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# The Book Isn't Dead, But That May Be a Problem

Adam Leipzig · Thursday, August 11th, 2011

Never chop down a tree in the forest before you know what it will sound like when it falls.

Millions of people, however, are clear-cutting forests with only this sound: Pages turning, no one reading.

It seems that everyone is writing books these days, and publishing them too. That may come as a great surprise if you, like so many people, have dreamed of writing a book and have struggled with it for years. *You have fallen seriously behind! You need to finish your book by the time you are done reading these paragraphs!*

According to industry sources, 2,776,260 book titles were published last year by non-traditional publishers – on-demand and self-publishing presses. That's more than double the number of titles just one year earlier, and it's a number that's hard to grasp. Each of those titles sells an average of 75 copies, and assuming each book is nine inches high, if you laid them end to end, they would go all the way around the planet and there would still be books left over to lay them from LA to NY and back again.

Or imagine this: Since you can get about 16 books from the average tree, that's about 13 million trees.

To put these numbers in further perspective, non-traditional publishing now amounts to a whopping 89% of the titles published. Last year, traditional publishers – everyone from Macmillan to Grove Press – gave us only 316,480 titles.

*Get cracking… I hope you have Chapter 5 done by now.*

In 2009, your book would have been one of 1.3 million new titles. Last year, with published authors proliferating like rabbits on Viagra, your book would have been one of 3 million. If trends keep up, by the time you finally get around to finishing your masterpiece, it may be one in 5 million, until everyone in America will be a published author several times over, and no one will be able to find a quiet place to read, what with everyone shouting, "Read my book!" "No, read mine!"

There is where I get completely ambivalent. There is something wonderful and life-affirming that so many people have books inside of them – and that so many people have had the focus and tenacity to plod through the pages, type "The End," and work through the mechanics of getting the

thing published. We should always validate creativity. To write something to the finish and then be proud enough to tell people about it – that's no small thing.

Books are alluring, and they declare the author is, well, an author. They are permanent – more permanent that digital files, which start to degrade after 5 years. Ink on paper: that can last for thousands of years. Unless those books get recycled after sitting in your garage for a decade…

You've got to ask two questions – questions of quality and results. A lot of books, published by traditional and non-traditional presses alike, fall short on the quality scale. They are repetitive, shallow, poorly edited, and evaporate quickly from your mind like steam over a tea kettle.

While many self-published books fall into that category, even more are results-challenged. By which I mean, the authors have gone through some of the steps to achieve Creative Results, but they don't complete the challenge. They have not engaged their audience, or found people to talk to through their book. They don't seem to be meeting a real need, be it a need for storytelling or for information.

Without results, which I define are genuine audience engagement, creative work is not complete. I spend a lot of time working with people to get creative results, and I sense their frustration – whether they are artists, or people in corporate positions who manage the key creative work of their companies. There are proven steps to take. The first one – which all successful writers use – is to see the end at the beginning. You really have to point yourself toward the horizon, and imagine everything finishing the way you want: the audience embracing your effort. (If you'd like to learn more about taking the steps that drive creativity to results, contact me.)

*Seconds to go… Chapter 10 – you got it proofread yet?*

Results matter. When the shouting dies down, only a few of these books will yield any lasting impact.

*Sources: Bowkers, Self-Publishing Resources.*

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