

# **Business Author Survey**

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Some survey results have now been published in the book *Build a Better Business Book* (Amplify, 2023).

# How I collected responses

- Promoted through various channels, including those controlled by me and sharing by friends and colleagues
- Collected 242 complete responses from 2019 to 2022
- To qualify, respondents must have published a nonfiction book (172 responses) or be working on a book (70 responses)

# Respondents came from a variety of sources

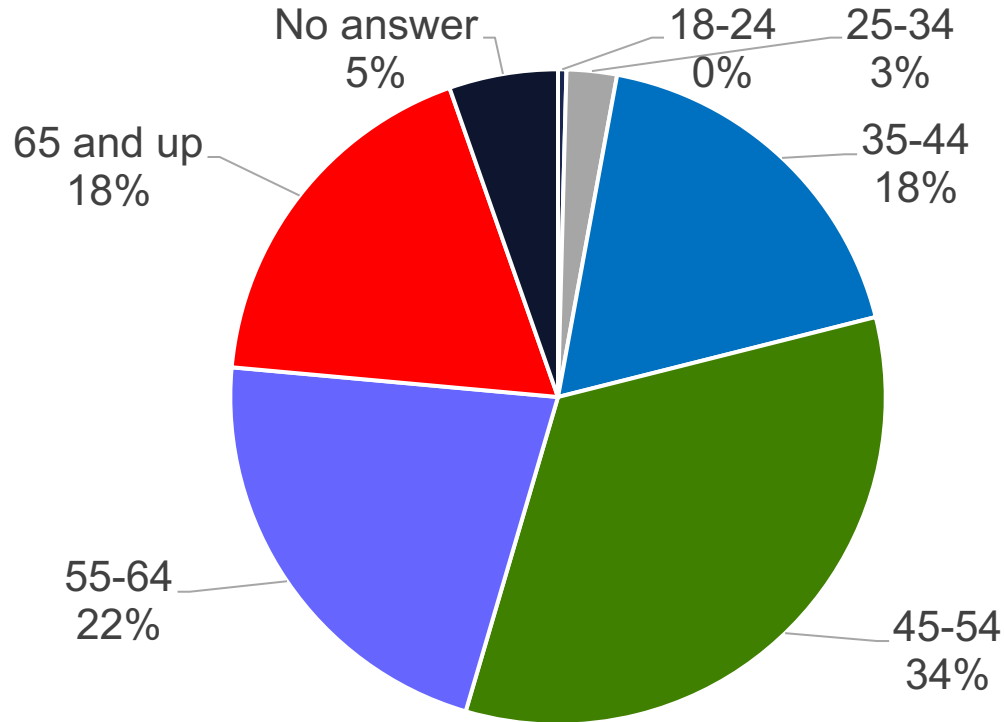
- 28% from Without Bullshit blog
- 38% from 13 different agencies and publishers who shared survey link
- 25% from Facebook author groups
- 5% from responses to personal emails
- 3% from Twitter
- 1% from Jane Friedman's "The Hot Sheet"

# Mostly white Americans, even gender split

- 86% American, 10% Canadian, 3% European, 1% Australian
- 90% white, 3% Latino/Hispanic, 5% Asian, 1% Black
- 54% male, 45% female

Source: Bernoff.com nonfiction author survey 2019-2022, 242 responses

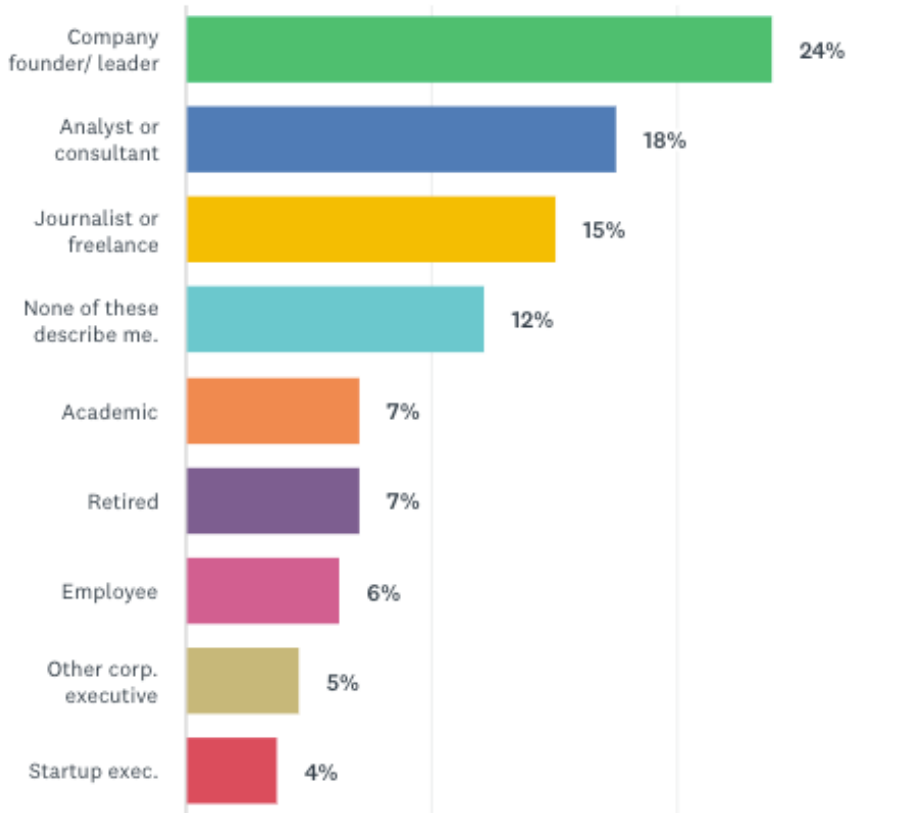
# Author respondents of all ages, median is 52



Source: Bernoff.com nonfiction author survey 2019-2022, N=242

# Authors include leaders, consultants, journalists

What is your current employment situation? Which best describes you?



Source: Bernoff.com nonfiction  
author survey 2019-2022, N=242

*bernonff.com*

# How-to, business strategy lead book categories

Now think about the most recent book you have published. How would you classify the book? Choose the single classification that best fits that book.

Category	
“How-to” practical advice	27%
Business strategy/trend	26%
Leadership	7%
Motivational	6%
History	5%
Biography	4%
Memoir	3%

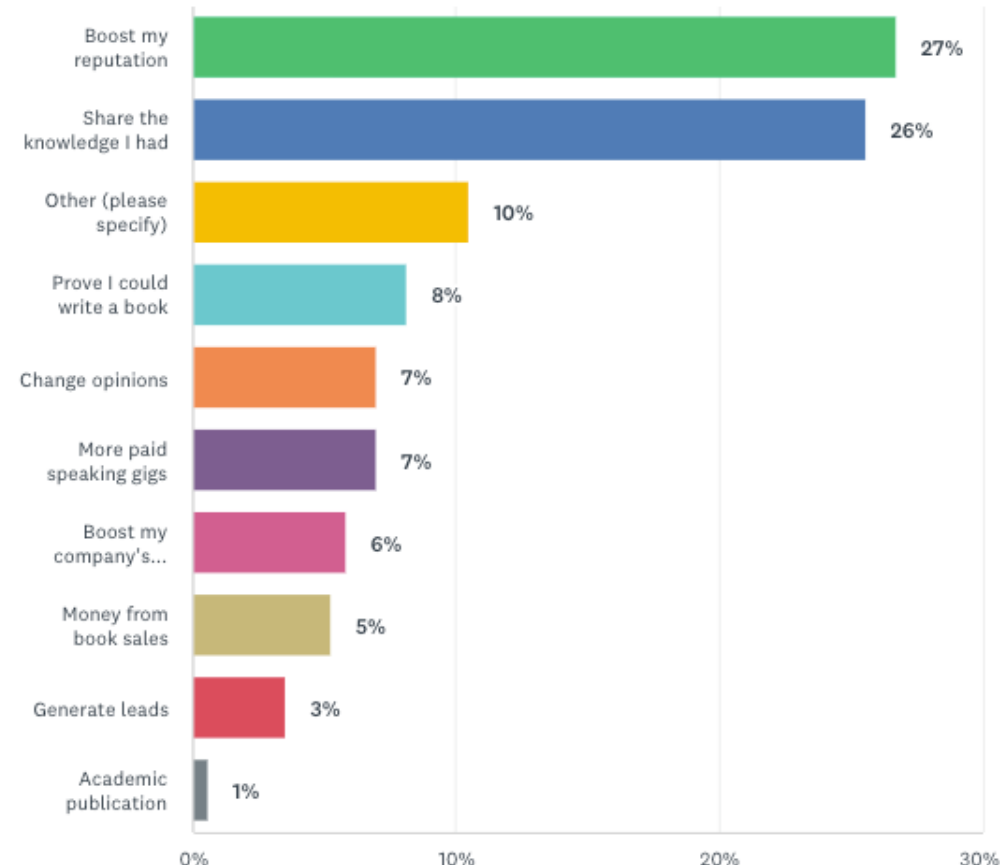
Category	
Personal productivity	3%
Business narrative	2%
General interest	2%
Personal finance/investing	2%
Science/medicine	2%
Advocacy/politics	1%
Other	8%

Source: Bernoff.com author survey 2019-2022, N=172 published authors



# Top single goal of published authors is reputation

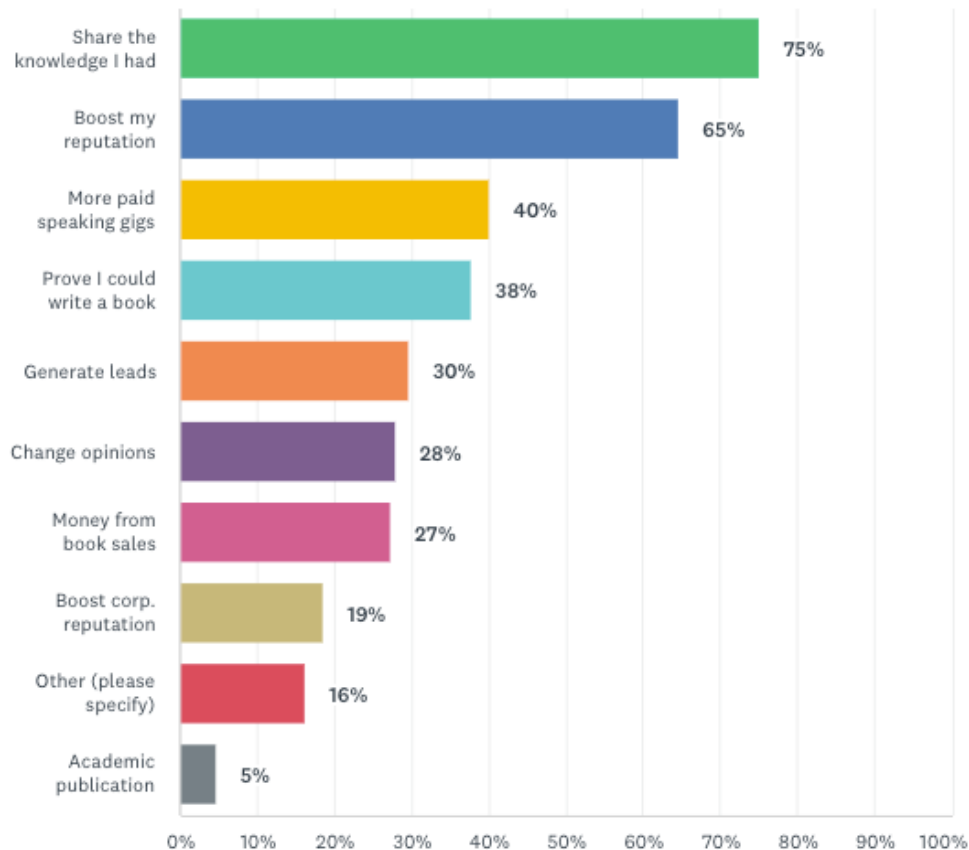
Among the goals you said you had when writing your first nonfiction book, which was the most important goal?



Source: Bernoff.com author survey 2019-2022,  
N=172 published authors

# 3 in 4 published authors hope to share knowledge

Review this list of possible goals people have when writing books. Which of these goals motivated you to write your first nonfiction book? Check all that apply.



Source: Bernoff.com author survey 2019-2022,  
N=172 published authors

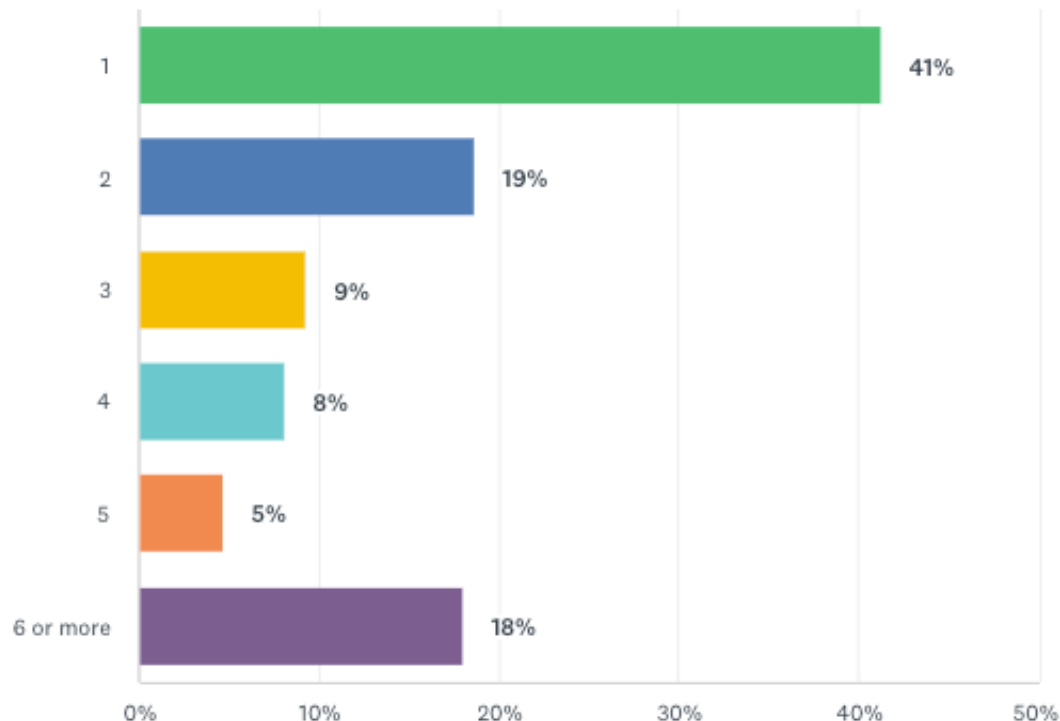
# Most published authors accomplished their goals

Goal	% with goal	% who accomplished goal
Share knowledge I had	75%	70%
Boost my reputation	65%	60%
More paid speaking gigs	40%	30%
Prove I could write a book	38%	36%
Generate leads	30%	20%
Change opinions	28%	21%
Money from book sales	27%	20%
Boost corp. reputation	19%	14%
Academic publication	5%	4%

Source: Bernoff.com author survey 2019-2022, N=172 published authors

# Median author has published 2 books

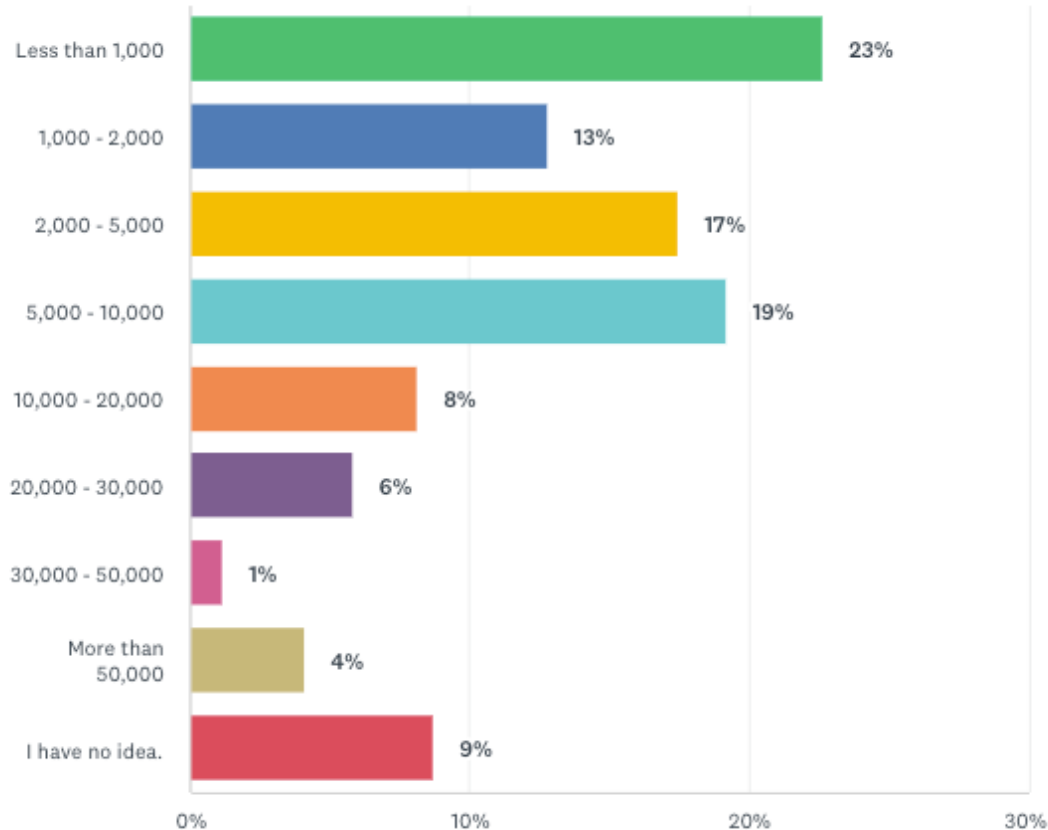
How many nonfiction books have you written and published?



Source: Bernoff.com author survey 2019-2022,  
N=172 published authors

# Published author median sales: just over 2000

How many copies did your most recently published book sell so far? Make your best estimate including printed books, ebooks, and audiobooks (but not foreign translations).



Source: Bernoff.com author survey 2019-2022,  
N=172 published authors

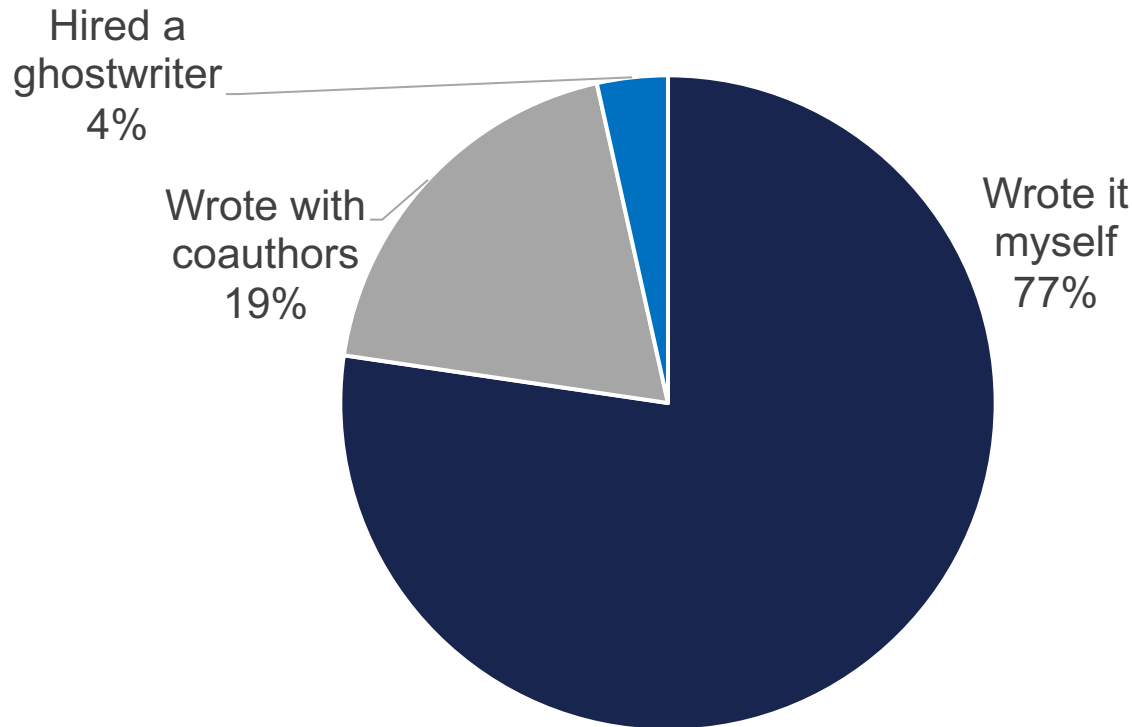
# Unpublished authors have higher expectations

- For the book you're working on to be a success for you, how many copies do you think it must sell?
  - Median expectation: 3,500 copies.
  - 28% feel that at least 10,000 copies are required.

Source: Bernoff.com author survey 2019-2022,  
N=70 not yet published authors

# Most published authors wrote books solo

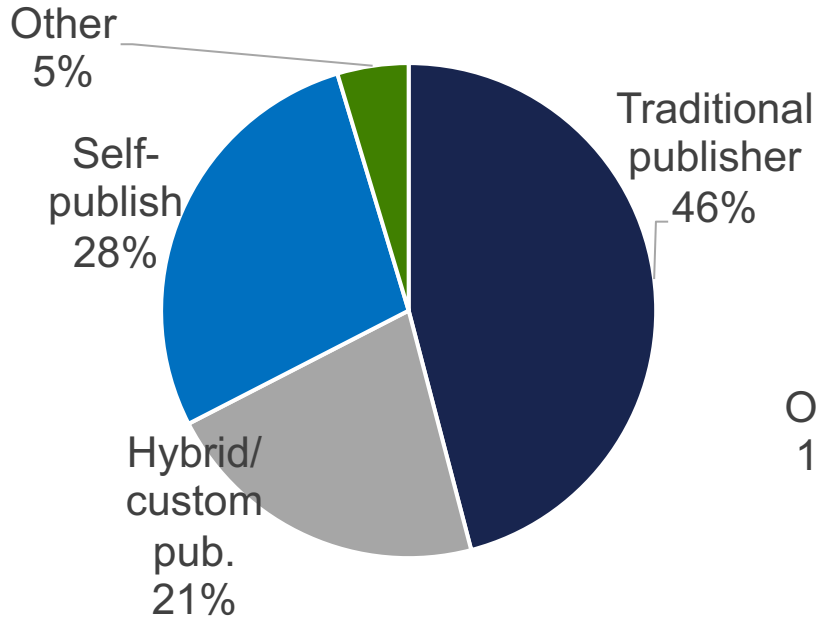
How did you write this book?



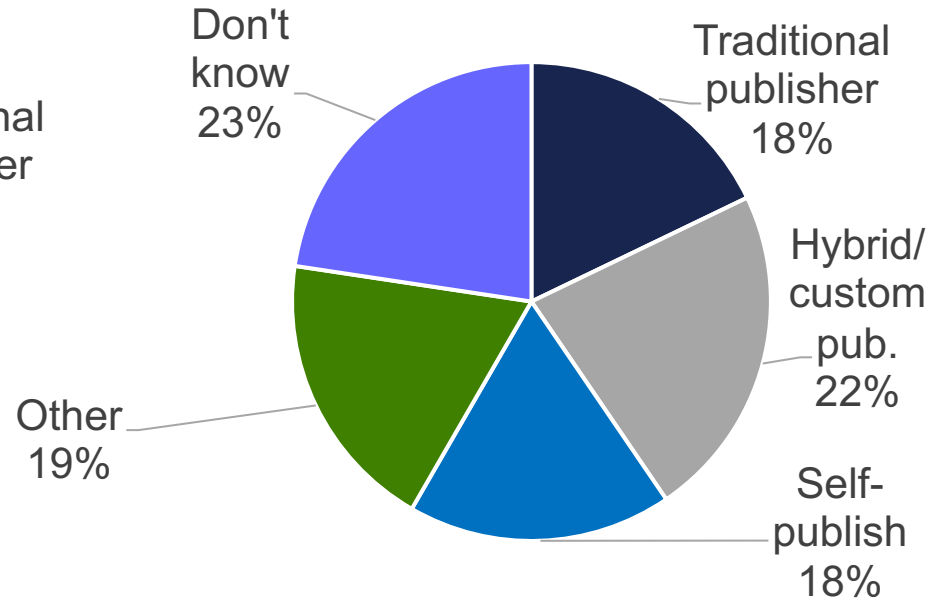
Source: Bernoff.com nonfiction author survey 2019-2022, N=172 published authors

# Authors used varied publishing models

## Published



## Not yet published

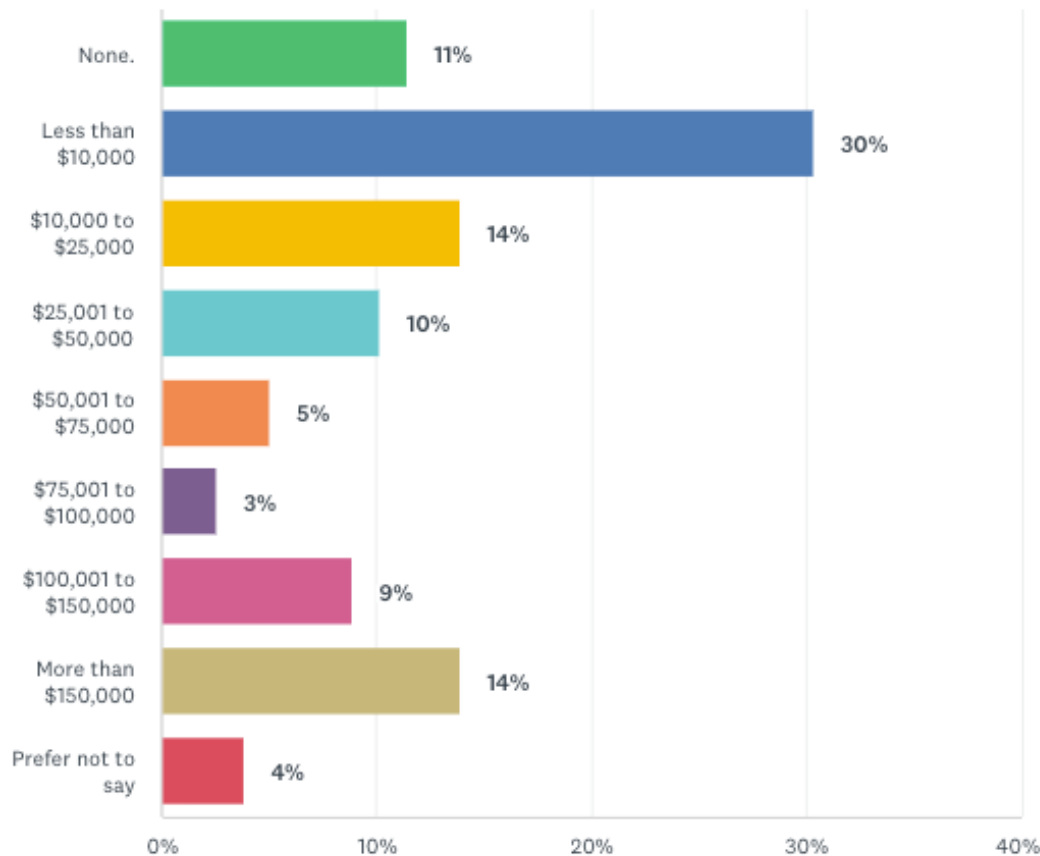


Source: Bernoff.com nonfiction author survey 2019-2022, N=172 published authors, 70 unpublished authors



# Median advance from publisher was \$17.5K

How large was your total advance from the publisher? (Answers in US dollars)



Source: Bernoff.com author survey 2019-2022,  
N=79 traditionally published authors

# Hybrid published authors like their publishers more

Would you agree that your publisher did a good job?

5-point scale, strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)

	Traditional publisher	Hybrid publisher
Percent who agree publisher did a good job	54%	86%
Percent who disagree	22%	3%
Average score (1-5)	3.52	4.32
Number of respondents	79	37

Source: Bernoff.com author survey 2019-2022, N=79 traditionally published authors, 37 hybrid published authors

# Many marketing complaints for traditional publishers

“Did a great job with every aspect.”

“A strong editing effort and desire to produce a quality book”

“Penguin Random House (Portfolio)

Fantastic Publisher!”

“Publicity person was awesome.”

“I’m on my 11th editor for my 1st book.”

“Disorganized process, great hearts, lots of churn.”

“The support during the writing and editing process was better than expected and a wonderful experience. I wish they had done more to promote the book”

“For working with a major New York imprint, it was a remarkably do-it-yourself process.”

“Well intentioned but pretty perfunctory” “They had no idea what the book was really about and did not really help with promos.”

“Didn’t invest enough in getting the word out about my book”

“They were downright nasty about the design process.”

“Marketing and distribution from my traditional publishers continues to be abysmal.”

“They suck”

“I wanted to work with them to get my book into distribution -- they did that -- nothing more/less”

“I was aghast at how little they market books.”

Source: Bernoff.com author survey 2019-2022,

N=79 traditionally published authors

# More positive comments than negative on hybrids

“Great to work with!”

“Did what I asked them to do  
and nothing else. I was satisfied,  
but not blown away.”

“Scribe was great in all ways. Loved them.”

“Page Two is phenomenal. So many great  
services and amazing friendship and support  
throughout.”

“Marketing-wise, I did not get much  
support”

“Excellent editorial advice. Hands-on engagement  
throughout the writing process. Incredibly valuable to  
have a trusted ally in this process.”

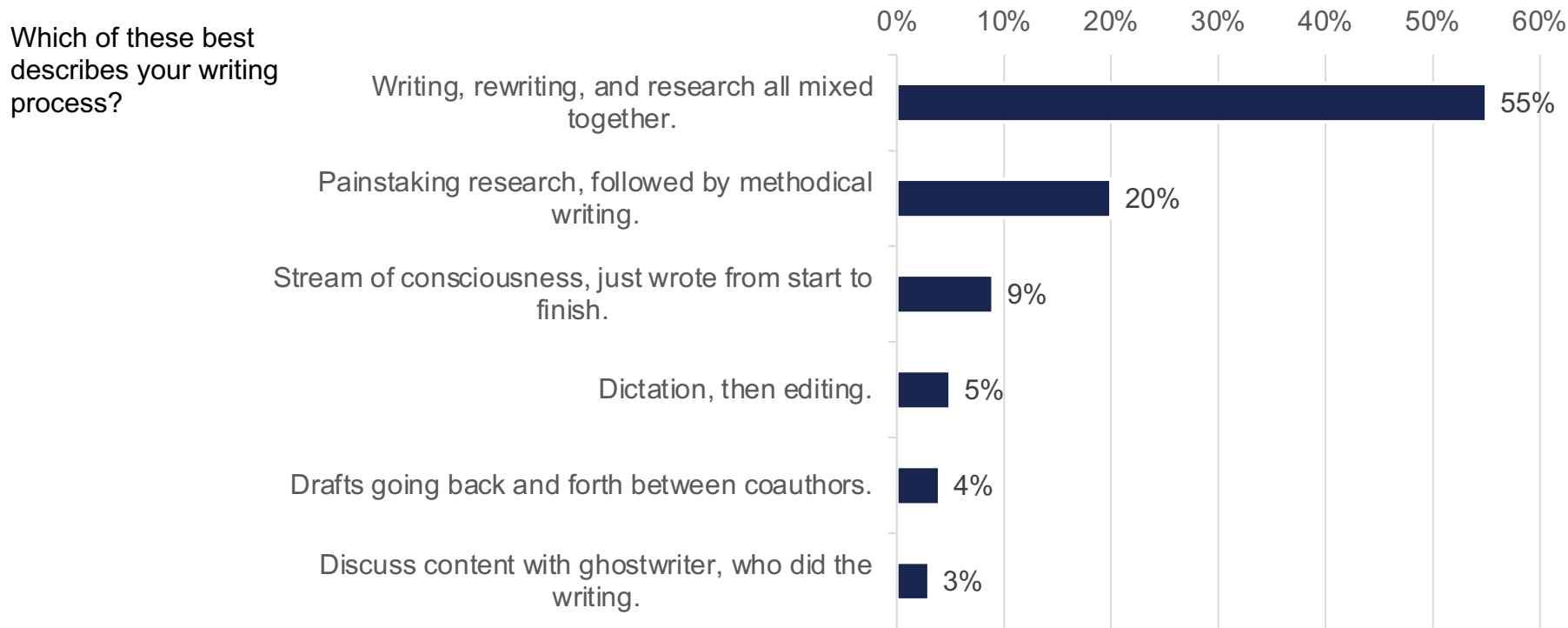
“Communication  
throughout the process  
wasn't great”

“They cared as much as I did and they proved  
this to me time and time again. They were true  
partners in the process.”

“Was expecting more help on the  
production side, could have been more  
proactive. Dropped the ball completely in  
some areas and had to scramble.”

Source: Bernoff.com author survey 2019-2022, N=37 hybrid published authors

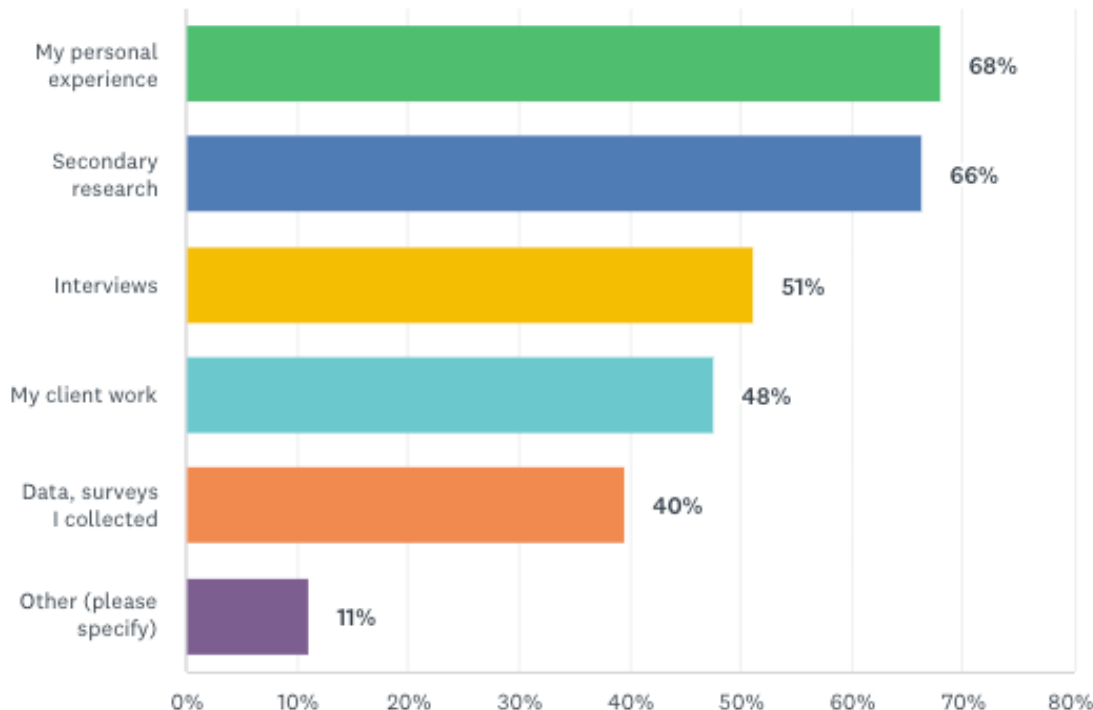
# Published authors often use chaotic processes



Source: Bernoff.com nonfiction author survey 2019-2022, N=172 published authors

# Most books based on experience, web research

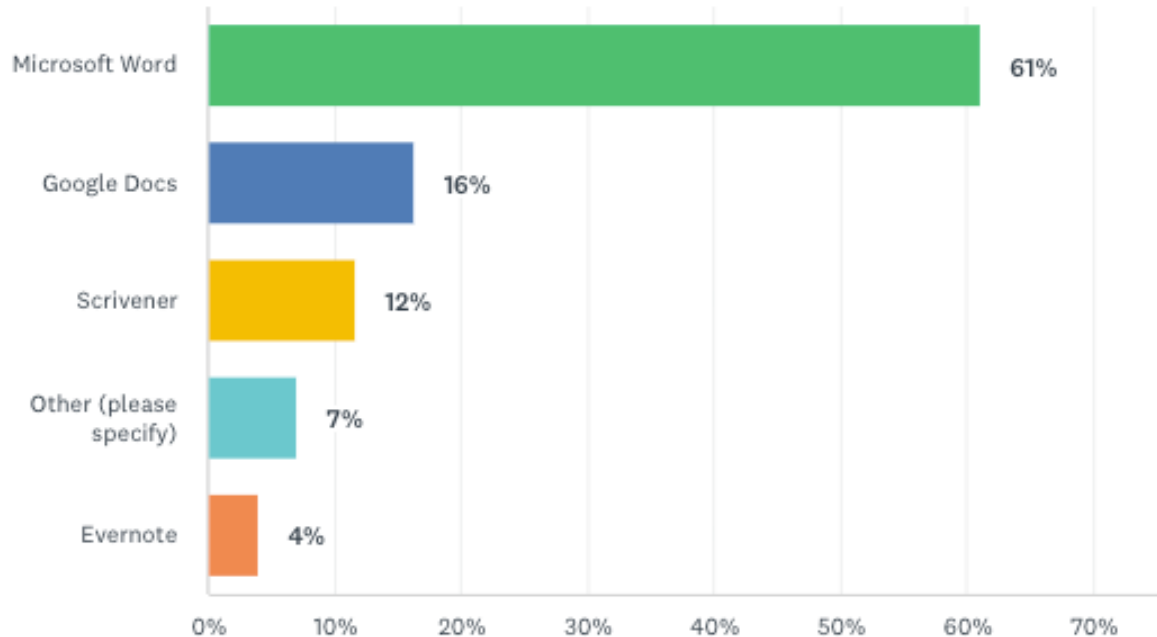
What are your primary sources of content for the book? Check all that apply.



Source: Bernoff.com author survey 2019-2022,  
N=172 published authors

# Authors still write mostly in MS Word

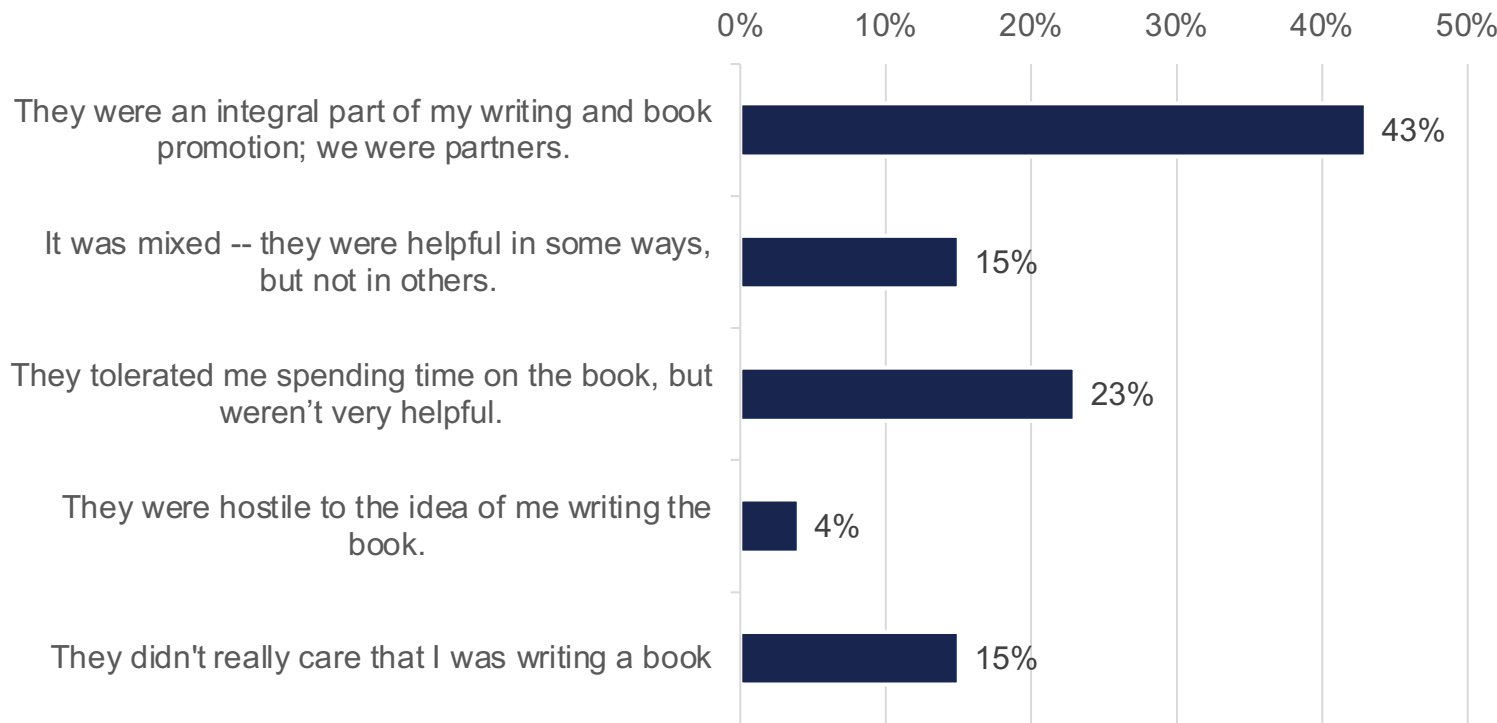
From the following list of tools, which do you use most in research and writing?



Source: Bernoff.com author survey 2019-2022,  
N=172 published authors

# Only about half of companies were helpful

Was your company or organization supportive as you wrote and publicized the book?

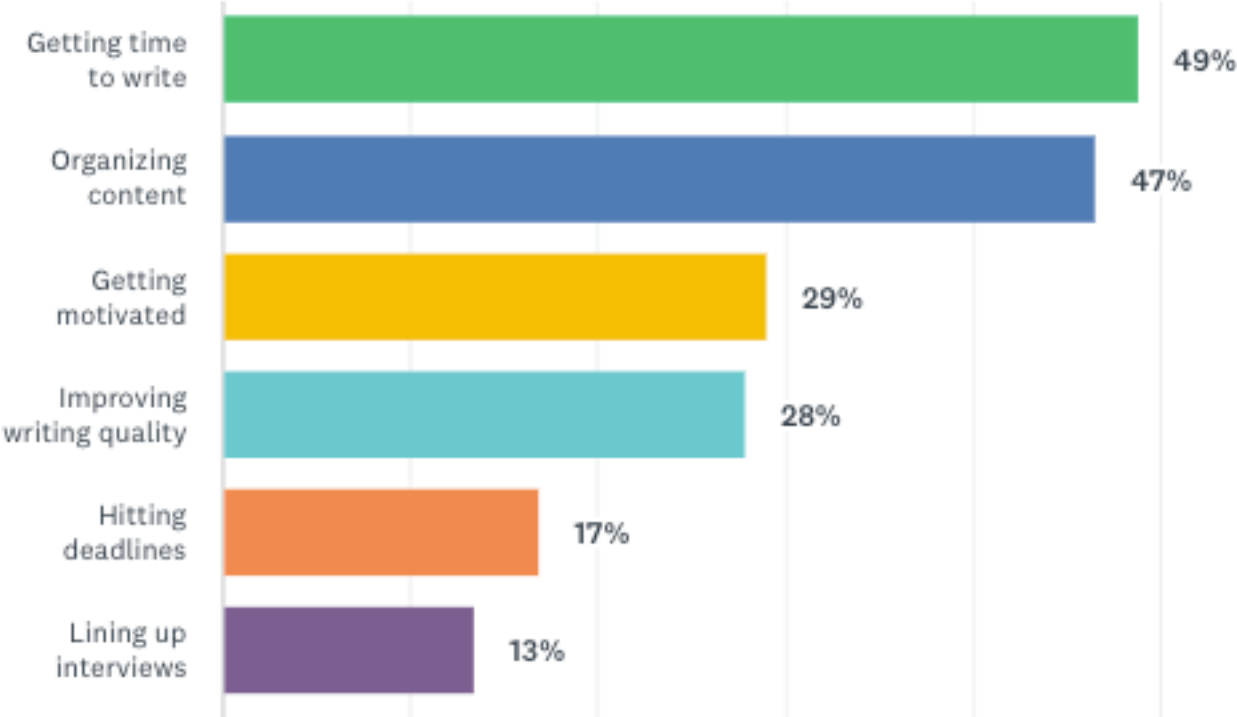


Source: Bernoff.com nonfiction author survey 2019-2022, N=74 published authors working for companies



# Time, organizing content are biggest challenges

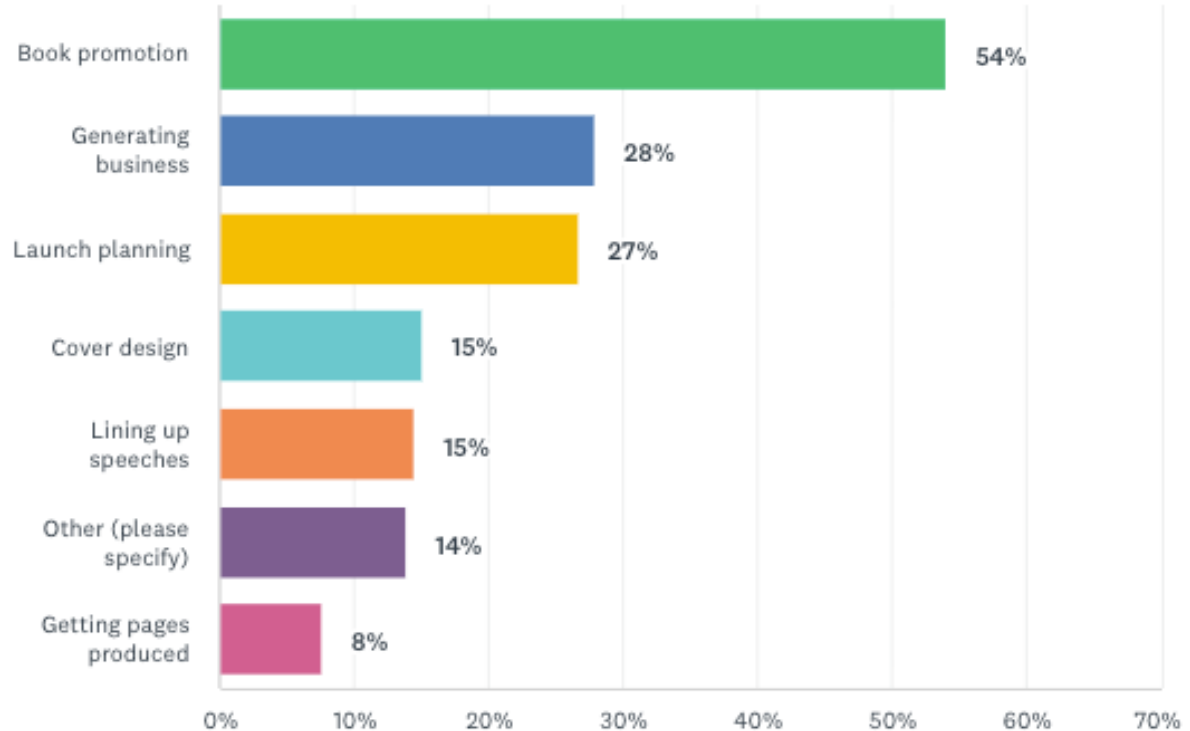
Which of the following were the biggest challenges in writing your book?  
Check all that apply



Source: Bernoff.com  
author survey 2019-2022,  
N=172 published authors

# Book promotion leads challenges after publication

Which of the following were the biggest challenges in publishing your book? Check all that apply



Source: Bernoff.com  
author survey 2019-2022,  
N=172 published authors

# One in five published authors considered giving up

- 78% said they never considered giving up.
- 22% considered giving up at least once
- 1% considered giving up every day

Source: Bernoff.com  
author survey 2019-2022,  
N=172 published authors

# Blurbs, Amazon reviews most popular promo tactics

Promotional tactic	% who used	% of those who said it worked
Back cover blurbs	72%	59%
Encouraged reviews on Amazon, similar sites	70%	55%
Public speaking	70%	67%
Contributed articles to media sites	57%	47%
Outreach to press	56%	44%
ARC copy distribution	51%	52%
Publisher's publicity team	50%	22%
Outreach to podcasters	40%	63%
Soliciting book reviews from media	37%	33%
Outreach to bloggers	34%	49%
Hire book publicist	30%	46%

Source: Bernoff.com author survey 2019-2022, N=172 published authors

# Facebook, Twitter, blog, LinkedIn top social media

Social media tactic	% who used	% of those who said it worked
Promote on Facebook profile/page	64%	45%
Promote on own/corporate Twitter	62%	36%
Promote on own/corporate blog	60%	55%
Post articles on LinkedIn	59%	50%
Produce and share video content	44%	57%
Promote on own/company Instagram	31%	31%
Post on Forbes, similar sites	23%	57%
Produce and share infographics	19%	33%
Promote on own/corporate podcast	16%	57%
Amazon ads	12%	45%

Source: Bernoff.com author survey 2019-2022, N=172 published authors

# Hybrid published authors spend more to create

Estimate how much you and/or your company invested in creating (not promoting) the book. Do not include the value of your time -- include only out-of-pocket expenses.

	<b>Traditional publisher (N=79)</b>	<b>Hybrid publisher (N=37)</b>	<b>Self-published (N=48)</b>
Median spend	\$3,000	\$28,000	\$4,500
Percent who spent \$0	30%	3%	10%
Percent who spent at least \$10K	32%	78%	35%
Percent who spent at least \$50K	13%	30%	10%

Source: Bernoff.com author survey 2019-2022,

# Typical authors spend ~\$10K to promote

Estimate how much you and/or your company invested in promoting the book. Do not include the value of your time -- include only out-of-pocket expenses.

	<b>Traditional publisher (N=79)</b>	<b>Hybrid publisher (N=37)</b>	<b>Self- published (N=48)</b>
Median spend	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$1,500
Percent who spent \$0	15%	8%	27%
Percent who spent at least \$10K	52%	54%	27%
Percent who spent at least \$50K	18%	13%	10%

Source: Bernoff.com author survey 2019-2022,

# Most authors are glad they wrote a book

	<b>Traditional publisher (N=79)</b>	<b>Hybrid publisher (N=37)</b>	<b>Self- published (N=48)</b>
Do you agree that writing a book a good decision?	91% agree (72% strongly agree)	86% agree (68% strongly agree)	80% agree (65% strongly agree)
Will you write another nonfiction book in the next 10 years?	77% likely or very likely	70% likely or very likely	79% likely or very likely

Source: Bernoff.com author survey 2019-2022,



# For more information . . .

Some of this data is now included in a new book about the process of conceiving, researching, writing, and promoting nonfiction books: *Build a Better Business Book*.

This book has been endorsed by more than 50 successful business authors.

Visit [Bernoff.com/books](https://Bernoff.com/books) for more information or to buy a copy.

