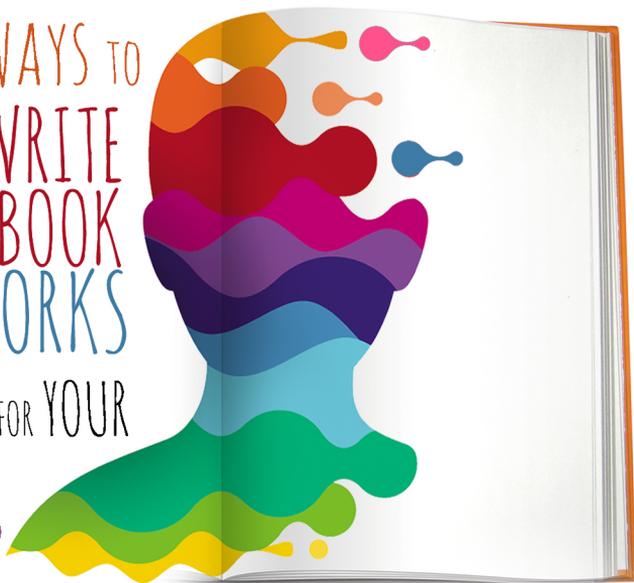


THIS  
BOOK  
BUSINESS MEANS

CLEVER WAYS TO  
PLAN AND WRITE  
A BOOK  
THAT WORKS  
HARDER FOR YOUR  
BUSINESS



ALISON JONES

# PRAISE FOR THIS BOOK MEANS BUSINESS

‘Practical, insightful and incredibly useful. Alison Jones is the trusted friend everyone should have when writing a business book. Combining her unique connections and expertise in the worlds of writing, publishing and business-building, she writes with clarity, generosity and wit, distilling the best of her experience - and that of a whole host of successful business authors - into an incredibly useful guide for anyone looking to write a book that really works for their business.’ – *Grace Marshall, Head coach, chief encourager and productivity ninja, author of How To Be Really Productive*

‘Here’s another lesson: blurbs don’t actually sell books. But if they did, this one would help you decide that this is a worthy primer, a great place to start on your journey to make a business book that matters.’ – *Seth Godin, author and blogger*

‘In this comprehensive, well-researched and immensely helpful book, Alison Jones lays out everything you need to know about how to write the right book, in the right way, to drive business results. Whether you’ve toyed with the idea of writing a book for years, and never gotten off the starting line, or you’ve already written several books, but want to do it in a more pleasant, purposeful and high-impact way next time, this book is for you.’ – *Amanda Setili, president, Setili & Associates business consulting, and author of Fearless Growth*

‘What Alison Jones doesn’t know about writing, publishing and marketing business books probably isn’t worth knowing. Even if the cover price of this book were £100, you’d still be getting a bargain: the sheer volume of advice it contains will prove priceless to anyone thinking of writing a business book. It contains everything you need to know, and then some.’ – *Scott Pack, author of How to Perfect Your Submission: Tips from a publisher*

‘Alison’s book club is indeed extraordinary – in style, practical how-tos and sheer entertainment. I love it.’ – *David Taylor, author of The Naked Leader*

‘At last! The Writers’ & Artists’ Yearbook has a companion. Read them both. Do what they say. And be lucky.’ – *Dr Andy Cope, author of Now That’s What I Call Leadership and The Art of Being Brilliant*

‘Writing a book helps you share your ideas with the world - and become recognized for them in the marketplace. Alison Jones’s informative new guide enables you to craft a meaningful work that will have a lasting impact on your business success.’ – *Dorie Clark, author of Entrepreneurial You and Stand Out, and adjunct professor, Duke University Fuqua School of Business*

‘Unlike many people in business, I generally have an aversion to business books other than Dilbert. What I can’t bear - and don’t believe - is the idea that any one author has all the answers, or at least enough to hold my attention for 200 plus pages. *This Book Means Business* is a much better recipe for success, and has extracted top tips from over 100 people with a veritable salmagundi of experience and talent. Alison Jones is a master compiler and curator of case studies and, as a result, this book about business has fantastic practical and pragmatic value for anyone in the business of books, and beyond.’ – *David Roche,*

*author, former President of the Booksellers Association, Chair of New Writing North and non-executive director of The London Book Fair*

‘Writing a book is a big deal, but it’s not rocket science. In her podcast and in this book Alison has demystified the process by revealing exactly how dozens of successful authors have gone about it. This book is full of ideas that work: open it at any page and you’ll find something you can use.’ – *Patrick Vlaskovits, New York Times bestselling author of Hustle and The Lean Entrepreneur*

‘Alison Jones brings her in-depth knowledge of business strategy to the topic of writing a business book, delving deep into the psychology of writing as well as providing tips and tactics on the practical side. A fantastic guide for those who want to take their business – and writing – to the next level.’ – *Joanna Penn, bestselling author, podcaster, and award-winning creative entrepreneur, www.TheCreativePenn.com*

‘Bad news: there are a lot of books on self-publishing. Great news: Alison’s book is brilliant because it’s not just about publishing your book - it’s about growing yourself, your platform, your network, and your business around your book. Buy *This Book Means Business* right now and follow Alison’s wise and detailed advice at every step. The book - and the business - you build will thank you for it!’ – *David Newman, author of Do It! Marketing*

‘Alison Jones has done a remarkable thing – she has created a toolkit that will transform your life and your business. *This Book Means Business* takes a practical approach to planning, writing and marketing your book which applies her experience as a publisher and writer, and draws on the best mentors from the business of writing business books. Follow her advice and

prepare for your life to change as you accelerate your personal and professional development.’ – *Bec Evans, innovation consultant and co-founder of Prolifiko*

‘Every now and then a new book gets released, and you find yourself facepalming while saying aloud, “Now, why couldn’t the author have written this 5 years ago?!” This is exactly the reaction I had to Alison’s *This Book Means Business*. It’s so jam-packed full of such vital information, any number of tips would have influenced my writing and publishing journey. Not only that, but Alison has built upon this with some incredible business insights from business giants across the globe. I can’t change the past, but this book will change my future writing career, that’s for sure.’ – *Robin Waite, author of Online Business Startup and Take Your Shot*

‘This book is the total package! It’s really not easy to find a book that covers both the “why” and the “how” of writing a business book – usually it’s one or the other, and very often only the “how” in fact. Alison Jones’s book covers both. The guidance she gives each step of the way is so detailed, it’s amazing the amount of things you would overlook if you didn’t have this book handy to support you on your writing journey. Indispensable!’ – *Melissa Romo, Director of Global Content at Sage, author and publisher*

‘If you want to write a business book, *This Book Means Business* gives you a blueprint to get ideas out of your head and into the bookstore.’ – *Pam Didner, speaker and marketing consultant, author of Global Content Marketing*

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CLEVER WAYS TO PLAN AND WRITE A BOOK  
THAT WORKS HARDER FOR YOUR BUSINESS

ALISON JONES

For more, see [www.thisbookmeansbusiness.com](http://www.thisbookmeansbusiness.com)

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Practical Inspiration  
PUBLISHING

For Dad, who taught me how to make the perfect cup of tea.



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# FOREWORD

If I had a dollar for every person who asked me whether writing a book will make them rich, I'd be able to confirm that it did. The reality is there are better reasons for writing your book than expecting to get rich through selling it. Yes, some authors get six-figure advances, sell millions of copies and get on bestseller lists. But they are firmly in the minority. You need to find your reason to write. Whether it's the people you want to help, the art you want to create or the legacy you want to leave, that reason will keep your bum on the seat and fingers on the keys.

Writing for an audience makes you notice things. It clarifies your thinking and helps you to come up with solutions the world has been waiting for. Writing your book will prepare you to speak on your topic with authority and help you to question, then improve your ideas. You'll create habits that serve you in other aspects of your life and astonish yourself in the process.

Many of the benefits you'll get on the journey from blank page to Amazon and beyond will be like the best surprise—which by its very nature you can't engineer.

The dream of writing a book is hardly ever about the 'writing' part. It's almost always about the 'holding your book in your hands' part. And while it's lovely to see your name on the spine of a book on the shelf alongside those of authors you admire, what's even better is the feeling you'll

get when someone emails you out of the blue one day to tell you that your book changed their life. Trust me—they will.

You almost certainly have nagging doubts as you ride the seesaw between permission and hubris. Maybe you're worried that your idea isn't unique or that it's all been said before. But one thing is for sure: it may have been said before, but it hasn't been said by you.

And if you're worrying that you're 'not a writer', don't. Nobody would be more surprised to know I'm an author than my high school English teacher, Miss McGinley. She tried and failed for five years to get me to 'fulfil my potential' and coax me out of my mostly 'solid C grade' mindset. It wasn't until three years later when I had a reason to go back and work for that 'A' that I discovered I could write.

'They' – the people responsible for imparting worldly wisdom – say the only workout you regret is the one you didn't do. The same holds true for writing a book. In the words of my friend Seth Godin; 'You don't need more time, you just need to decide.' And now that you have, Alison is on hand with decades of knowledge, experience and wisdom, not mention the secrets of all the successful business book authors she's grilled in The Extraordinary Business Book Club, to show you how it's done.

You don't have a moment to waste.

Bernadette Jiwa, author of *Story Driven*, *Hunch*,  
*Difference*, *Marketing: A Love Story* and more

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

February 2018

# PREFACE

You'll find in these pages a selection of tools, techniques and tips on the business of writing business books. Some I've developed myself for my own use or that of my clients, or adapted from a long career in publishing innovation and senior management; most are drawn from interviews with world-class writers in the Extraordinary Business Book Club podcast: [www.extraordinarybusinessbooks.com](http://www.extraordinarybusinessbooks.com)

All have been tested by real business people writing real books. And they all work, although they won't all work for every person in every situation.

I can promise you that wherever you're at in your book-writing journey – whatever problem you've come up against, however stuck you feel you are – there will be something here to help.

But it's not just about getting you unstuck.

This book is designed to help you make writing your book a profitable business activity, so that you see a return on your investment of time and energy long before publication. This period of writing is itself a fantastic opportunity to build your visibility and your network.

I guarantee you'll find an idea you can start using today to make your book work for your business, whatever stage it's at. I've tried all these tips and techniques myself and each one has moved me along in my thinking, writing or business development.

I'd love to hear what works for you, and how you've adapted these ideas to suit your own book and business. You can share in the Extraordinary Business Book Club group on Facebook, send me a tweet @bookstothesky, or drop me an email at [hello@alisonjones.com](mailto:hello@alisonjones.com).

And if you've developed your own brilliant way of building your business as you write your book, maybe you can be the next guest on the podcast!

Alison Jones  
February 2018

# INTRODUCTION

*‘The book that will change your life the most is the book you write.’ – Seth Godin*

Why are you thinking of writing a book? To become the go-to expert in your field, to get speaking gigs, to create a passive revenue stream?

All excellent reasons. But if you’re focused on what the book will do for you once it’s published, you’re missing a trick.

*This Book Means Business* shows you how to get the most out of the process of planning, researching and writing your book, so that it works for you and your business right from the start.

Because if you’re going to spend all those hours writing a book, you might as well maximize your return on investment in as many areas as possible, as early as possible.

This book is all about treating the writing of YOUR book as part of your business, making it happen one little bit of profile-raising, network-building, revenue-generating, search-engine-optimizing content at a time.

I’ve not just written this book, I’ve lived it. Most of the material has been developed through my podcast – the Extraordinary Business Book Club – in which I invite writers, publishers, and others with something interesting to say about the business of business books to share their experience.

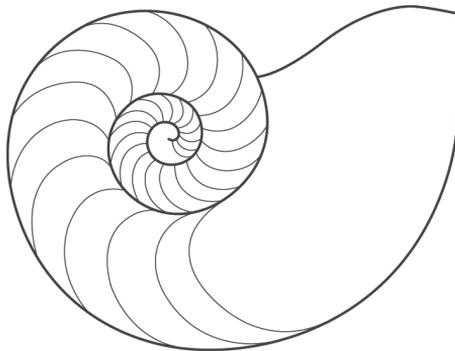
Over the months I've spent planning and writing it, it has become the engine of my personal and professional growth. Personally it's driven self-development, productivity and strategic thinking, not to mention the benefit to my own writing practice; professionally that has translated into network development, a stronger offline and online platform, and ultimately a better business. All before it was even finished, let alone published.

And that's what I want for you too.

## The business book growth spiral

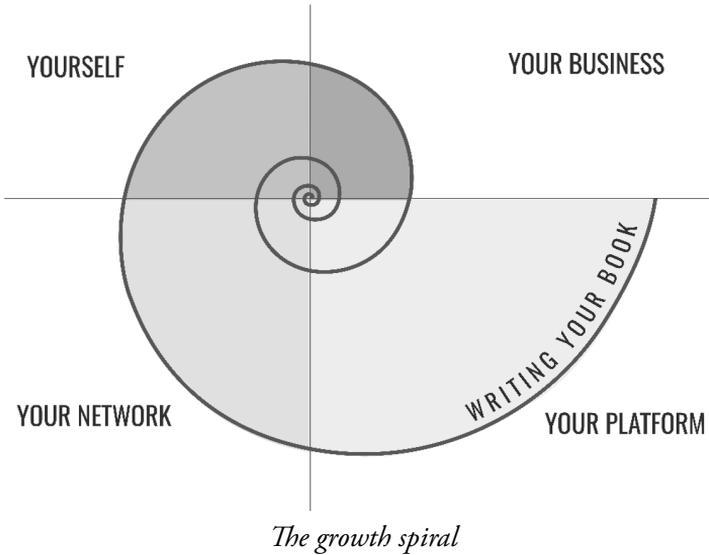
There's a beautiful natural expression of this self-reinforcing, exponential model: the growth spiral. It's also known as the equiangular spiral, the logarithmic spiral, or, as Swiss mathematician Jacob Bernoulli put it, *Spira mirabilis*, 'the marvellous spiral'.

The growth spiral is both a mathematical and an organic concept. It's found in nature at every scale: the nerves in your cornea, the buds of a Romanesco broccoli head, the curve of a nautilus shell, the flung-out arms of a galaxy.



*Nautilus shell*

It's logical yet instinctive, and it's the perfect expression of the business book-writing journey, embracing all aspects of personal and professional growth.



Part 1 of this book explores the four segments of that quadrant in turn, showing how your book can help you develop each one.

### Growing your business

Your business is the economic expression of your passion and personality in the world, and it is also the ‘back-end’ of your book, as Michael E. Gerber puts it.

For most writers – novelists and most non-fiction authors – the book is the end product. For business-book writers there's a different dynamic: the business underpins the book, and the book is successful only if it succeeds

in building the business. (This puts us in a much better position financially than those other writers, as one big new client that signs up because of the book will almost certainly bring in more revenue overnight than most book sales will in a year.)

In this section you'll discover how to make sure the two are aligned so that your book becomes an integral part of the business, your best salesperson, working while you sleep and always on message.

### Growing your platform

(‘Platform’ is a hideous word, almost as bad as ‘content’, but until someone comes up with a better alternative we’re stuck with it. Sorry.)

At Speakers’ Corner in Hyde Park, London, anyone can come along and speak about any topic. If they want to be seen and heard, though, they bring a stepladder or box to stand on, to raise them above the heads of those around them so they can be seen and heard by more people.<sup>1</sup>

Your platform, like that ladder, is what raises you above the noise of the crowd. It allows you to grab and hold people’s attention, and get them to listen to what you have to say. Each business book author’s platform is different, but, with so many tools available to help you get your message out, there’s no excuse for seeing your book as your only route to the reader.

---

<sup>1</sup> In 2017 soapboxes and ladders were banned from Speakers’ Corner for health and safety reasons. Better build your platform some other way.

Unlike Speakers' Corner – where you have no control over who happens to be passing – you can set up your online and offline platform to get your message in front of the people you're interested in talking to.

But the basic principle of Speakers' Corner still holds true: if you want people to stop and listen you'd better have something interesting to say, and you'd better say it well.

In the 'platform' section you'll find ideas for using your book as the engine of your content marketing strategy, increasing visibility and engagement, and even leveraging other people's platforms to punch above your weight.

### Growing your network

Your professional relationships are at the heart of your business, and they come in a variety of flavours. There are your core relationships: existing clients, your closest social media communities and your email list, which will also include – hopefully – some raving fans. Then there are partners and suppliers, peers, network coordinators and connectors, mentors, and other contacts such as friendly journalists or people in related industries.

There's also a whole group of people you don't have a relationship with right now, but you'd like to – e.g. future clients, the rockstars in your field – most of whom will be connected either directly or indirectly to someone in your existing network. Facebook recently disproved the old story that we're separated from anyone else on the planet by only six degrees of separation – apparently it's now just over three and a half degrees on average.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://research.fb.com/three-and-a-half-degrees-of-separation/>

When you're writing a book, your position in this web of relationships shifts. Suddenly you're leading the conversation, and that changes the way others relate to you. In the 'network' section of this book you'll find ideas for using this change of state creatively to develop and deepen relationships strategically.

### Growing yourself

There's a good reason why so many self-development gurus recommend journaling: the act of writing reflectively is a powerful tool to help synthesize experience, clarify your thinking and develop your ideas.

Psychologist Roberta Satow puts it this way:

*'Writing promotes the development of my self because seeing what I have written and responding to it makes me aware of what I am thinking and feeling and engages me in my own internal process.'*<sup>3</sup>

In the section on growing yourself, you'll discover how you can use the writing of your book to improve your habits and productivity, the clarity of your thinking, and how you conceive, structure and present your ideas (for the book and beyond).

But how do you actually write the book that will catalyze growth in all these areas? Most entrepreneurs are not professional writers – why should they be? – so Part 2, 'Writing your book', brings together the collective wisdom

---

<sup>3</sup> [www.psychologytoday.com/blog/life-after-50/201707/writing-self-development](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/life-after-50/201707/writing-self-development)

and experience of those who've done it before – to help with the nitty-gritty of getting the damn thing written, from planning through overcoming procrastination to polishing the first draft.

## Is it time for you to write a book?

Your book doesn't begin with the Introduction; it starts with your vision for your life and your business. Getting clear on that isn't a one-off job, because what you want from life evolves, and your understanding of your own message will shift and deepen over time.

Supercoach Michael Neill warned me against writing a book too soon, or in his words, 'premature articulation':

*'We try and put words to it before we've really felt it...  
There is a time to write. I know for me, the timing of  
my books is tied in to some movement in me.'*

Don't leave it too late, either. It's possible to end up writing what you used to believe, or something that you know is true but doesn't excite you any more.

My dad taught me how to make the perfect cup of tea: use fresh water and wait until the water's come to a rolling boil. Don't pour it too soon, before it's boiling, and don't wait until it's switched itself off and started to cool (or even worse when the water's been reheated a few times and is stale). If you can catch that moment when you've deeply felt and experienced what you're writing about but before you've lost your excitement about it, you're onto a winner.

Graham Allcott, author of *How to be a Productivity Ninja*, put it this way:

*‘Go out and do the work first and then put the work into a book later. I think it’s important to have a backstory and a credibility to bring to the book... If I can say, “I’ve taught Outlook to Bill Gates and timekeeping to the Swiss and efficiency to the Germans,” well, there’s a great start. It gives you more credibility when you’re in the room with people and when someone picks the book off the shelf. More importantly, it makes the book better because it gives you the experience of all of those conversations.’*

Caroline Webb, author of *How to Have a Good Day*, echoes this, pointing out the value of the interplay between the book she was writing, and the work she was doing day by day as she wrote:

*‘That iteration between the writing and the clients, that’s been central to the way this whole project came together over the years. The client work has made the writing so much more practical [and] the writing has really sharpened my ideas as I’m working with clients.’*

If it’s time, if you’ve done the work and built the backstory, if your ideas have been tested in the real world and you’re ready to articulate them to people who’ve not even met you yet (but really need to), but you’re struggling with the fear, lack of clarity or lack of time, then this book is for you. Dip in and out, experiment, have fun, and let me know what works for you and what you discover at [hello@alisonjones.com](mailto:hello@alisonjones.com).

# A NOTE ON FEAR

If you're reading this book, you probably haven't actually written your book yet.

And, if you're anything like me, it's because when you sit down to write the book of your business – the book that articulates the message you most care about to the people you most want to reach – the blankness of the page, the significance of the task and the fear of messing it up stops you dead. I spent nearly two years failing to write this book – and I've written five others before in a fraction of that time for other people and purposes.

The fear around writing a book is so vast and multifaceted that it merits a whole book in its own right: fear of failure, fear of success, fear of visibility, fear of not being good enough or original enough, fear of criticism or ridicule, fear of committing to one idea. Often the fear operates incognito: it disguises itself as procrastination or perfectionism and, while we beat ourselves up for not getting the job done, fear congratulates itself on keeping us safe by keeping us small.

As with anything in life, it all starts with a decision: the decision to dare.

Most people simply don't dare start a business – you've already done that.

Most people don't dare write a book – but you're not most people.

I can't take away the fear, and I'm not sure I'd want to (it serves a useful purpose), but what I have tried to do in this book is give you tools to manage it. It's reassuring to discover that every author is fearful, and helpful to discover how they went ahead and wrote the book anyway. And when you take the approach I set out here it inoculates you against fear one tiny bite at a time – one blog post, one talk, one conversation – rather than saving it all up for launch time.

'Fear is excitement without breath,' said business journalist Robert Heller. So breathe, as deeply and as often as necessary, and keep reading.

# A NOTE ON PUBLISHING OPTIONS

There's never been a more exciting time to be an author or an entrepreneur, and if you're an author who's also an entrepreneur you just hit the jackpot. Ten years ago you'd have had little choice but to submit your book proposal to an agent or traditional publisher – or more likely 30 of them – and hope one of them liked it enough to make you an offer. And if they did, they'd have the last say on the format, cover design, price, publication date and so on, and you'd get a modest cut of royalty revenue.

Today, however, you have options. And if you've established your platform, built a following and control your own routes to market, those options are very interesting indeed.

Many authors who could secure a traditional publishing deal with ease are choosing to exercise those options. Here's how it worked for Graham Allcott, author of *How to be a Productivity Ninja*:

*I turned down the deal with [the publisher] because they wanted far too much control over the whole process. Literally, the day before I got on the plane to Sri Lanka, I said, "I'm going to go off and write this book, and I'll talk to you when I get back about whether this is something I do through you." Then, I sat*

*there writing the book, and I had this one particular thing I wanted to say. It was [a] little bit on the edge and risky and I remember thinking, “What will the publisher think about me writing this? Will they take that out?” It was at that moment, I thought, “Screw the publisher. I’m going to write the book for me. I’m going to write the book that I want to write.”*

He published the book himself. It was a huge success, and it was then taken up by Icon Books and published traditionally, but with Graham’s input and on his terms.

At its simplest, publishing today is a three-way choice:

**traditional model** – publisher pays all the costs of publication and owns exclusive rights to publish, has final decision on publishing decisions, author receives a royalty on sales and can buy copies for own use at discount. Result: professional quality book focused on maximizing returns to publisher.

**self-publishing** – author pays publication costs, retains all rights and makes all decisions, can purchase author copies at cost and keeps all revenue from sales. Result: quality of book depends on expertise of author and/or professionals used, control is with author.

**partnership publishing** – author works with professional publisher to produce book, pays publication costs. Rights, degree of control, cost of author copies and revenue splits from sales vary

widely, so check the small print carefully. At its best, this can give authors the best of all worlds.

I've worked in traditional publishing for most of my career, but I set up Practical Inspiration Publishing as a partnership: my authors' books need to serve their business rather than mine, and it's my job to make sure they do that successfully. I'm proud to say that several of my authors rejected traditional publishing deals to work with me because they preferred my more collaborative approach.

However you're planning to publish your book, or even if you're not sure yet, this book is designed to help you write a book that's as successful for your business as it is for your readers.



*Part 1*



# YOUR BUSINESS AND YOU

For more, see [www.thisbookmeansbusiness.com](http://www.thisbookmeansbusiness.com)



# GROWING YOUR BUSINESS

*I've had development managers whose job is to get out there and talk to people, you know, open relationships and generate business. Realistically, if a business development manager was incredibly driven, they could possibly be out there doing that job 1,600 hours per year and a lot of that would be wasted time. As a business you'd spend something like £50,000 putting someone into that role. They may not get the message right. They may need a training period. They may have sick days. They may become awesome and leave and go work somewhere else... I look at this idea of 1,600 hours that they could spend, and I simply think, "Well, what if I just print 1,600 books and send them out to all the same people at a fraction of the cost?" And it actually kind of does the same job.'*  
– Daniel Priestley

Or as sales and marketing guru Marcus Sheridan puts it: 'Great content is the best sales tool in the world.'

But if your book is going to work effectively for your business it needs to be deeply integrated and aligned with it, and that's what this section is all about. We're going to start with some big questions that take you right upstream because, if you're not clear on where your business is going, you're not ready to write the book to move it forwards.

## what's your why? or the 20-year perspective

One of my favourite tools for business thinking isn't one of the fancy models I learned on my MBA; it's a poem by Rudyard Kipling:

*I keep six honest serving-men  
(They taught me all I knew);  
Their names are What and Why and When  
And How and Where and Who.*

And it all starts with WHY.

What's the 20-year vision for your business? That's probably further ahead than you're used to thinking. Clients often laugh nervously when I ask them this question. But if you're thinking of writing a book it's a sensible question to ask yourself: after all, books can have a very long shelf life.

Why does it matter? Well, if you want to sell the business eventually, you'll do things differently to someone who wants a lifestyle business that ends with them. If you want to establish a methodology and train other trainers to deliver your system, you've got to start establishing your intellectual property base and systematizing things. If you want to be working with very different clients to those you're working with now, or in a different area, you need to be thinking about where and how that shift starts before you put pen to paper.

There's something freeing about 20 years, too. If I were to ask you about your 12-month goals you'd give me SMART targets that take what you're currently doing one step further. They'd be hedged around with constraints and

hobbled by realism. In 20 years though? That's different. You could do anything in 20 years, right?

And that's the point: if you could do anything, *what would it be?*

Once you've articulated that 20-year vision, you can pull your time horizon in a little, keeping that end in mind, and focus on where you want your business to be in say five years' time. Now you can be specific: think about how you'll be spending your day, where you'll be located, how many staff you'll have, what products and services you'll be offering, who your clients will be, what turnover and profit you'll be making.

Once you know where you're going, you need to work out the route to take you there, because without the route you don't have a strategy, only a vision.

*'Our goals can only be reached through the vehicle of a plan, in which we must fervently believe, and upon which we must vigorously act. There is no other route to success.'* – Pablo Picasso

A vision is a great start, the best start, but you also need to know how you'll achieve that: what specific strengths and opportunities will drive you forward? How will you overcome your weaknesses and manage your threats? How will you differentiate yourself from your competitors? Which clients will you target and how will you reach them? What mix of products and services will be in your portfolio?

So now let's get really real: what are your goals for this year? If you've already set goals, take a look at them in the light of the thinking you've just done – do they still stand or do they need some adjustment? If you haven't yet set

goals then this is the ideal time: you should have much more clarity now on where you're going and what you want to achieve.

And finally, think about which strands of your business you need to focus on to get you there. You may need to drop some products or services that are no longer serving you, to give you time and headspace to build up the others.

Your book needs a clear strategic purpose within this bigger picture. It must align with the WHY of your business if it's going to be an effective tool to help you achieve it.

Most fundamentally, you need to be writing to reach the right readers (see **target reader**). But that's not all. Is the book a one-off or a series reflecting a whole stream of business activity? If you're building up your training programme, how can you link the book to that, for example as preparatory reading? Is the main purpose to get speaking engagements, in which case what is your best 'hook'?

### Over to you

- What's your 20-year vision for your business, and what does that mean for your book?
- What specific products and services will your book support, and how?

## target reader – who are you writing for?

One of the insights that typically falls out of the **20-year vision** work is a clearer understanding of who it is you want to work with in the future. They may or they may not be the same as the people you're currently working with. If you want to reach people you don't have access to right now, why not use your book to help you make that step?

There's an obvious synergy: a key part of business strategy is focusing on your customer, and a key part of writing a book is focusing on your reader.

And ideally, your ideal client *is the same as* your ideal reader. Just think about that for a moment. Your book is an opportunity to talk directly and at length to the very person you most want to come and work with you. If you can convince them that this is the book for them, if they feel once they've read it that you understand them, if they like and trust you, the book will have achieved more than a million-dollar advertising budget could ever do.

Many business owners resist the idea of focusing on a particular market segment because they think they're reducing their potential client base, and it's exactly the same with books – I can't tell you the number of proposals I saw as a commissioning editor that identified the target market as 'the general reader'. Sorry, but there's no such thing.

It might be true that anyone who reads your book will get something out of it but for most books by most authors – and certainly those without a big PR machine behind them – the more focused the book's market the easier it will be for you to write, the more useful it will be for your readers, and the more likely it will be that those readers

will find the book in the first place and make the decision to buy it.

You might find yourself in the position of writing for someone other than your target client: one of my authors is writing her book for women in middle management but her ideal client is a HR manager. She's using the book to pitch to HR managers to run workshops for their staff and, by building a community of individual managers who've read and loved the draft, she's getting introductions and referrals to the corporate gatekeepers who decide how to spend the training budget.

So if you think you've got that kind of complexity or mismatch between your ideal client and your ideal reader don't panic – just spend some time planning how the two will work together.

### Over to you

- Who do you want to work with in the future?
- What market sector is your book aimed at?
- If these two are different, why is that and what can you do about it?

## target reader – the persona

It's not enough just to be clear on your target market: books are read by people, not market segments. So think of your target reader as an individual.

When they're designing a new system, software developers create a persona for each of their target user types. Then whenever they have to make a decision about design or functionality they check first: what would Jon/Lisa/Howard/Mavis make of this? You can use exactly the same principle to help you write a more compelling, readable book.

There's something powerful about focusing on one person. Have you ever watched a report from a disaster scene? The reporter talks about the terrible loss of life and devastation and you think, 'How awful.' But it's not until the camera turns onto a child, standing desolate in the ruins of his home with no idea where his parents are, that it really affects you. We're wired to connect to individuals, not concepts. So creating an emotional connection with an individual, even a fictional individual, is a powerful way of keeping you engaged and engaging as you write.

I'm writing this book for Dee, although she doesn't know it. There's a picture of her stuck to the wall above my desk. She stops me writing for myself, and she keeps reminding me to stick to the point – that's nice, she says, but what's in it for me? You can create more than one persona if you have more than one core target market but don't go crazy – the more you have, the less you can focus on any one.

Here's how to construct a basic persona for your target reader:

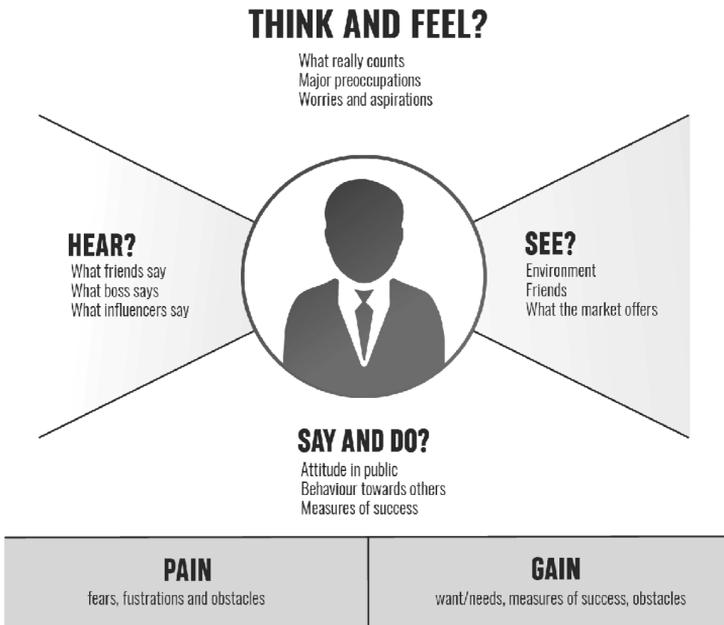
1. If you could only have one reader for your book, who would it be and why? Get as clear as possible about what the book will do for that person, and what that person will do for you.
2. Define some of the characteristics of that person: location, age, job type/level, gender, family situation, hobbies, even what car they drive and where they go on holiday!
3. Think about what motivates that person: what are their key fears?
4. What are their daily frustrations?
5. What are their desires: what is it they want to achieve?
6. How can you help them most effectively? (Use their words, not yours.)
7. Where are they currently trying to source the information or services they need, online and offline?
8. How can you reach them, online and offline? What communities, groups, networks do they engage in?
9. What more do you need to know about them? How can you find out?

It may sound whimsical to ask where your target reader goes on holiday but it works: the clearer you are about the person you're trying to reach, the more clearly you'll be able to speak to them in a way that floats their boat. (It's also incredibly useful when it comes to putting together a marketing plan, but that's a whole different book.)

It's so easy to forget when you're an expert in something, when you've spent years learning the language and using the tools and techniques, that the people you're writing for

don't even know what they don't know. They won't use the same words as you do, they won't care about the finer points of your art like you do: all they know is that something's wrong and they're looking for someone who can help.

Another useful tool to help you better understand and serve your reader is the empathy map, created by Dave Gray, which helps you go deeper into the day-to-day experience of your reader, inviting you to explore what they think and feel, see, hear, and say and do, and what their key pain points and desired gains are.



*Empathy map (originally created by Dave Gray of XPLANE)*

## Over to you

- Give your ideal reader a name – real or made-up – and complete the list of questions above for him or her. What do you learn about how to write your book from the answers? Find a suitable picture to represent them and stick it on your wall to remind you exactly who it is you're writing for.
- Create an empathy map for that reader – what does that reveal about how you need to write, structure or pitch your book?

## write the right book – Venn diagram

Even if you're crystal clear on who it is you're writing for and why, there's any number of books you COULD write for them. How do you choose between them? You can find yourself in perpetual possibility procrastination – unable to settle down to write one book because, as soon as you do, another brilliant potential title springs to mind.

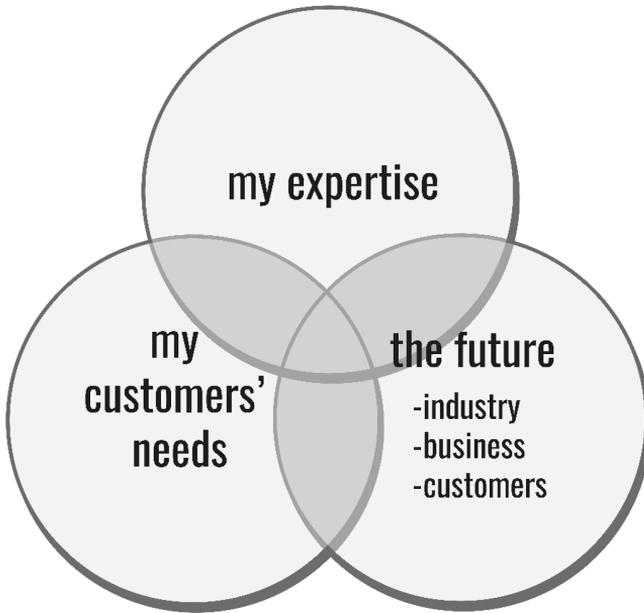
It's tempting to stick your fingers in your ears and try to focus on the book you've started writing, but it's better in the long run to give yourself the space and time you need to explore your ideas.

So go ahead and generate as many possible titles as you can, as long as (and this is important) they all fulfil two criteria:

1. they fit with your business strategy as revealed in your 20-year vision, and
2. they are designed to appeal to the ideal reader you identified in your persona.

Here's a simple model to help you come up with ideas for books in your 'sweet spot': at the intersection of your expertise, your customers' needs, and your broader business strategy.

On a piece of paper draw three circles in the form of a Venn diagram:



*'Sweet spot' Venn diagram*

Alongside the circle entitled 'my expertise', write down a list of the professional skills/areas that you could possibly write about. You might need to do more research for some, that's fine. But the starting point is what you bring to the party. (Most authors start and end here: having identified a book topic on which they can speak with authority, they start writing. That's not strategic thinking.)

Secondly, alongside the 'customers' needs' circle, write a list of the questions you are most frequently asked, the concerns and problems that bring customers to you, the needs – well articulated or barely understood – that they look to you to meet.

Finally, look ahead. The future circle has three inter-related parts:

1. Your industry – what trends and technologies are emerging? How will these change your sector in the short to medium term? How is the old order changing, and what new opportunities are arising?
2. Your business – in the light of these changes, where are you taking your business over the next five years? What are the areas of focus and growth, and are you planning to extend or develop into new areas?
3. Your customers – what are they just beginning to ask? What might they be asking next year? Five years from now? What do they not even know they don't know yet?

Now look at where those three circles overlap. The sweet spot for YOUR book is where your expertise meets your customers' needs as both they and you look towards the future.

### Over to you

- Use the Venn diagram model to identify the 'sweet spot' for your book.
- Identify at least 10 titles you could write in that space.

*OR* try the next exercise instead.

## write the right book – SO What?

Remember good old SWOT analysis? (Yes, I know. Stay with me.)

There's a good reason why plotting your Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats is a cliché of management consultancy: it's an incredibly powerful tool. In case you haven't heard of it (seriously, where have you *been* for the last 40 years?) here it is...



*SWOT analysis*

(Note that strengths and weaknesses are internal, to do with you and your business, and opportunities and

threats are external, to do with what's happening in the wider world.)

**STRENGTHS:** these are your unique levers of competitive advantage, and should form part of your **positioning statement**. It can be hard to identify your own strengths, so maybe ask someone you trust, or use an online strengths questionnaire such as the VIA survey.<sup>4</sup>

**WEAKNESSES:** it's very unfashionable these days to talk about weaknesses, but you need to recognize the areas in which you are LESS strong so you can pull together a plan to deal with them. If you're disorganized, get a VA. If you're technically challenged, ensure you have an IT support contract or cultivate a techie friend with a quid pro quo arrangement.

**OPPORTUNITIES:** these are effectively options for your strategic development, and you can't pursue them all simultaneously. So it's not enough just to recognize them, you also need to prioritize: which is the most compelling? Each opportunity you choose needs to work from a commercial perspective, of course, but it must also be aligned with your deepest values and fit with your unique style, circumstances and personality. Most powerful of all are those opportunities that complement your strengths and are less reliant on areas in which you are weaker.

**THREATS:** it may be that rather than planning to neutralize these external challenges, the best you can do is

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.viacharacter.org/www/Character-Strengths-Survey>

mitigate against them. But either way, you need to not only recognize them but design your business in full awareness of them, for example by diversifying your portfolio of products, expanding your customer base, or taking out insurance. Think too about competitors, and how you will differentiate yourself.

See, you'd forgotten what a useful wee tool it is, hadn't you?

But what does this have to do with title selection? Allow me to introduce my SO What model (**S**trengths & **O**pportunities – see what I did there?). Once you've done a SWOT analysis you've got a much clearer sense of the best opportunities out there and the strengths at your disposal. So here's the question: does the book you're planning make the most of both? The sweet spot for your book is where those two overlap, where what you do best plays forward into a space that's opening up.

Tim Ferriss did it with *The 4-Hour Work Week*, wedding his own experience with the emerging hunger for the laptop lifestyle. Then he did it again, seeing an opportunity to spin out the success of that concept into the hot topics of health and food with *The 4-Hour Body* and *The 4-Hour Chef* respectively. Brant Cooper and Patrick Vlaskovits did it with *The Lean Entrepreneur*, combining their practical start-up experience and training skills with the revolution in business thinking created by Eric Ries's *The Lean Startup* (which itself took as its starting point Ries's entrepreneurial experience plus the development of lean manufacturing processes).

If you're still undecided about the book you want to write, this is a great opportunity to do some brainstorming; what *could* you write, if you were to marry your

unique strengths with the most exciting opportunities you see out there?

When you have a handful of possible titles, that's when you need some prioritization techniques: see the next two chapters.

### Over to you

- Use the SO What? tool to identify the 'sweet spot' for your book.
- Identify at least 10 titles you could write in that space.

*OR* try the previous exercise instead.

# That's the end of this preview!

Find out more here: [www.thisbookmeansbusiness.com](http://www.thisbookmeansbusiness.com)



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