



Author Success Tools: Setting Realistic Goals, Writing Your Objectives

By Brian Jud, bestselling author of *Beyond the Bookstore*

Setting Realistic Goals

Setting individual and realistic goals for your book lays the foundation for a viable marketing plan and attracting your target audience. This may seem like a huge task, but if you fail to plan, you plan to fail. Successful businesses—large and small—begin with a business plan that defines their goals and objectives, from a general mission statement to the details of what and how they plan to sell. You are an Authorpreneur. This applies to you and your book as well.

As with any business venture, you should be prepared to invest money in this project with the expectation of recouping your investment and making a profit. First, you'll need to have the following rudiments so you know what to expect:

1. Mission Statement
2. List of Goals and Objectives
3. Budget
4. Timetable

If you are a first-time author, you may not have a basis for setting reasonable goals, budgets, or timetables because you've never published a book before. If this is the case, we can help you begin by examining some of the common expectations you can have for publishing and promoting your book.

Realistic Expectation #1: "I am not writing for everyone."

The mass market for books is typically dominated by certain genres and "bankable" writers. Much of what gives a book a shot at the bestseller list is the **genre**, or category, into which it fits. Some genres are

more popular and have a larger readership than others. For instance, it is unrealistic to believe that a non-fiction highly technical book dealing with genetics would have a mass-market appeal.

The industry also markets prior successes. There's a reason established names like John Grisham, Mary Higgins-Clark, and Stephen King sell hundreds of thousands, even millions of copies of books. Publishers are in business to make money, just like any other industry. They know that James Patterson and Danielle Steel because of their talent and prior success have loyal fans who will buy that hardcover edition every time. These authors, while varying the details and employing the creativity that made them writers in the first place, know the formula to their success—and so do their publishers. They are going to sell books and make money, year in and year out.

Does this mean your book won't be successful? Not at all. J.K. Rowling, author of the Harry Potter books, rose out of obscurity to have one of the most popular series today for both children and adults. The route to this level of success ultimately came through a publishing contract with a large, well-known publisher. If this is your goal, then the key is to get your work discovered. BookSurge, through its participation in Amazon.com's Content Acquisition Program (CAP), provides a means to expose your work to these types of publishers.

It will be important for you to understand the size of the market for your genre and have realistic expectations about your sales goals. Very specific non-fiction categories have a narrow readership pool. However, you can more easily (and less expensively) target your marketing to these readers because their specific interests make them easier to find online.

Since you are the writer and the subject matter expert of your book, you probably have already determined the book's audience. This is important to know to whom your book will appeal as it will help steer your marketing efforts in the right direction. If you haven't thought about who your readers are, here are some helpful guidelines.

Your book's genre is naturally paired with a **target audience**. These are the people who typically read your type of book. The market may be small or large and fit into a variety of categories, but most likely your particular audience will not include "everyone." The key is to start thinking for whom you are writing and the readers' profiles in terms of interests and tastes.

Realistic Expectation #2: “If I write it and promote it to the right audience, they will come.”

As a self-published author, you are retaining the rights and assuming much of the responsibility for your book as you would for any business. As you’ve probably guessed, promotion is paramount after you’ve crafted your manuscript. Most of the hard work is finding your readership, understanding how they discover new titles, and telling them about your book. Research avenues to market and promote your book online and on-the-ground.

Realistic Expectation #3: “I can expect to be both author and publicist.”

Expanding on the previous point, no book, whether traditionally or independently published, succeeds without its author. Sue Monk Kidd, author of *The Secret Life of Bees* and *The Mermaid Chair*, has six publicists and still must go on book tours for many months each year. You are the key to promoting your book. Not only must you consider *who* is going to buy your book, but also *why* they will want to buy *your* book. No one is as familiar with your book and understands your reasons for writing it better than you. And no one is a greater authority on your book than—you guessed it—you.

There may be many good books available. Make it your job to convince your target audience why they should buy your particular book. If your book is educational, make sure you list your qualifications or your experience. Chances are, if you’re writing a book about a specific subject, you have the educational expertise or extensive personal experience. Let that shine.

If your ultimate goal is to have your manuscript represented by an agent, or if you have the resources to invest in a publicist, you still will need to market your book. You have to promote it to agents, and if your book is picked up by a traditional publisher, you need to participate in and sometimes initiate publicity events. A publicist’s job is to get you and your book publicity—this includes speaking engagements, book signings, etc. It’s a package deal: your book and *you*.

So this is a time for a little introspection. Ask yourself how much time and money you have available to devote to promoting your book. As you get an idea of the marketing options available and the associated costs, you can also determine whether your resources and time match up to your expectations. Consider the following questions: How much time did you (or will you) have on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis to write your book? Once the book is printed, will you have the same amount of time? Do you have the

money to publish your book only, or will you have additional resources to pay for marketing expenses as well? Are you willing to dedicate that time to marketing? Your answers to these questions will help you determine the kind of success you can expect.

Start out with the **Author Self-Assessment Worksheet**, which follows. You can then move on to create some **Goals and Objectives**. Once you've had a chance to review these completely, you should be able to draft a **Budget** and a **Timetable**. You'll be pleased to feel a sense of accomplishment just by completing these preliminary items.

Author Self-Assessment Worksheet: The 20 Questions of Self-Publishing

You may not be able to answer all of these questions now, but keep them in mind as you progress through your publishing experience:

1. What is my original, ideal goal for my book?
 - a. Do I have aspirations of commercial success?
 - b. Is the book meant to support a business?
 - c. Do I want to be picked up by a major publisher or agent?
 - d. Can I quantify my sales goals?
2. How is this goal realistic or unrealistic?
3. How can I modify my goal to make it quantifiable and realistic?
4. What is the genre of my book?
5. Why did I write my book?
6. To whom does this book appeal? What does my target readership look like?
7. What are my qualifications as the author?
8. What other published books are similar to mine? How are they different?
9. Where do I buy other published books similar to mine?
10. How can I make sure my book is of the highest quality possible?
11. Will I need BookSurge to help me with editing and book design?
12. Do I have time to develop and instigate a marketing plan for my book?
13. Do I have access to help in developing my marketing plan?
14. What is my budget for the publication of my book?
15. What is my marketing budget for my book?
16. Will I need marketing support services such as those provided by BookSurge?
17. In the next year, how much time can I spend marketing my book each week?

18. Am I willing to travel to promote my book?
19. Am I willing to talk about my book to groups that are interested in my book's subject matter?
20. Am I willing to persevere until I meet my goal?

Your Goals and Objectives

You should set goals for your book at least two to three years into the future. Be specific. It's better to have quantitative, measurable goals, rather than vague ones; for example, "I want to break even in two years" or "I want to sell one thousand copies in two years" are better goals than "I would like to be successful" or "I want the book to become famous."

Objectives, on the other hand, are targets you want to achieve within the next year. "Complete publication" would be one objective. Objectives should also be quantifiable, so you may want to define "Complete publication" as "Have the book in-print and available for order online." You can also form marketing objectives, such as "Approach 20 bookstores in my state about holding book signings" or "Develop a mailing list of no less than 100 individuals, groups, and stores."

When setting goals and objectives, consider the following:

- **Who** will accomplish them?
- **What** will be accomplished?
- **When** it will be accomplished?
- **Where** will the action occur?
- **Why** do I want to accomplish this?
- **How** will I accomplish it?