

Oxford Literary Consultancy



How To Choose A Bestselling Title

by

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Introduction

What if you could sell ten times more books just by changing your title? Ok, that's believable. Are you sitting down? What if you could sell nearly a million more books just by changing your title?

No, this isn't hype. This is exactly what happened to author, Bob Morrison, when he self-published his book. When it first went on sale as *The Entrepreneurs' Manual* it sold only 12 copies. Disillusioned by these sales, and thinking the title needed an overhaul, he renamed it *Why S.O.B.s Succeed and Nice Guys Fail in Business*. The book has since sold over 800,000 copies.

Explosive results

In a world where we're bombarded with information, an attention-grabbing title can make all the difference between success and failure. If you're still having doubts, here's a handful of other manuscripts that have been successfully re-titled:

- *The Squash Book* was tested as a title versus *The Zucchini Cookbook*. The first title sold just 1,500 copies. The second sold 300,000 because it was more specific. It let people know exactly what it was about. It also addressed the needs of the many people who grow zucchini (or courgettes as they're known in the UK) and don't know what to do with them.
- Aspiring author, Colin McEnroe, created what he thought was a great book title, *Swimming Chickens*. After dismal sales, he decided to come up with another one. *Lose Weight Through Great Sex With Celebrities: The Elvis Way* went on to sell several hundred thousand copies.
- John Gray didn't get much attention with his book *What Your Mother Couldn't Tell You and What Your Father Didn't Know*. He shortened it to *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus*. The rest, as they say, is history...
- The young F. Scott Fitzgerald sent his new novel, *Trimalchio in West Egg*, to publishers in 1924. Charles Scribner's Sons unsurprisingly hated the title and told him to change it. Fitzgerald obliged and came up with the bestseller, *The Great Gatsby*.

All very well and good, you might be thinking. But *how* do I go about choosing a good title?

How to choose a title

Top titles create anticipation, excitement and enthusiasm. They express the passion of your message. They connect emotionally with your reader. This then, is what you are aiming for.

Here are some tips to help you get started with both fiction and non-fiction titles:

1. Include 'How to' in your title.

How To Write A Bestseller / How to Become a Forex Trader

People love to learn with simple and easy steps. They like miracle solutions and 'quick fix' answers. In today's busy world, they like anything that suggests they can shave off time from their own learning curve.

2. Make a big promise.

Lose A Stone In Six Weeks / No More Sleepless Nights.

If you have a big-gun promise, don't be afraid to use it. However, use your promise sparingly, and be ready

to deliver. Your readers will remember if you fulfill your promises, and will come back for more. They'll also run a mile from hype ~ so give careful thought to what you're promising.

3. Command your readers.

Tame Your Toddler / Buy Your Dream Home in Brazil.

The command has an immediate effect. It makes the reader think: "Yes, I want that!" It also reassures the reader that it's possible to achieve this and helpful advice will follow.

4. Offer your top benefit in your book title.

Think and Grow Rich / The 4-Hour Work Week / The One-Minute Millionaire.

Winning non-fiction titles should tell the reader how they'll benefit from reading your book. What's the problem your book is going to solve? Readers buy books for something that will help them grow, profit, save money, improve health, or gain more time.

5. Ask a question.

When Did You Last See Your Father? / Who Stole My Church? / How Good Is Your Sex Life?

Most times, your reader will answer your question in their minds. They'll be hooked in. The key is providing the answers in your book.

6. Be provocative.

So You Don't Want To Go To Church Any More? / Don't Waste Your Life.

Provocative statements jolt our attention like electric shocks. They make us curious. They make us angry. Most of all, they make us want to read on.

7. Use 'key words'.

Secrets of the Millionaire Mind / Bend It Like Beckham.

Key words grab reader's attention. However, in the Internet age, here's another good reason why they're important. If you're planning to sell your book online, it'll help readers to locate your book via subject searches on sites like Amazon.

8. Be outrageous.

Sex in a Tent / The Nigger Factory.

Take a risk. Write without fear of judgment or prejudice. Break boundaries. Challenge taboos. Make people sit up and take notice.

9. Use words that intrigue or arouse curiosity.

The Life & Loves of a She Devil / The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat / The Dangerous Book for Boys.

Books and films offer escapism and fantasy. They provide a chance to experience larger-than-life characters and experiences. Any title that hints at a life less ordinary is bound to arouse curiosity and interest.

10. Use pictures or strong visual images to provoke your audience.

Miss Smilla's Feeling For Snow. / The Colour Purple / A Thousand Splendid Suns.

Use the strong words, colours, or sensory images to stir your audience's imagination. Use a picture or metaphor to get started.

11. Use alliteration, rhyme or repetition.

What to Expect When You're Expecting / A Thousand Splendid Suns / How Much Poo Does An Elephant Do?

People respond to words or phrases that are catchy and memorable. This is why pensioners can still recite the nursery rhymes they learned when they were three-years-old! It's why you can find yourself singing along to jingles, TV ads or pop music even though they irritate you! Love 'em or hate 'em, they stick in your head.

Try testing titles on your friends and family, then pick the one that does best. You'll be a lot closer to sales success than by just guessing.

Your title may end up being only be one word long. However it's worth devoting considerable time and energy to getting it right. Remember that many authors and publishers have used this knowledge before you, to turn sales disasters into phenomenal success stories! Your efforts can be rewarded in the same way too...

Extracts taken from the home study course 'How to Hook An Agent in 7 Days.'
Available only to subscribers at www.richwriterpoorwriter.com