

Wally Bock's Writing Edge | Ghostwriting & Coaching For Business Writers | Writing a Book: The Dan Poynter Principle

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Dan Poynter was one of the very few people in the world who was a pioneer in more than one field. One of them was parachuting.

In 1972, he released *The Parachute Manual – A Technical Treatise on the Parachute*, one of the early books on skydiving gear. He continued publishing parachuting books for the rest of his life. One of them was *Parachuting: The Skydiver's Handbook*, which many people see as a cornerstone of skydiving literature.

Dan was also THE pioneer in self-publishing. When I say that he published a book in 1972, I mean he did it himself. No big publishing house wanted to publish a book on the technical aspects of parachuting. "Gosh," they thought, "there are only a handful of people interested in that." Of course, they were right.

But Dan realized an important truth. It wasn't likely that you could recoup the publishing costs if you depended on a huge number of the world's parachutists wandering into a bookstore that had your book on the shelf. But you could count on something else.

People who are enthusiastic about parachuting buy all kinds of parachute stuff, but they don't buy most of it in regular bookstores or department stores. In Dan's day, they bought them from specialty stores and mail-order catalogs. Today, you can add websites to that mix.

Dan had one of the first e-commerce websites, too. In 1996, he put up the first version of his site for Para Publishing. By that time, he was a pioneer in another field, self-publishing. In 1979, Dan published the first edition of *The Self-Publishing Manual*, the original bible for all of us who wanted to pursue self-publishing.

Dan Poynter's Big Insight

Dan's big insight is captured in a quote he used often: "Bookstores are a lousy place to sell books."

Dan realized that most bookstores had to appeal to a wide range of tastes, but people with a narrow specialty interest bought their books and manuals and supplies at specialty outlets. It's an interesting paradox of book publishing: you're more likely to make money selling your books if you write for and sell to a narrower audience, not a wider one.

That's the Dan Poynter Principle. Write your book for specific people with specific needs in a narrow niche. Sell your books to them where they buy other things to sustain or to fuel their interest.

Bottom Line

The Dan Poynter Principle is not the only way that you can make money from a book, but it is one proven way. If you have strong technical expertise, use that expertise to define a niche and fill it.