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The Savvy Self-Publisher

LUCETTA Zaytoun never expected that the end of her marriage would mark the beginning of a writing career. But after the sudden collapse of her partnership, which had lasted more than twenty years, she decided to set off on a journey. Zaytoun, fifty-seven, who had been a stay-at-home mother with six children, found herself suffering from a deep depression and desperate to be away from familiar surroundings and the people who knew the details of her personal life. She put her belongings in storage and took a yearlong trip around the world, volunteering in developing countries. She kept a blog and a diary, and that writing became part of her memoir, *It's Already Tomorrow Here: Never Underestimate the Power of Running Away*, which she self-published in June of last year. Zaytoun now lives in Raleigh, North Carolina, and works as a life/leadership coach, trainer, and speaker, and is at work on her second book. I talked with Zaytoun about her decision to self-publish her memoir, and the unique way she chose to launch the book. For more insight on how an independent author might increase publicity and sales, I spoke with Martha Bullen, a writing coach and author, and Scott Lorenz, president of Westwind Communications, a publicity and marketing firm.

The Author's Approach



When I took my journey, I never imagined I would write a book. But when I shared my story on my blog, people seemed to be inspired, so I started to think that maybe I should write a book. Then it just ballooned. The story grew so large that it just needed to be birthed. I had to write it. Though I never considered myself a writer, I had been a theater major in college and had written many scripts for my kids in their youth groups. I started writing in a fairly undisciplined way in the spring of 2015 but had to stop to care for my elderly mother for about two months. When I

MEMOIRIST LUCETTA ZAYTOUN



DEBRA ENGLANDER is a New York City-based freelance editor and writer. She managed a business-book program at John Wiley & Sons for nearly seventeen years and previously worked at *Money* magazine and Book-of-the-Month Club. She has written about business and books for numerous publications, including *USA Today*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Publishers Weekly*.

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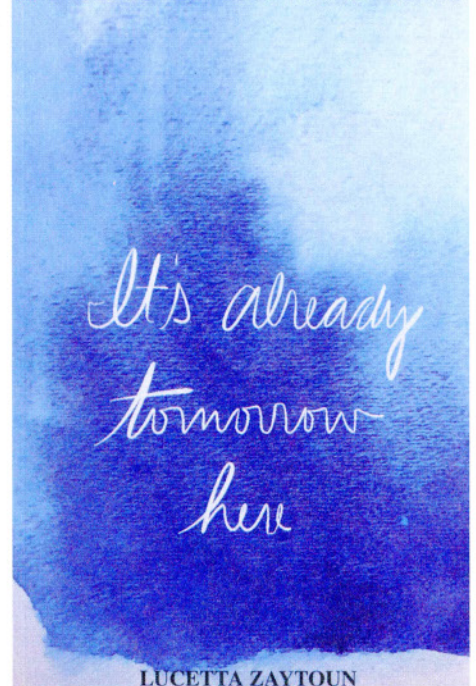
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told my friends and family about the book, it was as if they put caution tape around me to support my writing. I was still coaching and working with clients, but I shut down my personal life. I simply needed to finish the book. I hired my own writing coach, who helped push me through insecurities and held me accountable to my self-imposed deadline. I had my first draft on Christmas Day.

I wrote the book as individual stories, or personal essays, rather than writing them sequentially, and then went back and edited them, fitting them together as a single narrative. Some of the stories recounted heartbreaking events, and reliving those emotions allowed me to process the experience. *It's Already Tomorrow Here* is three things: a healing journey, a journey back to authentic identity, and a journey of crazy adventures. Somehow I found myself doing things I never expected. In South Africa, for instance, a young man my daughter's age (twenty-four) and I were the only ones at the world's highest bungee jump. I'm deathly afraid of heights, so I thought I would just accompany him up until he made the jump. But as we walked out onto the bridge and I looked straight ahead, a miracle happened. In that moment, I remembered a recurring childhood dream of flying over trees and mountains. This was my real-life opportunity to fly—and in an instant, my entire perspective shifted from “help this kid” to “I want to fly.” Writing that story down was powerful and became a key moment in the book, and in my life.

I did research before choosing how to publish. I talked with authors who were published by traditional publishers but decided to use Amazon's CreateSpace instead. I would be able to get the book out quickly, and I liked the idea of being my own boss and not having a publisher in charge of my writing. I attended a memoir writing

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF RUNNING AWAY



workshop in Raleigh taught by Alice Osborn and ended up hiring her as my editor. She gave me brilliant advice, not least to get honest feedback from four beta readers. These readers' input was invaluable because they found holes in my stories and suggested rearranging scenes to make them more compelling. I took their suggestions, made changes, and then sent Osborn the book. We met, I worked on the book, and I revised parts of it twice, based on her comments. For example, Osborn asked me about my time in Costa Rica. I didn't write much about that difficult part of my trip, and she kept pressing me for details. Her instincts that I should discuss my time there were right on; I finally wrote about that experience, and it was an important addition to the book.

I tried to get ideas about production by studying book covers online. A graphic designer was helping me (for free), but I didn't really like his concepts. I sent them to my daughter, a fashion designer in San Francisco, who said they didn't show the depth of the book. She ended up designing the jacket; she painted the watercolor, and

the title is her actual handwriting. I'm going to be carrying this book with me for the rest of my life and I wanted to be proud to hand it to someone. When I saw my daughter's design, I burst into tears. It was simply perfect.

I was prepared for the expenses of publishing. The editing cost \$1,200, formatting cost about \$300, and I spent about \$8,000 to redesign my website to include the book. I also spent about \$2,000 to record the audiobook. Since this is a memoir, I knew I had to be the one to record it.

To announce the publication, I wanted to do more than simply send out an e-mail blast. Fortunately I know people all over the country, so I packed a tent and sleeping bag and started a prelaunch tour. In fact, friends and family opened up their homes, so I didn't have to camp much. I gave talks and did book signings. I spent seventy-five days in thirty-three cities, covering thirteen thousand miles, and I sold five hundred books. (I had arranged to ship myself books in two-week intervals.)

When I returned home, I held a launch party as a Facebook Live event. Some friends hosted it, and acquaintances in a band provided the music. I promoted the event through social media and e-mail and afterward put videos on YouTube. Sales have been fairly steady at several hundred copies

a month through CreateSpace, as well as through speaking gigs and house parties. I consider promoting the book my full-time job, even though I still have my other work. I would like to get some well-known endorsements, but I don't know how to reach reviewers.

In terms of advice, I would tell other writers to start writing the stories they want to tell most and not worry about the book's structure at first. Even before you work with an editor, find readers who will give you honest feedback and aren't afraid to give you their opinions. This way, you're not just relying on your editor's view.

Self-publishing is not an easy process, and it takes a lot of work. There is a good deal of anxiety involved in every decision regarding the book, from the contents to the formatting to the back cover. For me, finding the right cover was the most stressful. Since my book was a memoir, I also felt I had to let my family see it before publication. I sent the book to each of my children as well as my ex-husband. One of my sons suggested some changes, which I made.

I'm enormously gratified by the feedback that I've gotten. People are saying they can't put the book down and my experience is helping them live more courageously. I've even gotten an inquiry from a film studio about the book. That sent me through the roof with joy.

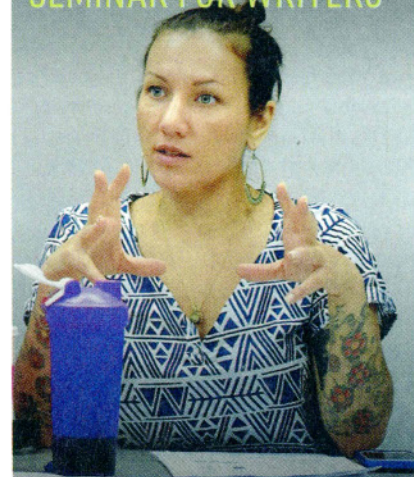
A Consultant's View



Martha Bullen is a consultant and book coach with more than twenty-five years in the publishing business. She is also the coauthor of several books, including Staying Home: From Full-Time

Professional to Full-Time Parent and Turn Your Talents Into Profits. She is the managing editor of The Bestseller Blueprint program with Jack Canfield. The cover of It's Already Tomorrow Here, with the watercolor and handwriting, is eye-catching, but the subtitle is in such tiny black type that it's almost impossible to read. That cries out "self-published," which is a common mistake among first-time authors. When you hire a graphic designer rather than a book designer, you often end up with a compelling graphic but an ineffective cover. I advise self-published authors to

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use professional designers and editors so that their book is indistinguishable from those published by traditional publishers.

There needs to be more of a balance between the graphic and the words. With the jacket thumbnail size on Amazon and other websites, it is hard to read. However, a great advantage of self-publishing is that you can easily correct things. I would use a more prominent font for the subtitle and move up the author's name. Zaytoun can get a new cover designed and upload the files to CreateSpace. Making this change, which shouldn't take a lot of time or money, is absolutely worthwhile. The online book description is very good, so a stronger cover design will certainly enhance the Amazon author page.

Zaytoun should use Goodreads to connect with readers; it's like Facebook for book lovers, with some fifty-five million members. Authors can use a number of promotions, some of which

are free, except for the cost of books and postage. When you give away a hardcover book, you simply pay for the books and postage to send copies to a specified number of winners. You can also pay to do an e-book giveaway. The author writes the giveaway copy, includes the book cover, decides how long the giveaway should last, and chooses territories (e.g., the United States or all English-speaking countries) for the promotion. She can also use paid ads, including those targeting readers of similar books, to promote a giveaway. This type of campaign can be very helpful in getting reviews as well as selling a book.

The e-book platform BookBub can be tremendously beneficial for promoting e-books. It's more expensive, usually at least several hundred dollars, but can give your e-book a huge boost. BookBub is selective, so authors may have to submit their book several times before it's accepted. Having strong reviews on Amazon is important; Zaytoun already

has more than fifty five-star reviews, which is impressive for a self-published author.

Getting reviews in traditional print publications is hard, particularly since many publications screen out self-published books. I would suggest Zaytoun approach targeted media such as travel bloggers and divorced or boomer-age women. She could hire a virtual assistant to research these sites and audiences, as well as podcasts and radio shows. It would take more time and effort, but she could personalize her pitch by saying, "Hey, Ted, I came across your <name of blog> or heard <name of show.> I am the author of *It's Already Tomorrow Here*. I am interested in writing a guest blog post..." Offer more than just a review copy. You can write an article and include a link to your website or create a Q&A, and so on.

The good news is that authors can keep their books alive for years. Major media focuses on new releases, but

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more specialized media does not. If Zaytoun's second book has overlapping content, then continuing to promote this memoir will help build a readership for the new book as well.

Other strategies she can employ to increase sales:

- Book speaking gigs at women's conferences, which are held in almost every state. She can customize an empowerment message to different audiences.

- Use video strategically. Produce two-minute or shorter videos about her travels and post them on YouTube and her website. This will get attention from readers and the media and also help her online visibility since Google optimizes websites that have video.

- Submit the book for awards. There are a number of awards that are designed specifically for self-published books, such as the Independent Publisher Book Awards, the Foreword Review IndieFab Awards, and the Writer's Digest Self-Published Book Awards, among others.

A Publicist's Perspective



Scott Lorenz is president of Westwind Communications. He has more than twenty years of experience in publicity and marketing, working with authors, corporations, and non-profit causes.

I like the title of the book. It's catchy and exactly what happens when you travel internationally, so it's a good title. But the jacket should be redesigned. There is a lot of blue space at the top; the title and subtitle are barely legible, especially on Amazon.

I would actually recommend Zaytoun consider a new subtitle—one that conveys the book's message

about discovering yourself. The subtitle has to drive home what the book is about. It's not easy to persuade authors to change their titles, but having a strong title and subtitle is very important. After all, you want to attract both readers and the media. Think about a reviewer who receives dozens of books every day. He or she spends a few minutes going through this pile, and if your book has a confusing title or jacket design, the reviewer is likely to skip your book. When you think of your title, think about keywords. Do a Google search for words associated with the topic of the book. See which words come up first or are highly ranked and use these words in the title. With self-publishing, you can change or update the cover without losing reviews that have already been posted, so there's really no reason not to redesign the jacket to make improvements.

Zaytoun could write a stronger description of the book with more

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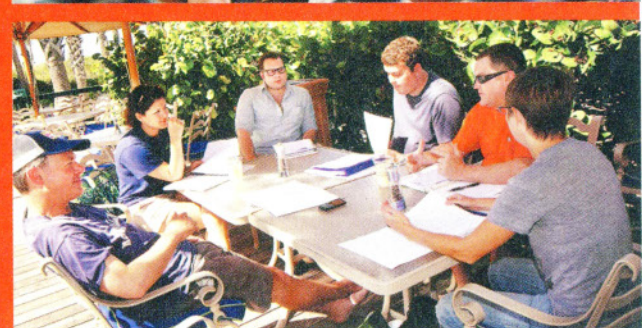
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details about her life. The book is a memoir, so she can include some narrative about the content of the book such as specific countries she visited during her yearlong trip. She could also create a book trailer to post on her Amazon page. The trailer could include her talking about the book and video from her travels. Trailers can be very effective in persuading readers to buy a book.

Selling some five hundred books prior to the official publication date shows that Zaytoun has the energy, capability, and interest in pushing the book. That's what authors must do. You have to keep flogging, and no one does that better than an author.

To increase her sales and visibility,

I would encourage Zaytoun to do the following:

- Approach TV and radio personalities where she lives. Some of the best

held throughout the country. There are several near her home, such as the Blue Ridge Mountains Christian Writers Conference or Asheville Christian Writers Conference.

- Enhance her Facebook presence. Facebook has become even more important than a website, so authors need a very robust Facebook page. Facebook pages are also ranked by keywords, so this is another reason to have a title that includes the strongest search phrases. Zaytoun can

also post video regularly and share content on the Facebook page so it is seen as fresh, not a static website. She should also consider buying ads to attract readers who have bought books similar to hers. ∞

When you think of your title, think about keywords. Do a Google search for words associated with the topic of the book. See which words come up first or are highly ranked and use these words in the title.... You can change or update the cover without losing reviews that have already been posted, so there's really no reason not to redesign the jacket to make improvements.

reviews come from someone with a prominent affiliation such as Joe Smith of local Fox News or the CBS Raleigh TV affiliate.

- Attend book festivals, especially Christian book festivals, which are

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You've written the first draft of your book. Maybe even the second or third.

If you are a prose writer, agents show interest, but ultimately pass. If you are a poet, you can't seem to get to first place and publication. The pros know: when you get to that point, it's time to take your manuscript apart and put it back together. That's where we come in. We'll pair you with a senior editor from a major publishing house to help take your manuscript to the next level.



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