

Blogging to Build an Audience 101

10 Lessons about Building an Online Platform

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Executive Summary

Why Should I Blog?

1. 1997 vs. 2011: A Tale of Two Years
2. Quantify or Die
3. Democratization of Demand

Blogging to Build an Audience 101

1. Attracting an Audience
2. Keeping an Audience

Why Should I Blog?

1997 vs. 2011: A Tale of Two Years

Quantify or Die

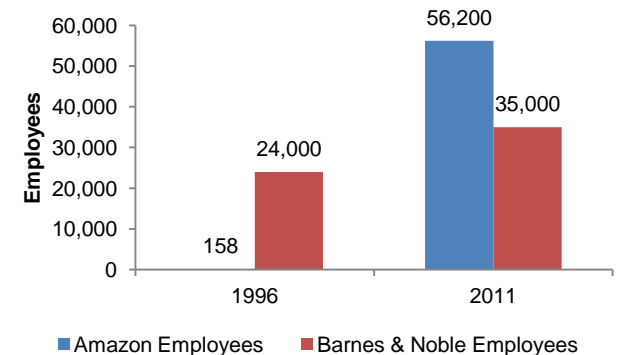
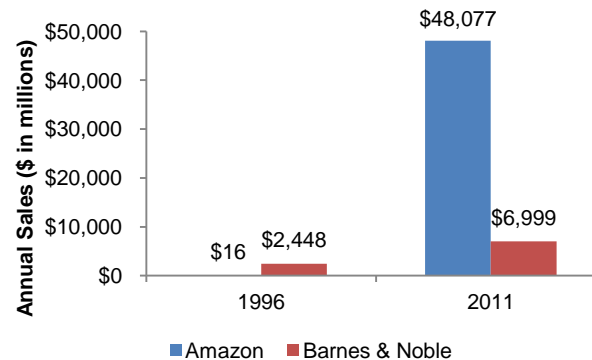
Democratization of Demand

A Tale of Two Years

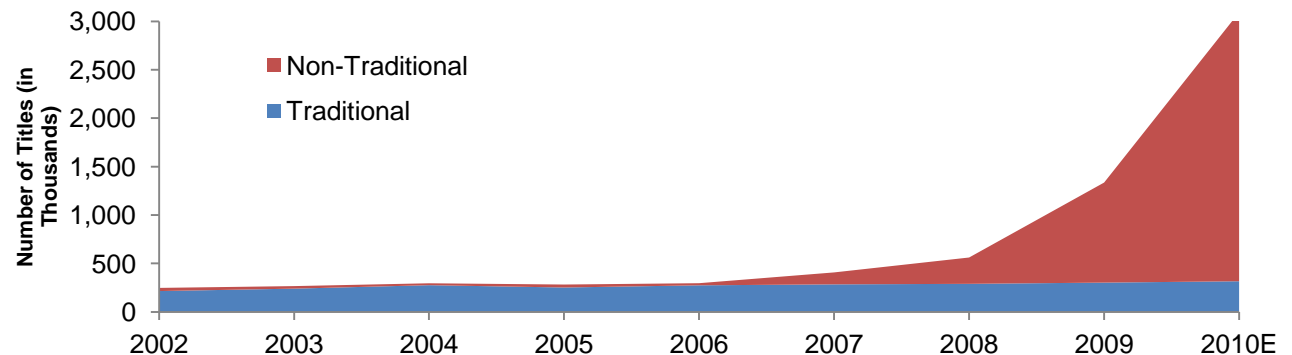
The World Has Changed

- **Disposable income is stretched**
 - From 1996 to 2010, median income for family of four rose ~2.7% per year
 - College tuition & fees were up 6.1%
 - Gasoline was up 6.1%
 - Utility gas service was up 4.2%
 - Rent was up 3.1%
- **New Business Models Dominate**
 - Amazon's sales grew at over 10x B&N's annual rate from 1997-2011
 - Amazon's employees grew at nearly 19x B&N's annual rate
- **New Media Sources Proliferate**
 - Non-traditional titles grew at a compounded annual rate 14x that of traditional titles

David Becomes Goliath; Goliath Becomes David



Traditional vs. Print On Demand

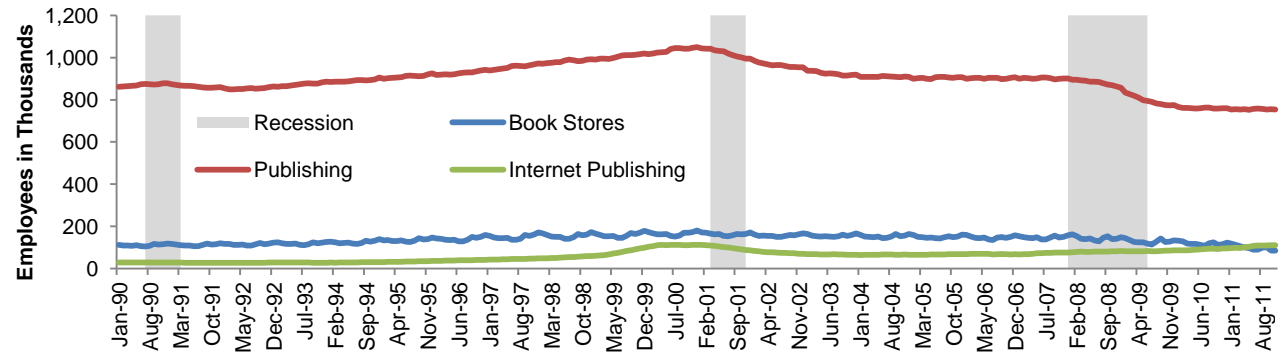


A Tale of Two Years (cont'd)

The World Has Changed

- **Lower Headcount**
 - U.S. publishing employees declined from a peak of 1.05M in 2000 to 756k, today
 - U.S. bookstore employees declined from a peak of 181k in 2000 to 85k, today
- **Higher Headcount**
 - U.S. internet publishing employees grew from a trough of 28k in 1992 to 111k, today

Internet vs. Traditional Publishing Employees



Internet vs. Traditional Publishing Employee Growth



Quantify or Die

- **Risk Aversion**
 - Publishing industry is more hesitant to back unproven writers, especially since 95% of titles sell fewer than 1,000 copies
 - Focus is on de-risking bets
- **Making a Market Is Critical**
 - New writers must prove they have a platform that directly can impact future book sales
 - Unless a new writer is a well-known CEO or former government official, getting attention can be difficult without market validation
- **Technology Is the Solution**
 - Blogging is an easy pathway to network and build an audience
 - Social media technologies can magnify the impact of a blog
 - Blogging can also help an author attract a publisher's attention

Democratization of Demand: Anonymity to Fame

Ezra Klein



- *Washington Post*, MSNBC, and *Bloomberg* columnist
- Provides political commentary on MSNBC's *The Rachel Maddow Show* and *Hardball with Chris Matthews*
- Started blogging in 2003

Nate Silver



- *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* contributor
- Started blogging in 2007 under a pseudonym
- Established his own blog in 2008

John Scalzi



- First published novel was first serialized on his blog, where Tor Books discovered it
- *New York Times* bestselling author
- SFWA President
- Started “Whatever,” a daily blog, in 1998.

Bloggging to Build an Audience 101

Attracting an Audience

1. More posts = more page views
2. Leverage the media to drive traffic to your site
3. Title for search when you search for a title
4. Leverage social media as a distribution platform
5. Take advantage of the news cycle
6. Leverage your personal and professional networks
7. Posts follow a Pareto, not a Gaussian, distribution
8. Use multiple media to engage your audience

Keeping an Audience

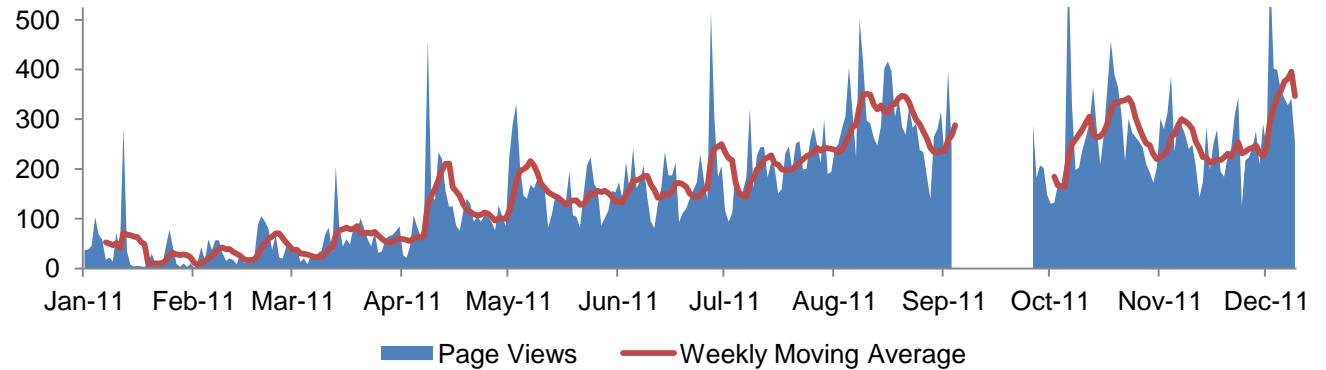
9. Generate unique and interesting content
10. Build a community

More Posts = More Page Views

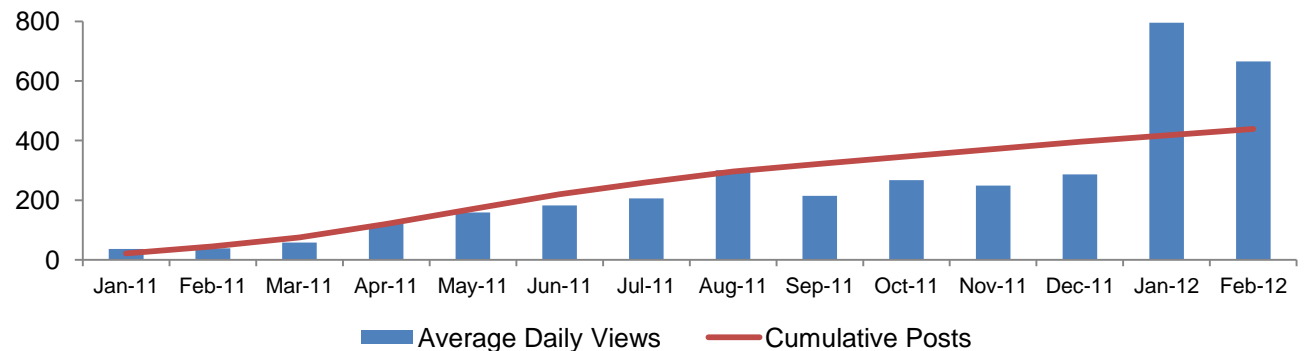
Use the News or Lose

- **Successful blogs are measured by their traffic**
- **More posts = more page views**
- **Comment on trending topics**

Daily Page Views Over Time



Average Daily Page Views vs. Cumulative Posts



Leverage Media to Drive Traffic to Your Site

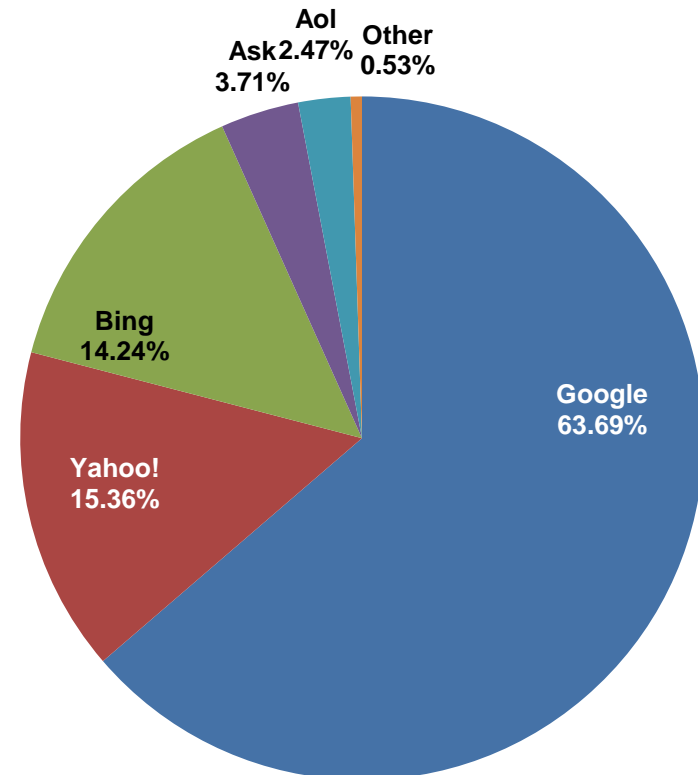
- **Go Big**
 - Target media outlets with lots of online traffic (e.g., *The New York Times*)
 - Comment on columns of famous people with rabid fan bases and preferably with whom you disagree
- **Go Early**
 - Comment early – no one reads comment 947; don't waste your time on old threads
- **Go Often**
 - The more comments you make on highly trafficked sites, the higher the probability that people will read what you've said, and ultimately visit your site
- **Be Provocative**
 - Don't preach to the choir – its boring...
 - ...But never kick a hornet's nest if you aren't prepared to fight hornets
- **Link to Your Site and Have Relevant Content Ready**
 - Linking is not spamming if you preface the link to your site with relevant and thoughtful content related to the thread

Title for Search When You Search for a Title

Keep It Simple, Stupid (KISS)

- **Register your blog with top three search engines**
 - Google, Bing, and Yahoo! account for 93% of all search volume globally
- **Keep It Simple**
 - How would someone searching for your topic enter it in Google?
- **Timing Matters**
 - Post articles on trending topics
 - Explore Google Trends:
<http://www.google.com/trends>

Top Search Engines by Volume



Source: Experian Hitwise, 4 Weeks Ending 3 December 2011

Social Media as a Distribution Platform

- **Twitter: Electronic Promiscuity**
 - Micro blog that limits messages to just 140 characters
 - Helps you segment your audience by common interests
 - Enables you to blast out blog posts to a wider audience
 - 100 million users as of September 2011
- **Facebook: Facing Friends**
 - Core support network
 - >800 million active users; >50% of them log on any given day
 - Average user has 130 friends
- **LinkedIn: Pandering to Professionals**
 - Enables you to blast out blog posts to a wider audience
 - Employment risk
 - 131 million members
- **StumbleUpon: Sharing Sites**
 - “Takes you to web pages, photos, and videos handpicked by your friends and like-minded people”
- **Quora: Engaging Experts**
 - A “continually improving collection of questions and answers created, edited, and organized by everyone who uses it.”
- **Klout: Scoring Your Influence**
 - Generates a 100-point score based on your social networks and how you influence others

Take Advantage of the News Cycle

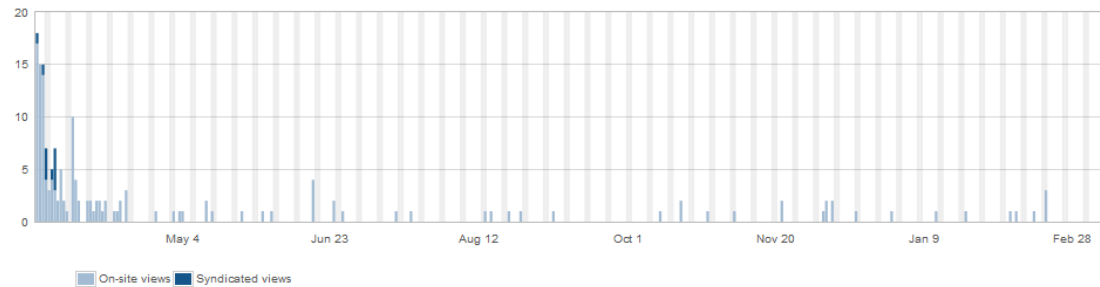
Use the News or Lose

- Find out what's trending
- Comment on trending topics
- Break stories, if you dare
- Take advantage of news implications

Example One: Potassium Iodide for Sale

Stats for: Sell to Sucker: Potassium Iodide for Sale!

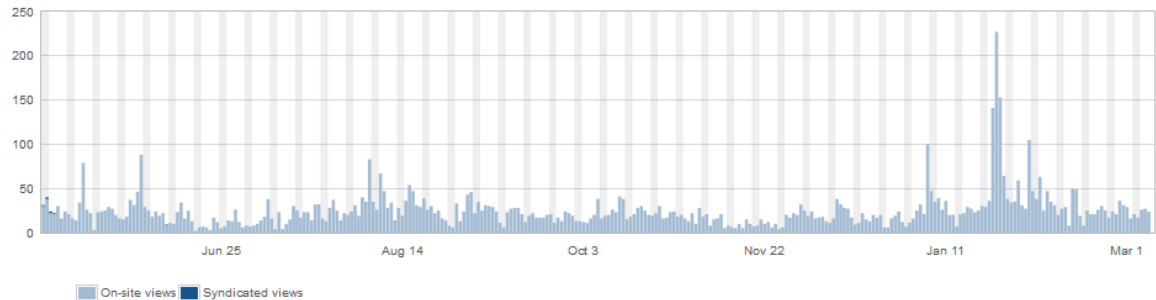
161 total views



Example Two: Bush vs. Obama – Unemployment

Stats for: Bush vs. Obama: Unemployment

7,559 total views



Leverage Personal and Professional Networks

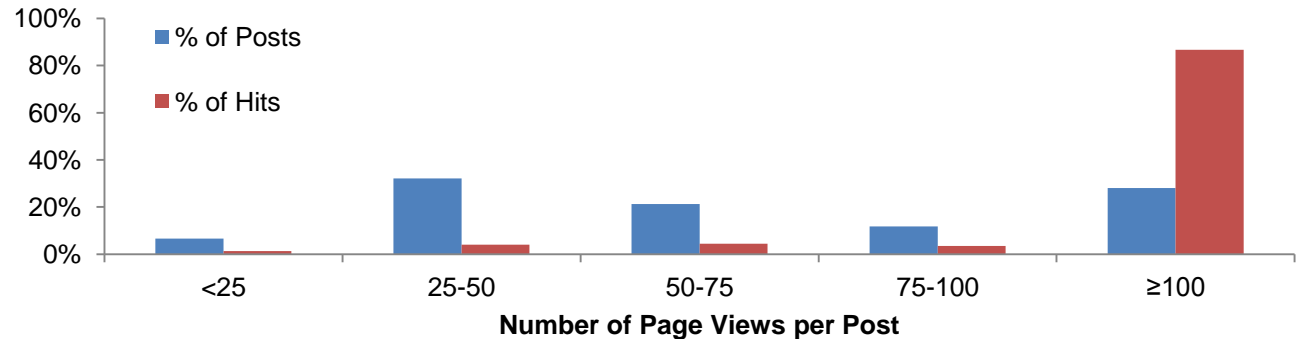
- **Spread the Word throughout Your Network**
 - Use social media to extend your reach
 - Use traditional methods like sending mass emails to friends and family – but do it sparingly
 - Reach out to your university alumni network – sometimes it can lead to better opportunities

Posts Follow Pareto, Not Gaussian, Distribution

Posts and Power Laws

- **Small Percentage of Posts Drives Disproportionate Number of Page Views**
- **Distribution Exhibits Characteristics of a Power Law Distribution, Rather than a Gaussian or Normal Curve**
- **Pareto Distribution: 80/20 Rule**
 - **Movie Revenues**
 - **Venture Capital Investments**
 - **Population**

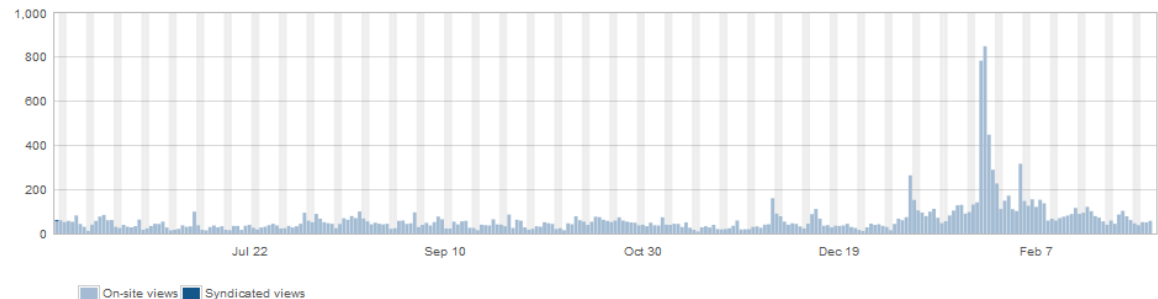
Page Views vs. Posts Follows Power Law



Going Viral and Then Reinforcing Success

Stats for: Bush vs. Obama: Unemployment (May 2011 Jobs Data)

17,680 total views



Use Multiple Media to Engage Your Audience

- **Use Graphics and Charts**
 - Incorporate images and charts to complement your words
 - Visuals make your site more readable and visually pleasing
- **Mix Video with Language**
 - YouTube can be a valuable ally in helping you find content for your site
 - Xtranormal offers technology to create animation that brings your words to life
- **Offer Interactive Experiences**
 - Making a blog participatory can sometimes generate a lot of excitement and build community
 - Use polls
 - Leverage third-party applications
- **Offer Promotions**
 - Host contests and/or giveaways on your blog

Generate Unique and Interesting Content

- **Find a Unique Voice**
 - What makes you different than anyone else who covers similar areas of interest?
- **Be Helpful**
 - Tackle a topic that helps others – e.g., if you just finished buying a house, write about the experience. What were the pitfalls?
 - Leverage your experiences to showcase your unique talents – e.g., “Should I Buy a Hybrid or an Electric Vehicle?”
- **Be a One-Stop Shop**
 - ~60% of traffic on big news websites comes from people who go directly to the site. The other 40% comes from referrals. Google provides about 30% of these referrals. The second largest source is the Drudge Report
- **Write a Series**
 - Many people today are too time-pressed to read posts on the internet with more than 750 words, or simply lack the attention span required
 - Break up longer posts into multiple installments to encourage readers to return to your site

Build a Community

- **Respond Promptly to Comments**
 - Always be polite
 - Never respond in kind to ad hominem attacks
 - Treat readers as you would a customer
 - Always respond to comments within 24 hours
- **Feed the Trolls**
 - Trolls are people who search the blogosphere for people with whom they disagree. They live for controversy
 - Trolls can be painful and annoying, but they do one thing really well: they keep your readers coming back for more
 - A troll may seem like an enemy, but they are really an ally – feed them with controversy. Remember to kill them with kindness!
- **Share Link Love**
 - Reciprocity is a major part of blogging
 - If an idea for a post comes from someone else, always acknowledge it and provide a link back (“hat tip”) to that person’s blog
 - You should also direct traffic to other blogs you find interesting or inspiring
 - The more you encourage your readers to follow other sites, the more the writers at other sites will encourage their readers to follow yours

15 Months of Blogging by the Numbers

- **Effort**

- 444 posts
- 12 pages
- 49 categories
- 1,300 tags

- **Engagement**

- 4,590 comments
- 728 followers (including blog, comments, and Twitter)
- 4 blog contributors
- 1 guest contributor

- **Results**

- 112,512 page views for a niche political blog in less than fifteen months
- Contributors invited to blog on Breitbart.com, the FrumForum, and The Huffington Post
- Interest in at least 60 copies of book that is currently in draft form.

Benefits of Blogging: Examples

- **Professors May Use Your Blog for Educational Purposes**
 - “This is the last week of class and in my World Politics class we go over current events, including newsclips about Iran, the Russian election, the Euro crisis, US-China relationship, etc. Today I put on the screen your list of recent covert actions in Iran to get students to think about how a covert war can be happening and covered in the news but most people miss it. It was a good conversation — just thought you’d like to know your blog is being used for educational purposes (I also gave students the address so they could hopefully check it out).”
- **Authors May Visit Your Site When You Discuss Their Books**
 - “Its a pleasure Sean. And congratulations on taking the analytical approach, rather than the all-too-common “it ain’t happening” approach. My concern, and I’m sure yours too, is for the farmers. The solution is straightforward, though not necessarily simple or cheap: recycle all the nutrients now entering our cities and being sent to landfill or disposed of in sewage. This can assure humanity against ever running out of nutrients, but will require rather more intelligence in global urban design that is evident so far. My objective in raising the issue of ‘peak P’ is to stimulate the kind of discourse that will lead to this development and the necessary investment. The previous 400 generations of humans recycled their nutrients: the last two have forgotten to do so. Not so smart. best wishes. Julian”
- **People May Express Interest in Your Book Before You Write It**
 - “Yes, you are a numbers guy — you proved that in your car purchase analysis! I presume your book is going to be about energy? Is it going to have an international focus? Is it going to mix geopolitics and national security with energy policies and economics? If you’re going to do those things I could imagine using it in my world politics class, which would sell at least 60 or so copies a year.”
- **Publishing Houses May Offer You Free Books to Review**

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