



The following is a transcript of a free podcast interview with Dan Poynter on self-publishing and book marketing.

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Dan Poynter with Joanna Penn at National Speakers Conference, Gold Coast 2010

Hi, everyone. This is Joanna Penn from The Creative Penn, and today, I'm delighted to be interviewing [Dan Poynter](#).

Dan started his self-publishing career in 1969 as a one-man company with a book on parachuting and now has more than a hundred and twenty books in multiple languages published across the world as well as staff, multiple products, and an international speaking career. His self-publishing manual is one of the key books that self-published used to navigate their journey. And **Dan is a legend in the self-publishing community**. So, welcome, Dan.

DPoynter: Great to be here, Joanna.

Joanna Penn: Fantastic to have you on this show. And I've been on Twitter this morning and people are excited to be listening to this podcast so wonderful. We'll get in to it.

Dan Poynter: We'll, it's really fun. It's very international. You're in Australia. I'm in Singapore for few a days and we're able to get together because of Skype.

Joanna Penn: I know. It's great. Okay. So, I'll just start by asking a basic question. **Why did you start self publishing and why should people still self-publish today?**

Dan Poynter: Well, you have to appreciate this is pioneering. It was back in 1969 when I first made that decision. And I was doing a very technical book on parachutes. I realized



that no publisher would understand and certainly wouldn't know where to sell it. But I did because I was selling to my friends in the parachute industry which is one of the basic secrets.

And so, I didn't even bother checking with the publisher and had no reason to face rejection and I went straight to a printer and started selling to people in my own industry. That is the secret to self-publishing. It isn't bookstores. It isn't the regular book trade. It is selling – **write what you know and sell to your friends**. And my parachute books, for example, sell to parachute catalogues, parachute schools, parachute associations, parachute magazines who resell to their subscribers, parachute clubs and so on. This is a much, much better market. **That's the way to make money and self-publishing is the way to go.**

Joanna Penn: Brilliant. So, just I guess a follow up question on that, **are you saying that really, only non-fiction authors should self-publish? Or what's your opinion on fiction authors?**

Dan Poynter: Well, the problem there is very simple. Most authors including the fiction authors think that the only way to promote books is radio, TV and book signings and most of us introverted writers don't want to go out and do those things. And so, they do nothing at all but there are lots of ways to promote books. And, a lot of that is online now as opposed to print and it's very easy. You can be discussing your favorite subject with people all over the world with whom your subject is also their favorite subject. You can do that almost anonymously.

And so, the fiction authors don't usually promote their book. And that's why fiction is so hard to sell. Fiction would be much easier to sell if people did a couple of things. Number one would be to focus on a certain area; in other words, a geographic area where local people and tourist would recognize the place names or a certain industry or a certain sport. I know a lady who wrote a work of fiction based on the skydiving industry and, of course, all skydivers would want to read that and they are very easy to reach.

We say you should work on your non-fiction first and save the fiction until you can afford it. But **whatever you do, you have to promote the book. Publishers don't do that.**

And so, if you're selling out to a publisher or publishing yourself, you still have to do the promotion. You have to let people know that it exists. So, I just don't want to hear fiction authors say, "Well, I'm doing fiction so I know no one is going to buy it. So, I'm not getting out there and telling anybody that I have a book."



Joanna Penn: Hmm. Now, good points there. **One of the things that people say is that there is still a stigma of self-publishing. Do you think that has changed? And, do you even care about that?**

Dan Poynter: I don't think there ever was a stigma. I think that some large publishers were snobbish. Some people who have been published by a large publisher were maybe snobbish and said, "Oh, yes. Well, you couldn't find a publisher."

Let me give you some numbers. In the United States alone, there are six very large publishers in New York, Three to four hundred medium-sized publishers and 86,000 self-publishers. It's the majority.

In the United States, 78% of the titles are published by the self-publishers. The big publishers only do 22%. Now, think about it. Non-fiction, and I'll focus on that first – non-fiction is written and people buy it to learn something or solve a problem.

And when somebody goes into a bookstore or other outlets, they look at these books on the shelf and they're asking themselves, "Is this book going to answer my question?" They might look to see who the author is to see what experience you have in the industry and are you a credible person. **Nobody ever looks to see who the publisher is, because it's hardly ever one of the large publishers. It just doesn't matter. People are not making buying decisions based on the publisher.**

Joanna Penn: Actually, that's a really good point. And, you know, probably we writers get too focused on the publishers. Actually, readers don't focus on the publishers. That is basically what you are saying.

Dan Poynter: Yes. That is perfectly true.

Joanna Penn: So, **talking about the new ways of publishing, then, because when you started it was just print books and you've recently published The Self-Publishing Manual on Smashwords. And so, maybe you could tell us why you did that and what opportunities you see going forward.**

Dan Poynter: Well, everywhere we look we see that **eyeballs are moving from print to online.** In the United States, for example, we see the newspapers are consolidating, downsizing, going out of business. I cancelled my subscription to the Wall Street Journal, the only paper I've read for 45 years, because I'd pick it up and say, "I've already read that online. That's not news. That's yesterday."

And young people today get their news online and maybe from television. They're not reading newspapers. So, what's the future of the newspapers? Take a look at magazines. Advertisers have followed the eyeballs online and these magazines don't have advertising. And, they're going out of business.



Reed Publications, the people who put the Book Expo on America last month closed down 27 magazines. One of them was Trade Show Week. And you take Newsweek, it's been around for generations. It doesn't have any advertising. It's getting thinner and thinner. They're losing half a million dollars every week and they're up for sale. I can't imagine who would buy them.

The future is online and the future is in E-books. We'll always have printed books but the sale of printed books are pretty level and they're decreasing. The sale of E-books are skyrocketing. And both Sony and Amazon have brought people's attention to E-books. It's in the public consciousness. Many people got Kindle for Christmas. On Christmas Day, Amazon sold more E-books than P-books, the printed books.

And I have been reading E-books for years because I travel so much. I can't carry printed books with me. I don't have space. Now, I travel more than 9000 kilometers every week. And I spend a lot of time on airports, a lot of time in airplanes and I can't be carrying books around with me.

So for years, I read on my Pocket PC. And for the last two years, I've read on my iPhone. The important thing for authors to remember is that they are generating content and there are many ways to ring value out of their content or their work. Now, there are some people, Joanna, who would like to read your book but they can't. Well, they can read but they're stuck behind a steering wheel. They're long-haul truckers or they're long distance commuters or they're sales reps and they're in their cars all the time. If your book isn't available as an audio book, they can't consume it.

So your book can be spun off into a printed book, an E-book, a large print book for the visually impaired, the audio book, the iPhone app and so on. You're generating content and there are lots of different ways to sell it.

Now, you spoke about [Smashwords](#)? You can upload your text and cover to Smashwords and they will turn it into nine different formats – PDF, LIT, Moby Pocket Palm, E/Palm, Sony, Kindle and so on – no charge. They put it up on their website. And when they sell one, they send you 85%. They just keep 15%.

Now, your audience is mostly in Australia and this is a way for you to approach the large markets and the U.S., UK and Canada and so on. Anybody can just go online, fill out the two-page form and upload the text and upload the cover and you're in. You're up there.

Also, Smashwords has deals now with Apple, Google, Amazon and barnesandnoble.com. So, you have to give away a little more, then, that way. But your books, your E-book is now available to all of these people. There was another announcement I read just this morning that [Amazon.com is now offering authors to upload their e-books 70%.](#) Can you



imagine what that's going to do to the big publishers in New York who are giving you 10 or 12% on the net receipts.

So, I mean, it's absolutely amazing. So Google and Amazon and so on, they are becoming the new publishers. The big publishers are going to go out of business. They're going to go from the top to bottom, overnight, just the way General Motors did. **And the new publishers are going to be Amazon, Google, BarnesandNoble.com and Apple. Those are going to be the new publishers.**

You see, what Amazon just announced is they say to authors, "Send us your text and we'll put it up there and put it out as a Kindle book." They can also put it out as a print book with their subsidiary grade space and we'll make it available to the entire world. **And Amazon now is the publisher and the store and the manufacturer. They're doing everything for you and they're giving you 70%.**

So you're going to see an awful lot of big name publishers going that route and they're going to abandon the state-old publishers in New York. The old publishers have not changed their way of doing business since 1947. And they blamed everything on the economy and they're waiting for the economy to get better so they can go back to business as usual. It isn't going to be there. The new publishers are the online people. The young people, the people who are doing things, the people who are making the difference and we're all going to benefit from that.

Joanna Penn: That's a fantastic outline of what's going on right now. **So do you think right now is the very best time to be self-publishing and there's basically nothing stopping people.**

Dan Poynter: Oh, absolutely. Now, you could make more money. You can get the press sooner. You can keep control of the whole thing. It's just a wonderful time to self publish. You know, meanwhile, the big publishers are cutting back on their production values. I ordered a book last year. It was a (Wiley) book I ordered from Amazon. When I received the book, I opened it up, and I put it down. They are cutting back on their production values. The grade of the paper looks like newsprint. If you saw this book, you wouldn't read it because it has no credibility.

And this is a fantastic opportunity for self-publishers today because your book is right next to these books from the large publishers and they're books look terrible and yours is done on a nice white paper and looks great. And people are going to buy yours. I mean, you just have to see some of these books coming out there—absolutely awful.



Joanna Penn: Now, that's a really good point. I go on a lot about self-publishing because **I love self-publishing, too, but what are the things that people fail at when they try self-publishing? So what tips can you give us so we don't fail?** Because, you know, a lot of people do self-publish, but it doesn't get them anywhere.

Dan Poynter: Well, every book has to go through four steps. **Number one, it has to be created. It has to be written.** That's up to the author. Well, you could have a co-author. You might even deal with a ghost writer. You don't have to be the writer to be the author. The celebrity books aren't written by the celebrities. The celebrities are a brand. They have a following. They're going to sell so many books because they are a celebrity and they have a following and those are all done by ghost writers. We all know that.

And the second thing you have to do is produce the book. That means, have it printed and have it bound. That's what a publisher does for you, but you don't need the publisher. You can go to a printer and have your book manufactured. **The third thing is that your book needs to be distributed** to bookstores and other outlets. And you make more money at the other outlets. That's what a book publisher does for you, but the book publisher only manufactures and distributes.

And **the fourth is the most important step, and that is the promotion.** And that is up to the author. **Publishers do not promote books.** You ask anybody who's been published by a publisher, they'll say, "Well, they manufactured the book and they sent it out to stores, but nothing happened. And then somebody told me I was supposed to do them. I thought they were going to promote the book." Publishers do not promote books. They never have. They certainly don't now. And if you'll ask them, they'll say, "Well, we list your book in the catalogue." That's not book promotion.

So then, by the time the author figures out that they're supposed to promote the book, nothing has happened. Nobody is interested in last year's book. It's too late. They have to start over. They've lost a lot of time.

So what often happens, because people don't understand what their responsibilities are, is they write the book, they have it produced, they get it into distribution and then all of a sudden they get distracted. It could be a family emergency or they start writing in another book or they take up something else. They don't tell people they have a book. They haven't done any of the promotion.

Now, I hate to use the word promotion because that turns a lot of people off. A lot of people are introverted writers like me. We really don't like to do radio and TV and book signings. And we kind of grit our teeth and go out there and do them, some don't go out there and do them. And they think that that's the only way to promote books and **that's why I have to tell the introverts, "Look, you don't have to do radio and TV. I give you permission not to. Here's what you have to do to promote your book. And it**



can all be done online, from home. You don't get dressed. You don't go out of the house. It's all very easy to do."

But the author still has to do the promotion. So the big failure is failing to do the promotion, not letting people know that you have a book. And then these people come back to you and me a year later saying, "Oh, this is a terrible industry. It's all stacked against me. I couldn't get anybody's attention." Well, nobody even knew that you existed because you didn't tell them. That's the big mistake.

Joanna Penn: That is brilliant. And you said something that I really thought was great. You mentioned there that you're an introverted writer. And I actually met you at the National Speakers Conference a few months ago now and I was having this conversation with other people. I said, "Look, I'm an introvert. I hate this stuff, you know, but I'm forcing myself." **So maybe you could talk a bit more there about being an introvert and yet doing marketing and speaking and other things where you're almost performing.**

Dan Poynter: Right. Okay. I want you to draw a line. And on that line, on one side, you put zero; in the middle, put five; and at the other – and put 10. Look at that line. And the first part, zero to five is introvert, five to 10 is extrovert. Now, figure out where you're going to be. This is really important that we understand ourselves because we're all different and one is not better than the other.

Now, up there very close to 10 is where you find the good sales people. Maybe at six to eight is where you find a lot of professional speakers, not all, but you do find a lot of them there. Around three and four and so on is where you find most of the writers. And down there, about one, is where you find most of the actors. Actors don't come out until they get into their character. A lot of these actors don't have a lot to say until they get a script. And that's one of the reasons why many of them don't like to go out in public because the last couple of encounters have not been very good since they were not as fascinating as their character, you know, they just didn't go over very well.

So once you realized where you are, if you're down there in the zero to five range, then I'd tell you, "You don't have to do radio and TV. There are other kinds of promotion that you can do." If you're up there, way up around nine or 10, these are the extroverted people who need a couple of hours of social time in order to spend a few minutes alone. And, Joanna, you know, it takes more than a couple of minutes to write a book. And so for those people, I give them permission to get help which could be an advanced editor or a ghost writer. You can be the author without being the writer.

The important thing is to get your information down on paper and into a book so that that book can be working for you and which brings you credibility, money and all that sort of thing. And, I mean, you know, in your business, as you run across these very, very extroverted people and they keep talking about this book that they're planning



to do and they never get around to it, and on the other hand, it's very hard to get a very introverted person to do any promotion and some of them don't show up for the TV appointments. Some of them don't show up for the autograph party. I mean, they're just scared to go out there.

And so it's very important for people like you and me who advise the industry to understand who our clients are so that we can come up with the best plan for them and then we can farm some things out. We can do some things for them. We can give them permission not to do a few things. And that way, the book gets promoted. The author is a lot happier and it's more successful all the way around.

Joanna Penn: That's great. I like that, giving permission to people to not be on radio and things because I briefly did radio and TV and I just hated it but I love the internet. It works very well. So thank you for that. That helps.

The other thing I wanted to ask about is your business model because clearly, you started off, you know, with just one book on parachuting and now, you've got all these books. You're an international speaker. You have staff. You have products. **So could you comment on how authors have to have multiple streams of income and what has worked well for you?**

Dan Poynter: Well, first of all, **write what you love and sell to your friends.** I started with books on parachutes. That's my favorite subject. I could sit around and talk with other people about parachutes for hours and hours. And, you know, I was a parachute designer for a number of years. I'm a skydiver. I made over 1,200 jumps. I have all the licenses and ratings. I'm past president of the Parachute Industry Association, past chairman of the board in the U.S. Parachute Association. I was chief in delegation in 1977 when the world meet was up there in Gatton, Queensland. I had a great time there.

And, you know, sports has taken me all over the world and I've just made a whole bunch of friends. And so that's one of the secrets – is write what you know, write what you love, and then sell into your own industry.

The first step is to do more editions or more versions of your book. So you write the book. You have it printed. You send off the files and you've got e-book. You sit down and record your audio book. You have the file all ready for the large print book. That's for the visually impaired and the reading-challenged. And so you can turn a lot of non-fiction books into an iPhone app. I have my own iPhone app. Go look up Dan Poynter at the iPhone store and download it. It's free.

So there are a lot of ways you can do that. Then in addition to that, what publishers should do is get into other products. You see, as soon as your book comes out you'd realize, "Oh, people want to know more about this subject. They want to go into greater



depth on that one." So you turn out special reports which ironically sell for more than the book. I mean, you know, the book could be \$15, but your report is \$20 to \$25.

I've been selling special reports from my website since 1996. As far as I know, we were the first one to sell downloads. Most of the people who are selling things online were selling vitamins and running shoes and computer parts. And we were selling little ones and zeros.

Let me tell you a story about an Australian. I get a call – it's been a few years now – and this guy said, "Dan, I'd like this special report..." whatever it was "...how do I get that?" And I said, "Well, that's \$19.95. We can ship it to you in what we call global priority mail or envelopes and we can put one or two books in them. It takes about five days to get to you in Australia, maybe six. I don't know – oh, the shipping would be \$11. I don't know if there'll be any taxes. There could be import duty. There could be sales taxes, (GST), something like that. But have you been to my website? You can go to the website and you can download it for (four). It's a PDF. You can print it out yourself. There's no shipping charge. There are no taxes. There's no duty and you get it at the speed of light."

And he was like this, "Thank you, mate. I think I'll go to the website." That's what the beauty is today, **don't think locally. Think globally. You can sell your products all over the world. You can sell your e-books. You can sell your reports—everywhere.**

You have to do a promotion, and today, you promote online. That's where you post all your information. Your information, your promotional stuff can be read by people in some other country. And they'll contact you.

If somebody in South Africa orders your report or your e-book, you'll certainly not going to say, "Gee, we haven't thought about that. We don't sell to South Africa. I mean, of course, you're going to make that available. So you'll wind up selling one book here and one book there and one way over there. It doesn't matter what your subject matter is, there are people all over who are vitally focused on and interested in it.

And so this is a great time to be in the publishing business. It's a great time to be in charge of your own publishing business. You want to be very close to your market. And these people, these friends of yours from all over the world are one of the places that you gather information, but they're also your clients. They are where you sell your information. So it's a very good time to be in the publishing business. And you do want to be totally involved in something you love.



Joanna Penn: Absolutely. Now, I do want to ask you again about speaking because we're almost out of time. **But did you start speaking in order to sell some of your books or did you start that as a parallel career almost and how is it worked for you?**

Dan Poynter: Well, I started with speaking on the subject about just over 20 years ago. And **it was just another way to get the word out.** We have to realize that our audiences consist of different kinds of people. Some people like writers and publishers are print-oriented. They read. There are some people like sales people who are more auditory (or in a) general statement, they don't read, but they would listen to your e-book or your e-report. And there are some people who are very gregarious like speakers who like to go to conferences. They like to hear it from you and they like to mingle with each other.

And so it's just a different, **it's another spin-off.** As I said, you could put your book out as a print book or e-book and audio book, but you can take that same information, turn it into an iPhone app or you can turn it into a speech. And so there's just a lot of different ways to spin it off. And currently, I fly more than 9,000 kilometers. I go around (only speaking). I joined the race. Right now, I'm on number 20. I spoke twice yesterday. I spoke twice the day before. Here in Singapore, I'll be speaking an all-day Saturday and all-day Sunday. And then finally, first of the week, I get to fly home. A few days ago I spoke in London twice and before that, Washington DC. So (if they are) really around the world like (inaudible).

So think about speaking, if you like to do it, if you don't like speaking, that's okay. I give you permission (not to).

Joanna Penn: So, Dan, you have so much free information on your site. People can spend a lot of time there as well as books and resource. **So can you tell people where to find you online and how they can connect with you?**

Dan Poynter: The reason I have so much free information because my site has been built and built and built since 1995 and it just keeps growing. And really, the reason so much stuff up there free is to kind of to protect myself because I can't talk to everybody. And this way, it helps a lot of people and again, I just, you know, I can't do it one-on-one. But anyway, yes. The most important thing is we have information kits. There's one on writing, one on publishing, the one promoting. Each is about 20 pages long and they're full of tips and resources that will get you squared away.

And I suggest that people – to go to parapub.com. Think parachutes and publishing, parapub.com. And right at the top, there's a button that says something like [resources](#), there's a dropdown menu, and you'll see free info kits. All you have to do is type in your email address. We don't ask for your, you know, your special numbers or your mother's maiden name or anything like that. We don't want to know your phone number. We just ask your email address and then it comes back as a – with an autoresponder, you get it



just a few seconds. And you can print it out or read it online. So that's parapub.com. Get the free info kits.

Joanna Penn: That's fantastic and I'll put all that in the show notes. So thank you ever so much for your time, Dan. That was brilliant.

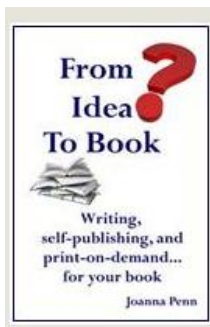
Dan Poynter: Okay. Well, thank you so much.

Thanks for listening today. I hope you found it helpful. You can get more information on writing, publishing options, sales and promotion for your book at www.TheCreativePenn.com. And you can also get your free “[How to Be an Author](#)” [workbook here](#)



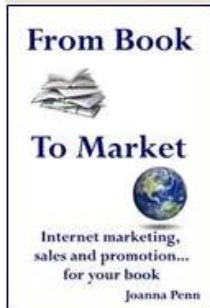
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