

Dog Writers: Wag Your Tail for the Consumer

by Kate Epstein, Epstein Literary Agency

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Dog writers may have an advantage over most writers, because at least your pooches keep you company. And yet, ultimately, you must dig up your bones alone. And that's fine, even wonderful on many days. But if you seek publication, keep your audience in mind.

Who's going to read it and why? Who's going to buy it and why?

Books about dogs fall into one of two categories—pleasure reads and problem-solving reads. Pleasure reads contain primarily photographs, stories, and/or narrative. Problem-solving reads make advice prominent. A pleasure read might teach by example, and a problem-solving read might be fun, but most books work best if the title clearly telegraphs which kind they are.

Most consumers of problem-solving books actually themselves have a problem with their dog. They want help, and it's the writer's job to give it.

But the consumer of a pleasure read—the person who opens his or her wallet—may or may not have a dog. The consumer may purchase the book as a gift for a dog lover; indeed, according to Barnes & Noble, well over half of book purchases are gifts. So envisioning your customer may require imagining what one person will think another will like.

Gift buyers are very sensitive to giving offense, but that doesn't mean edgy books can't sell well—witness *Bad Cat* and *Bad Dog*. Edgy concepts catch the eye, and sometimes, in a crowded bookstore, that's more important than anything else.

Perhaps my best piece of advice: whoever your audience is, it's not yourself, your dog, or your mom. She (it's probably a woman) doesn't know you or love you. But she wants a book. Will it be yours?

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