

Part Two

*Winning the Hearts of
Publishers*

By Linda Fulkerson



Chapter 10

Introduction to Winning the Hearts of Publishers

Becoming a published author can be one of the most exciting and rewarding events in your life. However, enduring the publication process can be one of the most frightening and frustrating. It is my hope that the tips and tidbits offered in this section can help alleviate your angst and bypass the bafflements.

Before I get into the meat of this section, I'll answer the question I'm asked frequently: "How did you become a publisher?" With the advent of Kindle Direct Publishing and other easily accessible tools, today nearly anyone can publish pretty much anything, so when someone asks me this or a similar question, the querier usually means, "Tell me the story of how your publishing company started."

I'm certain that each traditional publishing house has its own genesis story, but here's mine.

I wrote my first book in 2002, and I did all the things an author seeking traditional publishing is supposed to do. I had the book edited. I sent out query letters. I signed with a reputable agent. My agent offered some excellent guidance on how to strengthen the book. So, I did everything he suggested, and he began submitting my manuscript.

And I waited. And waited. And waited some more.

After shopping a book for about a year, I got that dreaded phone call. Our agent-author agreement had expired, and he wasn't going to renew it. The publishers he'd submitted to liked the book. It was needed. It was unique. And, most agreed it was well written. But, he said, the question he'd received over and over was, "Who is she?"

Because this particular manuscript was a memoir-styled "How to" piece, that question of "Who is she?" was valid. My then-agent made two more suggestions: First, get famous. And then, either resubmit or self-publish.

My first question was, "How does one become famous?" (And I was serious.) He gave me some great tips on how to build an author platform, including becoming a speaker and blogger. (Social media wasn't a thing back then, and blogging was a toddler.) I did my best at the speaker/blogger thing, but the self-publishing statement niggled in the back of my mind.

In 2003, when I published my first book, self-publishing was nothing like it is today. In fact, it was much like traditional publishing, only financed by the author. I went to a lawyer. Formed a corporation. Hired an editor. Hired a graphic designer who did the cover and formatted the interior layout. Found a printer. Did a print run. Built a website. Blogged. Got speaking engagements. Blogged some more. And, I sold the books.

But the most important thing that happened was I learned. A lot. I finally understood why publishing is slow. I'd just gone through most of the steps personally. And, above all, I learned why it's hard to get a manuscript accepted. Publishing has a lot of moving parts. It was a slow, complicated, and expensive process.

A few short years later (in 2007), Amazon launched its Kindle Direct Publishing platform, and everything changed. Publishing on KDP became fast, easy, and cheap.

I wrote a few more books and got bit by the fiction bug. I studied the craft of writing. Learned a lot about self-editing and attended

numerous conferences, building my network of friends in the publishing industry.

As one who had “gone through the process” personally, many authors asked me about platform building, author websites, and blogging. I started a blog coach and consulting business somewhere around 2009. In 2011, I was hired as the online editor for a mid-sized daily newspaper in Texas, and in 2013, I returned to my home state of Arkansas and launched a digital services business that focused on helping authors build their platforms. I have since built dozens of author websites.

Fast forward a few years. One of my website and consulting clients was Kathy Cretlinger, owner of Mantle Rock Publishing. I did a lot of projects for Kathy, including editing a few books. She started the company as a means to help debut authors get a foot in the traditional publishing door. Many authors have written great stories, but with the complexity and competition of the industry, many of those stories were gathering dust, waiting for publication. Kathy wanted to help those authors.

As she grew older (she’s in her early 80s now), her vision dimmed, and her body rebelled against the long hours. During a phone conversation in April of 2020, she expressed concern for her company. What would happen to her authors if she retired? Or worse, died?

My mother once said everything you do in life gives you the experience you need for where you are now. And I had a lot of experience. I’d self-published the hard way and the easy way. I had a lot of connections in the industry. I had acquired the technical skills necessary for book production. I had editorial experience. I was a graphic designer. At that time, I’d authored nine books. And, I’d learned a fair bit about marketing.

As Kathy continued expressing her concerns, my mind swirled with questions, but the first one that spewed out was, “Is the company for sale?” After a bit of back-and-forth that included consulting our husbands, we agreed upon a price, and within a few

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weeks, I was off to Kentucky, with a Bill of Sale and a Cashier's Check.

Kathy and Jerry gave me some whirlwind "how to be a traditional publisher" training during my visit, and I left with the rights to publish thirteen contracted titles and republish about forty books. I set up an LLC, opened a bank account, got a business license with the state of Arkansas, and built a website. *Boom!* I was a publisher.

But I didn't want to do things halfway. I want to serve authors and glorify God through this company. I've continued to study the industry trends and have received lots of input and advice from other publishers. Two-and-a-half years later, we've grown. At the time of this writing, we have over one hundred titles in print, forty-plus authors, ten freelance editors, three virtual assistants, and multiple imprints. God has blessed us!

As we go through this section of *Getting Past the Gatekeepers*, please understand that publishing processes vary from house to house. Each publishing company will have its own way of doing things. I don't pretend to know all the ins and outs of a huge publishing company, but the basics, including how to get past the gatekeepers, are fairly standard.

Join me as I share how to win the heart of a publisher.