



"Practical Problem-Solving Advice for Publishers"

Finding and Vetting a Book Publisher: Tips for Authors

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Whether you're a writer who has just finished a book and are looking for a publisher, or you're a publisher interested in preparing for conversations with authors, this article will help you achieve your goals. Book authors can use these twenty-eight questions to help find a publisher that is a good fit for their work. Publishers will benefit as well, because these questions will help them prepare for conversations with potential authors.

The questions in this article cover the gamut: production, pricing, distribution, marketing, subsidiary rights, and considerations for eBooks. You should discuss these questions within the context of a book contract.

It is also recommended that authors consult with an attorney familiar with the book publishing business and copyright law to review the terms of your book contract.

Legal Disclaimer

This information is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information regarding the subject matter covered. It is provided with the understanding that the author is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other such services. If legal advice or such services are required, contact a competent professional with these areas of expertise.

Questions to Ask *the Acquisitions Editor*

- How many years have you been an acquisitions editor? In which disciplines and subject areas have you worked?
- What are your least favorite parts of the job?
- To whom (title) do you report to in your organization?

What to Ask the Book Publisher

Money and Finances

- Does the company pay advances against royalties? How much advance would be paid against my royalties for my book?
- How are royalties paid? For example, on list or net price?
- How often are royalties paid?

Production

- How long is the average production cycle for a book from final manuscript submission to bound book?
- What is your expected time for editing? How frequently will I be asked to review edits and how quickly do you expect me to respond to edits? Will I have the opportunity to proof and approve final page proofs prior to printing/eBook?
- Is any of your production work done overseas? If so, what aspects?
- When do you expect my book to be released, and will it be released in print and eBook formats at the same time? If not, what is the timing difference?

Marketing, Sales, and Distribution

- What do you suggest as the list price for my book? Print? eBook?
- How many copies would be in the first printing?
- What is your company's marketing strategy to reach my book's audience?
- What distribution channels does your company use, ranked by importance to sales?
- What is the ratio of sales like a book like mine of print copies vs eBooks?
- What is your company's approach to special sales? How is the special sales function staffed?
- What is involved in the publicity program for publications; e.g., social media, press releases, review copies, article placement, and so forth? What involvement, if any, will I (the author) have in the publicity for the book?

International Marketing

- Is there significant international sales potential for my book?
- How are the sales of expert editions handled?
- What royalty rate do you pay on international sales and how often are they paid?

Books

- What is your company's royalty rate on the sale of eBooks?
- Will this book be placed with any digital libraries or digital subscription services? If so, how will the royalty on those services be calculated?
- What is the sales potential of my book in eBook vs. print formats?
- What is your company's policy with respect to eBooks licensing to libraries?

Rights/Licensing

- How do you maximize subsidiary rights sales and licensing income?
- What percentage do authors receive of subsidiary rights sales and licensing income?
- Can you provide examples of your experience with subsidiary rights licensing for similar books that you have published, and are those experiences likely to be repeated with my book?
- Does your company have a full time employee handling the licensing or an agent?

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About John B. McHugh

John B. “Jack” McHugh is a 40-year veteran of the publishing business. Jack has worked as an executive for Houghton Mifflin, Wadsworth, and Saint Mary’s Press. Jack is also an experienced association publishing executive. For seven years, he was Publisher and Director of Programs at the American Society for Quality and for a two-year period, he served as the Interim Publisher at the Project Management Institute. Jack’s specialties include association/nonprofit publishing, book publishing, executive recruiting, journal publishing, rights and permissions, organizational design, and startups. McHugh the author of 44 articles on publishing are available free at his website. McHugh helps authors locate, evaluate, and select the publisher best suited for their book and also on the feasibility of self-publishing.

Also of Interest:

- B-55, *Commercial Publishing vs. Self-Publishing: Advantages/Disadvantages*, 2019, 2 pages <https://tinyurl.com/2p8m459p>

John B. McHugh: Practical Problem-Solving Advice for Publishers

Contact: John B. “Jack” McHugh

Phone: **414-351-3056** Email: jack@johnbmchugh.com

Website: <http://www.johnbmchugh.com/>

LinkedIn™ Profile: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/john-b-mchugh-21651811/>

Association and Nonprofit Publishing LinkedIn™: <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/2949807/>