

# The Write Way to Grow

Entrepreneurs discover that self-published books add to the bottom line

**DURING THE HIGH-TECH INDUSTRY'S GLORIOUS RIDE DOWN** easy street in the 1990s, Aundrea Lacy's online brownie business coasted right along with it. A former marketing executive who worked for Hewlett-Packard, among others, she found her most loyal customers in the heart of Silicon Valley.

Almost immediately after Lacy launched Luv's Brownies in 1996, her signature heart-shaped brownies became a hit among chocolate lovers in the Valley, many of them former co-workers who sometimes requested up to 600 at a time. "They were my primary target," says Lacy, CEO of the San Jose, California-based bakery ([www.luvsbrownies.com](http://www.luvsbrownies.com)).

But when the dot-com bubble burst, Lacy's small business fizzled. Layoffs and tighter budgets meant fewer calls for her desserts. Sales dropped approximately 50%. But instead of shutting the oven off in defeat, Lacy rebranded herself by authoring *Luv Story: From Homemade Brownies to My Own Internet Bakery* (self-published; \$10), a telling book that shares her journey to entrepreneurship. Not only did the book revive her business, it showed that she was far more than just a brownie baker.

"Writing my book saved my business," says Lacy, 38, whose products and services earned the company \$595,000 in 2005. The company, which has three employees and relies on 20 contractors, is on track to match that figure in 2006. Lacy's book sales and related products accounted for approximately \$395,000 of her revenues last year. "I needed to keep afloat, and I needed to keep my product out there," she says. "But I also used this book as a vehicle to encourage entrepreneurship."

*Luv Story's* exposure created other opportunities that generated revenues for the business, including e-book sales; speaking engagements at libraries, schools, colleges, and book stores; and small-business consulting. "The book has been a cash cow during the past three years because it [opened] so many other [doors]," says Lacy. "These were avenues that weren't open to me when I just sold brownies."

Several publishers had approached Lacy about her brownie tale but weren't willing to pay more than \$3,000 for her story. Figuring she could do better solo, she surfed the Internet for information about self-publishing. She then hired an editor and a designer and tapped into BooksJustBooks.com, which eventually printed 2,000 books for her at \$1.25 per copy. "Not only did *Luv Story* open doors, it also provided additional avenues to sell and to get paid for speaking," says Lacy, who has sold nearly 30,000 printed copies since the book's release in 2003.

Lacy's success mirrors that of other business owners who have discovered the power of penning a book. A 300-page study conducted this year by RainToday.com, an online business resource, shows that entrepreneurs who published books increased their client base, attracted more publicity, closed more deals, and developed more business leads. The more books they sold, the better their outcomes. Sounds simplistic, but industry insiders say driving your book sales equals more success for your business.

In the study, titled *The Business Impact of Writing A Book*, 200 professionals who have written books, representing diverse industries, were asked to what degree their books advanced



LACY'S BOOK IS GENERATING ADDITIONAL REVENUES, WHILE CREATING OTHER BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES.

By Stacy Gilliam & Jermine Benton

their businesses. According to the survey's findings, those who sold at least 20,000 copies experienced a stronger effect on their business, compared with those who sold 10,000 copies or less. A whopping 96% of respondents reported a positive impact, and say the time and effort spent writing, publishing, and marketing a book was well worth the investment.

"Publish a book—it's a good idea," recommends Mike Schultz, principal of the Wellesley Hills Group, publisher of RainToday.com. The challenge, Schultz says, is finding a big-name publisher willing to pay for your idea. Publishers, who look at a book's sales potential, will ask: What's your reach?

band and business partner, Carl, won the Making It Real Business Grant Competition (see "Mrs., Mom, And CEO," *Motivation*, April 2002), a barrage of phone calls to the Clark household followed. Admirers from New York to Texas were motivated by their story and wanted to start a similar business to transport children home from school, to field trips, or to Grandma's house.

"Our book came by demand," says Clark, a 34-year-old mother of three, who started Kids R Travelin' in 1995. "It's a business manual that gives all my secrets, and it's sold only on our Website." Priced at \$297, *How to Start a Business in Transporting Children*

delivers step-by-step details and includes the Clarks' award-winning business plan and a workbook. To date, they've made almost \$30,000 with 100 copies of the e-book sold.

"This wasn't necessarily a way of promoting my business," Clark says of writing the book. "I did it to help others." To her knowledge, 50 transportation services have been started with guidance from her manual. The book has increased the company's profits only slightly but, she says, parents are impressed by it. It validates the company brand, distinguishes it in a heavily saturated marketplace, and casts the Clarks as experts in a niche industry.

Before business owners put fingers to keyboard, they must answer one important question: To self-publish or not to self-publish? Many new writers

wrestle with the decision. Rain Today.com's study weighs heavily on the side of commercial publishing. Surveyed business owners who published with a top-level publishing firm, such as McGraw-Hill or John Wiley, sold 11,000 more books than those who went with a smaller publishing house. They also grossed five times the indirect revenue, including paid speaking tours.

However, advances in print-on-demand technology make self-publishing a viable option. Entrepreneurs, business experts—or anyone for that matter—can publish professional-quality books in quantities as little as one copy at a time. The growth of online self-publishing services, for example, allows independent authors to publish books in easier, faster, and more affordable ways. ▶



THE CLARKS TURNED THEIR AWARD-WINNING BUSINESS PLAN INTO A GUIDEBOOK FOR ENTREPRENEURS.

Do you have an established audience? "[Approaching] publishers can be a good vetting process to find out what book will be successful," says Schultz.

Adding a book to an entrepreneur's arsenal of services not only leads to new revenue streams, known as indirect revenue, but can add instant credibility to the business. Small-business owners become respected experts in their fields after publishing. Some even cash in on speaking tours, freelance writing opportunities, and requests for consulting services.

Vickie Clark's path to the literary world began with helping others in mind. Clark is the co-owner of Stone Mountain, Georgia-based Kids R Travelin', a transportation service for children ([www.kidsrtravelin.net](http://www.kidsrtravelin.net)). The service is located about 20 miles outside of Atlanta. After Clark and her hus-

"Right now, there is a revolution in publishing," says Diane Gedymin, editorial director of iUniverse.com, a leading online provider of self-publishing services (see sidebar). "It's gone through music, it's gone through film, and it's gone through most businesses. Now, because of technology, that independent movement has come to book selling."

Gedymin, along with Susan Driscoll, president and CEO of iUniverse, are authors of *Get Published!* (iUniverse; \$9.95), a book that explores how innovations are changing the way books get published. They offer the following advice for publishing and marketing your book yourself:

**Follow editorial guidelines.** Get an editorial evaluation to ensure that your manuscript is compelling, effective, and competitive and that the content is placed in the appropriate order. "Even a professional [writer] should get the help of an editor," explains Gedymin. "Not everyone knows the professional components and order of a book."

**Develop and implement a marketing plan.** Before you can sell your books, you need to market them, explain Driscoll and Gedymin. Get your book noticed by positioning it in the marketplace, creating effective ways to reach your target market, and implementing a winning marketing plan. "Most people buy books because they've heard about them from other people," says Driscoll. "Your book is a great vehicle for word-of-mouth marketing."

**Take advantage of networking.** Build a network of contacts, making them aware of your book and the information in it. Use it as a calling card when you go to trade shows. "Attending events is an important marketing tool because you have a captive audience where you can promote your services," says Driscoll, who encourages authors to "find events that tie into your business."

**Book yourself on radio and television.** One of the most effective and

## Online Self-Publishing Services

Printing-on-demand technology and online self-publishing service providers are shaping the future of publishing by making it easier for aspiring authors to get published. Here are five Internet services worth looking into:

### Universe.com

This self-publishing service provider offers authors access to comprehensive, high-quality editorial services to ensure that titles meet the basic requirements of a professionally published book. Editorial services include professional evaluations and advice from freelance editors, as well as marketing and publicity packages.

Prices start at \$499 (online), \$599 (by mail)

### Blurb.com

A creative book publishing service that uses BookSmart, proprietary software designed to transform digital content into professional quality coffee-table books. Authors pay only when the book is published. Ready-made books allow users to add their own photos and personal details to set templates.

Prices start at \$29.95 for up to 40 pages

inexpensive ways to garner publicity is through radio or television interviews. Start small by contacting local radio and TV producers and hosts—the people in charge of booking—and let them know you are available for interviews or commentary. "Most local radio shows are hungry for content," says Gedymin. "Call up the producer and offer valuable tips on your particular specialty."

"I wasn't a huge [self-publishing] advocate until I did the research," says Lacy. Her goal was to sell *Luv Story* for no more than \$10, because she'd planned to package the book with her brownies. Sure enough, wherever the brownies go, her book goes.

### AuthorHouse.com

Writers can use an array of tools to customize their publishing process. Authors retain all rights, maintain editorial control, and choose the exact services that best suit their goals. A comprehensive suite of marketing and book promotion tools is also available.

Prices start at \$698 for black and white books (48-page minimum), \$999 for color books (28-page minimum)

### Xlibris.com

A strategic partner of Random House Ventures, this service uses leading-edge print-on-demand technology to publish titles quickly, easily, and affordably. Authors can use a wide variety of design, production, and publishing services, and can list books at the big distributors and online stores, print on demand as orders come in, and pay royalties on each sale.

Prices start at \$499 for basic services

### Picaboo.com

This digital photo tool publishes ready-to-order, high-quality photo books quickly. A client-side application and back-end network make creating, sharing, buying, and updating photo books simple. Real-time pricing shows the exact price of books with different options selected.

Prices start at \$9.99

Writing a book is no easy feat, and the process is time-consuming. Lacy accomplished it in chunks over several years; Clark, who self-published for a quicker release, completed hers in five months. But becoming authors undoubtedly gave them a leg up in their respective fields. Clark is now toying with another book and fielding requests to franchise Kids R Travelin.' Lacy has a second book, *Brownie Points* (Agate Publishing), hitting shelves next spring. She is also working on packaging an updated version of her Luv doll and recently celebrated 10 years in business.

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