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Revising Your Book

By Dan Poynter

The large (New York) publishers publish books by the season. With three periods per year, each book has a selling season of four months. After the four-month period, the book is moved to the *backlist*, is replaced on the frontlist by other titles and is forgotten. Smaller publishers take a much different approach because they are often the author too and are much closer to both their subjects and reading audience. They know it is a lot easier to sell a revised edition of the same book than it is to write a brand new one.

Your book has a reputation, a niche in its market and a market share. Why kill it off and start over? Why not keep your book alive? Your book is a member of your family, a product of yourself. Don't you want the very best for it? Don't you want it to live on?

You can update your book very quickly if you have a plan. What you need is a system and the time to establish that system is now. Here it is.

A. Organization. Start by setting up your *Correction Copy* and *Revision Pile*. What you need are collection points so that revision materials can be easily stored and found. When you come across articles and other small bits of pertinent information, you must have a place to store them.

1. Correction Copy. The Correction Copy is where you store short editing and proofreading changes. Take one copy of your book and cut off a small triangular piece at the top of the cover. On the page behind the cutout, write: "Correction Copy." Keep this copy on a shelf near your desk. The reason for marking this copy is so that it will not migrate into for-sale stock or otherwise get lost.

When you hear of a correction or addition, grab your Correction Copy and mark the change. Dog-ear the page to make it easier to find.

2. Revision Pile. Establish a pile in a drawer, on a shelf or in a file cabinet to store longer items such as pertinent magazine articles. You do

not have to do any revising now, just set up a place to collect the materials.

B. The revision process. Once you discover you are out of books, it is time to:

1. Go through a copy of your book with a **red pen**. Spend a few hours reading through your own book, from first page to last and mark it up. Make corrections, write-in clearer explanations, make notes to yourself to get new statistics, etc.

Marking up a copy of your book will quantify the project. Then you will know precisely how much work has to be done.

The Self-Publishing Manual recently came off the press in a revised edition. It has grown and improved a great deal since its first appearance in 1979. Again, we confirmed every fact and number and this time 124 pages (27%) were altered. Not only has our industry evolved but many area codes have changed.

2. Confirm all facts, numbers and addresses. Appendices with extensive resources must be updated to reflect changes in telephone area codes, fax numbers, and street, e-mail and web site addresses. In writing and publishing a book, you are committing history. You will be quoted and repeated. You want to be sure everything in the book is correct. Besides, if you print an out-of-date telephone number, readers are likely to call (your toll-free number) for the current one.

3. Enter all the corrections from the Correction Copy into the manuscript. Just go through the Correction Copy, page by page, and keyboard them in. Make updating changes to the copyright page. Change the ISBN and bar code to move your book to frontlist. This should take only a few minutes.

4. Chapter piles. Take the revision-pile materials and divide them into piles, one pile for each chapter. This is usually done most easily on the floor.

Pick up the pile that appears to be the shortest, easiest or most fun and enter the changes into your manuscript in the computer. Then look for another short, easy or fun chapter. Do not start with Chapter One and do not feel obligated to take the chapters in order.

5. Clean-up. Run your spelling and grammar checkers and then (proof) read your text from beginning to the end.

A new revision tells the world your book is a success. Send out news releases to the book trade and any specialized fields your book falls into. Point out the changes made to the new revision.

You are now the author of a brand new book but one with a track record.

Revisions have a way of sneaking up on us. One day we suddenly realize we are out of books! This discovery can upset our schedule and our cash flow. With a little organization now, the revision will be quick and easy.

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Dan Poynter does not want you to die with a book still inside you. You have the ingredients and he has your recipe. Dan has written more than 100 books since 1969 including *Writing Nonfiction* and *The Self-Publishing Manual*. For more help on book writing, see <http://ParaPub.com>.

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