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DanPoynter@ParaPublishing.com

1-800-PARAPUB

Gathering Testimonials & Forewords

by Dan Poynter

More than 300 titles are published each day. There is no way anyone can know and rank them. That is why the book industry relies so heavily on blurbs.

A *blurb* is a short sales pitch or review of a book usually printed on the jacket or in an advertisement. The word was coined by Gelett Burgess, a Boston-born humorist and author [1866-1951].

Testimonials, endorsements and quotations or “blurbs” sell books because word-of-mouth is one of the most powerful forces in marketing. Anything *you* say about your book is self-serving but words from *another* person are not. In fact, when readers see the quotation marks, it shifts their attitude and they become more receptive.

Harvey Mackay placed 44 testimonials in the frontmatter of *Swim with the Sharks*; he had endorsements from everyone from Billy Graham to Robert Redford. Did these luminaries buy a book and write unsolicited testimonials? Of course not. Mackay asked for the words of praise.

<http://www.mackay.com>

Your mission is to get the highest-placed, most influential opinion-molders in your field talking about your book. You have more control than you think over whom you quote, what they say and how you use their words. The easiest and most logical time to gather blurbs is following *peer review* of the manuscript. Testimonials are not difficult to get if you follow this two-step process.

Most testimonials are superficial, teach the reader nothing and lack credibility.

—Ron Richards, President, Venture Network.

Step #1. Send parts of your book out for peer review. Smart nonfiction authors take each chapter of their nearly complete manuscript and send it off to at least four experts on that chapter's subject.

Step #2. Approach your peer reviewers for a testimonial. Now the target is softened up. You are not surprising them by asking for a blurb for a book they haven't even seen. In fact, since you matched the chapter to their individual interest, they have already bought into the project and become familiar with your work.

Now, draft the (suggested) testimonial yourself. In order to get what you need and in order to control the blurb, draft a suggested testimonial. Then include a cover letter like this: *I know you are a busy person. Considering your position and the direction this book takes, I need a testimonial something like this: . . .*

Drafting a testimonial is a creative act; it takes time and careful thought. Editing is easier than creating. Your endorser does not even know how long the blurb should be. So, provide help. Some 80% will just sign off on your words, 10% will add some superlatives and 5% will get the idea and come up with something much better.

Forewords are approached in the same manner as endorsements. What you get back from the writer is just longer.

Gather testimonials by putting words in their mouths.

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