

**How to Profit
(Quickly!)
by Writing a Handbook**

A Handbook Handbook



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About the Author

Naomi Karten has always been fascinated by human behavior. Drawing from her B.A. and M.A. in psychology, and extensive experience in technical, customer support and management positions, she has delivered seminars and presentations to *more than 100,000 people* internationally.

Naomi's services have helped organizations and groups

- Manage customer expectations,
- Improve customer satisfaction,
- Strengthen communications and consulting skills, and
- Enhance teamwork.

Naomi is the author of **MANAGING EXPECTATIONS: Working With People Who Want More, Better, Faster, Sooner, NOW!** and **How to Establish Service Level Agreements**. Her book, **Communication Gaps and How to Close Them**, offers guidance for using communication as a tool for delivering superior service, building relationships, managing change, and strengthening teamwork. In addition, she has published three other books and more than 200 articles.

In addition, Naomi is the author of **Perceptions & Realities**, a newsletter posted at www.nkarten.com/newslet.html that offers ideas and advice on delivering superior service and managing expectations. Readers have described the newsletter as lively, informative, and a breath of fresh air.

Naomi is an avid downhill skier, who has taken numerous trips to the Rockies and the Alps. She and her husband enjoy helping friends and colleagues plan ski trips to faraway places.

To order **Managing Expectations** and **Communication Gaps and How to Close Them**, contact Dorset House Publishing at www.dorsethouse.com.

To order **How to Establish Service Level Agreements**, contact Naomi at naomi@nkarten.com.

Newsletters and articles on customer satisfaction, teamwork, communications, and related topics are available for your use at www.nkarten.com.

Chapter 1

Handbooks: Why Bother?

In this chapter, you'll find information on the “what,” “why” and “who” of handbooks:

- ◆ Objectives of this handbook
- ◆ What is a handbook, anyway?
- ◆ Who is *this* handbook for?
- ◆ Ten proven benefits of creating a handbook
- ◆ Case study of a profit-generating handbook
- ◆ Frequently asked questions about handbooks

Objectives of this Handbook

Several years ago, I wrote a handbook called “How to Establish Service Level Agreements,” which I adapted from one of my seminars. I knew there was a need for written information on establishing SLAs, but I saw this SLA handbook primarily as an adjunct to my training and consulting business — a product that would generate some sales and provide a nice little revenue stream.

I was wrong, or at least short-sighted. The handbook turned out to be a stepping stone to lucrative work because it has led people to see me as an expert on the subject and to invite me to deliver presentations, seminars and consulting support to their company. And a handbook that you write can do the same for you.

In other words, the “profit” in the title refers *not* to revenue generated by handbook sales, but to the profitable work that a handbook can generate for you — even from people who have never even seen your handbook. On a few occasions, I’ve tried to encourage people who were contemplating my SLA seminar to start by purchasing the handbook, and then see if they really needed the seminar. The handbook, I pointed out, would be *considerably* less expensive than a seminar. But they didn’t want the handbook; they wanted the seminar. No complaints from me!

The amazing thing is how little time and effort it took me to write my SLA handbook, particularly compared with my experiences in writing several full-scale books.

I’ve given many presentations to consultants, speakers, small business owners, and others on writing handbooks, and have now written *this* handbook to share with you what I’ve learned so that can write your own handbook and achieve similar results.

With that in mind, my objectives in writing this *handbook* handbook are:

- To explain what a handbook is
- To illustrate how handbooks have helped me — and can help you
- To provide tips, techniques, guidelines and recommendations to help you plan, write and market your own handbook(s)
- To use this very handbook to illustrate the tips, techniques, guidelines and recommendations that I describe

The starting point in profiting from a handbook is to write a handbook. And that’s what *this* handbook will help you do.

What is a Handbook, Anyway?

Well, *this* handbook is an example. I designed it both to explain how to create a handbook and to provide an example of how a handbook might look.

Handbook, defined

A handbook is a document that meets certain content, structure and format criteria:

Content: A handbook:

- Is a source of “how to” information. That is, it provides concrete information on how to (and perhaps also how not to) carry out a particular task, achieve a particular goal, undertake a particular activity, learn a particular process, develop a certain skill, or the like
- Presents this “how to” information as an orderly set of steps or sequential activities
- Features such types of information as case studies, exercises, examples, assessments, guidelines, directions, recommendations, and lessons learned
- Has a minimum of the sorts of information found in traditional books, such as theories, historical background, anecdotes, stories, and so on

Structure: A handbook:

- Features information structured as small, easy-to-grasp chunklets
- Presents much of its information in brief paragraphs, lists, tables, charts and images

Physical configuration: A handbook:

- Typically has 8 ½ x 11” pages though smaller-sized pages are fine
- Is typically soft-covered
- Is bound so as to stay open on a particular page

Adapting my definition for your use

There’s no one “right” definition of a handbook. Use my definition if it works for you. If it doesn’t, go ahead and modify it in any way that serves your preferences, objectives and circumstances — or create a definition that’s uniquely your own.

Can a handbook be a spoken product?

A spoken format, such as a tape or CD, may be fine, if people will be able to grasp and apply your advice using that format. Since a handbook is designed to give readers concrete information for carrying out a specific task or activity, consider whether a spoken form will support that objective.

If you choose to create a spoken “handbook,” you may want to supplement it with written material that people can have view as they listen. Or consider a video approach that offers spoken, visual and written information.

NOTE: The focus of the information in *this* handbook is written handbooks.

So how do handbooks differ from . . .

Books	Books are generally smaller in size, longer in page count, more formal in appearance, less focused on how-to information, featuring more information in narrative form rather than checklists and charts, and bound so as to require a book mark to hold your place.
White papers	White papers typically present high-level information about a subject, rather than detailed guidelines and techniques. White papers are generally 10- to 20-pages long and are often published to help a company tout its knowledge, capabilities and offerings.
Manuals	Manuals have the how-to orientation of a handbook, but generally lack the exercises, case studies, examples and so on that characterize handbooks.
Workbooks	Workbooks are similar to handbooks in content and appearance, but they are often designed for use by individuals. Accordingly, a workbook typically has numerous blank sections in which the user is invited to carry out exercises, write answers to specific questions, and so on.
Guides	In my own work, I use “guide” to describe brief how-to documents (approximately 20 pages) that are available only electronically, rather than as a printed document. In general, however, “guide” and “handbook” may be interchangeable terms.
Booklets	Booklets are usually less than 20 pages, often sized to fit in a standard business envelope, with information presented briefly and without elaboration. Booklets are very effective at helping readers acquire numerous tips and pointers quickly.

A handbook by any other name

Although my website and other promotional material clearly label my service level agreement handbook as a handbook, and my website offers a downloadable excerpt, many people who contact me about it refer to it as a manual, workbook or booklet.

Suggestion: If they think it'll help them and they want to buy it, let them call it whatever they want, and take their order! ☺

Who Is this Handbook For?

If you are a consultant, professional speaker, seminar leader, or small business owner, this handbook is for you. In addition, it's for you if any of the following (or *many* of the following) pertain to you:

- ✓ You have a book in you, but it doesn't seem to want to get written.
- ✓ You've written dozens of books (or at least one or two), and would like to try a different written format for communicating your ideas.
- ✓ You'd rather challenge an alligator than write a book, but you have information you want to communicate.
- ✓ You've got great ideas about your topic, and need equally great ideas about ways to package and communicate them.
- ✓ You'd like a product that generates revenue while you're busy doing other things.
- ✓ You'd like to build upon revenue streams you already have.
- ✓ You have no idea what a handbook is, but if it'll help you generate a profit quickly, you'd like to know more.
- ✓ You want to write a handbook, but you don't know what to do first and what to do next.
- ✓ You'd like to create a product that will pave the way to lucrative business.
- ✓ You would like to parlay your training and consulting material into a source of revenue.
- ✓ You'd like an easy way to generate (additional) wonderful clients and interesting work.
- ✓ You'd love to have a product to sell that you can change whenever you want to — and at no cost.
- ✓ You travel lots on business and would like to travel less without going broke.
- ✓ You'd like to travel more and to fascinating and exotic places.

Ten Proven Benefits of Creating a Handbook

- 1.** A handbook positions you as an expert in your field.
- 2.** Handbooks lead to lucrative training, consulting and other business opportunities.
- 3.** People unquestioningly pay more for a handbook than for a conventional book on the same topic.
- 4.** A handbook is a highly effective way to generate national and international exposure.
- 5.** Writing a handbook is easier than writing a book.
- 6.** You can write a handbook faster than you can write a book.
- 7.** Writing a handbook helps you develop and organize your thoughts, making it a great stepping stone to a future book.
- 8.** A handbook is great way to re-use material you've already generated for your books, articles, training material, presentations, and other services.
- 9.** Publishing a handbook is easy.
- 10.** Handbook content is infinitely adjustable; you can modify it or issue new releases whenever you want to.

Case Study of a Profit-Generating Handbook

This is the story behind the story of my 160-page handbook, “How to Establish Service Level Agreements,” which is in use worldwide.

Where the topic came from

A subset of my work in helping organizations manage customer expectations entails helping them establish service level agreements. An SLA is a document and a process that enables providers and customers to improve communication, manage expectations, clarify responsibilities, and strengthen their relationship.

My SLA work has included consulting and seminars internationally. Periodically, people used to ask me if anything had been written on the topic. I already had extensive training material and had considered writing a book on the subject. But I couldn't get motivated to write it. It suddenly dawned on me: why not write a handbook on the subject?

Having so much material to draw from, creating a handbook was a speedy project. Within two months of working on it as time permitted, I had a solid draft. All that remained was some editing, proofing, and decisions about how I wanted the physical document to look.

Orders before it was even done

But before I had a chance to complete these final tasks, I received a phone call. “Do you know of anything written on SLAs?” my caller asked. I explained that I had written a detailed handbook on the subject and that it would be ready in another month. “But I need it now,” he said. “I can't wait a month.”

I thought a moment and then I had a brainstorm. I told the fellow, “I still have work to do to finalize my handbook, but the information in it is solid. If you're willing to accept it in its current form, I'll give you a break on the price.” I named a price, and he eagerly accepted it. This was a Friday. I told him I'd have it on its way to him the following Monday.

I spent the weekend rewriting, editing and polishing. I inserted a footer on each page that labeled the handbook as a Pre-Publication Edition. I printed the handbook on my laser printer, put it in a 3-ring binder, and mailed it by priority mail. My newest product was up and running.

A few days later, I got another call. This time I was ready. “My handbook isn’t quite done yet, but if you’re willing to accept it as a Pre-Publication Edition — which means it may have some gaps and errors — I’ll sell it to you at a reduced price.” My laser printer went into action. My second sale!

Sold!

Clearly, there was no need to wait till my handbook was “done” to start promoting it. I posted a notice on my website, along with a downloadable excerpt. Inquiries and orders started flowing in. I didn’t yet feel comfortable declaring the handbook done, so I continued to send it out as a Pre-Publication Edition. To compensate for any gaps and glitches that readers might find, I inserted a notice offering a free hour of consulting. The notice said:

“Thank you for your interest in this handbook. In appreciation for your willingness to accept it as a Pre-Publication Edition, I offer you at no charge one hour of consulting support by phone at a time of mutual convenience. This offer is good for six months from the date of purchase.”

This was a calculated risk. If every order required me to deliver an hour of free consulting, I’d be, in effect, offering consulting services at a fraction of my usual rate with a handbook thrown in at no additional charge! The upside, of course, is that I might be able to turn a single consulting hour into an ongoing, paid, consulting engagement. But in the several months in which I included this offer, only two people took me up on it.

Sometime short of frying my laser printer, I started having my handbook reproduced and bound at Kinko’s. At any one printing, I now have enough copies made to last one to three months. A benefit of Kinko’s is that most locations are open 24 hours a day, enabling me to delay reprinting till I’m on the verge of running out. Many’s the time I’ve placed an order on a Sunday.

Getting word out

After six months, I finally decided it was time to declare my handbook done, and I removed the “Pre-Publication Edition” notice from the footer. But “done” didn’t mean forever unchanging. Having complete control over the handbook has given me flexibility to make whatever changes I want to whenever I want to. Over time, I’ve made occasional changes to the text. I’ve also tested various website notices, order form formats, and prices, learning as I went.

I've now marketed the handbook through information and articles on my website, articles on other websites and in printed publications, my newsletter, web seminars, and speaking and consulting engagements. Numerous individuals and groups have seen the handbook as supporting their own offerings and have promoted it as well, often asking nothing in return. At times, I receive a flurry of orders, which tells me that someone has mentioned it during a conference presentation or in some other professional gathering or publication.

Handbook as business-builder

I regularly receive orders from all over the world, including places I'd never even heard of and places I never would have imagined would have a need for help with SLAs. The real value of the handbook, however, has not been the direct sales, but rather the work it has generated for me. I've traveled internationally, provided SLA training and consulting services to numerous organizations, and had (and continue to have) fascinating clients, interesting experiences, and stimulating work.

Best of all, this handbook has generated a lot of business for me, without my having to do any selling. Some companies have hired me after buying the handbook. Others have hired me without even seeing the handbook; its very existence has served as a powerful credential, leading clients to have confidence in my ability to address their needs even if we've never met.

Major revisions, no; new products, yes

There's a lot more information I could incorporate in my SLA handbook, but I've opted instead to capture this information in separate products, such as my series of SLA guides. These are short documents, about 20-25 pages each, that provide a highly focused look at a specific aspect of the overall topic. These guides are only available electronically. This growing product line helps to further promote awareness of my expertise with the subject.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about Handbooks

Q: How long should a handbook have to be?

A: There's no "should be." Handbooks vary from 30 pages to 200 pages. Yours should be whatever length enables you to deliver information that people want at a price they're willing to pay.

Q: How long does it take to create a handbook?

A: Some people can write one in a week. Others take more than six months. And still others start and never finish. The real issue is how long it'll take *you*, and that depends on your own motivation and your competing priorities.

Q: Can a handbook be delivered electronically rather than as a printed product?

A: Absolutely, and doing so expedites delivery, reduces production costs, and enables you to charge a lower price for it if you so choose. A downside is that buyers won't see your beautiful handbook in its polished printed form. Consider offering your handbook in both formats at different prices, and let buyers decide which they prefer. (Some will want both!)

Q: Is there a risk that someone who buys the handbook electronically will "steal" it and sell it as their own?

A: Sure, but the real question is whether it's a risk worth worrying about. Ultimately, anyone can rekey your information into their own computer and sell it as their own. But by copywriting your work, including your copyright notice and your contact information on every page, and incorporating information that is indisputably your own (such as articles you've previously published elsewhere), the odds of losing control over your material are small.

Q: Do people ever want to return a handbook they've purchased and get a refund?

A: Yes, but rarely. In fact, with my SLA handbook I've had this experience only once in many years of selling it. I agreed to refund the payment if the handbook was returned to me within a week in resellable condition. The handbook was returned; I refunded the payment.

Chapter 2

Producing a High-Quality Handbook

This chapter will guide you in creating your handbook. Topics include:

- ◆ Selecting your topic
- ◆ Whipping out an outline
- ◆ Criteria for a “Buy-me! Buy-me” title
- ◆ Creating compelling content
- ◆ Write NOW!
- ◆ Using feedback to make it better
- ◆ Making your handbook a snap to use
- ◆ The physical pieces and parts of the handbook

Selecting a Delectable Topic

Chances are, you already have several topics to choose from and your challenge is to narrow them down. This section will help you consider topic possibilities and select one that will be appealing to your prospective buyers and easy (and fun!) to write.

How to go topic-picking

- **Examine the topics you specialize in.**
You probably have a dozen topics to choose from.
- **Listen to what people are asking you for advice about.**
When people seek your advice, they are indicating both that they need the advice and they see *you* as a trustworthy source of that advice.
- **Listen to what people are asking you for sources of information about.**
If people often ask you where they can find information on a particular topic, it may be that little information currently exists on the topic, they can't locate it, or it's not very good. Voilà — a handbook topic!
- **Use the Rule of 3.**
If three people have asked you for advice or sources of information on a particular topic, it's likely that many more have the same need — and that you can provide it in a handbook.
- **Select a topic in which you have a strong interest.**
While there's less work in creating handbooks than books, you'll enjoy the process much more if the topic is one that appeals to you.
- **Select a topic that will enhance your professional reputation.**
A handbook will promote your reputation as an expert on its topic, so select a topic you want to be known for. If you write a handbook on a topic of little professional value, you run the risk (especially if you are an effective marketer) that people will begin to associate you with your handbook topic rather than your chosen topics.

- **Select a topic that supports and complements your other services.**
By doing so, the handbook will become part of your portfolio of services and resources, each of which will help to market all the others.
- **Select a topic you know well.**
The more familiar you are with your topic, the faster your handbook will progress from a vague idea to a marketable product. Once you gain experience in creating a handbook, you may find it relatively easy to create others on topics you are less familiar with.
- **Review your existing material.**
If you deliver training, consulting or other business services, you may need to do little more than some tweaking to convert your existing material into a handbook.
- **Select a topic that's handbook size.**
Don't try to solve every problem in your topic area in a single handbook. Better to write two handbooks, or a handbook and other supporting material, rather than overload a single handbook with too much information.
- **Select a topic that makes you smile at the thought of writing about it.**
Last though this item is in this list, it's positively not the least important. If the topic appeals to you, you'll enjoy the experience of writing about it and you'll do a better job of writing about it.

Getting started

1. Identify some topics that your clients, colleagues and others would find helpful in a handbook format.
2. List some topics that you know a lot about and would enjoy writing about.
3. Jot down questions people have often asked you for information or advice about.

Criteria for a “Buy-Me! Buy-Me!” Title

Try to defer choosing a title till you’ve written the handbook, because selecting a title too early in the effort can constrain your thinking. If you do select a title early on, think of it as a working title only. Don’t fall in love with it, or you’ll find yourself coming up with elaborate justifications for retaining a title that could limit sales or confuse people.

Focus on what and how

A handbook title should be concrete, explaining at a glance what and how; that is, what readers will learn and how they will benefit.

I favor titles that begin with “How to” and are followed by a phrase that describes the benefit. For example:

- ✓ How to Develop a Marketing Plan for Sure-to-Win Businesses
- ✓ How to Write a Proposal that Gets You the Contract
- ✓ How to Develop Achievable Goals When You’re Used to Falling Flat
- ✓ How to Overcome Procrastination and Write Your Handbook

Notice the impact these titles have by including both what readers will learn (“How to Write a Proposal”) and how they will benefit (“that Gets You the Contract”)

An alternative is to use the verb form of stating what readers will learn:

- ✓ Developing a Marketing Plan for Sure-to-Win Businesses
- ✓ Writing a Proposal that Gets You the Contract
- ✓ Developing Achievable Goals When Your Used to Falling Flat
- ✓ Overcoming Procrastination and Writing Your Handbook

In addition to the handbook title, aim to use clear, concrete, attention-grabbing section titles and page headers throughout the handbook. Notice the titles and headers used in this handbook.

Whipping Out an Outline

The next step is to divide your topic into meaningful subtopics, which you can then organize into an outline.

Subtopic selection

Jot down all the subtopics that come to mind, and consider these questions in further identifying possible subtopics:

- ✓ What do people need to know about the topic?
- ✓ What help could they use?
- ✓ What questions have people asked you?
- ✓ What false assumptions do they make?
- ✓ What puzzles or confuses people?
- ✓ What are some of the biggest errors they make?
- ✓ What do they overlook, ignore or inadequately appreciate?
- ✓ What steps, activities or information will help readers of your handbook achieve a successful outcome?
- ✓ What tools, methods, techniques, processes, etc. would they benefit from knowing?
- ✓ What are your top ten recommendations?

From subtopic to outline

Now, take your list of subtopics and arrange them in a sequence that makes sense *right now*. Unless you are a magician (or brilliant outline maker!), the choice and sequence of subtopics will change, because as you write your handbook:

- ✓ some subtopics will merge together
- ✓ some subtopics will split up
- ✓ some subtopics will get blown to smithereens
- ✓ some subtopics will regroup into altogether different subtopics
- ✓ you'll come up with subtopics you hadn't thought of initially
- ✓ you'll discover better ways of organizing your material

All these changes are perfectly normal and a natural part of the writing process, so begin with an initial outline and let the ultimate sequence of subtopics evolve as you write.

By the way, this topic — Whipping Out an Outline — wasn't in my initial outline. It wasn't till I'd written about the topics that now appear before and after it that I realized that its absence left a gap.

Creating Compelling Content

Now that you have a topic, a set of subtopics and an outline, consider the many ways you can present your content. The following content categories describe some of the possibilities. They're in alphabetic sequence so you can find them quickly. As you read about them, think about how you might use each in your handbook.

Assessments

Readers often find it instructive to assess themselves, their work, or their progress towards specified goals. An assessment can take numerous forms, such as a list of questions or a rating scale. You can use your own assessment or borrow one from elsewhere (provided you have permission to do so and give credit appropriately).

Assessments can appear in multiple places in your handbook, such as at the beginning so that readers can establish a baseline, at the end to evaluate improvements, or at key points through the handbook to gauge progress towards the goal.

Call to action

If appropriate, you might close a chapter or section by issuing a call to action or encouraging readers to jot down their plans, goals or concerns. Or you might end with a Getting Started subsection in which you summarize key points or prompt readers to consider what they're going to do with this information.

Case studies

Case studies give readers an opportunity to examine and reflect on the details of an actual situation faced by an individual, group or organization. As an example, see the section on **Case Study of a Profit-Generating Handbook** — a case study of my experience with my 160-page SLA handbook.

You might want to follow the case study with a list of lessons learned. Another option is to ask your readers some questions, such as their reaction to the situation, how they would handle certain aspects of it, what problems they noticed in the situation, and what they'd recommend doing differently.

Don't leave readers hanging, though. If the purpose of your handbook is to teach, guide and explain, be sure to offer answers to the questions you've posed. Or, if appropriate, let them know where, in the handbook or elsewhere, they'll find the answers.

Examples

Use as many examples as possible to illustrate what you mean so that readers can apply your advice rapidly and correctly.

Consider two categories of examples:

1. Brief examples: For example, any information you present with “For example” (such as this very sentence) would be a brief example.
2. Full-scale examples: My SLA handbook presents two complete service level agreements, one as an example of how-not-to and one as an example of the use of the guidelines and recommendations that precede it. Each SLA is followed by several pages of commentary to highlight key points and offer recommendations.

Exercises

Exercises at various points in the handbook can help reader in multiple ways, such as to:

- ✓ practice what they’ve learned so far
- ✓ assess how well they understand what they’ve read
- ✓ analyze a particular situation before you present the detailed “how-to’s”

Exercises make a handbook interactive. Use of it isn’t just one-way, with readers as passive recipients of the information you’re offering; if they choose to do the exercises, they become active participants in the learning experience.

To make the handbook workbook-like, provide blank space in which they can write their answers.

If appropriate, provide answers or recommendations to help readers assess their responses and deepen their understanding of the issue addressed in the exercise.

FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

A FAQ section offers a place to answer the most common questions asked about your topic, so that readers can readily locate this information without having to search through the handbook for it. Typically, the information is included in the appropriate sections of the handbook as well as in the FAQ section.

Food-for-Thought Questions

These are questions you include at the end of sections or at various other points to help readers stretch their thinking on the topic and to examine it from perspectives they might not otherwise have considered.

Guidelines, Pointers, Tips

At various points throughout your handbook, it may be appropriate to present guidelines, pointers or tips. (These terms are interchangeable. Call them whichever you prefer.) Much of this handbook consists of guidelines, pointers and tips.

Lists

Handbook information lends itself nicely to lists. Each list can include whatever amount of supporting detail is appropriate; some lists may have extensive detail and other lists just a few words.

For example, you might provide lists on any one or more of these:

- ✓ a list of questions to ask under specified circumstances
- ✓ a list of symptoms to watch for
- ✓ a list of caveats for handling certain situations
- ✓ a list of common flaws that get people in trouble
- ✓ a list of recommendations or points worth noting
- ✓ a list of steps to follow in a prescribed sequence
- ✓ lists of lessons learned
- ✓ lists of guidelines for handling certain situations
- ✓ lists of how-to's and how-not-to's
- ✓ a list such as this one!

Models

A model is an example designed to illustrate “the right way,” for situations in which there is only one right way or many possible right ways of which your model is one example. Seeing an example of a “right way” can help people enormously in avoiding the multitude of wrong ways.

Q&A

To provide variety in the way you present your information, consider presenting some information in the form of questions. In other words, instead of telling readers how to do something, you ask them and then suggest possible answers.

For example, the next page of this handbook — titled **Write NOW!** — presents subsections in the form of questions.

Practice Sessions

Practice sessions are exercises designed specifically to help readers apply and integrate the ideas you've provided. Practice sessions may consist of problems or situations for them to work on. To make the handbook workbook-like, include space for readers to write their answers or solutions.

Suggestions & Recommendations

At various points throughout the handbook, you'll probably want to offer advice, such as ways to look at a situation, things to do to address certain situations, or caveats about steps to take to avoid certain problems. You can accomplish all of these via suggestions and recommendations. These two terms are interchangeable; "suggestions" is simply a softer version of "recommendations."

Templates

Templates mean different things to different people. I use the term to mean a detailed outline of the elements of a certain type of document, such as a proposal, contract or (in my case) a service level agreement, into which users can insert the specific text that applies in their own situation. A template may also include the specific text which users can then adapt to their own needs. Another use for a template is to outline the elements of a process or steps to take in carrying out an activity, such as a template for an information-gathering session with customers.

Write NOW!

In order to write a profit-generating handbook, you have to *write* the handbook. Planning it and outlining it are necessary but far from sufficient, so crank up your word processor and get going! Work on it sequentially or in any random sequence you like. It doesn't matter where you start; all that matters is *that* you start.

How long should a handbook be?

Some people ask this question out of simple curiosity. For some people, however, it's prompted by a fear that they won't have enough to say. My advice: don't worry — you have enough to say!

The appropriate length, of course, is whatever length conveys useful content at a price that people are willing to pay. My SLA handbook, at 160 pages, is on the long side. I've seen others that are 40 pages and some that are closer to 200.

Rather than being concerned about how long it “should” be, focus on capturing all the information you think is appropriate. I guarantee that as you write, additional ideas will come to you (this handbook is twice as long as I initially envisioned!). Once you get going, you may find it easier to fill the pages than you anticipated, and the challenge you're likely to face is trimming it to a manageable size.

How long does it take to write a handbook?

Well, that depends. Will writing your handbook be your full-time job? Will you be simultaneously juggling 15 other priorities?

Whether it'll take you a week or six months to write your handbook depends on such factors as:

- ✓ Your other priorities and obligations
- ✓ The extent to which you're dependent on the expertise of other busy people to help you
- ✓ The amount of material you already have available to draw from
- ✓ Your familiarity with the topic
- ✓ Your eagerness to produce the handbook
- ✓ Your attitude about writing
- ✓ Your skills at procrastinating (!)

Dealing with the “this is awful!” syndrome

Many people never complete their writing projects because of that little voice that keeps telling them that what they’ve done isn’t good enough. The reality, however, is that most writing that ends up sounding good and reading well started out pretty bad. It’s through writing, editing, revising, reworking — and believing in your ability to create a quality result — that will enable you to complete your handbook.

Therefore, if this is self-bashing syndrome is one you experience, forget about the handbook and do a brain dump of everything you know on the subject. This is what I call the zero-th draft, downloading what you know without regard for its eventual usefulness. If (when!) you’ve completed this download, you can begin to rework it and develop your first draft.

Please remember: Writing anything well is an iterative process of writing and thinking and revising and reflecting and fixing and redoing and so on. If your early attempts strike you as just plain awful, you’re in good company — and right on target. Congratulate yourself for making progress, and keep at it.

Using Feedback to Make It Better

Everyone can benefit from the perspective from others. No matter what a good job (or bad job) you think you've done, the feedback of others will offer valuable ideas and insights that you would have overlooked yourself.

When to get feedback

- ✓ Before you start, to help you develop your ideas and find out what prospective readers would find helpful.
- ✓ While the handbook is in progress, to make sure you're on track
- ✓ If (when) you get stuck, to help you climb out of the rut you're in
- ✓ When you've got a completed draft, to identify improvements that would strengthen the handbook

Who to request feedback from

- ✓ People who are familiar with your topic and can offer feedback based on their knowledge, experience and expertise
- ✓ People who are unfamiliar with your topic, but would benefit from the information that's in it
- ✓ People who are unfamiliar with your topic and have no need to know it, but whose objectivity may enable them to see gaps, inconsistencies and ambiguities that those closer to the topic may miss

How to get helpful feedback

To maximize the value of the feedback you get, tell reviewers the type of feedback you'd like. For example, you might ask reviewers to give you feedback on one or more of the following — which you might want to describe in writing so they'll have it as a guide:

- ✓ Did you find the information organized, and if not, in what way?
- ✓ What information that you would have liked to see is missing?
- ✓ What inconsistencies did you notice?
- ✓ What confused or puzzled you?
- ✓ What topics need more detail? Of what sort?

- ✓ What topics are too detailed?
- ✓ Where would you have liked more or fewer examples?
- ✓ What guidelines are written in such a way as to be particularly easy or particularly difficult to follow?
- ✓ What aspects of the handbook appeal to you most?

Notice that these questions request specifics; not just “I liked it,” but concrete details and examples that will guide you in improving your handbook.

Observation: a special category of feedback

Unlike the preceding categories of feedback, this one pertains to usability, rather than comments from reviewers.

Usability refers to the reader’s actual experience in using the handbook. If you have the opportunity to observe readers reading or working with your handbook, you may identify changes you want to make in the topics, the organization of the information, or the design or layout of the physical product. For example:

- ✓ If users continually flip back and forth between two sections, you may want to sequence the two sections closer together.
- ✓ If users keep looking at the front and back side of a given page, you may want to revise the layout so that these two pages are side by side.
- ✓ If users have difficulty finding a particular topic, it may be that the topic is missing, vague, or unclearly described in the table of contents.

Making Your Handbook a Snap to Use

Useful, well-written information is worthless if presented in a migraine-inducing format. Handbooks that are unreadable aren't read. Two criteria are extremely important in creating readability:

1. **Accessibility:** This means that readers can locate what they need quickly without having to wade through a lot of blah-blah-blah to find what they're looking for.
2. **Clarity:** This means that readers readily grasp what they're reading without having to reread, blink, find their quadrifocals, fend off an Excedrin headache, or take a three-month break.

How to achieve accessibility and clarity

Consider the following suggestions, and apply those that make sense for your own handbook. I have tried to follow all of them in *this* handbook, so you can see the suggestions in action.

- Use a compelling title.** As described in the section on **Criteria for a “Buy Me! Buy Me” Title**, choose a grabber of a title.
- Provide a detailed table of contents (TOC).** List every page in the TOC in which a new topic or subtopic begins. This level of details provides an outline of the contents — and also helps to promote the handbook if you post the TOC on your website.
- Start each topic on a new page.** Doing this ensures an orderly presentation of information that readers can easily follow.
- Stick to standard typestyles.** Typestyles that are fancy, unfamiliar, or incompatible with your topic (such as presenting a serious topic in a playful typestyle) will detract from your information. Times New Roman, Arial, Verdana are examples of well-known typestyles.
- Use a large enough type size.** Readers should not need to use a magnifying glass to read your handbook. This handbook is written in 13-point Times Roman, with section headers (such as **Making Your Handbook a Snap to Use** at the top of this page) in 18-point Arial and subsections headers in 15-point Arial.

- ❑ **Use wide margins.** Make margins wide enough so the print doesn't fall off the page. White space all around the page greatly improves readability.
- ❑ **Use liberal spacing.** Make spacing generous enough that the information doesn't gobble up every bit of unused space on the page. Allow a little more space between subsections or items in a list than you might normally.
- ❑ **Highlight key points.** Use bold type, italics and color to help key points stand out. But be consistent in their use; for example, each paragraph on this page begins with a checkbox and a sentence in bold type.
- ❑ **Use color.** If your handbook will be printed, you may want to minimize use of color to keep costs under control. In addition, if you send your handbook electronically, some people will print it out entirely in black and white, and colors that look good on the screen may be difficult to read when printed in black and white. (Another option is to have a black and white version of the handbook for electronic use and a color version for printed use.)
- ❑ **Use overviews.** For example, it may be helpful to start each major section of your handbook with an overview of the key points in that section. That way, readers can tell at a glance what they'll find in that section.
- ❑ **Use section and subsection headers.** To help them stand out, format them in bold type and in a larger type size than the text within the section. Repeating section headers on each page of that section enables readers to avoid flipping pages to remember what section they're look at.
- ❑ **Use short paragraphs.** Lengthy paragraphs cause eyestrain. Aim to keep paragraphs to 8 lines or less. You may not always be able to do it, but having it as a goal will help you avoid runaway-length paragraphs. For this handbook, I tried to keep paragraphs to 5 lines (and mostly succeeded).
- ❑ **Keep paragraphs to one key point.** As soon as you start on another point, start a new paragraph.
- ❑ **Use lists.** To the extent appropriate for your topic, use checklists, bullet-item lists, numbered lists or other types of lists to convey key information. These formats convey information in a far more accessible way than presenting the same information in a continuous paragraph.

- ❑ **Present information visually.** Use tables, charts, images, diagrams, and illustrations wherever possible to convey key points. Such information is generally more accessible than the same information presented in narrative form, though it may be perfectly appropriate to present certain information in both a visual and narrative form.
- ❑ **Provide “you are here” information.** This is information that helps readers know where they are within the content. For example, if a section overview describes six key items the section will address, you might include a miniature list of the six items in a box on each page in that section, with the specific item being addressed on that page highlighted in bold type.

Single-sided vs. double-sided printing

If your handbook will be a printed document, both single-sided and double-sided printing have benefits and potential pitfalls, so you need to consider which is best for your purposes:

- ✓ **Single-sided printing:**

This is fine for relatively small handbooks, though it will of course require the use of more paper. With print on only one side of each page, the handbook looks heftier. If the handbook is workbook-oriented, the back side of each printed page can be used for written exercises.

Single-sided can become a problem if the handbook is lengthy. When I had my 160-page handbook printed single-sided, it was heavy, expensive to mail, and awkward for readers to use.

- ✓ **Double-sided printing**

Double-sided printed saves paper, minimizes shipping costs, and improves usability. However, cost savings may be minimal; for my 160-page SLA handbook, the difference in cost for having it reproduced as single-sided vs. double-sided was negligible.

There's one additional consideration with double-sided printing: usability is enhanced if two successive pages that are related (for example, one presents the positives about a situation and the next one presents the negatives) are on an even-page/odd-page pair. That way, when the handbook is opened flat, both pages are visible, and readers don't have to flip back and forth to view them.

The Physical Pieces and Parts of a Handbook

What page size is typical?

Handbooks tend to be full-page size — that is, 8.5 x 11” — rather than the smaller size that’s typical for most books. This larger size enables each page to contain a lot of information, while ensuring that the information is highly readable. However, if a smaller page size suits your topic or your intended use of the handbook, go with it.

What are the physical components of a handbook?

A handbook includes:

- A front cover.** The cover features your title, your own name, your copyright notice, and your ISBN number if you chose to obtain one. If you’re using your handbook as a marketing tool, be sure to also include your contact information, so that readers can readily get in touch with you.

- Lots of pages, such as:**
 - ✓ **A title page.** Although the title is featured on the front cover, you may want to include a title page, just as most books do.
 - ✓ **Other opening pages.** These pages might include, as appropriate, your copyright notice, reproduction rights, disclaimers, your bio, a list of your other products, and any marketing material you’d like to include.
 - ✓ **A table of contents.** This table should include all section titles and subsection headers. This detail helps readers to readily find a topic of interest. This table of contents also serves a marketing function if you feature it on your website.
 - ✓ **Sections or chapters.** Subdivide the information in the handbook into logical sections or chapters based on the questions readers are most likely to ask about or need answered. (See the section on **Creating Compelling Content** for more detail on this topic.)
 - ✓ **An index.** If the table of contents is sufficiently detailed, an index is unlikely to be needed. But you can certainly include one if you’d like.

- ❑ **Section or chapter dividers.** These are optional, but can give a nice look to a printed handbook. They may be tabbed dividers, pages of a heavier weight or different color than the other pages, or simply pages that you format as the first page of each section.
- ❑ **A back cover.** The back cover may be a sheet of heavy stock used to protect the handbook and give it a finished look. Printers offer them in a choice of colors.
- ❑ **Inserts.** When you ship your handbook, you may want to insert a few pages of information to supplement the handbook, promote your products and services, describe your upcoming speaking engagements, or other related purposes.
- ❑ **The binding.** Some people like to store their handbooks in 3-ring notebooks. Use of a notebook usually entails the creation of insert sheets for use in the front and spine to present the handbook title and other cover information. Numerous alternatives to notebooks exist, such as coil, stitched and stapled bindings.

Chapter 3

Money Matters

This chapter will help you estimate the cost of producing your handbook and set a price to charge for it. Topics include:

- ◆ Costs to product your handbook
- ◆ Pricing your handbook

Costs to Produce Your Handbook

A handbook is a low-cost product. There are various ways you can spend more than just a little if you'd like to, but happily, you don't *need* to. Costs are divided here into those associated with professional services associated with writing and selling the handbook and those associated with producing the physical product.

Costs associated with professional services

This includes any costs associated with hiring professionals to edit your handbook, provide coaching support, create illustrations, do proofreading, market the handbook, create or maintain a website or shopping cart, and any other costs associated with writing or selling it.

You may also want to factor in the cost of your time in creating or marketing the handbook.

Costs associated with producing the handbook

Of course, if you send the handbook out electronically, such as in an email attachment or a website download, your production cost is zero.

The unit cost per printed handbook varies significantly depending on whether you'll be using a printing service for some or all of the process, purchasing the materials (paper, section dividers, etc.) and assembling the handbook yourself, or doing the entire job in-house.

Costs you may want to consider in calculating your own costs include:

- Page reproduction cost, which varies based on:
 - ✓ the weight, color and brightness of the paper you select
 - ✓ the total number of pages to be reproduced
 - ✓ the use and extent of color
 - ✓ whether pages are printed single-sided or double-sided
 - ✓ whether you're having the pages hole-punched for insertion in a notebook
- The handbook binding. Numerous coil, stitched, stapled and other binding options exist. For that matter, numerous coil bindings are available.
- The type of front and back covers, which typically use a heavier paper stock than the inner pages

- Tabbed dividers, which can be used to divide the handbook into numbered or named sections or chapter
- Any special features, such as a plastic sheet over the front cover to protect it.
- If you use a binder to hold the handbook, your costs include the costs of the binders, insert sheets for the front and spine (and perhaps the back also), and section or chapter dividers if you choose to use them. Note that nice-looking dividers cost more than the notebook that holds them.

In addition to the above factors in calculating costs, your unit cost in using a printing service will depend on whether you qualify for a volume or corporate discount. Always inquire about the availability of a discount.

Pricing Your Handbook

There's no one right price for a handbook. I've tested many prices for my SLA handbook. To see the current price, visit <http://www.nkarten.com/book2.html>. The right price at which to sell *your* handbook depends on:

- ✓ What you must charge to recover your costs and generate a profit
- ✓ What your prospective buyers are willing to pay
- ✓ What you're comfortable charging
- ✓ What will help you accomplish your objectives in terms of sales volume, follow-on business, and so on

Setting the best price

In considering what you want to charge for your handbook:

- **Figure out your costs.** Draw from the information I've suggested and any other relevant production costs. Depending on the value of your information to your market, you may be able to charge four to ten times your production cost.
- **Consider the possible impact of different prices.** While it's tempting to charge a high price and generate a bigger profit, that high price may result in fewer orders. Talk to prospective buyers about prices that might attract them or discourage them.
- **Take into account what people can realistically afford.** Buyers who pay out of their own pocket have less flexibility than those whose company covers the bill. However, even when a company is paying, a price at the lower end of the feasible range may be more profitable in the long run. One of my most lucrative consulting contracts resulted from a client who, in introducing me to her colleagues, told them, "She sold us her handbook at a price we could afford."
- **Keep your objectives in mind.** If your objective is to generate a significant revenue stream from handbook sales, a higher price may be appropriate. If, on the other hand, you view the handbook as a stepping stone to other business opportunities, a lower price may be better, since each order stands a chance of leading to follow-up work. The latter is my objective for my SLA handbook; the more people who have it, the more widespread is my reputation as an expert on this topic.

- **Don't be concerned about finding "the right price."** Start with a price that seems reasonable, then adjust it based on the response you get until you reach a price you're comfortable with.

Special pricing arrangements

Regardless of the price you charge, consider special pricing arrangements, such as

- A discount for the purchase of your other books along with the handbook
- A percentage or dollar discount for volume purchases — or various levels of discounts for different volumes
- A special student price. I'm regularly contacted by students who are doing research or theses on SLAs and inquire about my handbook. I offer them a discount because they generally can't afford it otherwise, and I want to support their research.
- One price for the electronic version of the handbook and a higher price for the printed version, with a price that's less than the sum of the two if both versions are purchased in a single order.

Shipping costs

Your shipping charge is based on the cost of shipping and the cost of your packaging materials.

If you're new at shipping products, you may want to try different options to see whether you prefer to use the US mail or a package delivery service, such as UPS or Fedex. Cost, convenience, and reliability will factor into your decision.

In comparing these options, consider these questions:

- ✓ How quickly do you want your package to arrive?
- ✓ What packaging expenses will you incur?
- ✓ What pick-up options are available?
- ✓ What factors come into play for international shipping?
- ✓ What shipping charge will be acceptable to prospective buyers?

Most shippers, including the US Post Office, provide envelopes and boxes of various sizes at no charge. The US Post Office has flat fee mailers of various sizes. The large flat fee envelope size easily holds my 160-page handbook, but lacks room for additional items.

Padded envelopes and boxes of various sizes are available at your local office supply store. For large orders, mail order companies generally provide shipping materials at a lower per item cost.

Most shipping services offer online tracking, so that you can confirm the arrival date and time. For the US Post Office, delivery confirmation is available via a special form that costs about 45 cents. I have found this form valuable in the occasional situations in which, long after the ordering date, a buyer reports that the handbook has not yet arrived, despite the fact that the shipping confirmation proves that the company received it. The buyer then needs to go scurrying to the company mail room to locate the package.

Shipping charges vary with shipping service (US Post Office, Fedex, UPS, etc.), speed of delivery (overnight, two-day, etc. for shipping services; overnight, air mail, priority mail, global priority mail, book rate, etc. for the Post Office), and destination (domestic vs. international rates).

People sometimes add a couple of dollars to the cost of shipping and packaging as a handling charge. For the shipping charges associated with my SLA handbook and other books, download the order form at: <http://www.nkarten.com/book2.html>.

Chapter 4

Generating and Filling Orders

This chapter offers ideas for marketing your handbook, filling orders, and using the handbook to market *you*. Topics include:

- ◆ Marketing and promoting your handbook
- ◆ Filling orders

Marketing and Promoting Your Handbook

The suggestions in this section describe just a few of the many possible options that can help you inform people of your handbook and inspire them to want to buy it. In addition to these ideas, draw upon all your other marketing methods you already use or learn about.

- ✓ **Pre-announce your handbook.** Using your website and any other method you can, start telling people about your handbook even before it's completed — or if you dare, even before you've written it. Doing so whets appetites and generates interest. (I started marketing this handbook as soon as the idea for it came to me.)
- ✓ **Pre-sell your handbook.** Start to offer the handbook for sale before it's completed — but of course, accept payment for it only if you're certain you *will* complete it, and in a reasonable period of time. (I consider one to three months reasonable, but some publishers start to sell their books up to a year before the books are ready to ship.)
- ✓ **Feature your handbook on your website.** Publicize it on your home page, on a book page (perhaps one dedicated to the handbook), and perhaps other pages as well, such as those that feature articles or seminars on the same subject.
- ✓ **Offer website visitors a downloadable excerpt.** Include the table of contents (this alone can generate sales) and selected pages or a sample chapter. For the excerpt from my SLA handbook, see <http://www.nkarten.com/book2.html>.
- ✓ **Create a website for your handbook.** Use the site as a location for information on not only the handbook, but also your related articles, training, etc.
- ✓ **Arrange to have your handbook sold on book sites.** The upside: visibility beyond what you're able to achieve yourself. The potential pitfall: You may have to offer steep discounts and may lose flexibility to change the price.
- ✓ **Write articles on the handbook topic.** Write them for your own website, for related sites, for your newsletter or e-zine, and for print publications. Scan the web for online publications that address similar topics and offer them articles you've already written on your handbook topic, thus generating additional visibility with no additional effort.

- ✓ **Respond to media personnel who contact you — quickly.** Offer as much information as possible as quickly as possible to media personnel who contact you regarding articles they are writing for their newspapers, magazines and trade publications. An article that cites you as an expert on the topic of your handbook can lead to numerous sales.
- ✓ **Mention your handbook in your bios and introductions.** Reference your handbook in the bio posted on your website, as well as the bios you submit with your articles and use in your presentation introductions.
- ✓ **Create an order form.** This form can focus specifically on the handbook and related services or it can list your other products and services as well. Bring the order form to your speaking engagements. Include it as an insert with your promotional mailings. Have it handy so that when someone is ready to buy, you're all set to take down the pertinent information.
- ✓ **Don't leave home without it.** Carry your handbook with you to meetings, client visits, and wherever there may be an opportunity to show it off. Even if you prefer to sell it in electronic format, have a printed copy handy so people can see it up close. The more people who see it, the more you'll benefit from word-of-mouth and word-of-Internet marketing. (Many of my sales are from people who heard about my SLA handbook from other people who have a copy.)
- ✓ **Sell it as pre-publication edition.** I started promoting my SLA handbook — and receiving orders — before I'd done the final polishing. I was initially reluctant to send out a product that still had gaps, glitches and typos, but these people were eager to buy. I offered it as a pre-publication edition at a reduced price, in exchange for their understanding that it still needed work. No one complained and I sold numerous copies while continuing to work on it.
- ✓ **Create an article packet.** Create a collection of articles on the topic of your handbook that you can email to people who contact you for information about the handbook.
- ✓ **Build your lists.** Add to your mailing and emailing lists the names of all those who contact you for any reason and send them information regularly. Newsletters, e-zines and so on that are heavy on useful information (such as articles on your handbook topic) remind recipients of your handbook and other offerings, and lead to sales. Of course, always make it easy for recipients to unsubscribe if they no longer wish to receive your material.

Have your handbook market you

Once your marketing efforts have generated sales — or even just awareness of your handbook — you can turn things around and have your handbook market *you*. Just a few of the ways you can use your handbook as a marketing vehicle include these:

- ✓ **Display your contact information throughout your handbook.** For example, place your email address and website on the cover, in a footer on every page, and at various points throughout the handbook where people may want to contact you for additional information or follow-on support.
- ✓ **Include promotional information in the handbook.** In your handbook text, include references to your related products and services that readers may find helpful.
- ✓ **Include marketing material when you ship your handbook.** Include information about your products and services, with emphasis on those that relate to the topic of the handbook. Written information is rarely enough to help people address issues that are important to them, so make sure they know about your related training, coaching, and so on.
- ✓ **Listen to the questions people ask you about your handbook topic.** Questions about issues you didn't address in your handbook may suggest you need to add some information — or (even better) it may suggest an opportunity for a related product, such as a guide, a manual, white paper, or a CD version of the handbook.
- ✓ **Create related products that draw from the handbook.** I've created a series of 20- to 25-page SLA guides. These guides address information that's in my SLA handbook, but the guides present it from a different angle and in a more concentrated form. Each additional product improves the odds that people will buy at least one of these products — and many people will buy the full package. And these related products work together to emphasize and demonstrate your expertise.

Filling Orders

Ways to take orders

You can take orders in numerous ways, such as by phone, email, printed and online order forms, and an online shopping cart.

Although many people prefer not to submit credit card information by email (and some corporate policies forbid doing so), many people still submit their orders by email. If you wish to use this approach, a way to minimize buyers' security concerns is to have people email part of their credit card number in one message and the remainder plus the expiration date in another message.

Regardless of the method you use to take orders, collect as much information as you can, including at minimum: the purchaser's name and title, the shipping address, phone number, email address, and credit card information.

Payments

In some companies, but fortunately not many, all purchases must be made by purchase order. This means you must await the receipt of the purchase order, ship the handbook with an invoice (or send the invoice to a separate address if so indicated in the purchase order), await payment, send out follow-up notices if payment is not forthcoming — in general, a time-consuming nuisance.

Credit card payment is the simplest option for taking orders, minimizing the work involved and ensuring speedy transfer of funds to your bank account. Fortunately, most individuals are accustomed to paying for books by credit card, and in most companies, people with buying authority have company credit cards. For information on creating a merchant account so that you can accept credit cards, see: <http://www.practicepaysolutions.com> or any other source of information on merchant accounts.

When you receive queries about your handbook

- If you receive queries about your handbook (as well as your other products and services), respond as quickly as possible. Most people are unaccustomed to speedy responses, and the very fact of receiving one from you can lead to a larger order.

- To save time, create a template of an email message that you can use as a starting point for responding to queries. Include in the template pricing options, any special discounts, methods of ordering, and the time period within which orders are typically filled. Pay attention to the types of queries you receive: By offering information on your website for frequently asked questions, you'll receive more orders faster.
- You may want to use slightly different templates for orders originating in the U.S. vs. elsewhere. For example, for international orders, my template message says, "Shipping is by global priority mail. Orders are generally filled within three business days, and usually reach Switzerland [or whatever country] within 4-5 days thereafter." In responding to queries, I simply insert the country name and adjust the shipping time accordingly.
- When people contact you, use the opportunity to learn more about their situation and the nature of their interest in your handbook. In engaging them in a conversation, and offering a bit of assistance right up front, you are building a relationship that may lead not only to a handbook order, but to a request for your services as well.
- When you respond to queries, send related free information, such as a set of articles on the same topic. You might use wording such as, "In appreciation for your interest in my handbook, "**Name of Handbook**," I've attached a selection of articles on this topic." Offering this information reinforces your expertise on the subject, and improves the odds that the person places an order.

When you receive orders

- Send a confirmation that you've received it, so people don't worry that their orders weren't received or that their credit card information has fallen into the wrong hands.
- Don't ship the handbook till the credit card transaction has gone through — but don't submit the credit card transaction till you're able to ship. For example, if you've run out of handbooks and are having more printed, delay submitting the credit card transaction till you've replenished your supply and are ready to ship.
- If the order can't be filled within the time period you specified, notify the buyer, and provide an estimate of when you expect to be able to ship it.

After you've shipped the handbook

- When the handbook has been shipped, send a confirmation by email. This is both a courtesy and an ideal opportunity to provide some additional information related to your handbook topic to assist the buyer till the handbook arrives. It's also an opportunity to mention the other services you offer.

- Thereafter, consider following up with the buyer:
 - ✓ several days later to make sure the handbook arrived,
 - ✓ a week or more thereafter to see if the buyer has any questions, and
 - ✓ from time to time thereafter to see how the person is doing and to offer a reminder about your services and other products

Automating order fulfillment

You can use automated responders to respond to initial queries, send ordering and shipping confirmations and follow-up mailings, and doing so makes good sense when the volume of orders becomes too large to handle on a one-at-a-time basis. However, nothing beats the personal touch in creating relationships and setting the stage for future business, so don't rule out personal and direct contact with the buyer.

Need help???

If you have quick questions about writing a handbook, contact me and I'll answer them if I can.

For more in-depth support or coaching assistance, contact me and let's discuss the options.

Good luck! ☺

Naomi

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