**Is What You Have to Say What People Want to Hear?**

By Brian Jud

When authors complete their manuscripts, they are proud of their work, thinking it will be a blockbuster. That is certainly understandable. However, in the final analysis it is the reader -- not the author -- who defines the value of the content. It is valuable only if the readers believe they are better off after reading it then before.

Creating reader value is less likely to happen if the content is written from the author’s perspective – what he or she believes the readers need to know. Invariably, that is based upon the author’s personal experience, not upon the perspective of those in the target market and even more rarely on analysis of competitive sources of information. A typical comment (one that generally leads to failure) is, “There is no other book like mine out there.”

If authors will ask themselves and answer these five questions, their chances of creating valuable content -- valuable to the reader -- is greatly enhanced.

**Question #1: Who is my target reader**? Most authors define their potential buyers as “everybody.” However, given limited time and money it will be difficult to reach them. Define your prospective buyers with Five Ws. **W**ho are they demographically? If it is an older audience you might consider a large print version. You may define them as “women, but are they mothers, career women or in retirement? **W**here do they shop? That will tell you the places in which you need to have your books available for sale. **W**hen do they buy? Is your content of seasonal value? Or purchased as a gift? **W**hat form do they want your content delivered? Is it a printed book? An ebook or an audio book?

**Question # 2 (The fifth W): Why do they want (vs. need) your information**? Look past what people say they need to identify what they really want. Do they need to lose weight or want to be more attractive? Do they need more money or want to provide for their families, pay for their child’s college or save for a secure retirement? This does not require professional analysis, but by asking yourself “Why?” until you get to the real issue. For example, “Why do people need my cookbook? To be better cooks. Why is that important? To prepare tastier meals. Why is that important? So their families will eat without complaining. Why is that important? So they will be healthier. Why is to that important? Readers will feel like they are being a better parent. Now you have the basic motive to which you can appeal.

**Question #3: What sources of information already address this desire?** In other words, what are you competing against? You compete not only against other books, but against information that is readily available on the Internet. Conduct a search on Amazon.com for books that address your message. Every book has competition, and if you think yours does not, reevaluate the potential size of your market opportunity. If nothing else you compete for shelf space, media space and time, and your share of people's attention. In corporate sales you compete against coffee mugs, golf shirts and other promotional items. Know the value of each relative to your content.

**Question # 4: How is my content different from and better than what already exists**? You will not make news (or sales) if you have nothing new to say. Your stakeholders—prospective buyers, retailers, distributors, librarians and the media -- do not want more of what already exists. Peruse the information currently available to see how it differs from what you have to say. Readers do np want more of what they already have. They are looking for something different because what exists does not provide the results they want. Create content that is different and better so that you give your readers a unique way to solve their problems.

**Question #5: How can I use the answers to those questions to create and market content that will provide value to readers**? Your responses to the first four questions make it significantly more likely that you will have the right product, delivered in the proper form where it is easily accessible by people who need the unique and valuable information you provide. Your promotion will engage prospective buyers because your message describes how they can get what they really want.

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