**Stop Doubling Down on a Failing Strategy**

**By Brian Jud**

Are your sales at the point where you expected them to be when you published your book? Are you doing the same things you always did to try to sell them? Low sales are a fact of life for most authors, but they have probably not heard the maxim, “If you do what you always did, you’ll get what you always got.” If your sales are below forecast, maybe it is time to try something different.

You may have your book on Amazon, and you are probably active on social media. You feel that have too much time and money invested in getting to where you are, so you will keep doing what you have been doing until it works.

Why in the world would someone do that? Based on my discussions with many authors there are at least three reasons.

1. **The sunk-cost myth**. When considering a decision to change, people often factor in costs they have already incurred – both time and money. Authors think if they abandon their book now those costs won’t be recovered, but if they continue doing something, their costs will be recouped. But a rational decision maker will look only at future costs, not historical ones.
2. **Believing their own publicity**. The authors have told so many people that their books are the greatest ever written that they have come to believe it themselves. Now they must continue until everybody else realizes that, too. To not do so would be to admit they were wrong, that perhaps their book was not so great.
3. **Loss of objectivity**. People do not like to admit they were wrong. They blame other events or people for their lack of success. Their distributors did not give it enough effort, bookstores would not give it shelf prominence, and the TV or radio show on which they appeared did not generate any sales.

These biases lead people to ignore signals that their current strategy is no longer working, and they continue on the same path. So, what can they do? Here are a few suggestions.

**Understand the problem**. Poor sales are a symptom of the problem. Your book could be priced incorrectly, improperly distributed, poorly designed and not professionally edited. Or the culprit could be launching without a marketing plan, and promoting solely via social networking.

**Determine that you must do something different**. “Something must be done” is rarely as effective as, “I must do something.” Think about what will happen if you continue doing the same thing. You may determine that the best course of action is to abandon your present book, and go on to the next one. It may take more courage to make that choice than to proceed with your current project. But changing strategy does not have to be a “go, no go” decision. That can just increase the pressure and lead to inaction.

**Develop realistic expectations**. Assuming you choose to continue, recognize what you are getting into. Last year Bowker assigned 786,935 ISBNs. You are competing with those for librarians’ and retailers’ shelf space, media time and the budgets of potential buyers. Creating large sales can take years of persistent promotion. Don’t expect any shortcuts because “your book is different.” It’s not, if nobody knows it is.

**Go back to the basics**. Learn about book marketing. Read books and blogs. Attend webinars and workshops. There are many book-marketing actions you can do after your book is published. Here is a checklist to get you started: [www.bookapss.org/PostLaunchChecklist.pdf](http://www.bookapss.org/PostLaunchChecklist.pdf) Also, join associations such as IBPA ([www.ibpa-online.org](http://www.ibpa-online.org) ) and APSS ([www.bookapss.org](http://www.bookapss.org) ). If you are near a local publishing group, join it and become an active participant. You can find a list of these at <http://pro.bookapss.org/partner-organizations>

**Objectively assess your circumstances**. Now that you know what makes a book successful and are willing to make yours a winner, honestly evaluate your current situation. Do you have a plan in place, and are you willing to invest the time and money to implement it? Do you have the skills to do so? If not, all is not lost. You can hire people to do much of the work for you. Next, appraise the quality of your book. Is it edited and designed professionally? Is it priced competitively? Is it distributed properly to retailers (including bookstores) and non-retail buyers? Are you implementing an assorted promotion mix?

**Know what you are really selling**. Look at your book (or line of books) in a way different from how you normally do. Do not define it in physical terms (size, page count, binding) but in terms of what your content does for the reader. Does it help people feel better, live longer, make more money, be a better parent or cook? Who could use that information? Where and when do they shop. How can you reach them with your promotion? Stop selling your books and start selling what your book does by showing buyers how your content can help them.

**Create distribution where your buyers shop**. If your prospective buyers are parents, have your books in supermarkets, health-food stores, toy stores, gift shops in national parks, libraries, discount stores and appropriate specialty stores. If your potential buyers are travelers or businesspeople in an upper-income bracket, have your books in high-end specialty stores, airport stores, business-supply stores and gift shops in hotels or cruise ships. Talk with your current distribution partners to see if they distribute to these outlets.

**Reach your prospects where they work**. Display marketing companies such as Collective Goods (formerly Books Are Fun) arrange displays at business locations, teachers’ and nurses’ lounges and schools. Could the military use your content? Do not think primarily about the service people, but also about their families. They have spouses and children who want and need non-military content. Is your content appropriate for K-8 readers? Do not only contact only public schools, but homeschoolers, private schools, religious schools and perhaps daycare centers.

Remember that you are in the top echelon of the general public because you have done what many people only dream of – you wrote and published a book. Do not allow that tremendous accomplishment to be diminished or lost. Never give up, but never give in to the temptation to keep doing what is not working. Try something else. If that does not work, try something else. Eventually you will find the right combination and your dreams will be fulfilled.

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