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Books: The New Premiumby **Jody Costa**

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Every time the tradeshow season rolls around, I hear the same old question: How can I tap into the special sales markets without using last year's hats, bags, Frisbees, pens, and other boring gimmicks?

The solution is simple and effective—good old-fashioned books. Books that are high in valuable content and actionable information will establish expert credibility for you and your firm and deliver a useful tool to your clients. And the best part: You probably have all the information you need already written in newsletters, case studies, user manuals, etc. It is then just a matter of repackaging the content and publishing through a legitimate publishing house.

OK, but isn't that too good to be true?

Yes, it certainly sounds far-fetched. After all, publishing is that pie-in-the-sky dream that every author dreams of and rarely gets. And really, what do Random House-type publishers really care about you and your corporation's idea of a book as a premium? Well, they don't! However, that is just the type of opportunity that smaller publishing companies are now pouncing on.

It sounds too complicated; where would I start?

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Start by brainstorming about what information your clients need most. It may be tips they request over and over again or types of related information that they look to you for as the expert in the field. Or, better yet, it could be new information that you are hoping will establish you as the forerunner in the market.

Here's an example

A software company provided support material to all of its customers after they made a purchase. Research had shown that although customers could use the product (an option trading program) effectively, they would soon get frustrated trying to learn how to trade options and give up.

To alleviate this problem, the software company created a small manual outlining some key issues to be aware of when trading and included it with every software package. And, bam, there it was! Their first book was staring them right in the face.

OK, so I have an idea, but now what?

The key is finding a small publishing company that will see the value in both your

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content and your distribution channels. You'll need to convince the editors that the information is not just useful for your best clients, but for the wider audience in your industry.

This is where you really need to think about the details:

- How does your book relate to the market?
- How can you disseminate the information—that is, can it be sent to your internal lists and will people actually buy it?
- What goals are you trying to accomplish with you book, and how does it fit into your overall marketing plan?
- Does it hold enough weight to gain credibility for your firm in the wider consumer/business market—does it offer more than PR/marketing fluff?

Once you answer those questions, you'll need to do some research into the publishing firms. Stay away from vanity press. These types of companies are looking for substantial investment on your end without any promise of return.

Another important point: Try to find a publisher that is either established in your niche market, or hungry to start a book line in your niche market. In either scenario, your chances of getting the editor's attention and getting the book to market are greatly improved. The publisher should offer full editorial support and production capabilities. And, unless someone on your staff is a published writer, the publishing company should also have the ability to offer you a ghostwriter to flesh out your book idea.

One of the most important points: You'll want to make sure that the publishing company has significant marketing resources to devote to your book. You don't want to go through the whole trouble of production and then have the book never see the light of day. This is why finding the right publisher is important; those who understand your niche market will want to promote your book just as much as you do.

In our example, the software company found a publisher who specialized in trading. Since they were well-versed in the market, the editors realized that the booklet was well-written and valuable to all options traders, whether they had the software or not. Under their guidance, the booklet was repackaged published as *The Four Biggest Mistakes in Options* by Jay Kaepffel, and an advertisement for the software package was placed in the back of the book. It was then used as a premium by the company and the publisher, and given away to thousands of traders.

This was a great success for the software company—it received huge exposure for its product, and its book remained in the top 25 options books on Amazon.com week after week.

So what are you waiting for?

Go ahead, look through your existing content. You'll see that your first book may be sitting there just waiting for you to make a move.

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Jody Costa is an editor with Marketplace Books (www.marketplacebooks.com).

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