOEL

“everything you need to know”

SHEL ISRAEL

“will save you from countless mistakes”

JOE PULIZZI

“like Jiminy Cricket on my shoulder”

TODD CAPONI

“transform readers and shape markets”

JAY ACUNZO

“full of amazing advice”

RISHAD TOBACOWALA

“packed with instructional stories”

LAURA GASSNER OTTING

“an absolute masterclass”

DAN PONTREFACT

“a game-changer”

ROGER DOOLEY

“concise, actionable substance”

ROBERT TERCEK

“stand out in a sea of sameness”

DAVE CARROLL

“clear-sighted, no-punches-pulled answers”

TAMSEN WEBSTER

“Josh is the bookmaster”

DIANE HESSAN

“the best bible for aspiring authors”

DAN GERSTEIN

“an investment you must make”

SHEP HYKEN

“get two, share one with a friend”

JEFF FROMM

BERNOFF.COM



Josh Bernoff is the best-selling author or ghost-writer of eight business books. He contributed to 45 book projects that have generated over \$20 million for their authors.



Josh Bernoff

BUILD A BETTER BUSINESS BOOK



“If you’re serious about writing a business book that matters, then look no further.” – Daniel H. Pink

Josh Bernoff

BUILD A

BETTER

BUSINESS

BOOK



How to Plan, Write, and Promote a Book That Matters

*Advance Praise for*

# **BUILD A BETTER BUSINESS BOOK**

Endorsed by more than 50 successful business authors

“Priceless advice from a business book nerd, destined to save authors time, money and heartache. Anyone who is smart and generous enough to take on writing a business book needs to read Josh’s book asap.” —**Seth Godin, author of *This Is Marketing***

“If you’re serious about writing a business book that matters, then look no further. Josh Bernoff’s step-by-step approach, backed by years of experience and insider knowledge, will show you how to create a compelling story that connects with readers and drives real change.” —**Daniel H. Pink, #1 *New York Times* best-selling author of *When, Drive, and To Sell Is Human***

“Josh gets what countless teachers of this craft seem to forget: Your book should not be fancy packaging for yet another hollow guide, checklist, or personal success story. Your book should share something profound that transforms readers and shapes markets. If that’s the business book you aspire to write, start by reading this one.” —**Jay Acunzo, author of *Break the Wheel: Question Best Practices, Hone Your Intuition, and Do Your Best Work***

“If you’re thinking about writing a business book, start here. This book provides the formulas for your success, from concept to writing to launch and all the in-betweens you didn’t even know you needed to know.” —**Melissa Agnes, author of *Crisis Ready: Building an Invincible Brand in an Uncertain World***

“*Build a Better Business Book* is staggeringly useful, and I’m more than a little angry that I had to write six books without it. This is the new, definitive guide to making a business book happen.” —**Jay Baer, coauthor of *Youtility: Why Smart Marketing Is about Help Not Hype***

“If you care about quality, this indispensable writing guide from respected book coach Josh Bernoff will teach you exactly how to start (and finish!) the business book you’ve always dreamed of writing. Even after writing nine books myself, I found Josh’s advice to be consistently useful and wonderfully non-obvious.” —**Rohit Bhargava, three-time *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author and cofounder of Ideapress Publishing**

“Finally, a definitive, complete resource for every author who needs to connect the dots from pitching to writing to publishing to promoting! You don’t know what you don’t know about developing a book—but Josh does, and now you can too.” —**Margot Bloomstein, author of *Trustworthy: How the Smartest Brands Beat Cynicism and Bridge the Trust Gap***

“With this book, Bernoff provides a very actionable plan for aspiring—and published—authors.” —**Chris Brogan, author of *Catching Appfire***

“When I write, I feel Josh’s presence like Jiminy Cricket on my shoulder, guiding my every word and sentence. Now, he’s written the go-to handbook for writing a business book your audience is going to want to read. I will never write another book without this one at my side.” —**Todd Caponi, author of *The Transparency Sale* and *The Transparent Sales Leader***

“As the master of writing without bullshit, Josh reveals twenty-four essential areas that demand action when designing a book capable of standing out in a sea of sameness. This is a clear blueprint for aspiring authors who’d prefer to learn the pitfalls before they publish.” —**Dave Carroll, author of *United Breaks Guitars: The Power of One Voice in the Age of Social Media***

“Your breakthrough idea deserves a breakthrough bestseller. When you finally decide to write that book, this is the indispensable guide to making it great.” —**Dorie Clark, *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author of *The Long Game* and executive education faculty, Duke University Fuqua School of Business**

“Practically anyone can write a business book—and it often feels like practically anyone does. But Josh Bernoff gives you the tools to write a good one ... maybe even a great one.” —**Rob Cottingham, cartoonist, *Noise to Signal***

“Josh Bernoff has written a remarkable book that explains and demonstrates exactly how to build a better business book. I wish this book had been available before I started writing.” —**Don Crowley, author of *The Compassionate Geek***

“Deconstructs the business book into both the profound and the practical in the no-bullshit style that has made Josh Bernoff my go-to for all things writing.” —**Liane Davey, bestselling author of *You First* and *The Good Fight***

“Don’t even outline your business book without reading this one first. *Build a Better Business Book* is equal parts inspiring and actionable, packed with interesting case studies and tactical advice from a true expert.” —**Melanie Deziel, author of *Prove It: Exactly How Modern Marketers Earn Trust***

“Josh Bernoff has written a supremely practical and well-thought-out book for anyone looking to write a business book. From the use of storytelling to working with a coauthor to essential tips in writing, the advice here is invaluable.” —**Minter Dial, author of *You Lead: How Being Yourself Makes You a Better Leader***

“Turn your ideas and insights into a must-read business book with Josh Bernoff’s start-to-finish guide! Packed with insider tips and practical tactics, this book is a game-changer for both aspiring and seasoned writers.” —**Roger Dooley, author of *Friction* and *Brainfluence***

“From the first sentence, I knew I would like this book. Josh knows that how we process information best is via story, and he spins an enticing tale of how you can chronicle your own knowledge and experience to not just teach readers, but captivate them.” —**James Fell, author of *On This Day in History Sh!t Went Down***



[www.amplifypublishinggroup.com](http://www.amplifypublishinggroup.com)

***Build a Better Business Book: How to Plan,  
Write, and Promote a Book That Matters***

©2023 WOBS LLC. All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means electronic, mechanical, or photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the permission of the author.

The advice and strategies found within may not be suitable for every writer. This work is sold with the understanding that neither the author nor the publisher is held responsible for the results accrued from the advice in this book.

Author photo by Ray Bernoff

**For more information, please contact:**

Amplify Publishing, an imprint of Amplify Publishing Group  
620 Herndon Parkway, Suite 320  
Herndon, VA 20170  
[info@amplifypublishing.com](mailto:info@amplifypublishing.com)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023934547

CPSIA Code: PRV0423A

ISBN-13: 978-1-64543-255-5

Printed in the United States

Josh Bernoff

BUILD A  
BETTER  
BUSINESS  
BOOK

How to *Plan, Write, and  
Promote* a Book That Matters

A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE FOR AUTHORS

# CONTENTS

## **PART I: PREPARE**

---

<b>Chapter 1:</b> Business Books Are Stories .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Chapter 2:</b> Why Write a Book? .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Chapter 3:</b> Great Ideas and Great Titles .....	<b>26</b>
<b>Chapter 4:</b> Publishing Models.....	<b>40</b>
<b>Chapter 5:</b> Book Proposals That Sell .....	<b>56</b>
<b>Chapter 6:</b> Book as Narrative.....	<b>69</b>
<b>Chapter 7:</b> The Book Plan.....	<b>77</b>
<b>Chapter 8:</b> The Employee Author.....	<b>83</b>

## **PART II: RESEARCH AND WRITE**

---

<b>Chapter 9:</b> Case Studies and Stories .....	<b>95</b>
<b>Chapter 10:</b> Research and Data .....	<b>106</b>
<b>Chapter 11:</b> Drafting Chapters .....	<b>115</b>
<b>Chapter 12:</b> Writing and Planning Tools .....	<b>127</b>
<b>Chapter 13:</b> Graphics and Cartoons.....	<b>137</b>
<b>Chapter 14:</b> Coauthors and Ghostwriters .....	<b>146</b>
<b>Chapter 15:</b> Editing and Revising .....	<b>156</b>
<b>Chapter 16:</b> Facts, Footnotes, and Back Matter.....	<b>165</b>

## **PART III: MANUSCRIPT INTO BOOK**

---

<b>Chapter 17: Turning a Manuscript into a Book</b> .....	<b>177</b>
<b>Chapter 18: Covers</b> .....	<b>189</b>
<b>Chapter 19: Blurbs and Endorsements</b> .....	<b>197</b>
<b>Chapter 20: Audiobooks</b> .....	<b>204</b>

## **PART IV: SUCCESS**

---

<b>Chapter 21: Launch and Promotion</b> .....	<b>215</b>
<b>Chapter 22: Public Speaking</b> .....	<b>234</b>
<b>Chapter 23: Making Money</b> .....	<b>240</b>
<b>Chapter 24: Writer to Author</b> .....	<b>248</b>
Acknowledgments .....	<b>251</b>
Index .....	<b>253</b>
About Josh Bernoff .....	<b>263</b>





# Chapter 1

---

## Business Books Are Stories

---

*To engage readers, tell a story.*

Jay Baer commands attention as he stalks around the stage. He's not a small, quiet guy. He radiates a big, friendly energy; his talks are filled with startling insights and stories that make you smile. He's unforgettable in his exquisitely tailored plaid suit, typically bright purple. And he's so good that he gets around 65 paid speaking gigs a year.

His popular business books fuel that speaking career and send paying clients to the marketing agency he founded, Convince & Convert.

In 2017, Jay was on a roll. His last two books based on counterintuitive marketing ideas were hits. *Youtility: Why Smart Marketing Is about Help Not Hype* (Portfolio, 2013), which explained how brands grow organically by being as useful as possible, was a *New York Times* bestseller. And *Hug Your Haters: How to Embrace Complaints and Keep Your Customers* (Portfolio, 2016) proved that reaching out to your worst, most hostile customers could expand your brand and break down barriers.

It was time for another book to fuel his reputation for great and useful ideas. So Jay decided to deconstruct word of mouth. There were plenty of books on word of mouth, but no one had created a formula for how to build a business

that people loved to talk about. Together with coauthor Daniel Lemin, Jay began to investigate examples of companies that had built a “talk trigger” into the way they did business. Think of the warm cookies you get when you check into a DoubleTree hotel, or an oral surgeon who calls patients the week of their appointment to reassure them and answer all their questions, or a theme park that gives out unlimited free soda to every visitor.

These “talkable” people and companies were getting free publicity and driving businesses in ways that traditional marketing couldn’t even approach. Jay and Daniel set out to create a clear and compelling set of instructions on how businesses large and small could create talk triggers and become unforgettable (much like Jay’s purple plaid suit).

The resulting book was *Talk Triggers: The Complete Guide to Creating Customers with Word of Mouth* (Portfolio, 2018), with a cover featuring a photo of a couple of fuzzy alpacas sharing a secret. Here’s how it starts:

### **Chapter 1: Talk Is Cheap**

Do you like chicken? Do you really, really, really like chicken? Do you like chicken as much as Jimmy Buffett likes the beach? If so, The Cheesecake Factory is your perfect restaurant.

Each of the chain’s 200 locations offers 85 different chicken dishes. Unsurprisingly, given how many chicken dishes alone it includes, the menu itself runs to 5,940 words long. That is more than 11 percent of the book you are about to read.

You might think that’s too long, but for The Cheesecake Factory, it’s just right. Why? Because the vastness of the restaurant’s menu is so unusual that it compels conversation among its patrons. Menu breadth is its secret customer-acquisition weapon — it hides in plain sight, in the hands of each and every diner.

The menu at The Cheesecake Factory is a talk trigger: a built-in differentiator that creates customer conversations.

Jay and Daniel then tell us what a talk trigger is, how it drives business, how people react to talk triggers, and how you can build one yourself. *Talk Triggers* describes the four criteria for a talk trigger, the five types of talk triggers, and the

six steps to create one. It's a complete manual for how to get people talking, and it's both fascinating and useful.

As they describe later in Chapter 1:

People have the power now in ways that would be unthinkable just a few years ago. That is why the time for talk triggers has never been better — or more necessary. Businesses' ability to unilaterally dictate consumer attitudes and subsequent purchases and loyalties is fraying like the hem of a cheap dress. . . .

One hundred percent of businesses care about word of mouth, but less than 1 percent have a plan for achieving it. That's why we wrote *Talk Triggers*.

The text is dotted with fun examples, like the meeting venue in Antwerp that comes with a free pass to the zoo. You smile, then you think, "We have got to learn to do this." And if your eagerness wanes a bit, there are constant reminders that "same is lame" — that businesses without talk triggers must continually shell out bucks for advertising that generates neither loyalty nor word of mouth. It's a hard pitch to resist.

When the book was done, Jay and Daniel knew that they couldn't just fling it out into the world and hope that Jay's reputation and speeches would spread it. They had to do what they told everyone else to do — make their book talkable. So they sent a bunch of copies to reviewers who had decent-sized followings (including me) in a package that also included a tin of DoubleTree chocolate chip cookies and a cuddly plush alpaca. I wrote about the book on my blog. Four hundred other people posted "shelfies" of them reading the book with their own plush alpacas. For a time in October of 2018, if you were a marketer, you couldn't go anywhere on social media without bumping into a #TalkTriggers shelfie.<sup>1</sup>

Did it work? *Talk Triggers* sold more than 50,000 copies and garnered 168 Amazon reviews, averaging 4.7 stars. In the years that followed, the authors

---

1 To see more about Jay Baer and Daniel Lemin's successful book promotion, including a collection of *Talk Triggers* shelfies, see my blog post, "Secrets of 3 successful book launches: connecting ideas and people," Josh Bernoff, April 21, 2020. See <https://wobs.co/BBBBtriggers>.

cleared speaking fees of more than \$1 million. And marketers continue to call Jay's firm for help creating their own talk triggers. The book did its job: It spread an idea so broadly that it became part of the marketing lexicon, indelibly connected to the authors.

## Stories fuel business books that matter

*Talk Triggers* isn't successful because Jay Baer and Daniel Lemin are smart.

Oh, they're smart alright. And they're excellent writers. But when it comes to business books, smart and talented by themselves are insufficient.

And while there are a thousand decisions involved in the creation of every successful business book — and I promise, I'll help you with as many of those as I can in the pages that follow — there is one thing that makes all the difference.

Story.

Humans love stories. We want to believe them. We relate to the people in them, imagine ourselves living them, remember them, tell other people about them.

When author Chip Heath conducted an experiment with Stanford University students making presentations, ten minutes after the presentations, only 5% of the audience could remember a statistic, but 63% of the audience remembered the stories.<sup>2</sup>

To be convincing, business books need facts, and data, and reasoning, and advice. But *stories* are what people relate to, remember, and act on. Even though I only shared a few hundred words from Jay and Daniel's book, I know you'll remember the parts that are stories — the story about The Cheesecake Factory's menu, and about the venue that includes a trip to the zoo, and how Jay and Daniel sent me DoubleTree cookies along with their book.

For a business book to matter, it needs to connect with people, motivate them to act, and stimulate them to share the ideas in it. Story is crucial to all of that.

This doesn't mean that you should start your business book with "once upon a time." It's not a fairy tale. But it does mean that when you're planning and

---

2 Cited in *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* (Random House, 2007) by Chip Heath and Dan Heath, p. 243.

writing your business book, you must consider these five things that relate to stories and narratives.

1. **Who is the audience?** For the readers to relate to the stories in your book, they need to be able to imagine themselves having the experiences you describe and taking the advice you deliver. This demands that you clearly identify your audience. The audience for *Talk Triggers* is marketers. Your audience might be podcasters, or business executives, or new college graduates. But it can't be "everybody," because not everybody will relate to your advice and stories. You are solving a problem; your audience is the group that has that problem and wants to solve it.
2. **What is the idea?** The stories in your book need to have a *point*. That point is your idea — the new way of looking at the world that you've discovered and are sharing. The idea should be new, because why write a book about an idea everyone already knows about? For example, *Talk Triggers* wasn't the first book on word of mouth, but it's arguably the first one that shows systematically how to engineer your business to create it. The idea of a talk trigger is more specific and actionable than vague generalities about word of mouth. Every story in the book is about somebody who created one, how they did it, and how you can do it, too. (For more on how to refine and differentiate your ideas, see Chapter 3.)
3. **Where will the stories come from?** Stories don't just fall from the sky. Authors need to collect them. *Talk Triggers* has 22 case studies; collecting them was crucial to making the book believable and memorable. In your book, the stories may include full case studies, shorter examples of a paragraph or two, and little two-sentence narratives that reinforce a point. But every one of them will be there because you did research to find them: You conducted interviews, researched news articles, or wrote down relevant experiences that you had personally. Unless you are deliberate about collecting stories that reinforce the parts of the idea, the book will be dry and sterile. And books like that don't catch on. (Chapter 9 explains how to find stories and conduct interviews.)
4. **What is the narrative thread of the book?** The best business books don't just contain stories, they *are* stories. The chapters link together to

form a narrative. The narrative in *Talk Triggers* goes like this: Marketers who want ideas to spread need a talk trigger. Otherwise, they're the same as everybody else, and same is lame. Every talk trigger fits four criteria. There are five types of talk triggers. And there are six steps to create one. If you follow this advice, your marketing will succeed, your company will grow, and you will live happily ever after. (To learn more about how to structure your book as a story, see Chapter 6.)

5. **How will you promote your story?** For your book to matter, it needs to reach people. That starts when you seed the world with people who can share your story. That includes both media people who can write about it and regular people who have a lot of friends. That means you need a promotional plan. The core of the *Talk Triggers* promotional plan was getting all those “influencers,” like me, to understand the big idea in the book and to talk about it. Your plan won't look just like Jay and Daniel's, but you must have a plan. (For ideas on how to promote your book, see Chapter 21.)

## The first chapter must scare the crap out of the reader

The most important part of every story is the beginning, because if the story doesn't suck you in at the start, you'll lose interest.

When it comes to business books, if you don't create urgency in the reader, they will stop reading, and the book will go on the bedside table on the pile that my agent refers to as “guilt mountain.” If your book is on guilt mountain (or your ebook is in the digital guilt mountain in the reader's Kindle), it won't be a business book that matters.

The way to start is by scaring the crap out of people. Chapter 1 must be the scare-the-crap-out-of-you chapter.

There are two main ways to scare the crap out of the reader: fear and greed.

Fear looks like this: “Something bad is happening. If you don't act, you could be in big trouble.”

Greed looks like this: “You are missing out. If you don't act, you won't take advantage of something great.”

You must tap into fear, greed, or both in chapter 1.

In *Talk Triggers*, greed is most prominent. (Jay and Daniel would probably not characterize it as “greed,” but marketing is about generating more business, and wanting more is, basically, greed.) The greed in chapter 1 is “If you want your business to get customers talking about it as they do with The Cheesecake Factory, you need a talk trigger.”

There’s also a little fear. “Same is lame” is fear. Nobody wants to be an ordinary business that competes by being the same as everybody else. If that scares you, you need a talk trigger.

Once you know the fear/greed formula, you’ll see it in nearly every business book you read. Here are some excerpts from Chapter 1 of some successful business books:

- **Fear:** “Big data has plenty of evangelists, but I’m not one of them. This book will focus sharply in the other direction, on the damage inflicted by [weapons of math destruction] and the injustice they perpetrate. We will explore harmful examples that affect people at critical life moments: going to college, borrowing money, getting sentenced to prison, or finding and holding a job. All of these life domains are increasingly controlled by secret models wielding arbitrary punishments.” *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy* (Crown, 2016) by Cathy O’Neil, p. 13.
- **Greed:** “I will show that timing is really a science — an emerging body of multifaceted, multidisciplinary research that offers fresh insights into the human condition and useful guidance on working smarter and living better. . . . Think of this book as a new genre altogether — a when-to book.” *When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing* (Riverhead Books, 2018) by Daniel H. Pink, p. 4.
- **Both:** “This book is a guide to the world being created by the new machines, platforms, and crowds. . . . The three rebalancings we describe here will take years, and their end points and exact trajectories are far from clear. But in chaos lies opportunity.” *Machine, Platform, Crowd: Harnessing our Digital Future* (W. W. Norton, 2017) by Andrew McAfee and Erik Brynjolfsson, p. 25.



## The Gladwell exception

Maybe you're not the kind of person who feels comfortable with fear and greed. Is there any way to create a business book that matters without tapping into fear and greed?

Sure. Take Malcolm Gladwell. Even though he wouldn't describe himself as a business author, businesspeople avidly snap up his books like *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* and *Outliers: The Story of Success*, scouring them for business insights.

Malcolm Gladwell is an amazingly successful author simply because he is an incredible storyteller. You can't put his books down because they're fascinating. Malcolm Gladwell succeeds, not because of fear or greed, but because he is entertaining.

Couldn't you do that?

No, you couldn't. Because you are not Malcolm Gladwell. (Malcolm, if you're reading this, you're the only person I'm *not* talking to right now. And while you're reading it, go ahead and pick a fight with me, I'm sure the resulting publicity would help attract attention to this book.)

You may imagine that you are as talented as one of the most successful nonfiction authors in the last two decades, but you almost certainly are not.

You could try to write a funny book. It might catch on, and it might spread, and it might get you a few speaking gigs — but if it doesn't tap into fear or greed, in the end, it won't matter. It won't change the way your readers think about the world.

So I'm going to assume that, lacking Malcolm's talent, you'll have to get by the way the other 99.9% of business authors do: by coming up with an awesome new idea and telling stories that people relate to, including tapping into fear and greed. Do that well in your first chapter, and you'll be off to a good start in creating a book that matters.

## What you can learn from Dan Bricklin's book experience

Dan Bricklin is one of America's most insightful inventors. In 1978, while in an MBA class at the Harvard Business School, he watched as a professor walked

through the tedious process of performing and correcting business calculations. An idea emerged in his mind: Why not create a computerized table that could perform and update calculations automatically?

Dan's conception, created by his programming partner Bob Frankston as software for the Apple II hobbyist computer, was the first electronic spreadsheet: VisiCalc. VisiCalc, more than any other product, turned personal computers from expensive toys into business machines. Microsoft Excel and Google Sheets are direct descendants of Bricklin's groundbreaking idea.

Over the decades, Dan continued to develop successful software products and to observe and comment on developments in the world of computing and technology in blog posts and essays. His blog attracted the attention of editors at the publisher Wiley, and Wiley proposed to publish *Bricklin on Technology*, a book based on Dan's essays and posts, with additional commentary and context. The book was published in 2009. There was no book advance.

Here's how *Bricklin on Technology* begins:

### **Chapter 1: Introduction: Case Studies and Details**

The goal of this book is to help you better understand the juncture between computer technology and people, the process of creating that technology, and the evolution of those innovations. It does this through the use of essays and annotated case studies of people using technologies such as cell phones, blogs, and personal computer productivity tools. . . .

Insight into the forces that govern computer technology, and how that technology affects and is affected by a society made up of people, used to be of concern to just a few insiders. With the new, prominent role that computer technology plays supporting all of society, this insight is now something of interest to a much wider range of people. This book brings a unique perspective to help gain that insight.

When *Bricklin on Technology* came out in 2009, Dan made sure to encourage events where he was speaking to include copies of the book. But there was no concerted publicity campaign. Wiley, the publisher, sent copies to all the usual reviewers but didn't put much emphasis on publicity — not having paid an advance, they had very little skin in the game. In the end, the book sold just a

few thousand copies and didn't have a significant impact on Dan's visibility or success as a public speaker.

Was publishing the book worth it?

When I spoke to Dan about working on the book and the launch, he told me it had accomplished some useful goals. He felt that having some of his thoughts in print, as opposed to in online essays and blog posts, made them more permanent — for example, they could be included as references in Wikipedia. And he ended up taking his own advice in the book and developing another software product — an iPhone app for taking notes — that achieved moderate success.

Dan is brilliant and his book is full of fascinating insights. But from where I sit, it could have been a lot more successful. It was a missed opportunity.

Dan doesn't perceive his book as a business book, but his imprint, Wiley, focuses on business books, and books that analyze technology are generally part of the business genre. In this case, *Bricklin on Technology* didn't fit the template of a business book that matters.

The audience was unclear and overly broad — basically, anyone who cares about the impact of technology on society or vice versa. It didn't solve any particular problem for those people.

Ideas were not the problem here. There are plenty of ideas in *Bricklin on Technology*. He analyzes what technology and tools are free and which people will pay for. He examines the dip in CD sales (which would eventually crater) and dismisses the glib explanation that file sharing was responsible. But there is no single driving idea — no “aha” moment. Without a unifying idea, you can't easily tell others what it's about even if you loved the book.

There are certainly a lot of stories here. But the book itself is not a narrative. The essays cluster around some classes of ideas, but they don't naturally lead one into the next.

The promotion was meager, so not enough people learned of the book's existence to give it a chance.

There is certainly no “scare the crap out you” energy in chapter 1, which basically cues you up to receive a bunch of observations and insights but doesn't explain how those will have a significant impact on what you should or should not do next as a businessperson or consumer.

And while you could make the argument that Dan Bricklin is as talented a

software developer as Malcolm Gladwell is as a writer, Dan's prose is not at the Gladwell level. There is no shame in this; almost nobody can write that well. So the Gladwell exception doesn't apply.

The problem is not that this is a book of essays or blog posts. Guy Kawasaki's *Reality Check: The Irreverent Guide to Outsmarting, Outmanaging, and Outmarketing Your Competition* (Portfolio, 2008) is in the same format, but it's assembled and organized into a complete manual for getting ahead: "Hardcore information for hardcore people who want to kick ass." Seth Godin's *Small Is the New Big: and 183 Other Riffs, Rants, and Remarkable Business Ideas* (Portfolio, 2006) amounts to a complete essay collection on new ways to think about marketing, as he promises: "I'm certain that you're smart enough to see the stuff you've always wanted to do, buried deep inside one of these riffs. And I'm betting that once inspired, you'll actually make something happen." Both books came out around the same time as *Bricklin on Technology*, and both made a big impact. Guy and Seth made it seem like you were missing out if you didn't take their advice: They scared the crap out of you, at least a little. Dan didn't.

I can't help but wonder what would have happened if Dan had focused his audience, unified his analysis behind an idea, assembled a story around it, and created a little urgency — and then drove that story home with some focused promotion. That would have been more work. But it might have made the difference in this book catching on. We'll never know.<sup>3</sup>

## Don't waste your effort

I recently surveyed 242 business authors, of whom about three-fourths had successfully published a book. Among the published authors, 87% agreed that

---

3 Dan is a thoughtful guy regarding media, and upon reading what I wrote, suggested another reason the book didn't catch on: It wasn't the right format for his audience. For various reasons, Dan and Wiley didn't create an ebook version of *Bricklin on Technology*. He wonders if his technical audience was perhaps unwilling to cart around the bulky paper version of the book, which was especially unwieldy for travelers, and might have been more receptive to a version for the then fairly new Kindle ebook format. As a result, if any of his potential readers heard about the book on Twitter or one of the podcasts that interviewed him and wanted to immediately start reading it, they were unable to obtain it in electronic format.

writing a book was a good decision. But as I'll reveal throughout this book, they have many regrets. They found it challenging to organize content and get time to write. They were stymied in their promotional efforts. They were disappointed by their publishers.

Writing a book that matters is hard work, and there are plenty of pitfalls awaiting you. I'll do my best to get you past those pitfalls. But if there's one thing I want you to remember, it's that stories are central. Unless you have a story to tell — and you tell it as a story — people won't easily remember or share your book. And unless you figure out how to scare the crap out of people in chapter 1, they won't read further (unless you're Malcolm Gladwell, of course).

I want you to end up like Jay Baer, with a book that fuels your dreams and puts your ideas into the mainstream conversation of your audience. That's a book that matters. I want to help you avoid ending up like Dan Bricklin, with a book that's a nice statement of your ideas, but that didn't make much of an impact. I want your book journey to be worth it.

The subtitle of this book promises a comprehensive guide for authors. While working on 45 books as author, coauthor, ghostwriter, editor, or writing coach, I've seen a lot go right — and a lot go wrong. I feel compelled to share what I've learned and help other authors. In the remainder of this book, I'll try to give you all the tools you need to create a business book that matters.

I've tried to write the book in a way that is both useful and entertaining. But there's no requirement that you read it in order. Feel free to dip into the rest of the chapters when you need to — to research how to deal with planning, writing chapters, making graphics, obtaining blurbs, marketing, or whatever's on your mind — as you set out on your own author journey.

The first section, Prepare, focuses on the crucial skill of making and executing a plan that will put you in the best position to succeed. I'll explain the different objectives people have in writing business books, how they can make their books memorable, the three ways you can get your book in print, how to structure your book's story, and how you can sell your book to traditional publishers with a book proposal, provided that's your preferred route to publication.

The second section, Research and Write, will walk you through everything you need to assemble the ingredients and bake them into a book. It includes tips on research, where to find case studies and stories, how to structure and

plan chapters with a “fat outline,” and how to write and improve prose (and graphics) to compel people to believe you and to keep on reading. I’ll also talk about how to collaborate with editors, coauthors, and ghostwriters in a way that makes writing faster and more efficient, not just more troublesome.

Once you’ve completed a manuscript, you’re not quite done. The process of turning words into actual books is mysterious to most authors, so I tackle that in the third section, Manuscript into Book. It deals with nuts-and-bolts topics like your book cover graphic, how to verify facts, copy editing, pagination, indexes, and, of course, footnotes. I’ll also describe what’s involved in self-publishing, if you decide to take that path to publication.

The final section, Success, details how to launch and promote your book, including how to leverage your friends and followers, how to generate publicity, and how to get blurbs (back-cover quotes). I’ll also discuss some ways to make money from being a published author.

My aim is to answer every significant question you have about becoming a business book author. If you’re worried about something, it ought to be in here — just check the index.

I don’t know if I scared the crap out of you in this chapter, but I hope I did, at least a little. You should be greedy about what a book could do for you — I’ll give you what you need to grasp that opportunity. And you should be fearful about the effort you could be wasting. Crafting the story of your book — and the stories *in* your book — could be the most rewarding thing you’ll ever do. And it all starts with having a goal and a purpose, as I describe in Chapter 2.

## Key takeaways

---

- People love and remember stories, so stories are central to successful business books.
- Five story-related qualities are central to the success of a book: audience, idea, case-study stories, a narrative thread, and promotion.
- Chapter 1 of your book must scare the crap out of the reader. There are two ways to do this: with fear and with greed.

To read the rest of the book, buy a copy at [bernoff.com/books](http://bernoff.com/books).