Seven Things to Consider When Preparing Your Book Proposal

Like many things, a good book starts with a great idea, but how do you develop that idea so that a publisher might be interested in work- ing with you? Start by creating an initial proposal outlining your idea and why you think it would make a good publishing project. When submitting a proposal to a publisher, it pays to do a little research beforehand. For example, does the publisher publish books in your subject area? A quick look on your own bookshelf or at an online bookstore can help you answer this question.

It is not necessary to have written the whole book before you ap- proach a publisher. It is better to draft an overall plan and talk to a publisher at this early stage. If you are ready to submit a proposal to Wiley, we recommend you structure it along the following lines, so we can best evaluate your project.

1. Overview
It’s very helpful to cover the composition of the book by including an overview. Aim to develop a 200-300 word summary of the book’s objectives and scope. Start by asking yourself the following:

• What will the title be?
• What will the book contain?
• How will the selection, organization, or treatment of the subject encourage readers to buy this publication?

2. Contents
Include a table of contents indicating chapters and subdivisions within chapters, as well as any materials to be included in an appen- dix. A contents list should contain a short paragraph describing each chapter. Also, be sure to brainstorm and note any materials that might enhance an electronic edition, as most books are now published electronically as well as in print.

3. Readership
It is essential to think about whom the book is for and important to ensure that a proposal contains detailed information on who will read the book. Please try to be specific and stress the major markets. Consider the following:

• What level is it pitched at?
• If applicable, for which course(s) will it be used? Will it be required for supplementary reading?
• Is its appeal international or confined to a particular geographic market?
4. Competing titles
Points you should consider and explain are: Why is there a need for the proposed publication? For example, have there been changes in this field? Is there a gap in the existing literature that needs to be filled? Who is the intended audience for this material (e.g., academic/research, undergraduate or graduate students, professionals)? Are there any groups with an occasional need for this material?

We look carefully at any potentially competing titles, so it's always good to see a list of publications that might compete with or are similar to the one you propose. Describing their weaknesses and strengths, as well as how your publication will be superior, is also very useful. In all cases the more specific you can be, the better. This list should include:

- The author, title, publisher, publication date, price, and number of pages of the main competing titles.
- Any unique features that will distinguish your book from the competition (i.e., why someone should purchase your book as opposed to someone else's).

5. Timetable
Estimating how long a book will be is tricky, but providing an exact page count is not necessary. A commissioning editor will be more interested in whether you think your book is going to be 100, 250, or 750 pages long, providing insight into the proposed level or depth of coverage. Reflect upon the following:

- What stage are you at now, and when do you hope to complete the manuscript?
- How long is the final manuscript likely to be (i.e., word count)?
- How many line diagrams and photographs will there be?
- Will there be any unusual text features, such as color or fold-outs?

6. Other relevant information
What else might go into a proposal? The more information, the better – for example, if you're proposing an edited book, you would want to include a list of your preferred team of contributors.

7. Submission
Can you identify the correct person to send the proposal to? Sometimes the answer is yes, sometimes no, but if you can, you'll get a much quicker response than if you send it to a general mailbox. For a listing of the names and e-mail addresses of Wiley's commissioning editors, visit Wiley's Author Services site. Finally, don't forget to include a brief résumé or CV.