

Daniel Hall Presents



## Episode 75

# People Do Judge A Book By Its Cover - How To Create A Cover That Sells

with Nick Zelinger

Welcome to this episode of the Real Fast Results podcast! Nick Zelinger is today's special guest. He is a publishing and graphic design extraordinaire who has put together many covers for bestselling books and covers that have won awards. He's won awards for his designs as well. It's important, as an author, to know what to watch out for when it comes to having a cover designed, and that's what Nick is here to help you understand. Welcome to the show Nick...

## Promise: How to Create a Book Cover that Sells

Thanks for having me. **First of all, if you are thinking of publishing a book, or if you have already published a book and you aren't getting good sales or have gotten some bad reviews, you may want to consider hiring a professional book designer.** The tendency today in independent publishing, self-publishing, is to do it yourself, and that's, for lack of a better term, a crap-shoot. You are going to be in the wild wild west of not knowing what you want to do, not meeting the printer's specifications, and just not having a very professional design.

I think that if you're serious about publishing your book... This is a business. Independent publishing, or self-publishing, is a business. You've got to treat

it that way. To do that, you've got to hire professionals. I would say, first and foremost, for authors who design their own books, or want to, take a hard look at your skills, and be honest, and step back a little bit because you really do need to be very objective about your goals. It's a profession, and you get what you pay for in this industry, so you really do need to hire a professional.

**Do people really judge a book by its cover?** Absolutely, and in fact, it's the gateway to your book. [bctt tweet="Research shows that we have less than 10 seconds before a potential buyer makes a decision on a book cover" via="no"]It's a subjective thing, but it's something that makes them want to go to a bookshelf, pick it up, and look at the back, or click on the thumbnail at Amazon to see what the "Look Inside" feature is. So you've got a very, very short timespan to really capture someone's attention, no matter what the genre.

It is a cliché, but it's a truism. It's like showing a home. **It's curb appeal.** It's whatever pops and strikes your fancy. It doesn't mean it has to be a pretty cover, it just means that it has to do its job. If it's a non-fiction business finance book, does it target that audience? If it's a historical fantasy fiction book, does it target that audience? Those are crucial elements to any book's design, especially if you want to get the attention quickly.

## You Only Have a Few Moments to Get Someone's Attention

I think we have something like 4,000 books a day that get published in this country, or maybe it's worldwide, but it's 4,000 books a day. That's a daunting figure. How do you compete with that? **The book buyers that I talk to, that are back in New York, say that they do judge a book by its cover.** When they get stacks and stacks of books that they look at, it's the cover that they gravitate to first. That makes you turn the book over, and then you read what it's about. It has to be professionally designed. It has to look like it belongs on a bookshelf in a major bookstore.

It's crucial because you've got seconds to impress someone. I usually use [Amy Collins](#) as a sounding board on a lot of covers myself because she's been doing this for so long. She tells me that if it's shoddy-looking, if it looks like someone did it themselves, or if they got something, an image off the Internet that is clip art, or they used outdated fonts, professional book buyers and professional book reviewers know at a glance if a book cover has been done professionally. They just know it. **The goal, for myself as a designer, I have to always know that I'm competing against every major bestselling book on the market.**

## Hiring a Book Designer

It's not guaranteed that a professional is going to design your book well either. In a lot of ways, there's no true certification for graphic design. I mean, I have a fine arts degree and a graphics arts degree, but not all graphic designers do that, but that doesn't mean they aren't good designers. Some of them have been apprentices or interns at advertising agencies or publishing houses for many years, so they do have credentials.

For people out there who say, "I've written a book, and I want to get a good book designed, but I don't have anyone in my metropolitan area, or locale. I want to go online." **There are places online, but I would suggest that, if you don't know a graphic designer, you join associations like [Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers](#) out here in the Colorado area, or the [Author U organization](#), some author/publishing organization.** This would help you, obviously, more than just with a cover design. It would help you to be in a community of like-minded authors and publishers, but that networking will connect you with professional designers.

There are places online, like [Fiverr](#), that you can go to get competitive bids for something. **The only caveat to that is you really do get what you pay for in this industry, so I think that you do need a good consult with a designer, or at least another author who has published their books.** The associations that I mentioned before is another great way. Just look for something that's in your local area. So, that would be the first step. Get some high-level opinions from people that know.

You may want to be the kind of author that makes all of their covers themselves. Now, any designer wants to be hired, so they may or may not give you a really good critique. That's where that networking comes into play. Other authors, publishers, and in fact, independent publishers and small publishing houses are really good sources of getting critiques.

You could go to a bookstore, but I'll tell you, book buyers and people at bookstores are really busy, and it's very hard to get their attention. Unless you know someone at a brick and mortar store, like at Barnes & Noble or a local bookstore, they may give you some advice. Your local bookstore is really a good place to start, if you've got something and you can establish a good relationship, without taking up too much of someone's time.

## A Professional-Looking Cover

Let's say that you've met a designer somewhere out there that you want to interview. You've seen their portfolio, and you've decided that he or she is the person that you want to design your cover. I view it as a collaborative experience. Most designers want a detailed synopsis of the book. We don't have the luxury of reading an entire book, but we do want to know what the book is about, and we want to know what the genre is. We want to know that you know what your genre is and you know what your target audience is.

We do a lot of vetting, and we do a lot of research before we go do any design. I go online and make sure that I am going to create a cover that's going to compete for the target audience that you have selected. That's your competition, and I want to make sure that I'm doing something that's not identical, the same, or subpar. I want to make sure that I do something that's a little bit better, if I can. So, I do some research on that.

I'd say that a good consult and conversation to start is giving your designer that kind of information. In the course of that discussion, obviously you'll know what the designer charges for their services. Be clear up front what your demands are, or what your expectations are. If it's a strictly "work for hire" situation, in which I just get paid for the work that I do and the work belongs to the author, I hold no rights to that. Now, if you're a children's book author, that may be a different story because an illustrator may want to have some rights to their work. There are a lot of caveats to the relationship between an author and their designer.

If you are hiring a designer in a "work for hire" scenario, you want to make sure that it's clear, up front, that you will retain the rights to the work. Yeah, and if an author wants that, I'm happy to do that, but it should be understood right at the get-go that, "This is what you're getting for your money." If you want all of the rights to that, you have to say it up front. Most designers work like that anyway, so I think this is an issue that can be avoided once you establish that it's a work for hire situation.

Pricing, timelines, deadlines, and changes, and all of that, can be discussed at the outset so that you get a clear understanding of, "What I'm getting for my money, when am I going to get it, how many changes or edits do I get to make during the course of that design project, and are there any up-charges beyond the initial charge? Then, exactly what files do I get, and what other kinds of services can the designer do?" For instance, aside from covers, I also do book interiors.

I regard myself as a book designer, cover to cover. More often than not, I help authors get their online books to the printers, like if they are doing print on demand. I get files to an eBook conversion service, or any marketing materials that they need for their cover design, or their website and stuff. There's a host of little things that I do for them, beyond just producing their books.

## **What Might I Also Have Produced?**

All the collaborative material that you want. If you have established a brand, or if you have a series of books, regardless of the genre, you want to keep a very similar look. And, of course, if you're developing a website, you may want to incorporate those looks, and colors, and fonts, and styles into your website. So, I'd usually provide a designer all of those elements so that they can construct something that keeps that brand going from piece to piece to piece.

## **Why Should I Have a Branded Look?**

The easy answer is that it's instant recognition. It makes it easier for a book buyer to know that this is the second book of your series that's coming out. Once you establish that look, it's a go-to thing. It's that visibility factor that makes it recognizable. Maintaining a brand is important. I mean, that's "Marketing 101". You want to have something that's so easy to recognize so that your buyers will go get that next title.

Let's say that you've done a book on taxes, for instance, and you're going to do a series of books on different tax issues that come up during the course of a year. If your first book has been a success, you don't want to go and break the mold by doing something totally different. It's just a comfort level that readers know. For example, think about Stephen King. His name is larger on his covers than his titles because he's earned that recognition, and there's a comfort there. Everyone knows Stephen King. Or, John Grisham or something, you know those are authors that you want, and you might not care what the title is. You know that his name is on it, and you've got it. So, it's the same recognition factor.

It's almost an immediate sale, if you've done well with your first title and you've marketed your book well. Maybe, in your first book, you say, "Well, look for my next title," and if it's a historical fiction/fantasy book, and they've loved that, you can pre-market that book at the end of the first book so that it's ready to go right out of the gate. People are waiting for that next title. That's assuming, of course, that you're doing all of the social media, and marketing, and things that everyone needs to do these days.

## What's Next?

There are designers that do nothing but book covers, and there are those designers that do nothing but interiors. Then, there are those, like myself, that do everything from cover to cover. I do interior layout, and I do some minor illustration, but a lot of charts and stuff for business books. So, I just do books cover to cover. So, let's say that you've got the front cover established, the next logical thing is what goes on the back. That could be an entire hour discussion onto itself, in terms of what goes on a back cover, and I'm happy to consult with most authors about that too.

There's a special art to writing back cover material for your book. But, that would be the next step, getting our back cover elements together, getting a bar code in place, establishing who the printer is going to be, or who your printers, plural, would be. After that's put together, and you've got your manuscript in place, all designers assume, and hope, and pray that your book has been professionally edited. That's probably the second question that I ask an author, "Are you having your book professionally edited?" That will kill the fish in the water, if you don't get that done right.

I assume that you've done all the work that you need to do to make your book the best that it can be, in terms of readability. My job, then, is to produce something that, when you open it up, it's a piece of art in itself. It's easily read by someone, it's enjoyable, and it looks professional... It looks as good as any other book out on the market. If you're

proud of the product (because it is a product), chances are that you will be more than happy to put both feet in the water, in terms of marketing that book. It's just logical that you would want to do that.

## The Process

Usually the process is, the cover design is first. You need that front cover because you can do pre-marketing and pre-sells, if you have a cover. This is important because you can do it a month before, or two months before, your book has been laid out and you can generate some sales. You've done the layout of the book, and after that, it's customary to have someone do a cold-eye read, which means to go through the book and look at it. Once your book is in its layout form, you'll see things that you've missed or that the editor has missed. So, we fix those things. Once that's all done, it goes to print.

It could be a traditional printer, or it could be something like [CreateSpace](#) or [Ingram](#). You know, some print on demand. Then, you've got your book in hand, and then you move onto all of the collaborative marketing material that an author needs, like a one-sheet, a press release, postcards, a business card. Maybe you want a vertical display banner, if you are going to trade shows, posters... The list is endless. Those are all things that an author needs to budget for, plan for, and map out, in terms of their platform strategy.

There are so many books that come out, and the books that are done poorly are instantly recognizable, and they are offset against books that are just done very well. You know where you want to lie in that arena. You want to be in the top 2. You want to have a great looking product because it reflects you as a writer, or a speaker, or whatever. So, it behooves any author to do their due diligence and search for professionals to help them because it is a business, and you want to succeed in sales, and whatever your end goals are, for sure.

## Connecting with Nick

If anyone needs to contact me, you can do so at [NZGraphics.com](#). I'm always happy to consult with anyone about their books. I live and breathe "book design," so I'm happy to talk to anyone about book design. My website contains a virtual portfolio of my work. My authors and clients have gotten over 100 international and national book awards over the last 20 years, so I'm kind of backed into this business as a graphic designer. I've learned my way through a lot of errors and mistakes, but it's an exciting industry to be in. I wish a lot of authors the best of luck with their endeavors in this.

## Resources

[How to Sell Your Books in Stores...Even if You're Self-Published with Amy Collins](#)

[Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers](#)

[Author U organization](#)

[Fiverr](#)

[CreateSpace](#)

[Ingram](#)

## Real Fast Results Community

If you are diggin' on this stuff and really love what we're doing here at Real Fast Results, would you please do me a favor? Head on over to [iTunes](#), and make sure that you subscribe to this show, download it, and rate & review it. That would be an awesome thing.

Of course, we also want to know your results. Please share those results with us at <http://www.realfastresults.com/results>.

As always, go make results happen!