

2023

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Recommended Citation

Roberts, Sherry and Matthews, Lucy M. (2023) "Textbook Publishing for Secondary and Higher Education," *Atlantic Marketing Journal*: Vol. 12: No. 2, Article 10.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/amj/vol12/iss2/10>

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Textbook Publishing for Secondary and Higher Education

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Abstract – Given the number of high school and college students in need of textbooks, there is an opportunity for individuals interested in becoming textbook authors. The process begins with conducting research to determine the appropriate type of book and the market for that book. The research for secondary education includes understanding curriculum standards for the given subject. Understanding the market for the book is important to also determine the appropriate publisher for the proposed textbook. Next, it is time to prepare the items needed for the prospectus. These items include the table of content, end-of-chapter exercises, and likely a few chapters of the book. Beyond a new textbook proposal, taking over for an existing author on a textbook is another means of becoming a textbook author. Publishing a textbook is a lot of work, but the payoffs may include filling a gap in the market, recognition, staying current, and royalties or flat fee payment.

Keywords - Textbook Publishing, Post-Secondary Education, Higher-Education, Societal Impact

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners - This manuscript will provide insights into some of the factors one must consider when entering the world of becoming a published textbook author. This information can assist individuals interested in pursuing the publication route by highlighting some of the issues and concerns of publishing companies as it relates to proposals, regulations, timelines, and payment structures. Further, the benefits of the journey are discussed.

Introduction

With more than 19 million students enrolled in over 5,300 colleges and universities and 49 million students enrolled in public pre-k to 12th grade in the U.S., the need for academic textbooks is great (Wordsrated, 2023a, 2023b). The textbook is a crucial resource for students and instructors alike. For many academics, becoming a textbook author is of interest as it means filling a gap in the current market, gaining national recognition, staying current, or earning some additional income. However, figuring out how to begin this work can be daunting. This manuscript provides insight into two means of becoming a published textbook author.

Literature Review

Research and Development (R&D) for any industry is an important part of conducting business (Janjic, Jovanobic, & Simmonovic, 2021). Janiic, et al, describe how “knowledge, i.e. intellectual resources, in particular, are marked as a key determinant for building and maintaining competitive

advantages (p20).” Furthermore, Janjic, et al (2021), go on to say “R&D entails increasing the knowledge base and applying that knowledge in developing new and enhancing existing products and processes (p20).”

Why look at how a business sees R&D when thinking about writing a textbook? The principles of R&D in business are similar to R&D when thinking of writing a textbook. Ross (2022) provides the following explanation of R & D:

Research and development consist of the investigative activities that a person or business chooses to do with the desired results of a discovery that will either create an entirely new product, product line, or service.

Ross (2022) goes on to explain that research allows a business to look at a new way of thinking that results in a new product or even a new feature of a product that already exists. When looking at writing a textbook, whether it be the secondary level or higher education level, you need to view this textbook idea as either a new product or an update to an existing product. Thus, no different than running a business, this would be the first step to developing a new textbook or updating an existing textbook.

When thinking about R&D and the development of a new textbook or updating an existing textbook, one will need to remember that the bottom line for R&D is to increase or gain market shares for the product. You will want to ensure that the product (text) you develop has the ability to be successful in the market and gain the largest share of the market possible.

As schools across America closed their doors during the pandemic, the spotlight shone on the inequities in access to technology. This has been called the digital divide for years, but the pandemic brought this divide up front. What then happened is that many publishers of K-12 textbooks found that digital auxiliary materials and ebooks were not working for all students because they were no longer able to have access to what they needed to learn. Schools began to hustle to provide laptops to students but for many households, there was no internet connection (Chandra, Hill, Kothri, McBride, & Vaduganathan, 2021).

Chandra, et al, (2021) states that approximately 30% of school age children in K-12 did not have adequate access to technology such as internet access or services, to continue schooling from home effectively. Those areas affected most came from rural and Southern communities, with more deficit in lower income households, Black, Latinx, and Native American households.

As part of the R&D for developing a new textbook or materials for study, it is important to look into what is happening with the digital divide, how schools are coping with technology access for all students no matter the grade level, and how this will affect the materials developed for new or existing textbooks.

Where to Begin

Keeping in mind the R&D perspective, textbook publishing begins with research. Whether you are being added as a co-author, replacing a co-author of an established textbook, or writing a new textbook, there is research involved. When working as a co-author of an established textbook, you will need to research the area you will be writing to add to what is there and provide updated or new material that is pertinent to the subject. This can be a very lengthy aspect of the project. Content should be relevant as well as recent since instructors using the textbook rely on new editions to contain the latest information. Because of the timeline of copyediting and publishing, this may include forecasting and finding projects for the future.

Curriculum Standards

When an author(s) is considering writing a business textbook for the secondary level, research should be completed of standards for the focus content area. It is important to begin your search by checking the National Business Education Standards for all business courses (NBEA, 2020). This is a good base for you to begin your research on the subject you are considering for a secondary textbook. You can also look to see if there are other national standards that would fit the business course you are considering writing. Some areas of business are taught in the Social Studies or Humanities area. For example, Economics can also be part of the social studies curriculum and therefore, you would need to research this area. You will also want to look at the national standards for Family and Consumer Science to see if your course of study is included there.

Once you have exhausted all your national standards, it is time to begin looking into specific state standards. Quite often these may be found under Career and Technical Education (CTE) for a given state. For example, when writing for marketing at the secondary level, look for the CTE standards. This may mean looking at the standards for the largest states (Texas, Florida, and California are considered the big three of the secondary market) to see what the CTE standards are for different marketing courses. This will also give you an idea of how marketing is divided when looking at content. Contact may also be made with the CTE state department coordinator to discuss what might be missing from the current state's textbook list. This will help focus the content of the subject before writing begins.

Current Textbooks

Another area of R&D in textbook development is to know what is listed in the catalogs for the top publishers such as Pearson, McGraw-Hill, and Cengage. These can be found online, requested from the publisher, or talk with representatives of the top five publishers. Representatives will be very helpful when you are developing a new product (textbook). These people will be your biggest resource for finding out what is needed, what is currently available, and what is already in development. Beyond the representatives on the frontline, another source includes talking with

teachers that interact with the content daily about what they need, what they see for the future, and what they like about what is currently available.

When doing your research on what is currently available, look at the date of the editions for each textbook offered that might match the focus content area being considered. When marketing begins on the textbook proposal, it is good to show that research has been done and the author(s) know what is currently available and how this textbook proposal will fit the market, especially if it is a new textbook. A spreadsheet of all this information is helpful in keeping track of what you find. If the textbook is being updated (a new edition), the editor will contact the author(s) about a new edition. At that time, if there is more than one author, each will make the decision to continue with the publication or will be replaced by another author. This happens often in textbook publishing because of retirements, illness, one of the authors is no longer interested in continuing, or even the addition of another author because their expertise is needed with topic(s) for the new edition.

As with any project, you will only want to do a new edition of a textbook if there is new material to add or update. For example, after the pandemic, there was so many changes and updates that needed to be made to Personal Financial Literacy. The publisher wanted to have an additional chapter on Economics. This chapter had to be different from the previous chapter. These changes meant a complete revision to the current Economics chapter to make it appear more introductory and the new chapter to delve deeper into Economics. During the pandemic, jobs began to increase in the area of gig jobs and gig workers. Many states have added this to the standards, therefore information about what are gig jobs and gig workers had to be added to the career chapter. Research had to be added that focused on grants and funding for small businesses through federal, state, and local entities for small businesses. This comes with the growth of small businesses over the last several years.

When looking at the End-of-Chapter (EOC) material and research if any new teaching trends are being used. This may require changes to how the EOC materials are presented or additions may need to be added for a new edition of a textbook. For example, many textbooks now feature overarching or essential questions for the chapter and the unit of study within a textbook. Project-based learning is very important in today's teaching standards. EOC questions may need additions or changes to reflect this style of learning.

Preparing the Proposal

It is important that the proposal for a textbook follows specifically what the publisher is asking to be included. Pearson Higher Education offers a comprehensive guide for authors (Pearson, 2023) to follow when writing a prospectus for a new textbook or new-media development. This is a wonderful guide for both secondary and higher education when looking for how to begin your textbook prospectus.

As with Pearson, most publishers require a prospectus that explains the intention of your textbook proposal. For any business, this would be the moment where the writer gains the attention of the

reader (editor or publisher). Within the prospectus, the author(s) want to tell why they are qualified to write the textbook. This might entail providing information about if the author(s) have taught the course they are proposing to write a textbook about, what academic background they have in the subject (degree(s) focus), and any other scholarly writing they may have (other textbooks, journal articles, or digital media projects.)

Continuing with the prospectus, you will next want to sell your vision for the textbook. Describe to the reader (editor or publisher) your content area focus and explain the rationale for the project, how the author(s) will approach covering the content, and what pedagogy will be followed throughout the textbook. Think about these questions: Why is this project unique and distinctive over others on the market? What unique features will your project provide that others don't?

When looking at pedagogy, whether for a secondary or higher ed textbook, you will want to provide details that explain to the reader how the author(s) will include learning objectives, a chapter summary at the end of each chapter, case study (studies) for each chapter, critical thinking questions, and project-based learning activities. Each of these that the author(s) plans to include will need to be detailed to the reader. These forms of activities help to engage learners and promote student comprehension and retention. It is important to have already thought about the End of Chapter (EOC) activities or questions that will be provided. For secondary education, many states will want these activities to be project-based as well as comprehension based.

What type of supplemental materials will be provided by the author(s)? This includes but is not limited to workbooks, presentation materials such as PowerPoints, test banks, instructor manual, or study guide. It might include digital supplementary materials. Each of these would also need to be specifically described for the reader in the prospectus.

For any textbook proposal, the author(s) needs to be sure to identify the intended audience. For higher ed, is the intended audience lower undergraduates, upper undergraduates, or graduate students? If this is a secondary level textbook, who is the intended audience secondary (grades 9-12, 9-10, 11-12, or lower level such as 7-8, 7-9, 6-8). Further, it would be helpful if knowledge about the size of the market was known. For example, is the textbook being proposed for a required course (e.g., English) or an elective (e.g., French III)? Estimates on how many schools offer the elective and an approximate class size help to indicate the projected market size.

Any proposal will need to show that research has been completed for the current market. This will include a SWOT analysis of products that are similar to those that are currently on the market. What are their strengths and weaknesses. Then how will the product the author(s) is proposing differ and address the strengths and weaknesses of the competition.

The prospectus sets the foundation for your proposal and therefore should be thorough by providing relevant information that speaks to the author(s) qualifications. This is very detailed for any publisher, and it is important that the author(s) show a thorough understanding of the market.

Once the initial information is collected and written, it is time to present a detailed Table of Contents (TOC) for the textbook. This should provide the outline of your proposed textbook in a great deal of detail. You will want to be able to provide any in-chapter information that might be provided, such as “Check Points” within the chapter and where these will occur. If there is in-chapter “extra” material such as “Career Moments,” it should be shown where it will occur within the chapter. All in-chapter additions should have been explained in the beginning of the prospectus when describing the textbook. The TOC will also show chapter summary, and chapter activities as they would occur after the chapter.

Once a detailed TOC is established for the textbook, completed chapters will be needed. Some publishers ask for only one chapter, but most will ask for three completed chapters. This includes the EOC for each chapter provided. Research should have already been completed for the content of chapters, so it is simply a matter of writing the material. Readers (editors and publishers) are looking at the author(s) writing style. If there is more than one author, this would be the time to explain who will be responsible for what part of the textbook and for the reader to see that the writing styles are similar and there will be cohesiveness within the textbook.

These initial chapters should follow the TOC. It is often suggested that author(s) don't provide a first and last chapter. Readers want to see cohesion between chapters and the flow of writing. This is easier to see when going from one chapter to the next. Therefore, it is better to provide the first three chapters of the proposed textbook.

For secondary level textbooks, the reading level is very important to keep in mind while writing. Most secondary textbooks are written at a ninth-grade reading level unless the textbook is being proposed for lower secondary level (grades 6-9). Higher Education textbook publishers are not as concerned with reading levels in textbooks. Again, it is important to check the submission guidelines for the publisher before beginning writing.

Even though only one to three chapters are asked for in a submission, it is important to complete the entire textbook. Once a contract is signed, it can be only nine months to a year from the time of signing until the publication date. This is because most publishers will want to see pages quickly and get moving to publication after the signed contract. There are many people involved at this point. They include, an editor, manuscript editor, copy editor, line editor, and the author(s) may even be asked to provide graphics, side bar photos, and information plus the captions and titles for these, as well as any materials that will be added to an appendix (if one is provided).

For secondary education textbooks, it is not uncommon in today's market for author(s) to be asked to write the Teacher's Edition, test bank, and presentation materials for the textbook. Before signing the contract, be sure to clarify what “all” materials mean to the publisher. The same may be required of the author(s) of higher education textbooks, too.

Higher Education Textbooks

For higher education textbook publishers, the trend is increasing toward digital textbooks or ebooks as higher education budget cuts continue across the United States. The best place for students and university administrators to reduce costs is through digital textbooks. These are less cost prohibitive than hardcopy textbooks. With this trend, competition among publishers has become greater because of the number of eBook publishers already out there (Harmon, 2023b). Digital textbooks also get students to go to a site in which publishers can also offer additional online interactive features that help facilitate learning and test student knowledge. Online resources can also allow students to study anywhere without carrying a heavy book and provide edutainment options like music, videos, animation, and other audio explanations. Further, given that paper is not required for online textbooks, all the printing and transportation costs are eliminated (Harmon, 2023a). This allows for materials to be updated more frequently and for textbooks targeting a smaller audience to be offered.

When thinking of writing or collaborating on a textbook (existing or new) in higher education, Harmon (2023b) provides insight into one way to offer a textbook that fits the growing trend of ebooks or the digital market. As an author is researching for a new or updating an existing textbook, it is important the textbook provides industry relevant content that can be gained by talking with industry professionals as part of research. This will ensure that what is taught will provide students with marketplace skills that are cutting-edge.

With the Association of American Colleges and Schools of Business (AACSB) focusing more on the societal impact of business education, writing a textbook, no matter the level, is providing material that has a societal impact on the business education of students. Cadotte and Agrawal (2022) discuss the need for “business schools to stop teaching shareholder primacy and train students to become leaders committed to positive societal impact.” When looking at the AACSB standards (2023), guidance is provided to business schools for establishing a more focused societal impact not only in teaching but in research. Textbook publication is one way to have a societal impact on students.

Higher Education Prospectus

When proposing a new higher education textbook, a prospectus will need to be completed. Like the secondary education textbook, this should outline the proposed topic identifying the current gaps in the market, the targeted audience, others that benefit (instructors or future employers), the potential market size, and the qualifications of the authors. A detailed table of content should also be provided. If the authors are new to publishing, initial chapters should be provided. If the authors are established textbook authors, prior works can be used as examples.

One main difference between secondary and higher education textbook publishing would be the EOC content. The author may not be the creator of all the content. This may depend on the

publisher. Many times in higher education, the publisher will source out the development of EOC questions and activities. This could include questioning or case studies that might be available through digital sources such as Connect (McGraw-Hill) or MyLab (Pearson).

As with secondary education, tables, figures, photos, and examples are typically the responsibility of the author(s). Also, any in-text content will often be the responsibility of the author(s). It is important to know if the book will be printed in color, greyscale, or plus one color. This information is helpful in the development of the visuals for the textbook.

Research on the best publisher for the type of book being proposed should be done prior to submitting a proposal. Some publishers prefer to focus on high-volume textbooks, while others identify niche markets for specialized courses for which there is a gap in the market. It is important to approach the publisher that fits with the product being proposed. Since there would not be competition in the niche markets, it is best to identify other niche courses and look at the textbook publishers to identify which companies to approach.

During the contractual phase, there are at least two options for payment: a royalty (percentage of sales shared among the authors) or a flat rate. Often a flat rate is provided to those who have been requested to do the outsource material such as the EOC questioning, activities, or case studies. Flat rates are also provided for those who might be outsourced to do any presentation or digital material to accompany the textbook. Other aspects that may arise during the contractual phase include the timeline for submission and payment dates. While working through the contract, it is important to understand the total responsibility of the author(s). Will the author(s) complete the EOC activities, prepare a sample syllabus for the course, and create test bank questions or other study materials?

When taking over a prior author's position on a textbook, the incoming author will be revising an existing textbook. In this example, the author will work closely with the publisher to understand the type of revision that is being done. This might include a standard update that brings the content up to date and changes a minimum of 20 percent of the content. It is not always a given that a new author will be named on the cover during the first year of revisions, particularly if the book is well established. Rather, the author may be given credit in the early pages of the book then if the process went well and the new author was a good fit, they may gain being named on the cover in later revisions.

During the writing process, as chapters are submitted to the publisher, the author(s) will receive feedback with suggested modifications. As a result, the author(s) will handle each chapter multiple times prior to the final publication. Beyond chapter feedback, the author(s) will see the copyediting and the proof pages. Therefore, the author(s) and publisher need to have a good tracking system for identifying the stage of each chapter.

Another form of textbook for higher education is one that is a compilation of multiple articles focusing on one subject area. These types of textbooks might feature one or more editors for the textbook. The editors of the textbook may not always be a contributing editor to the textbook but simply the one who gathers the materials to be included in the work. In this instance, authors would send in their article for inclusion and the editor(s) of the textbook would make the decision as to which would be included.

For a textbook that is a compilation, it might be independently published or published through a small press that the editor(s) has researched that fits the subject matter. This would also include textbooks that are digitally produced but not available in hard copy.

In this instance, royalties are generally given to the editor(s) of the textbook and not always to those who have contributed to the textbook. This will vary and needs to be understood before submitting your work for such a publication.

It can be that an author(s) has very specific needs for a specific class that is being taught and the materials needed are not available. In such an instance, the author(s) will write a textbook that fits their specific needs for their class. These materials may be published independently or sometimes through the university press to be sold to students who take that class. One would need to check with their university to make sure this is allowed before pursuing this type of textbook publication.

Conclusion

As with publishing for any academic, it is important that research is completed before beginning to write. Whether it is for secondary or higher education, there is a demand for more from the textbooks that are on the market and finding that niche for a topic is what is required. A publisher must see how a new textbook or new edition of a current textbook will be beneficial to the market. As with any product, textbooks need to make a profit, and this is will be up to the author(s) to show that a profit will be made due to the demand for the product.

Publishing of a textbook is a slow process. Sometimes the research prior to even writing the actual textbook will demand the most attention. Once a proposal is accepted, the timeframe seems to move quickly with many different divisions working towards getting the textbook out as quickly as possible. There will be an editor, line editor, copy editor, sometimes a manuscript editor, while at the same time the author(s) may be working with marketing to begin developing promotional material such as fact sheets or “What’s New” videos for promotion.

Looking at the future, publishing will require that author(s) be knowledgeable in the art of digital design, especially when thinking of EOC or learning materials to go along with the textbook. This might include writing the script for video or digital learning materials to be produced by the publisher and offered as part of the textbook “package.”

As schools across the United States closed and moved to online learning during the pandemic, the disparities between those who have and those who have not access to technology became very clear. As such, many textbook companies who had begun to move materials for secondary education to digital found that teachers were quickly requesting that materials are provided as choices. This means that Pearson, for example, who had moved most of the auxiliary materials to digital such as MyFinLab, were asked to go back to the disposable workbooks that originally came with Personal Financial Literacy so that all students would have access to study materials at their homes.

Forbes reports (2021) that “although 87% of households have access to a computer, smartphone, tablet or another internet-enabled device, only 73% of households have access to the internet.” For many secondary education students, internet access for completing school assignments can only be done through their school internet or a public library internet. During the pandemic, these were not available. For higher education, the divide is less prevalent. For the higher education student, the costs of textbooks and materials is more of a concern and therefore, digital or ebooks is more acceptable.

Publishing today many topics that are ever changing such as social media topics, technology topics, finance topics, is very fast moving because so many changes happen sometimes even before the textbook is actually in the public or students’ hands. This means long days and nights to get the work together, completed, and published before it is outdated.

The end result of publishing a textbook, what makes all the hard work worth it, is the payoff. Royalties can be a good supplemental income for any academic at any level. This is beyond the recognition that is garnered nationally and, in some cases, internationally when publishing a successful textbook. It is also rewarding to know that the textbook is having a societal impact on students who are learning from the material within the textbook.

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