STRATEGIES FOR A SIX-Figure BOOK ADVANCE

A Study of 20 Books That Sold For Over $100K

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Introduction

This report is a study of twenty books that were reported as receiving advances of a $100,000 or more by Publisher’s Lunch, a free newsletter available at: http://www.publishersmarketplace.com/lunch/subscribe.html

Most of the books chosen were picked because the authors were not famous and didn't have super successful books prior to the one for which they were paid so much money. Many of these authors are actually first-time authors.

On the other hand, most of these books couldn’t be written by just anyone. In most cases, these authors are uniquely qualified to write what they are writing about. Generally, if just anyone can write about a particular topic, it doesn’t merit a $100K advance.

What I hope you will see once you look at this list, is what publishers seek in order to shell out a lot of money for a book: Unique ideas, especially ones that fill a hole in the market, books that can be tied to a trend or start one, controversy, and most of all, universality.

How Publishers Figure Out What They Want to Pay for a Book

Publishers use a formula to decide what a book is worth. Generally, they are willing to pay one year’s worth of an author’s royalties up front. So a book advance is based on how many copies they expect to sell—times the royalty.

Generally, authors of hardcover books get 15% of the cover price once it sells 15,000 copies. Before that they get less.

Authors of softcover books usually get 7%.

So to make $100,000 off a $25 hardcover book, publishers need to be convinced you can sell 30,000 -35,000 copies. To make that same figure off a $15 softcover book, they need to believe you can sell 100,000 copies during your first year.

Keep those numbers in mind when you go over this year’s list of 100K books. But there’s one other thing to bear in mind as well: Publishers don’t really know what will sell. The last time I compiled a list like this, back in 2002, not one of the books published successfully made back their advance. This year will be different, as one of the authors has already appeared on Oprah.
The List

1) **POSER: A Memoir in Twenty-Four Yoga Poses** by Claire Dederer
   This book, by a journalist, is a memoir about starting off lousy and getting better at yoga, while she looks at motherhood, being politically correct, and what it means to be happy.

   **Deal Price:** $250-499K  
   **Publisher:** Farrar, Straus  
   **Editor:** Courtney Hodell  
   **Agent:** Anna Stein, anna@annastein.com  
   **Agency:** Irene Skolnick Agency

   **Comments:** There’s a wide audience for yoga books and as well as a substantial group of mothers who buy books—so from a marketing standpoint, this book has huge potential. A memoir has to be well-written, and I’m sure this is—but an equally compelling reason that this book received such a large amount of money is that Claire Dederer reaches two large groups of book buyers with the message of her book.

   I suspect that this book is written with great style, with each chapter named after a yoga pose, adding a little originality and fun to the proceedings.

2) **CHARLES DUTTON'S UNTITLED MEMOIR**
   A young man who grows up in the East Baltimore projects and spends a significant amount of time in jail discovers the theater and turns his life around, eventually winning Emmy and Tony Awards.

   **Deal Price:** $250-499K  
   **Publisher:** Crown  
   **Editor:** Rachel Klayman  
   **Agent:** Sherry Marsh  
   **Agency:** Marsh Entertainment

   **Comments:** I promised you I wouldn’t use famous people for my examples. But have you actually heard of Charles Dutton? Unless you follow Broadway, where he’s starred in several of August Wilson’s plays, you probably haven’t. He’s not exactly as well known as Tom Cruise.

   The reason I’ve included his biography here is that it illustrates two points I hear from agents again and again: 1) If you’re trying to sell an autobiography or memoir, when the story is finished, there has to be a “takeaway” for the reader. 2) If your story is about the bad things that happened to you, the tale should end with you succeeding in a big way. You don’t have to necessarily be famous, but you should have risen to a position of prominence. One example would be starting off a drug-addicted prostitute and ending up

Dutton isn’t well-known enough to justify the large advance he received for this book on the merits of his fame alone. But his story, in combination with his fame and his enormous success, is strong enough to get him on every talk show in the country.

It’s the stuff that myths are made of: Go to jail, discover theater, come out and become a working actor who wins the Tony and the Emmy. Is there any doubt in anyone’s mind that this will become a movie?

3) **YOU SAY MORE THAN YOU THINK: A 7-Day Plan for Using the New Body Language to Get What You Want** by Janine Driver

The author is a regular on the Today Show and Fox News—and she teaches law enforcement officers how to use body language to maintain their power and figure out who is telling the truth. This book explains how to use body language to boost your effectiveness in everyday social interactions and family situations.

**Deal Price:** $250-499K  
**Publisher:** Crown  
**Editor:** Heather Jackson  
**Agent:** Daniel Lazar  
**Agency:** Writers House

**Comments:** Here are some of the lessons you can learn from the large advance this book took home: 1) Build your career before you try to get a book deal. Driver already is a regular on television news shows. That helps. 2) Publishers understand that teaching something that is visual gives you a huge edge when you want to get on TV. Body language is the ultimate visual—you literally have to show it to tell it. 3) Her back story is also interesting and will be fun to watch—she teaches “Lyn’Tamer” seminars to police. Given the name, this seminar is about figuring out whether people are telling the truth or not according to their body language. 4) She takes her niche skill and applies it to everyday life. This is extremely important in terms of getting a book deal. And notice how the summary of her book also mentions that her technique can be used in social interactions and family situations—so she shows that her book’s potential audience is quite large. (Using body language as a tool for family situations actually puts a new spin on the topic, as it’s primarily been marketed in the dating relationship arena.)

4) **THE SECRET CODE OF SUCCESS: 7 Steps to More Wealth & Happiness** by Noah St. John

Life coach St. John, founder of SuccessClinic.com, “exposes the hidden reasons so many smart, talented people are going down the road of life with one foot on the brake - and reveals a proven, seven-step system to get your foot off the brake in your life, career and relationships.”
**Deal Price:** $250-$499K  
**Publisher:** Collins Business  
**Editor:** Ethan Friedman  
**Agent:** Stephen Hanselman  
**Agency:** LevelFiveMedia (www.L5M.net)

**Comments:** It’s clearly not the title that has Collins Business shelling out more than a quarter million dollars for St. John’s book. It’s as generic as they come.

Nonetheless, St. John has a top-notch agent in Stephen Hanselman, who represents New York Times Bestselling authors Jorge Cruise (*8 Minutes in the Morning*), Michael Gerber (*The E-Myth*), and Tim Ferriss (*The 4-Hour Work Week*). (Don’t write to Hanselman, though, as he is not currently taking on new clients.)

If you’re a first-time author, you stand to make more money with an agent who has best-selling authors in his or her stable. They have more clout with publishers, who want to keep them happy so they can continue to work with their big-name authors whose follow-up books are likely to be extremely profitable. (Or they may want to steal those authors away from their current publisher.)

But St. John’s story isn’t just in his agent. He had to have something special that would lure a mega-agent like Hanselman.

What was that something special? The secret begins to unfold on his Web page, [www.SuccessClinic.com](http://www.SuccessClinic.com).

First off, his Web page has so much happening that it makes it clear that St. John already reaches a lot of people.

It starts with testimonials from eight bestselling authors, including Jack Canfield of *Chicken Soup for the Soul* fame. Publishers know that testimonials help sell books—and if you have a significant number of testimonials from well-known authors in your book proposal, that may increase your book advance. It will certainly make it easier for you to get a publishing deal. (By the way, my company, The Authors Team, conducted a survey of 500 book buyers and discovered that 35% bought a book because of a testimonial on the cover. Surprisingly, the most influential celebrity wasn’t Oprah, but Stephen King.)

You can also tell that St. John probably has a very large mailing list. He gives away a lot of free products on his site—and the site is so well designed that it looks like he’s successful at it.

On top of that, he has appeared on national media frequently.

Another clue to St. John’s advance is his speaking career. If you click on his video page, at the bottom you’ll find a list of his speaking clients. Publishers usually estimate you can...
sell your book to 25% of your audience. So the more people you can prove you are in front of each year, the bigger your advance.

Ultimately, though, I have an unconfirmed source who says St. John used this unique strategy: he partnered with non-profits—who agreed to promote his book to millions of people in return for getting a small percentage of his royalties. This strategy, which is taught by Brendon Burchard, is a new model that helps unknown authors piggyback on the large followings of well-known non-profits—while the author, in turn, helps raise funds and awareness for those organizations. For more information, go to www.thepartnershipprogram.com.

5) **THE DISEASING OF AMERICA'S CHILDREN** by John Rosemond
Rosemond stands up to doctors and psychologists and as it says on Amazon.com, “uncover(s) the fiction and fallacy behind attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), early-onset bipolar disorder (EOBD), and the drugs prescribed to treat them.”

**Deal Price:** $250-$499K  
**Publisher:** Thomas Nelson  
**Editor:** Joey Paul and Debbie Wickwire  
**Agent:** Steve Laube  
**Agency:** Steve Laube Agency

**Comments:** Rosemond has previously done well as an author. *Parenting by the Book* has sold 40,000 copies. Yet that alone would not justify and advance of more than $250,000.

The reason he gets such a large sum of money for this book is that he is saying something new and controversial on a topic that is constantly in the news. Plus it has a large audience who is interested in it. Various published statistics place the number of children diagnosed with ADHD as between 2 million and 7 million. All of those kids have parents, teachers and caregivers who are potential buyers for this book. And, though his message is controversial, the truth is we would all prefer it if it turned out our children didn’t need to take drugs. It’s a message that everyone, except for certain doctors and the drug companies, wants to hear.

6) **PLASTICS: a Natural History of Our Unnatural World** by Susan Freinkel
Plastic is everywhere. This book focuses on six important and enduring plastic objects as way to explore the effects of plastic on science, business, our health and environment.

**Deal Price:** $250K – 499K  
**Publisher:** Houghton Mifflin Harcourt  
**Editor:** Amanda Cook
Agent: Michelle Tessler  
Agency: Tessler Literary Agency

Comments: This book hits two trends. I don’t know what to call this category, but it’s a journalistic version of narrative non-fiction that explores culture through an object or a material. Two books that did extremely well in this category were *Salt* and *Longitude*. This book belongs in the same category—and I’m sure it was pitched that way. Since these books are few and far between, if this one is well-written, I’m sure it had publishers lining up for it. The marketing plan for this is easy: “If you liked *Salt* or *Longitude*, you’ll love *Plastics*.”

*Plastics* should also be able to capitalize on the green trend since it deals with the effect of plastic on the environment.

7) THE LEADERSHIP SUMMIT: What the World's Most Forbidding Peaks Teach Us About Success by Chris Warner and Don Schmincke

Chris Warner is a mountain climber. Don Schmincke is an organizational dynamics expert. Together, they have field-tested leadership lessons on dangerous summits and discovered how to apply those lessons to business, entrepreneurship, and management.

Deal Price: $250K – 499K  
Publisher: Jossey-Bass  
Editor: Rebecca Browning  
Agent: Donna DeGutis  
Agency: Margret McBride Literary Agency

Comments: One trend I’ve noticed in publishing over the last several years is that if you can take something unusual and apply it to everyday life (including business), you’ve got a book deal.

I think that’s especially true of lessons we can learn from adventure. We all have our own inner Hardy Boy or Nancy Drew that desires a life with more thrills in it. So if you can take the lessons learned in an adventurous setting to somebody’s life while they’re sitting in their favorite recliner—you’ll find an audience, or at least a publisher who will throw money at you.

My friend Rich Fettke wrote a terrific book, *Extreme Success*, that took lessons he learned from participating in extreme sports like sky diving, rock climbing and bungee jumping (a sport in which he is a record holder) and applied them to being successful in life. Eight publishers were in the running for his book and he received a six-figure advance. If you’d like to see most of his book proposal, it’s in my book, *Write a Book Without Lifting a Finger*.

The other exciting thing about this book is, once again, the visual opportunities. The authors must have amazing video of mountain climbing—which they can use as “B roll”
when they appear on talk shows. B roll is film footage that producers cut away to during an interview, so that they don’t have to air two people on a couch talking.

When I appeared on the Fox News Channel, to talk about the presidential candidates and their ghostwriters, the producers cut away to footage of the campaign trail—while they continued to air the audio of my interview.

Over the years, I’ve met with many TV producers and have come away with this lesson: Authors are more appealing as guests if they have their own B roll to bring to the talk shows they visit.

8) WHEN GROWTH STALLS by Steve McKee
An advisor to fast-growth companies, McKee presents new research, gathered from over 400 top firms, to help leaders triumph over a downturn in business.

Deal Price: $250K-$499K
Publisher: Jossey-Bass
Editor: Rebecca Browning
Agent: Judith Ehrlich
Agency: Judith Ehrlich Literary Management

Comments: There’s nothing better than having a topic that is a current trend that no one has written about. Though this book sold before the economic downturn was in full force, it was already obvious that bad times were ahead.

Based on a cursory search of Amazon, though there are dozens of books that talk about growing your business, none focus on what to do when growth stalls.

Even if you don’t have the advantage of pitching the right book at exactly the right time, if you find a hole in the market, it makes it a lot easier to get a book deal.

Typically, publishers are looking for authors who already have a built-in audience. You either need to have a big mailing list, a speaking career, or a lot of media exposure. But if you can find a topic with a built-in audience that has a need, and no one has ever written a book for them—and you can prove that audience exists—you can get a book deal.

A book that just sold for more than $50,000 at the time of this writing is Strategies for the C-Section Mom, which is billed as “the first detailed physical conditioning and nutrition plan geared to the special needs of women following a C-section.”

The authors found a hole in the market and got a book deal.

There’s one important factor that goes along with this rule: You have to be qualified to write the book.
In the case above, the lead author, Mary Beth Knight is the president of a company called StrollerFit, that promotes an exercise program moms can do with their children in a stroller. She is obviously qualified to write an exercise and nutrition book for moms.

What do you do if you have a great idea for a book that fills a hole in the market, but you’re not qualified to write it?

Find a qualified partner and let them be co-author. (Before you make a partnership agreement, though, look at the material on partnerships and collaboration in Write a Book Without Lifting a Finger.)

One other point about McKee’s book: It’s very well-researched. Publishers like good research a lot. So do readers.

Another book that comes to mind that was based on research on hundreds of companies is Jim Collins’ Good to Great.

There’s a section of a book proposal—the tool you use to get an agent to represent you, which the agent in turn uses to sell your book to a publisher—where you discuss comparable books.

You can be sure McKee mentioned Good to Great as a comparison for his book.

It always helps if you can compare your book to a major bestseller. This helps sales people at the publishing companies to sell your book to bookstores. In this particular case they can say, “You know how well Good to Great has sold for you. This book is like Good to Great, except it’s for all the executives at good companies where growth has stalled in today’s economic downturn.”

9) MY STROKE OF INSIGHT: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey by Jill Bolte Taylor

A brain scientist has a stroke, loses her ability to walk, talk, read, write or remember things—but is still able to observe herself using the right side of her brain. Eventually, after eight years, she recovers completely, partially because of the knowledge she has of how the brain works. The author was named one of Time Magazine's 100 Most Influential People, and the advance she received was for a book that she originally self-published.

**Deal Price:** $500K+
**Publisher:** Viking
**Editor:** Clare Ferraro
**Agent:** Ellen Stiefler
**Agency:** Stiefler Law Group
Comments: Though she was named one of Time Magazine’s 100 Most Influential People, I don’t consider Jill Bolte Taylor a truly famous person when it comes to this list.

I’m including her to make a very specific point.

Taylor didn’t fully recover from her stroke until 2004. Up to that time she was only known inside her profession.

She became internationally known after a talk she gave at a conference by put on by an organization called TED. This talk was videotaped and is still on TED’s Web site at: www.ted.com/index.php/talks/jill_bolte_taylor_s_powerful_stroke_of_insight.html.

People were amazed by her story and about her experiences healing her own brain. They started sending a link to her video to their friends with a note that said, “You’ve got to see this.”

Did you get one of those invitations? I received seven myself.

The point is, you can start off as no one and still be discovered by the whole world. The power of the internet—particularly viral videos—can propel your story to an international stage.

Unlike my previous list of books that received large advances—where not one book became a bestseller—this list has at least one moneymaker on it. My Stroke of Insight has hit the New York Times bestseller list. It helped that Taylor appeared on Oprah.

But again, how do you think she got there? If you were a friend of an Oprah producer, don’t you think you would have forwarded that video to her?

By the way, I have a tip for anyone who wants to appear on Ms. Wynfrey’s show. A friend of mine is a former guest booker for Oprah, and she keeps in touch with the current producers.

She says that if it’s possible, they prefer to discover people on their own, rather than booking people who pitch them the traditional way.

So if you want to appear on Oprah, do a campaign aimed at Chicago area TV, radio, newspapers and magazines. Don’t forget the suburbs, as some Oprah producers commute—so they read the local suburban paper as well.

And there’s another way to be discovered by Oprah’s producers. Follow her upcoming shows on Oprah.com and if you fit, submit a note. You can also suggest an idea for a show there. (I would recommend that you suggest a show theme and a few possible guests, including yourself—not just a show that features you.)
It’s a much less formal way to approach Oprah. And when you submit through the Web site, the producers still feel as if they are the ones discovering you.

Or you can take a page from Jill Bolte Taylor’s book and create a sensational video, even if it’s just you talking. If it’s unusual and interesting enough, word will spread all the way to Oprah’s producers.

10) **THE PROGRAM: The 12 Week Method to Get your Body in Sync with your Brain for a Healthier, Happier You**  Dr. Kelly Traver with Betty Kelly Sargent

This book takes the latest research on how the brain works and how to apply that to your health goals, like stopping smoking, ending diabetes, controlling cholesterol, etc. The implementation of this program was so successful that the author was hired as global medical director for Google.

**Deal Price:** $500K or more  
**Publisher:** Atria  
**Purchasing Editor:** Judith Curr  
**Actual Book Editor:** Johanna Castillo  
**Agent:** Robin Straus  
**Agency:** Robin Straus Agency

**Comments:** Dr. Traver started with the concept that 70% of illness is preventable and that the current medical system applies band-aids, instead of creating cures. So she did some research into how the brain works—and how you can use that information to fulfill your health goals.

Apparently she was successful. In just two years, the word on her program has spread so fast that Stanford University is studying it, health insurance companies are using it, the town of Menlo Park is trying it, the CDC has put her on several committees, and Google has hired her as their global medical director.

With the kind of credentials Traver quickly developed, it’s easy to see why her book garnered such a high advance.

If you really have something that works—and you can prove it—publishers will be interested. In fact, one way to convince agents and editors that your program is valid is to get them to use it themselves. Traver’s agent, Robin Straus, is on her program and so are her editors.

Here’s another lesson you can take from this book: It’s very easy to build the case that there’s a wide audience for it. In a book proposal, there’s a section where you talk about the potential audience for your book. You can’t say everybody—because unless you are planning to advertise during the Super Bowl or the Oscars, you can’t reach everybody. You have to have measurable target markets.
Since this book helps people with a wide range of health problems, it’s easy to see how the projected audience for it could add up fast: x million smokers who try to quit, y million diabetics, z million people with high cholesterol, etc.

So when you think about the audience for your book, explore the identifiable, measurable groups of people who will be interested in it. Build your audience into the millions by adding these groups together.

11) **AMERICA'S MOST WANTED RECIPES** by Ron Douglas
Reveals secret recipes from America's favorite restaurants so readers can recreate them at home for a fraction of the price.

**Deal Price:** $100K–249K  
**Publisher:** Atria  
**Editor:** Laura Stern  
**Agent:** Frank Kinard and Adam Weiss  
**Agency:** Adam Weiss PR

**Comments:** Great title. Great concept. And, theoretically, it’s easy to show the potential audience for this book. Just find out how many customers each of the restaurants represented in this book has, and add them up. In addition, show all the people who subscribe to cooking magazines and the folks who watch the cooking shows.

But that’s not all: *America’s Most Wanted Recipes* features a unique angle for cookbooks that comes from other industries—knockoff designer clothes, knockoff perfumes, and now knockoff recipes.

It’s obvious there’s a market for this book, proven by the market for other products like it.

By the way, you could easily sell a similar book by creating a niche version and changing the title a little bit: *America’s Most Loved Dessert Recipes*, *Vegetarian Recipes*, *Appetizer Recipes*, *Soup Recipes*, etc. Just be able to get the best restaurants to give up their recipes, or find a way to figure out how to re-create them yourself.

12) **GIVE A LITTLE, GET A LOT: The Power of Affordable Donations** by Wendy Smith

This book profiles nonprofits, the individuals they help, and the donors themselves to show how small donations have a significant effect on the one who gives as well as the one who gets.

**Deal Price:** $100K-249K  
**Publisher:** Hyperion
**Comments:** At first I was puzzled as to why this book got a six-figure advance. I’ve been tracking “make a difference” books, and they don’t seem to be doing well enough to justify a large advance.

But then I thought about the number of non-profits a book like this can cover. And how many people each of these non-profits reaches. And how a smart author would get a note from each non-profit on their stationery, saying that they will publicize the book on their Web site, in their newsletter, and possibly even how they will buy x number of books to give away or sell to their donors.

When you add it all up, this book could easily be marketed to ten million people or more.

That’s how you make a book like this get a big advance.

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13) **THE RIPPLE EFFECT: How Better Sex Can Lead to a Better Life** by Dr. Gail Saltz

Dr. Saltz is the Today Show's health, sex and relationship contributor. Her book explains that how women see themselves sexually has a powerful impact on every other area of their lives—and gives advice on how to optimize this effect.

**Deal Price:** $100K-249K  
**Publisher:** Modern Times  
**Editor:** Leigh Haber  
**Agent:** Marly Rusoff  
**Agency:** Marly Rusoff & Associates

**Comments:** Two points: First, as previously stated with Janine Driver, it helps to build your career and status as a well-known expert before you try to publish your book. If you want to use your book to create your status, then self-publish—unless you’ve found a hole in the market that you are qualified to fill.

Secondly, as mentioned with *The Leadership Summit*, one of the best moves you can make is to take your niche topic and apply it to everyday life. Here Saltz takes better sex, a common topic, and makes it unique by showing how it can lead to a better life. This same concept has been used on many subjects, including presentations (*Presentations in Everyday Life*), acting, and even thinking like a lawyer.
This book has a lot of potential for media attention that it wouldn’t get if it were another improve your sex life tome. Better sex by itself isn’t newsworthy. How to use the pleasure you receive in the bedroom to lead a more fulfilling life in the outside world is.

14) ONLY SKIN DEEP by Leonard Sax

Leonard Sax is a psychologist, family physician, and the author of WHY GENDER MATTERS and BOYS ADRIFT. In this new book Sax takes a look at how the current teen culture for girls—which focuses on appearance and achievement—actually prevents them from establishing strong identities. This book also provides advice on what parents can do to help their daughters achieve their full potential.

Deal Price: $100K–249K
Publisher: Basic
Editor: Amanda Moon
Agent: Felicia Eth
Agency: NA

Comments: Once again, this book shows that if you can write about a current trend, you enhance your ability to get a large advance. If you have a strong voice with a unique angle on that trend, all the better. And if you can add some how-to advice in a traditional category like parenting, then you’ve got a hat trick that will definitely increase the amount of money a publisher is willing to pay you. (If you don’t follow hockey, a hat trick is the relatively rare feat of scoring three goals in the same game.)

In terms of how-to advice, publishers favor “prescriptive non-fiction.” The difference between a prescriptive work and a typical how-to book is that the prescriptive book offers a recipe to follow. For example, Lisa Steadman, author of It's a Breakup -- Not a Breakdown has a new book coming out: The Breakup Workbook, a 21-Day Action Plan to Get That Man Off Your Mind and Out of Your Heart for Good.

Her first book offers more general advice. Her latest offers a prescription that you follow for 21 days that will help you move on from your ex in three weeks. See the difference?

Most prescriptive non-fiction isn’t written in a workbook format.

By the way, you can freshen up any topic by adding a current trend to the content of your proposal. Your new, current perspective gives booksellers a reason to put your book on their shelves—and to kick an older, more out-of-date book to the curb.

Author Ford Myers created a new angle with his job hunting book Get the Job You Want Even When No One's Hiring by creating strategies for the current job market.

Smart move.
As soon as you see a trend as obvious as a slowing economy, if you can add material to your book to reflect that trend, you’ll have an easier time selling it.

Conversely, if you’re writing the same old stuff that everyone has always said when times have changed, you’re likely to have a very tough time.

15) ODD BOYS OUT: Protecting Our Youngest Boys from Today's Climate of Unfair Expectations, High Demands, Quick Diagnoses and Pills by Dr. Anthony Rao and Michelle Seaton

This book says that doctors and child psychologists should stop taking normal boy behavior and treating it as an illness and that the rise in diagnoses of ADHD is a mistake. Plus it gives parents clear advice as to what they can do about diagnoses and over-medication.

**Deal Price:** $500K+
**Publisher:** Collins
**Editor:** Nancy Miller
**Agent:** Eve Bridburg
**Agency:** Zachary Shuster Harmsworth Literary Agency

**Comments:** This book should have a champion in Dr. Laura, who has been saying the same thing for years.

Once again, we have a topical subject that is often in the news—ADHD and other childhood “ailments”—and authors who take a controversial stand against the prevailing wisdom.

Notice how *Odd Boys Out* differs from *The Diseasing of America's Children*, a book on a very similar topic. While *Diseaseing* takes on overmedication of both genders, *Odd Boys* focuses on boys. Plus it has a specific focus on how behavior that is normal is being misread as an illness. *Diseaseing* focuses more on the business and politics of the ADHD establishment.

Though both books make the same point, each takes a different approach.

When you create a book proposal for your book, it is important to show how your material is different from anything else that’s out there. If you can’t, you won’t get a book deal.

*Odd Boys* got a huge advance partially because its controversial stand mirrors what we want to hear—that our sons are normal and don’t need to be medicated for the rest of their life.

If its controversial stance that was less agreeable, it would not have gotten so much money.
One book that comes to mind for its unpopular approach is *Why Men Earn More: The Startling Truth Behind the Pay Gap -- and What Women Can Do About It* by Warren Farrell. The premise of this book is that the pay gap between men and women’s earnings comes primarily from the number of men in commission-based jobs. If you eliminate those jobs and compare men and women in salaried positions, the pay gap disappears.

Though the pay gap is frequently in the news and Farrell’s position was controversial, his message was one a lot of people didn’t want to hear. One publisher told him his book proposal was the best proposal he had ever seen, yet he couldn’t convince his editorial board to get behind the book and publish it.

Farrell, who has been writing about men and women for at least thirty years—one of his books was required reading in my 9th grade health class in 1974—has enough of a following to merit a sizable advance. But this book didn’t reach six figures.

By the way, if you sign up for my program, Agent University: How to Land the Best Agent for Your Book and Your Career, one of the bonuses is Inside the Editorial Boardroom: How Publishers Really Decide to Buy Your Book. This CD will reveal exactly what happens at a publishing company once someone is interested in your book—and how they decide whether or not to offer you a contract.

16) **CHASING MIRACLES: THE CATHOLIC CHURCH’S SECRET TRIAL TO CANONIZE THE EIGHTH AMERICAN SAINT** by Bill Briggs
What is the mysterious process for becoming a saint in the Catholic church? Journalist Bill Briggs explores every aspect of this journey by looking at the mission to name Mother Theodore Guerin a saint.

**Deal Price:** $100K-249K  
**Publisher:** Doubleday  
**Editor:** Charlie Conrad  
**Agent:** Frank Scatoni  
**Agency:** Venture Literary

**Comments:** To get this much money for a book, you have to start off with a very well-written manuscript. When you submit narrative non-fiction like *Chasing Miracles* to publishers, the more complete the manuscript, the better. This kind of story has to be as lively and fun to read as a novel—and publishers will want to see if you have the skill to carry off an entertaining plot.

The audience for a book like this, if it works, is huge. It starts off with the Catholic Church, but includes everyone who is interested in the sociology of sainthood.

If you’re going to do a journalistic piece, pick something that a large audience of people that are easy to describe is already interested in. With this book, your first statistic in the audience section of your book proposal would be the number of Catholics in the US and the world.
17) ANGRY FAT GIRLS: Five Women, Five Hundred Pounds, and a Year of Losing It... Again by Frances Kuffel
Millions of Americans lose and gain weight over and over again—each year. This funny, painful, deeply felt book chronicles the up and down weight loss journey of five women.

**Deal Price:** $100K-249K  
**Publisher:** Berkley  
**Editor:** Denise Silvestro  
**Agent:** Fredrica Friedman  
**Agency:** Fredrica S. Friedman and Company

**Comments:** I selected this book for the list to illustrate one trend that pervades the publishing industry and never seems to go away: the club book. It doesn’t have to be an official club, just a group of people, usually women, doing the same thing. Publishers seem to have a weak spot for this book—and not just in non-fiction, but in novels, too. And these books have been major successes: The Sweet Potato Queens, the Jane Austen Book Club and many others have sold tons of copies.

Of course, a book like *Angry Fat Girls*, written memoir style, has to have something else going for it. The best thing you can do to raise your advance is to create a book that makes people laugh. Preferably out loud. If you can accomplish that admittedly difficult task, you will have several publishers who want to publish your book. If your agent can create a bidding war, the size of your advance will increase geometrically.

18) PARENTING WITH THE BRAIN IN MIND by Dr. David Walsh
This book takes the latest brain research and makes it practical and simple to use for parents and teachers in real life—creating new solutions to common problems—and new opportunities to optimize learning and emotional growth in children.

**Deal Price:** $100K-249K  
**Publisher:** Free Press  
**Editor:** Leslie Meredith  
**Agent:** Marly Rusoff  
**Agency:** Marly Rusoff & Associates

**Comments:** One of the themes in this list is “take something ordinary and make it unusual by freshening it up with the latest research or a new approach to the topic.”

There seem to be a slew of books that are taking the newest brain research and using it in a practical manner—not just the books on this list, but lots of other books as well.
In *Synectics*, by William J. J. Gordon, there are two main principles when it comes to coming up with a new idea. You either have to “make the strange familiar” or “make the familiar strange.”

In the publishing world, if you can manage to make the familiar strange—by applying new research or new methodologies for today’s circumstances—you are likely to get a book deal.

19) **VIRTUALLY YOU** by Elias Aboujaoude, MD

Aboujaoude is a psychiatrist and director of the Impulse Control Disorders Clinic at Stanford University School of Medicine. In this book he explores the impact of the internet on the way we interact with people in everyday life. In particular, Aboujaoude examines the split between our online and offline personalities and how the Internet is creating negative offline behaviors like impulsivity, rudeness, and aggression.

**Deal Price:** $100K-249K  
**Publisher:** Norton  
**Editor:** Maria Guarnaschelli  
**Agent:** Rachel Sussman  
**Agency:** Zachary Shuster Harmsworth Literary Agency

**Comments:** Once again, this book is very current and explores topics that are discussed in the media every day. Even Oprah recently did a show on rudeness.

This book also falls into the “how this skill or this trend can be used or affects everyday life” category.

The audience is anyone who ever chats or leaves messages on the internet—and their parents, friends and spouses.

That’s a very large audience. And a large audience combined with a new, trendy set of ideas equals a large book advance.

20) **UN-CONFORM: Cancel All Your Meetings, One-Down the Competition & Discover Greatness** by Jason Fried and David Heinemeier Hansson

The founding partners of software company 37 Signals on how to focus on just the important stuff at work and fight the epidemic of more. The company's blog Signals vs. Noise has tens of thousands of regular readers.

**Deal Price:** $500K+  
**Publisher:** Crown  
**Editor:** Rick Horgan
**Agent:** Lisa DiMona  
**Agency:** Lark Productions

**Comments:** It helps to have a built-in audience of people who know who you are. Not only does their blog have tens of thousands of readers, but millions of people use the online project management and contact management software developed by 37 Signals. 30,000 people have downloaded their $19 e-book, *Getting Real.* Time Magazine calls this company “One of the net’s rising stars.”

Add that background to what their agent, Lisa DiMona calls “a very strong world view” and suddenly their huge advance seems plausible.

Once again, this is a book that exploits a trend. In this case, it’s the trend of doing more all the time. The authors’ message is the opposite: “Focus on the important stuff so you can do less.”

It’s an idea that few people live by, but everybody wants to hear.

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**Three Lessons to Take From This Report**

You’ve just taken a glance through twenty books that got the largest advances in 2008. There were many books to choose from, but only these few had lessons that made sense for most authors.

Though there are lots of factors in landing a massive book advance, or even a publishing deal at all, there are three ideas that show up again and again. They certainly appear throughout this report:

1) It really helps to write about something that’s a trend or currently in the news. It helps even more if you have something controversial to say—but it must be something that people are ready to hear.

2) Whatever topic you write about, you need some kind of new approach to it. Otherwise there’s no reason to put your book on a bookshelf if there are already plenty of other books out there like it. The exception, of course, is if you have a fan base who will buy the book because they know you. Then the fact that are the author is the new angle for your book. But that only works if you are famous.

3) It is easier to sell a book to an audience that already interested in the topic, than to create interest in a topic from scratch. The more you can prove there is a ready made audience for your book and that you are qualified to write it, the larger your book advance will be.
For More Information about getting paid a six-figure advance for your book, buy *Write a Book Without Lifting A Finger*. It includes two book proposals by first-time authors that sold for over $100K. It’s available at [www.SecretAuthor.com](http://www_SECRETAUTHOR_com).

**About the Author**

Mahesh Grossman is the author of *Write a Book Without Lifting A Finger*. He has been called a "ghostwriting guru" by the Fox News Channel and "America's leading expert on ghostwriting" by Jim Christoferson of KWKC-AM. Grossman has discussed both publishing and pop culture on more than one hundred radio and television shows worldwide, as well dozens of newspapers including USA Today. *Newsweek* covered an event Mahesh quarterbacked as a consultant—*A Black Republican Salute to Richard Nixon*, which brought the former president back into the public eye eleven years after he resigned.

As president of The Authors Team, a company that turns “credible experts into Incredible Authors”, Mahesh has been involved with the editing and ghostwriting of over 60 books, including a New York Times bestseller. He is also the president of 10 Finger Press, a publisher of more than fifty books including *The It's Just Lunch Guide to Dating in America* series as well as Business Leaders Press. His newsletter, *Author Secrets*, goes out to more than 50,000 aspiring authors.

As a speaker, Grossman has shared the platform with Mark Victor Hansen, Tom Hopkins and Dan Kennedy, among others.

Mahesh’s clients include multi-million dollar companies, authors who have sold millions of books, and authors of NY Times bestsellers. His staff includes several writers whose books have hit the Times bestseller list and even a Pulitzer Prize winner.

Mahesh’s unique perspective is that publishing a book can solve some of the toughest problems CEOs, consultants, senior executives, and business owners face, including lead generation, growing your market share, getting better clients, closing more deals with more customers, and standing out from the competition.

Mahesh has an eighteen year old daughter and lives in Santa Cruz, CA. He is also a Big Brother to a ten year old boy through Big Brothers, Big Sisters of America.

After studying numerous books and proposals that have received six-figure advances, Grossman can help you fatten your book advance. A terrific resource is available to you at [www.AgentUniversityProgram.com](http://www_AGENTUNIVERSITYPROGRAM_com).

Grossman also has room for a few consulting clients. E-mail him at [GetPublished@AuthorsTeam.com](mailto:GetPublished@AUTHORSTEAM_com) or call (831) 479-7555.