

Interview With Heidi Yi by Joanna Penn
November, 2008

Joanna: Hi, everyone! I'm Joanna Penn from <http://www.HowToBeAnAuthor.com> and today I'm interviewing Heidi Yi.

Heidi is the author of "Pro Make Up by Heidi," which will teach you how to get the best out of your skin through diet, exercise and lifestyle, as well as show you simple, great looks for everyday makeup.

Heidi is also an award-winning makeup artist, specializing in wedding makeup, and has her own company in Sydney, Australia.

You can find Heidi at www.heidiyi.com.

Good morning, Heidi, how are you?

Heidi: Good thanks, Joanna.

Joanna: So just tell us a little bit about yourself and your new book.

Heidi: Yes. I started as a makeup artist and beauty therapist a few years ago, and I just got bit tired of doing the same thing.

I'm not very good at writing, but I just wanted to put into words and to educate people so they can do their own makeup, and to teach them how to look after and present themselves.

And there was a demand for my book—a lot of people were asking—that there's no Australian makeup book out there. It's all American, and all profession, coffee table books. My book is a *how to*—so it's a how to look after your skin, how to do wedding makeup, photographic makeup. It's very exciting and anyone can do it. It's a simple, step-by-step instruction book with illustrations, demonstrations and photos.

Joanna: That's great. So how did you get started in writing?

Heidi: It was very nerve-racking because I've never written a book before, and I didn't know where to start, who to contact. But I just started writing, just hoping that I'll get the manuscript done first, and maybe, you know, I'll go from there.

Joanna: So did you have any training as a writer? Did you do any courses?

Heidi: Oh, no. I know nothing about writing. I mean, I used to go to university but I couldn't finish it because I wasn't very good at writing my assignments. I failed English in high school and you know, grammar, spelling, all incorrect. So, I mean, to write a book is a big commitment. But I tried. I gave it a go.

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Joanna: Did you record your book or did you write your book?

Heidi: I hand wrote it on blank paper, and then I typed it out. And then I moved it around—I added to it and had a look.

Joanna: And did you do everything yourself—the editing, typesetting, etc.?

Heidi: No, because my area of expertise is purely in makeup, and that's the skill and the knowledge that I have. So, what I did was I wrote everything about makeup in plain English. I didn't know how to put it into proper sentences or chapters, so I gave it into the hands of a copywriter and editor.

So the editor had a look and proofread and copy wrote it so it sounds professional. And the design was done by a graphic designer and photographs were taken by a professional photographer. So I outsourced a lot of the work. All I did was just the manuscript.

Joanna: Wow! That's amazing. So you self-published your book. So tell us how that worked. What was the process?

Heidi: Well, I sort of worked out how much it was going to cost me from start to finish and what the outcome would be—whether it would be a profitable or whether, you know, it's not worth doing.

So I contacted one of the cosmetic companies that I used to work with to be part of it in partnership, and they accepted my proposal and about to go into a financial agreement.

But then they pulled out halfway to production so then I had to—it was very disappointing because I had already started writing and the money was an issue.

So I've got a silent partner in my company who was happy to fund me and believe in me, so with that fund I used, you know, expenses in producing the book and finally got it printed.

So from start to finish it took about twelve months, including time knocking around and all the disappointments and things. But writing the manuscript itself took only three months to do.

Joanna: Okay. And then how many copies did you print?

Heidi: I was very lucky because, see, I had a business plan, and the plan was where am I going to sell this book. And I thought *I'll get a distributor, because he'll go to all the bookshops*. So initially I was thinking, my

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printer said, “Why don’t you start with 100 copies and see how it goes?”

But I wanted to think big, because I’ve got big dreams and goals. One hundred isn’t good for me. It’s not enough. I know I’m taking risks, but I’m a risk-taker, so I rang—looked up in yellow pages—and I rang a distributor, and they said no.

And I rang a second distributor and I won him over, because there’s no makeup book out there like what I was writing, and my distributor was so happy that he had found me, he ordered 1,000 copies initially, and then 400 copies the second time. So I ended up printing two-and-a-half thousand copies to begin with.

So while he’s selling, distributing it to bookshops, I started selling online.

Joanna: That’s fantastic. Okay, so you say you got a distributor on the second ring. So where are the books being placed?

Heidi: Currently they’re at Borders, Angus & Robertson, Dymocks, Mary Ryan, Collins Bookshops [*big Australian bookshops*]. Yes, so I had a twelve-month exclusive contract with my distributor, which means I can’t contact the bookshops myself. So he’s in charge of those. So I leave it in his expert hands to market my book to bookshops and see how it goes.

Joanna: Okay. So, just for anyone who doesn’t know, just explain what distribution means.

Heidi: He acts as an agent—so a distributor, they have a big company and they’ve got sales reps that go around. They have good contact with the bookshops.

So instead of me going around shop-to-shop asking if they’re interested in my book, what he does is he contacts all the bookshops, including bookshops in airports as well as newsagents, pharmacies and department stores.

So I have a higher chance of using him than me going around, doing all the work. Because they don’t know me.

Joanna: And then just to explain a little bit about the financials with a distributor.

Heidi: Yes. It’s good to have a distributor, because he distributes into many areas in a short time. But then the books are on consignment, so it

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goes into bookshops and whatever gets sold, the bookshop gets a commission, and the distributor gets a commission and then the remainder I get it.

And then when I get, say 35 to 40 percent, I've got to take away the printing costs and everything else. But it's still worth it because you've got to rely on volume sales. You may not earn a lot but then you've got to rely on second copies and more orders and it's gets very exciting after that.

Joanna: Okay, so have you done your own promotion or have you used a publicist?

Heidi: I had marketing people, you know, PR. I'd write press releases, articles, editorials—but the majority of the time, I write it and the media releases it—you know, they edit it, sort of reword it, and then I submit it to like newspaper people, or TV or magazines.

And yes, I have been very successful at doing that. It's not what you know but who you know in the industry, so I've written my story. I've written my press release and media release, got published in various beauty and health and beauty magazines, available in newsagents.

But sometimes it's better to do it yourself then get someone else to do it, because they don't know your book or the content as much as you do.

Joanna: Absolutely. And have you used any internet marketing for your promotional sales?

Heidi: Yes, that's where I want my business - online business, internet sales. So I've got shopping carts built into my website, so people order from there. And I'm looking into getting search engine optimization so that people can find me through Google.

So whether it's pay-per-click or AdWord Google or keyword searches, or I put it on eBay so people can find me. It's just a matter of searching me on the computer instead of me being everywhere and trying to pull customers.

Joanna: Okay, what other sales channels are you using?

Heidi: I need to really get out there and get myself known, and my branding as well. People have to get to know me and my products, and have that trust in the products, so I need to build good relationships with people, whether it's customers or businesses.

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So I get out there and do a lot of marketing and networking and do a lot of expos, organize book signings, book launches. So a lot of time and effort and money goes into getting myself out there for people to reach me.

Joanna: You're going to be doing some book signings. Why did you decide to do that?

Heidi: For example, bookshops—lot of books—majority of the books in bookshops are on consignment. And three people suffer if the book doesn't get sold. It's the bookshop owner, the distributor and the author, which is myself. Three of us won't get paid.

So, we need to get the books off the shelf, and to do that, I need to go in and do book signing events so people will come to me and they'll get to know me. And I need to self-promote myself by doing book launches. Get people together and have a catering, so people come in for networking and nibbles and drinks, and a bit of fun/work. So it's social—sort of half social/work gathering, but still make some sales.

Joanna: And how did you get those places to book you for a book signing, or did you just fall into it yourself?

Heidi: Oh, it's so hard. I rang around the bookshops where my books are sold. Some bookshops don't want to know me, saying they're too busy. And I've rang the same bookshop like four times now.

There's two places in Melbourne which I've procured to do a book signing and I've already booked a flight and accommodations. And when I rang to confirm the book signing event, they have no record of me, so there was obviously miscommunication—that I've spoken to the wrong person.

So I've learnt through the experience that I need to approach the Marketing Coordinator in the bookshop and then arrange it, saying that I'm coming in.

Joanna: Okay, so you have a successful business. Is the book aimed at promoting your business or is it a venture all on its own?

Heidi: Well, in my company, I've got two products, which is my book, "Pro Make Up by Heidi," and mineral makeup, the Heidi Yi Mineral Makeup. How that came about was, while I was writing my book, I needed some photos of makeup products.

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So I approached a few makeup companies and asked if they want to participate in my book. They were wanting compensation, because I asked them what I would get in return for promoting their company in my book, in the event that my book sells well, they will get sales out of that, you know, their product.

So I thought *Well, that's very greedy because I'm promoting them for nothing*, so I thought I might as well come up with my own product. So I did a lot of research and coming from makeup and beauty background, and I have a lot of education and training, I've decided to come up with my own brand.

So now I've got book, photos of the products in my book, so when my book sells, people will be able to see my products and purchase it online as well.

So, I sort of up sell and cross-sell and cross-promotion.

Joanna: That's brilliant. So, do you consider yourself an author or a businesswoman first?

Heidi: I started as a businesswoman. I consider myself as an entrepreneur, because as a woman in business, it's a brave thing, you know, being a housewife and also being—you know, many people work for other people, like employee.

I'd never go back to working for other people. Yes, it feels secure to have a job and secure income, but I'm a risk-taker. This is my third business venture since I was 19. I started my first business when I was 19 and every time I fell, I picked myself up again and I started again—to come up with all the different ideas and just give it a go.

Because if you don't give a go, you'd never know.

Joanna: That's great. So what did you learn then, throughout this process?

Heidi: That before writing a book, I should have done more research what self-publishing is about. Now I know the whole process because I went through ups and downs and made lots of mistakes and lost lots of money along the way.

And lots of tears, and hard work and long hours and exhaustion. So, maybe I should do a course, or ask someone, or read a book on how to self-publish. Or talk to people who've been there and done that. Instead of jumping in.

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Joanna: So, what would you do differently, next time?

Heidi: Well, I do have plans on writing a second book. I don't know on what and when, but I know how, because I've been through the first one myself.

I know dos and don'ts, and I know what works and doesn't. And I know who to contact and who not to go to. And I know now to get three different quotes from three different people before I make a commitment to get the job done, whether it's printing, or graphic design. Yes.

Joanna: That's great. So you are going to write another book?

Heidi: That is on my mind, but, because I'm working on growing my business—also looking into exporting my product—there's a lot going on in the moment, but I'll get that up and running and when I have staff, and more time, I'll sit down and start writing again.

Joanna: Yes. So when you said that it was difficult and hard work—but is it worth it?

Heidi: Oh! Absolutely! Because for me, I love challenge, I like going through difficult—I know there were so many times I wanted to just call it quits, and there were so many times where I had sleepless nights because I lost money due to a bad business decision. Had gone with the wrong people or you know, something went wrong.

But, hey, everyone makes mistakes in business and in personal life, and you learn from that. So I've learned a valuable lesson, and now I'm very excited because I ended up finishing the book, and it's been distributed over 300 retailers Australia-wide, and I'm very happy of my achievement.

And because of persistence and patience, perseverance, I just kept going. I'm not a quitter. When I start something, I finish it, and I'm a doer person, so, yes, I'll do it all over again, but I wouldn't go the way that I did. I'll go a different way.

Joanna: So, how can people get in touch with you?

Heidi: The best way to contact me is via email—heidi@heidiyi.com.

Joanna: That's great. Okay, well thanks very much, Heidi. That was brilliant.

Heidi: Yes. Thanks very much, Joanna.

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Joanna Penn is an author, speaker and consultant who helps people create their own books.

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