

## Reasons for Declining Publishers

In any given year, most book retailers and libraries decline to stock a large majority of the books that are published in that year. In order to best serve these customers, Small Press United (SPU) has to do its best to select the titles most likely to appeal to enough of them to make accepting the book worthwhile, and to keep the SPU list interesting and relevant to their business.

Years of constant feedback from book buyers and sales reps has helped us develop good instincts for what our customers may or may not buy. There are many reasons why a well-written book may be turned down for purchase. Sometimes it's due to a perceived limited market, but unfortunately, and far too often, it's due to common missteps among start-up publishers. Any one of these missteps is reason enough for a title to be passed on rather than purchased, and therefore unlikely to be accepted by SPU.

In no particular order, here are some common reasons why a book might not be accepted by SPU:

- **Cover art and design are not competitive.** Professional buyers judge the sophistication and professionalism of a book, as well as the publisher, after spending just a few seconds looking at a book's cover. Most days, buyers are looking at and considering books that have been created by experienced designers who specialize in books. A book that is not professionally designed or has weak cover art is easy for buyers to pass. It's not enough to be good; cover art and design have to stand out. What may be a fine-looking book to a general consumer may not get a second look from a professional buyer.
- **The title and front cover copy does not immediately identify the benefits of the book, the subject matter, or category.** For example, if a buyer can't immediately tell if a title is fiction or nonfiction, or which of their shelves it will go on, they won't buy it. If the cover doesn't tell or show what the reader will get out of the book, it has less of a chance of being stocked.
- **Interior design is not competitive.** There is an art to designing quality book interiors. If a publisher hasn't used an experienced book designer, most buyers will notice the lower-quality design.
- **The title's category is extremely competitive and only those titles with big-name authors or high-profile publicity campaigns are considered.** Even though a book may be unique, shelf space is limited and only those books with the greatest chance of selling are stocked.
- **The author has no clear credentials for writing a book on the topic.** For example, a book in the child care category needs an author or coauthor with some nationally recognized academic or professional training rather than someone who wants to pass along their experience as a successful parent.

- **Quotes used on the front and or back covers are not from people with impressive credentials.** It's a common mistake to have a quote from a teacher or child on a children's book, but unless that teacher has nationally recognized credentials or the child is a star somewhere, it hurts the book more than it helps.
- **No spine.** If a book can't be identified by its spine, it most likely won't be stocked.
- **The format does not fit the category or age group.** For example, a hardcover fitness book that lacks an author with a history of sales is less likely to be considered than a reasonably priced paperback. Similarly, a children's picture book with pages that have large amounts of text no longer works as a picture book.
- **The book's immediate consumer appeal in a retail environment is overestimated.** A book may make sense to be sold following the author's hour-long speaking engagement, but may not be impressive enough to be picked up off the shelf without someone having heard the author speak.
- **While it may be a good book, it does not stand out as more salable among the books that are already on the shelf.**
- **Book awards that carry no weight in the marketplace are touted on the cover.** Second-rate book awards mean nothing to consumers and work against publishers in the trade. They indicate a lack of sophistication in the industry. Buyers then assume that lack of sophistication extends to editing, promotion, etc.
- **The book is inappropriately priced for the category and format.** It is obvious that many publishers do not do their research before establishing a suggested retail price for their book. If the price isn't competitive, it won't be considered.
- **Fiction is a tough sell.** A good book from an author with limited credentials and no big plans for promotion is very difficult to sell to our customers.
- **Poetry may be the only thing tougher to sell than fiction from a first-time author.**
- **Any book that lacks an ISBN or proper bar code will be automatically rejected by most accounts.**

If you would like to learn more about the publishing industry and receive advice on how to produce and market a book for sale in the book trade, please consider joining and using Independent Book Publishers Association (IBPA) at <http://www.ibpa-online.org>.