How To Create A Guide For Almost Anything

GETTING IT DONE YOUR WAY
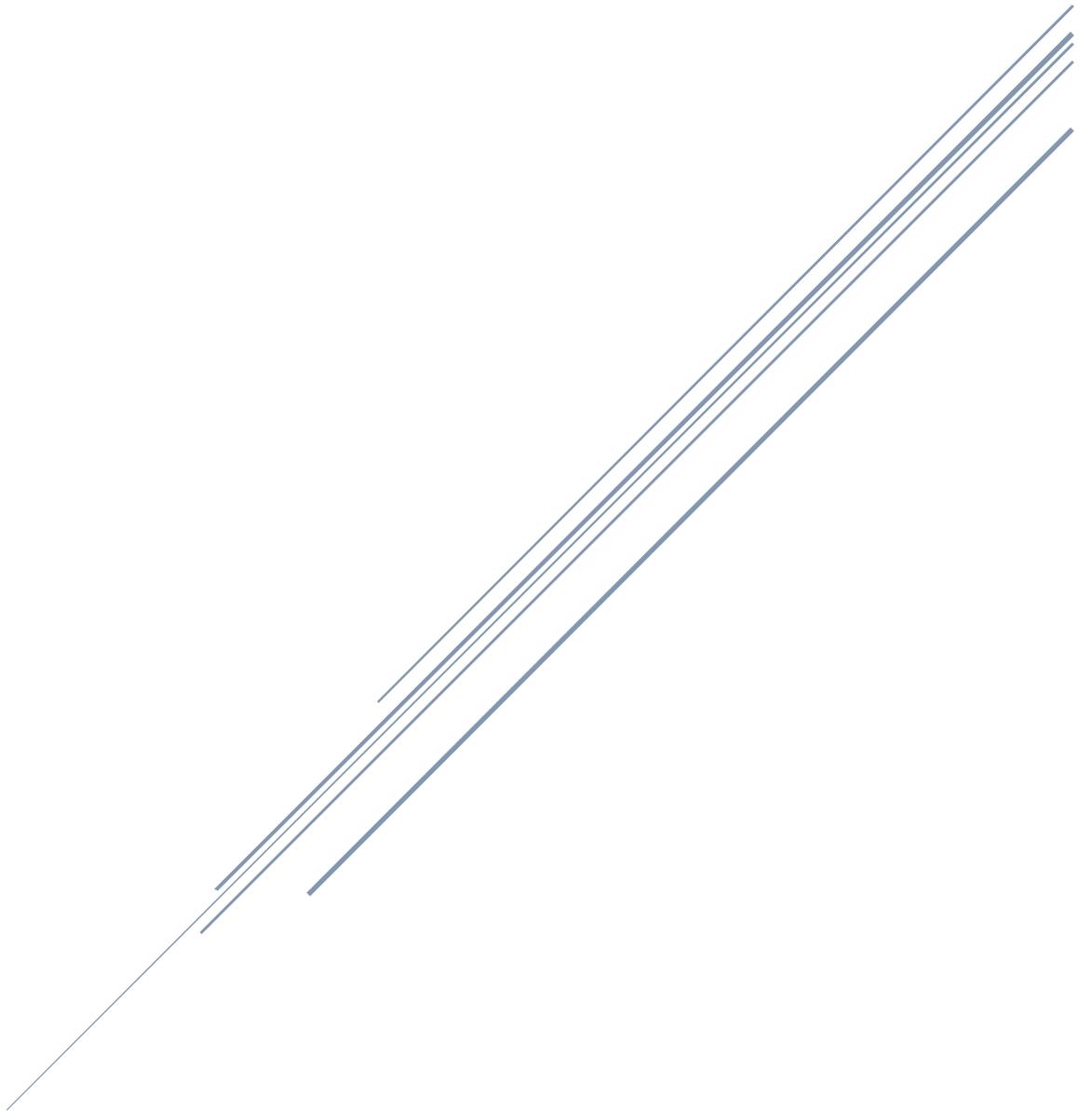
By Diane Ziomek

HOW TO CREATE A GUIDE FOR ALMOST ANYTHING

Getting it done your way.

Diane Ziomek

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How to Create a Guide for Almost Anything
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Disclaimer

The information in this guide is true to the best of the author's knowledge at time of writing. It is for informational purposes only and does not replace medical, financial, or legal counsel.

Introduction

No matter what you do, create, or build, you can write it out in layman's terms. And the best part, sell your guide to others wanting to do, create, or build what you have done.

Let's face it. People are lazy. They'd rather someone else do most of the work for them, so why not cash in on what they don't want to do.

Several years ago, I wrote a guide for a new (then) online digital product selling platform (Sellfy) that didn't have its own. I navigated my way through the site and figured out what it did, how much it cost and how efficient it was. That little guide earned me some extra money over the course of a few years.

That site has now changed its dynamics, what I wrote is now irrelevant, and I recently delisted the e-book. However, I'm sure it helped others sell their own products on the site. My only regret: I basically gave the information away for nothing when I could have most likely built a retirement fund from the sales. And I didn't know anything about marketing to get it in front of my target audience. (More on this in Section 4.)

That said, it paid off in other ways. I learned how to utilize the power of words to help others benefit from the site, earn some extra money, and quite possibly fund someone's college education. And that is my main goal: to help others improve their lives/income.

This short e-book is going to walk you through the steps to create your own guides for products, services or whatever else you need a guide for. And chances are, if you're needing to write the guide to understand something better, there are others out there needing to read it. It's a win-win, no matter how you look at it.

One final note before we begin: this method is not going to make you rich overnight. It takes time, work, and patience to build a writing business. And your first guide is essentially the beginning of your writing business. If you write just one and make millions, kudos to you. However, be prepared to dedicate several hours per week to it (your writing business) in the beginning. The more you write, the easier it will become.

Section 1

What is your guide about?

Creating the guide itself is often a lot simpler than figuring out what subject, product or service you should start with.

I have created a handful of guides over the years, but none as in-depth as the one I'm currently working on. And no, I don't mean this one. Although, it is making me think in steps again.

Figuring out what to break down into steps is often a challenge, especially if we're just used to "doing". I'm a writer so I can often pull words out of a hat and just make it work. However, when it comes to telling someone else how to structure an e-book, guide or even an article I really need to think.

I have been working on a gardening website since late December 2019 and am having a lot of fun with it. It was the creation of the site that has made me focus on one aspect of gardening I really enjoy (although the site itself covers gardening in general), so I decided to create a guide to help others build their own little produce section in their back yard.

Now, your guide will be different than mine I'm sure. And even if you decide to do a gardening guide, the chance of it being the same as mine is quite slim.

To help you decide, think about the things you like to do.

What are your hobbies? Do you like to collect coins, or craft toys out of wood? What about sewing, knitting/crocheting, or even cross-stitch? You are probably an expert at what you do, and others will want to learn from you. Go ahead and teach them.

What is your day job? Oftentimes people really do enjoy their day job and want to make more efficient use of their time or resources. By mapping out what they do each day allows them to see where improvements can be made.

If you are in a management position you undoubtedly have had to train new employees. Is there a simple guide to follow for training procedures? If not, you can write one and present it to your employer.

Or, you can take it a step further and help businesses create training guides for their employees. That alone can be a service you provide, which can become a rewarding part-time venture.

Have you ever bought something that didn't have clear instructions? I'm sure we've all been there at one time or another. If you could have done a better job at writing them, would you?

Do you make a living teaching, consulting, or writing? Do you feel your income is capped because you don't have enough time to take on more students or clients? Write a how-to guide based on your experiences. Not only will you have more income, but you will also have more time to enjoy life. And isn't that what we all want?

Do some brainstorming while answering the above questions. I have found mind mapping to be a wonderful tool, especially if you're a visual person. I must admit, I resisted the technique for a long time. I changed my attitude toward it once I tried it and saw how effective it really is. Here's a thought: write a guide on the effective use of mind mapping.

I have several mind maps done on different aspects of my creativity. I should never be stuck for a topic for an article, guide, or even a novel. My current novella series was the result of using a mind map.

As you can see, the power of brainstorming can lead to a lifetime of topics. I have my mind maps in a sketch book and when I'm stuck for a topic to write about, I simply look at them and pick one.

To show you an example of mind mapping, I have included a section of my own mind map for creatives. Please excuse the messy writing; it wasn't meant to be pretty. The highlighting was done so I knew which bubbles I had moved over into a document

outline. At this point I haven't decided if I'm going to cover all the points in a single guide or write several based on each niche. I do feel niche specific will be the better route to take.
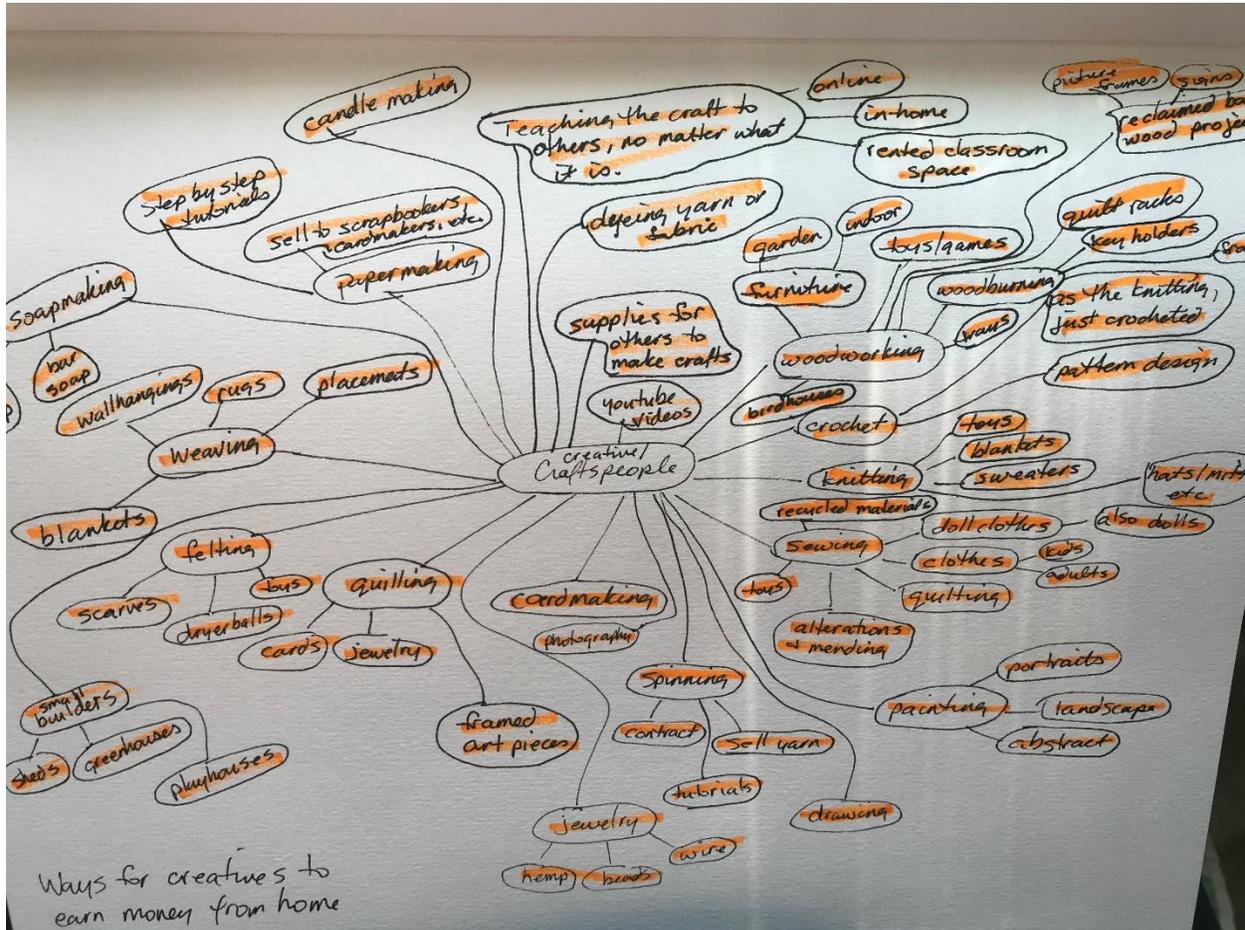
As you can see, the overall topic is how creatives can earn money from home. As a creative person both in writing and other craft interests, I can combine my talents to put together a nice little collection of How-To books.

Even if writing isn't your strong point, you can compile the information on your topic and enlist the help of a friend or family member to make it shine. And as I said before, the more you do the better you'll get.

Join me in the next section where I talk about the research aspect.

Section 2

Do your research.

Think back to the essays and reports you had to do in school. Did you simply start writing, or did your teacher send you to the school library to find out more information?

Chances are you were sent to the library. Nowadays a trip to the library isn't as easy as Googling it, but you still need to find reputable sources of information. Just because it's the first site that pops up when you type in your search criteria doesn't mean it's accurate. This is especially true when looking up medical information.

It's a good idea to make notes of where you obtained your facts and other information. You may choose to not include the source in your guide, but it's good to have the information handy in case anyone disputes what you have written.

And while we're on the topic of disputed information, you may wish to add a disclaimer to the beginning of your guide that reads something like this: *The information in this guide is true to the best of the author's knowledge at time of writing. It is for informational purposes only and does not replace medical, financial, or legal counsel.*

By including a disclaimer such as the one above, you are preventing yourself from being taken advantage of by someone who interprets your information as binding. It never hurts to protect yourself from the small percentage of people out there who will try anything to get something they don't have to work for. I don't mean to scare you, but I have heard of it happening. It's just better to cover your backside right from the get-go.

Okay, back to the research. You may wish to print off pages you find on the internet for your records, but do not copy and paste the text into your own document. It is up to you to craft your own sentences to make the guide your own. If you copy and paste, you're looking for copyright infringement charges. Trust me, that's not something you want hanging over your head if you want to be known and respected as a writer. (I have never been in that position but have heard of others who have, and it's just not worth the hassle.)

My research for this product is minimal, as I am writing from experience gained from previous informational products. My *Guide to Compact Gardening* however is going to take more than some simple recollection to get it finished. It's going to take research, a ton of reading, and even some back-breaking work on my part. Yes, I will be documenting some of the processes I complete as I write the guide. I initially wanted to write it and have it ready for distribution by the time spring came along but I decided to take a more in-depth approach and include photos and experiences of my very own.

Plus, I have a bookshelf full of gardening books written by the experts I can refer to. I have to say, there's nothing quite like the feel of a book when doing research. Sure, the internet is convenient, but will you remember each site you go to? Will you recall which one you found certain information on?

I highly recommend you make notes (and detailed at that) while researching online. It's hard to put a sticky note on a web page and say, "page 25 – edible flowers". (Page 25 may not be where you find information on edible flowers, but they are a real thing.)

When you're researching your topic, I suggest index cards. They're easy to write on, a breeze to reorganize, and small enough to tuck into your purse or laptop pocket. Plus, they're also perfect for marking pages in hardcopies of books you're using.

I have used index cards to record my research for nonfiction titles I've written as well as fiction. My Pipestone Creek Romance Series was written based on a few characters and scenes I came up with while brainstorming on index cards. (That was the series I wrote before I found the magic of mind mapping.)

No matter your choice of where to keep your research findings, the main thing is to find a system that works for you. It may take a while and you may try different things but do keep your notes in a folder (in your filing cabinet or on your hard drive).

Sometimes websites disappear overnight, so be sure to make note of the web address and the date of your research. You can always update your files with a note stating that a certain site is no longer available. The reasons being: a) you won't be wasting time trying to find it again, and b) you can update the information if you find a more reliable resource.

If you do find information you can use online, print it off and store it in a file in your filing cabinet (or box, desk drawer, or other system you have in place). It will give you a quick reference point should you need to verify some information.

The goal is to do your research on your topic of choice and get as many facts and examples as you can. If possible, talk about your own experiences with the product, service, or information you are writing about. Personal experience goes a long way because you will be able to relate to questions your readers may have.

Now before I end this section on research, I do want to stress one thing: always gather at least twice as much information as you think you'll need. If you don't use it for the project you're working on, you'll have it for another. Plus, you'll have enough material so you're not skimping on what you should be including in your guide.

The next section will give you a breakdown on what you need in your guide and in what order.

Section 3

Now what?

You've figured out your topic and done your research. Now what?

First, I suggest you **make an outline** if you haven't already. Outlining is a good way to stay on track while you write. (When it comes to writing fiction, I consider myself a pantser, but my latest series is being done with an outline and it is so much easier to write.)

Note: I have included an outline of my gardening guide at the end of this section so you can see the basic format.

Categorize your information into steps or sections so you can streamline the process. For example, in my gardening guide I'll have a list of plants in their own section instead of scattering information about them throughout the guide. That way my readers will know they can look in the Table of Contents and find the page number where the plant information starts. They won't have to skim through the entire guide to find out where the information on strawberries is.

Once you've categorized, **write the heading of each section on an index card** (or your word processing program). You'll figure out which system works best for you as you navigate your way through your first project.

Add bullet points to each index card so you know what information you need in that section. There's no need to write out full sentences; leave that for the first draft.

When you're finished with the organization process it's time to **get busy and write**. You may do it longhand or on your computer. Do what works best for you. I often find myself starting out longhand then switching to my word processor. It's easier to cut and paste in Word than it is in an actual notebook.

Break each section into subsections if it's a complex topic. Also have easy-to-read sentences, short paragraphs, and white space. It's easier to read short sections than it is to find the information needed in a long paragraph. (During the writing of this

paragraph I went back through the entire document and added more white space, changed my font and size, and increased my heading size. I realized as I was talking about white space that I didn't have enough. Each project brings something new to the table, no matter how many you write.)

Remember, it doesn't have to be pretty and perfect when you do your first draft. That's why it's called a *first draft*; changes will be made. In fact, no first draft should ever be submitted anywhere. Your job as a writer is to make it as easy to read and follow as possible. It may take you three edits or ten, and that's okay.

You want clarity, readability, and a document that others can easily follow.

Oh, and one more thing. **Don't use the big fancy words.** Most of your readers will be everyday people just looking for a solution to their problem. They won't be interested in reading technical jargon (unless of course it warrants the application). If your writing is too technical most people will just zone out. I know I do when all I want is an easy fix and a website or manual is long-winded.

Software I have used repeatedly for both my fiction and nonfiction is Scrivener. It is ideal because it allows for a variety of outlining methods, formats and even publishing mediums. Files may be saved in Word, PDF or other electronic formats, as well as formatted for printing. I mainly use it for my fiction but after writing and trying to organize my thoughts for this e-book strictly in Word, I regret not using Scrivener.

I like its drag-and-drop features which make reorganizing an outline easier. Plus, it also has an index card layout for quick notes. Adding photos and charts is relatively simple as well, and there are great tutorials on YouTube to teach you how to use it. (As of this writing, the standard licensed product for Windows is $62.00 CAD.) It has paid for itself many times over because I haven't had to hire anyone to format my books for different platforms. I have been able to do it all myself.

Something I will add is there is a free trial available if you want to give it a test-drive before buying. That's what I did and wrote a novel in the time I had my free trial period. After checking the site, I do see there is also mind-mapping software available (called Scapple). It too has a free trial period, which I will be taking advantage of (and will most likely purchase). (At time of writing, Scapple for Windows is $24.00 CAD.)

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When you're finally ready to compile your research into a document you will need to structure it (just like the essays in school). You're going to need an introduction, the body, and a conclusion.

Your **introduction** should be strong. Let readers know what they should expect from your guide, how it will help them, and what they need to do. If it entails some extra paper or downloading a separate cheat sheet/workbook, be sure they know that right from the beginning.

The **body** of your document is all the steps, information, and examples required to help your reader understand and utilize your guide. The length of it varies based on subject matter, how much detail you provide, and how many diagrams/charts you include (if any). I have read guides which are only a page or two, and others which are hundreds of pages (think Owner's Manual for a vehicle).

If your guide is a lengthy one, I recommend you include a Quick Start version as well. That will help readers find the information they need quickly, and the main guide will have more detailed information should they require it.

Your **conclusion** should sum up all you have said in a few paragraphs, as well as direct readers to additional resources if applicable. Those additional resources may be more detailed information on your website, the websites of others in the field, or books you have consulted while writing your guide.

You may wish to include and appendix if you have a long list of resources. If you have only a few, listing them at the end of your guide is sufficient. If you have included links throughout your guide, it's always good practice to include them, along with website names, at the end for easy reference.

As I said earlier, you will find what works best for you as you write and compile your guides. Don't expect perfection with your first; the key is to just get it out there. The benefit of digital products is you can update them as you see fit and send your buyers the updated version.

With that in mind it's good practice to sell via your own website so you have a list of buyers. I do believe other platforms notify customers if there is a new version of an e-book they have purchased, but I can't say for sure.

When you have written your final draft, either self-edit or have a trusted friend or family member read it over. It will be helpful if they know little about the subject matter because they will undoubtedly have questions. It is being able to answer those questions that will make your guide better.

Let your computer program read it out loud to you as well, as I stated earlier. Hearing it will help you pick up on any errors so you can correct them before publication.

Below is the basic outline for my gardening guide. I have left out the individual species of plants to be included, as well as other sections. Its main goal is to give you a refresher of what an outline consists of. As you will notice, the example below does not have the sections numbered. I will be making the final decision on how to arrange everything once I have compiled my research, experiences, and photos.

Sections to have:
- Raised bed instructions
- Trellis ideas
- Ideal soil mix
- Lists of common:
  - Herbs
  - Veggies
  - Fruits
  - Flowers
  - Ornamentals
  - Trees/shrubs
- Composting how-to
- Monthly calendars for seeding/planting/harvesting
- Garden bed planner
- Journaling space
- Tools for gardening in small spaces

If you haven't finished your guide yet, it's not too early to start letting others know it's being written. The next section talks about marketing options you may utilize for little or no cost (aside from some time).

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Section 4

Putting it out there.

I know this may seem like I'm jumping the gun but creating excitement for a product will ensure quicker success than waiting for sales after its launch. There's a reason this section is included before the next one on wrapping it up.

That's not to say you shouldn't launch your product if you already have it ready to go. And for those who don't have an existing mailing list, launching first then advertising it is fine.

Creating a mailing list is important to the success of an online digital product launch. It not only creates excitement but also has loyal followers ready to spend their money on your product.

When you're just starting out it's not always easy to have that tribe waiting for your next product, but over time it will come. If you haven't started to build your own list yet, now is the time. I use MailerLite for my email list and am pleased with the results so far. I'm still on the free plan too, as my list is still small. With my current plan I can have up to 1000 subscribers and send out up to 12,000 emails per month. That's a lot of emails.

Creating your list may be done by inviting your family and friends, creating a signup form for your website, or linking to a form from your Facebook page (if you have one). I find MailerLite quite simple to use. Something you may wish to do is create a free product to give to your potential subscribers.

It doesn't have to be anything lengthy or take a lot of your time to make. For my gardening site, I have a sprouting guide and record sheet new subscribers may download in exchange for their email address. I took my own photos as the sprouting process progressed from beginning to end, and subscribers have a visual of how the sprouts should look after the elapsed time.

Utilizing social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram and Snapchat will help you get the word out about your product. MailerLite has some great

templates for creating landing pages for your product, which may then be shared on any of the above platforms.

In the beginning I do suggest you stick to one or two platforms, unless of course you're already a master at social media. I find trying to keep up with them all is too overwhelming, so I am concentrating on my Facebook Pages and my Instagram accounts. The nice thing about the latter is you can post to it and link to a Facebook Page so your post is seen on both platforms, therefore reaching more people.

When you start getting signups for your mailing list avoid bombarding subscribers with salesy emails. You're going to want to offer helpful tips, strategies and other information instead. Make your emails related to your product or niche but don't make them salesy. If subscribers like what you have to say they will visit your website and most likely eventually purchase from you.

As I said in the beginning, this is not a get-rich-quick-scheme. Your goal is to be helpful. Even if it takes a dozen emails with helpful content, eventually most subscribers will make a purchase. This is what is called content marketing. You may include the link to your product in your email signature if you wish, but research has shown it's best to let subscribers make their own decisions about buying.

I subscribe to several lists and when I see salesy right from the start, I will most likely unsubscribe. No one likes to be sold. I would rather make a buying decision on my own than to be pressured into a purchase. Just think of when you go into a furniture store: are you more likely to walk out if the salesclerk is being pushy or simply explaining the benefits of the different features?

I will listen to the benefit speech a lot longer than being bombarded with prices, sales, limited time offers and so forth. Truth be told, I have politely excused myself and left a store just for that reason. No one wants to be forced into deciding.

Something else to keep in mind is to not bad-mouth the competition. We had just that scenario when we were shopping for a massage chair. We went to a leisure and sports centre and were told how great their products were compared to the competition. For a company that talked so highly of their customer service, when we had questions after the visit our emails were basically ignored. The result: we did not buy a massage chair

from them, nor will we buy a hot tub from them when we're ready to make that purchase.

What I don't think the salesman realized was I am aware of how marketing works. He presumed neither of us knew much and we would be an easy sale if he applied some pressure tactics. It was the wrong choice on his part.

When we did find a similar massage chair at another business, the saleswoman was more open to listening to us, didn't pressure us, and told us to take our time. At the end of it all not only did she sell a massage chair she also sold a sectional to us. And not once did we feel like we were being sold to. It was our decision, and our decision alone. She simply provided the customer service and information to base our final decision on.

What I'm getting at here is don't be aggressive with your tactics. Give potential customers the tools to choose your product over the competition's. Provide information. Give them a solution to their problem. Perhaps a freebie or two.

When it comes to digital products, offering a freebie isn't a bad thing. If your guide is the first product you have ever created, your freebie could be something as simple as a cheat sheet to help get them through the steps. It doesn't have to be much and once your guide is written it'll be a breeze to create a cheat sheet.

If you have created other information products in the past you can include an older product as your freebie. Or, you can give them the cheat sheet for signing up to your list. If they are genuinely interested in what you have to offer, they will purchase the guide/information product from you at some point.

It is your responsibility to build a positive relationship with your list. Positive relationships bring better results and more sales.

In the final section I'll go over your publishing options and an overview of what all I have discussed in this guide.

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Section 5

Getting ready to publish.

When you're finished your guide, walk away from it for a day or three. Some writers prefer to let their project sit for a week or more before they go back to it.

The reason for this is so you can look at it again with fresh eyes. You'll have given yourself that needed time away from it, especially if it has been one you've been working on for days or weeks.

Print it out or save it in a different format (such as a PDF) before you read it again. If it's hundreds of pages I suggest the latter, just for the sake of being environmentally friendly. Read it out loud to see if you've missed words, misspelled words, have run-on sentences, or if something doesn't make sense to you. If it doesn't make sense to you, it isn't going to make sense to your reader either. (Printing out a final draft is always recommended, just for the sake of copyright protection. I print my manuscripts and store them in my filing cabinet, plus save them on my external hard drive and a USB.)

Occasionally we find ourselves in a time crunch and a document needs to be submitted or published sooner than later. If you find yourself in that predicament, read the document from back to front. No, it's not going to make any sense at all, but you will find spelling mistakes.

Something else you can do is let your computer read it out loud to you. This is a relatively new feature I have been utilizing and it has brought more than one error to my attention.

You will find what works for you through trial and error. Remember, what works for me won't necessarily work for you. The main thing is to try different systems, but always keep the goal in sight. And if you're reading this, my guess is your goal is to create your own guides and information products.

At this point you should have given some thought to your marketing efforts, building your email list, and whether you plan on utilizing social media. If you haven't, it's not too late.

Depending on your intended audience, you may self-publish your guide on Amazon, Rakuten, Draft2Digital, and other platforms. Or you may decide to only offer it via your website or newsletters. As a self-publisher I will say this: by using your own website you will retain all the profits and have more control over pricing. Plus, you will be paid as soon as someone uses the checkout of your online shopping cart.

When using the other platforms there is a waiting period to get your money, plus the platform will keep a percentage for their fees. I fully support using online retailers for fiction and larger nonfiction projects, but when writing guides and other information products I feel building your own following is best.

Another advantage to publishing on your own site is the fact you can also sell additional formats such as CDs, DVDs, MP3s, and printed materials. My gardening guide will be available as a digital download, but it will also most likely be available as a physical product which I print and assemble. (I'm still working out the details on the latter.)

Wrapping it up.

I hope this has helped you come up with an idea or plan for your very own guide. I made it short so you can get started right away.

Once you have your idea and start writing, it will undoubtedly come together for you. Don't stress out over the time you put into it; some guides will take longer than others. How knowledgeable you are about a topic plays a big part in how quickly you can get the first draft written.

Don't be afraid to brainstorm, do your research, and write. Let the words flow as you go along and edit when you're finished.

When you're sure about a topic and a title, start telling others about what you're up to. Create some excitement prior to launching your guide.

Something I haven't discussed here is pricing, simply because each guide will have a different purpose. If you're stuck on what to charge, feel free to [contact me](#) and I will help you work through the process. As you become better at creating guides and providing more in-depth information, you will be able to command higher prices.

Keep in mind however, you want your guide to be accessible and affordable to those in the chosen niche. Don't price a 20-page guide at $20.00 unless it is going to provide your reader with information not found anywhere else.

Best of luck with your new project. I know you will create something worth sharing and one your readers will love.

Happy writing,

Diane

About the Author

Diane has been writing and publishing online since 2010. Her desire to entertain and educate has led to titles in both fiction and nonfiction, with the latter mostly focusing on earning extra money from home. Her passion for crafting and gardening have led to the creation of patterns, eBooks, and planners.

She lives in rural Alberta and works as a part-time library assistant. When not working or writing she enjoys spending time with her family, going for walks with her Blue Heeler Buddy, gardening, reading, and enjoying all life has to offer.

To find out more and to stay updated on her latest publications, visit her blog and sign up for her newsletter.