

The High Cost of a Six-Figure Book Advance

The six-figure book advance, like the New York Times bestseller, is the object of many a writer's fantasy. Whether it's also a realistic goal is something else again.

Can you really get a six-figure book advance?

When Susan Page wrote **The Shortest Distance Between You and a Published Book** in 1997, she included the following list of the qualities that you and your book have to have if you're going to get a six-figure advance.

1. Your book is on a topic of wide general interest that could excite a large number of readers.
2. Your book has a distinctive angle and makes an original contribution to its field.
3. You have substantial credentials to write on this topic OR you have a co-author who does, OR you can get an extremely famous, well-credentialed person to write a foreword for you.
4. You have prepared an extraordinary proposal and are working with a competent editor already.
5. You have a show-stopping title.
6. You secure the services of a well-known, experienced agent who believes the book can earn such an advance.
7. You are both willing and able to promote your book on radio and TV and in print.

This is not a mix-and-match list. You have to have **all** of those things to get the big advance, unless you are an international celebrity or a best-selling author.

Page's aim was to deflate unrealistic expectations. Her book aims to get you into print, not necessarily to get you rich. Most authors do not get rich from their books. Most publishers don't get rich either. Book publishing is an industry in which there is very little profit. If authors get rich, it's usually because having a book lets them sell expensive services and book high-paying speaking gigs.

You can get a six-figure advance, but it will cost you.

And I don't mean the \$197 price tag on Susan Harrow's new e-book, *Get a Six-Figure Book Advance*. A \$200 investment is nothing if it gets you a \$200,000 return. Using the proposal template/software included with her \$197 e-book, you'll be able to produce the kind of proposal that will have publishers in hot pursuit—but getting the advance requires a whole lot more than just buying the book or even having all the right elements in your proposal.

If you want a six-figure book advance, you're going to have to work for it.

Susan Harrow, jokingly known as a "de-motivational coach," doesn't try to pretend otherwise. In her August 4th teleclass, co-hosted by ghostwriter Mahesh Grossman of the Authors Team, she made it clear just how much work goes into getting a six-figure advance, and how long and hard you have to keep working **after** you get the money.

How advances work

In order to persuade publishers to pay you \$100,000 or more before your book is published, you have to convince them that your book will sell at least 100,000 copies. (Your royalty will be about \$1/book for a trade paperback, possibly as much as \$3/book for a hardcover, so you do the math.) And since books don't sell themselves, what you're really saying to the publisher is that **you** can sell those 100,000 copies.

Yes, a publisher that invests that much money in you will also invest more in the production and marketing of your book than in someone who gets a smaller advance, but when you get right down to it, no one really buys a book because of its publisher. And your book won't sell just because it's a good book. People rarely buy non-fiction books for the quality of the writing. They buy for the quality of the information—and in the mind of the public, that depends on the expertise and reputation of the author. It all comes back to you.

How do you get readers to think of you as an expert?

First, they have to know you exist. If you're not already a celebrity, you're going to have to become one, or at least put up a convincing show. If you don't have legions of fans, you should at least have thousands of subscribers to your e-zine or blog, or a syndicated column in a newspaper. If you haven't been on Oprah or The Today Show yet, radio interviews and local TV news programs are a good start.

Getting into the public eye

To get visible enough fast enough, you probably need a publicist, which means shelling out several thousand dollars. In order for media attention to do you any good, you have to look good and sound good every time you appear. That means getting professional media coaching before you start lining up interviews to make up for not being a celebrity. You need to arm yourself with a repertoire of sound bites for all occasions and rehearse until you can spout them in your sleep.

That doesn't just take money, it takes time. It takes **work**. And no one can do it for you, either, because you, as the author, have to be the one in the limelight.

Editing is essential for a killer proposal.

Media coaches and publicists aren't the only team members you'll have to enlist if you want a six-figure advance and a book that justifies it.

The services of a professional editor are essential for both your proposal and your finished book. In fact, you might just want to hire a ghostwriter and get it over with, because you're probably going to be too busy marketing to write.

That's more money spent in advance of getting your advance.

Post-publication publicity

Youâ€™re not through yet, either. Now that youâ€™ve gotten enough media attention for yourself to impress a publisher, you have to do it over again for your book. Youâ€™re going to have to shell out a good-sized chunk of that advance on your own publicity efforts. More and more publishing houses assume that your advance *is* the marketing budget for the book, so they expect you to spend your own money on getting the book sold. (Tip: when mentioning this in your proposal, always make the offer contingent on the publisher matching the amount.) This expectation actually holds true regardless of the size of your advance, but the more money you want to get, the more money you have to spend.

Six-figure advances are not for the faint of heart

Writing a good book is the least of the challenges facing you when you set out to get a six-figure advance. Moreover, if you *donâ€™t* earn out your advance by actually selling 100,000+ books, your chance of getting such a large advance again are nil. To succeed when the stakes are this high, you need to become an Olympic athlete of a book marketer. That can be hard to do if you have a day job or a family, never mind both. And itâ€™s almost impossible if you donâ€™t have a substantial chunk of starting capital.

Do you really need a six-figure book advance?

For many authors, five figures are plenty, especially for a first book. Even if it loses money, that book will create the leverage the author needs to succeed in other aspects of her business. (Thatâ€™s one reason self-publishing can be such a good option for business book authors.) Getting a smaller advance still takes work and costs money, but itâ€™s a much more manageable goal for a first time author without fifty grand to invest in getting into the bookstores.

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