

# don't write *that* book!

## Episode 18

### Cover Design

**Mike Michalowicz** ([00:01](#)):

Welcome back to the Don't Write That book podcast where you can learn how to write your bestseller and own your authorship. Follow along with us as we give you an Insider's view of the book industry. Now, here are your hosts, myself, **Mike Michalowicz** and **AJ Harper**. Today's episode is going to be about book covers. They say, don't judge a book by its cover because people judge a book by its cover. Now looking under the covers. <laugh> This is our third attempt at this one episode. And it's all because of my technical snafus.

**AJ Harper** ([00:35](#)):

Two full episodes gone. Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([00:38](#)):

An hour and 15 minutes was one.

**AJ Harper** ([00:41](#)):

But just this one episode.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([00:43](#)):

I know another one was an hour. So we spent two and a half hours. If this isn't the best episode on the planet, we've rehearsed it enough times.

**AJ Harper** ([00:51](#)):

Also, I feel if it's, if we actually succeed, if uploading it this time and getting it where it needs to go. That means we're going to have the best year ever. <Laugh>. I'm going to treat it like a sign from the universe.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([01:04](#)):

Oh, I like that. I like that.

**AJ Harper** ([01:05](#)):

Yeah.

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**Mike Michalowicz** ([01:06](#)):

Right. Because the other episodes were recorded in 2023.

**AJ Harper** ([01:10](#)):

Yes. Several months apart.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([01:13](#)):

Oh. Interesting.

**AJ Harper** ([01:13](#)):

Yeah. I'm going to, I'm going to, we're going to, we're going to rock this. It's going to be like groundhog. The groundhog. Does the groundhog see a shadow? Does the groundhog not see a shadow? We'll see. And if we actually upload it. Good things.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([01:26](#)):

So if someone's listening to this episode right now, my gosh. Amazing. Good things are happening. The world's coming into alignment. I am sitting in studio in our overheated solar gain office on the third floor, which is frighteningly high with my writing partner, **AJ Harper**. AJ, welcome to the studio. Thank you. You are actively working on building your dream home.

**AJ Harper** ([01:50](#)):

Yes.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([01:51](#)):

And I can't wait to see pictures during our next break, but I think that also explains who you are, is you are persistent and consistent in achieving an outcome. And it's not about the sprint to get there, it's about the commitment to get there. And I know this house has been a dream since you were--

**AJ Harper** ([02:07](#)):

28 years.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([02:09](#)):

A wee lass. A wee lass!

**AJ Harper** ([02:12](#)):

Yeah. 28 years.

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**Mike Michalowicz** ([02:13](#)):

And it's coming about and it's magnificent. Yeah. It's a writer's paradise.

**AJ Harper** ([02:21](#)):

<Laugh>. It's a writing studio. It has a writing studio. Yeah. They, they sent me, sent me a picture of my, the walls up on my studio, which incidentally will have a whole conference area for doing small retreats, which is what I'll be doing up there. I I, I actually cried.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([02:39](#)):

That's, if anyone

**AJ Harper** ([02:40](#)):

28 years

**Mike Michalowicz** ([02:40](#)):

You so deserve it.

**AJ Harper** ([02:41](#)):

28. Well, I don't know about that, but I definitely,

**Mike Michalowicz** ([02:44](#)):

I know that.

**AJ Harper** ([02:45](#)):

I definitely worked on it.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([02:46](#)):

So that's my co-host, **AJ Harper**,

**AJ Harper** ([02:49](#)):

And my co-host is **Mike Michalowicz**. And you've, you've realized a lot of dreams.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([02:54](#)):

I, I have. I really have. Yeah.

**AJ Harper** ([02:55](#)):

Yeah. I, I always tell people when you say you can't make any money from book royalties, I say, you should meet Mike. <Laugh>

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**Mike Michalowicz** ([03:05](#)):

Yeah. Who heard that from Tim Ferris. Yeah. Who said, you can get rich off of selling books.

**AJ Harper** ([03:11](#)):

But more importantly, I, I love can I just talk about your home? I don't know if it's your dream home.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([03:17](#)):

It is. Oh, it's our dream home. Yeah. It really is.

**AJ Harper** ([03:20](#)):

It's so welcoming. It's so well cared for and so loved. Thank you. And it makes me happy every time I see it. Every time I pull up. Actually, the first time I pulled up was during the pandemic.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([03:32](#)):

Oh, yes. Right. And stuck the cart, the thing in the mailbox we weren't allowed to beat.

**AJ Harper** ([03:35](#)):

Yeah. This was the height. This was literally within weeks of everything shutting down here on the East coast. It was *Fix This Next*. It was *Fix This Next*. And we had a release date in April of 2020. Yeah. And you didn't have a copy of your book.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([03:50](#)):

Correct. But you did.

**AJ Harper** ([03:50](#)):

But somehow they gave me copy. Which usually it's the opposite.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([03:54](#)):

Yeah.

**AJ Harper** ([03:55](#)):

And I said, I will bring it to you. And you did. And I got in my car, which I don't think I'd been in my car. And I don't know how long, because I was staying in quarantine and we were not allowed to speak with it. I dropped it at your mailbox. <Laugh> in an envelope. I felt like a spy. Yeah. It was like standing rock. And there was no, it was like Armageddon here. There's no one on the road. No one, nobody was here waving. Yeah, yeah,

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**Mike Michalowicz** ([04:17](#)):

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**AJ Harper** ([04:18](#)):

Even then your house was gorgeous. <Laugh>.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([04:20](#)):

Thank you. You know what? As when we moved in, it was in a worn state, we'll say. And my, not bad, very livable, but my wife said, we're going to put love into this house. And just room by room outside, inside is constantly putting love into it. So the new things that may be coming about is I may be putting in I, I want to, I don't even know the term. They're called flow hives. It's for bee-keeping, bees.

**AJ Harper** ([04:49](#)):

Oh man. You become quite the were you always, I've noticed on your Instagram,

**Mike Michalowicz** ([04:53](#)):

More and more I'm into outdoors

**AJ Harper** ([04:55](#)):

Your plants. You're always saying, what's this plant?

**Mike Michalowicz** ([04:57](#)):

<Laugh> Trailblazing. I love plants. Yeah. So we have an orchard at the house. I love it. Last year I must've eaten a hundred plums right off the tree.

**AJ Harper** ([05:07](#)):

You made yourself sick.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([05:08](#)):

Myself sick every time. I couldn't stop. Love gardening. The new edition, though. So in including the, the bee section inside, we have now a secret tunnel. It goes into one of the rooms that we made. It goes, it's really cool. It's a secret door. You don't know what's there, but once you go through it, it just goes into another bedroom. Well, we're going to convert that into grandfather's library from Young Frankenstein <laugh>. So a smoldering cigar and a violin. But it's going to become a library room. It's going to have all the books.

**AJ Harper** ([05:39](#)):

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Oh, amazing. Well, just to close this out, the reason I mentioned that is I feel like you have reverence. I think you're a person who has, you said, you mentioned me about, you know, sticking with something. Yeah. But I think you have reverence for life and beauty.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([05:57](#)):

Thank you. I do.

**AJ Harper** ([05:57](#)):

And people, and, and it's not something that I think people know that well about you. Is you have you such deep appreciation love people.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([06:07](#)):

One last little story, maybe it's a little self-facing. Yesterday I was getting off the plane. I was flying back from Orlando, walking off. Someone's like, dude, Mike Michalowicz. It's, I've read your book. It is happening more and more frequently now. I promised my father, he told me when I was 18 years old, he goes, you're going to want to change your last name because no one can pronounce Micalowicz. I said, I'm proud of the name. I said, I'm going to make sure the name is known. And when every time I hear someone say, Michalowicz, it's the way I pronounce it. I'm like, wow. Another person knows I'm, I'm delivering my promise.

**AJ Harper** ([06:37](#)):

I mean, they probably can't spell it.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([06:39](#)):

<Laugh>, I guess.

**AJ Harper** ([06:39](#)):

But they can say it.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([06:41](#)):

They want to spell it. All right, so let's talk about covers there. There's so many covers that we've worked on collectively. I thought a real breakthrough cover, because it's become a standard for our work, is *Clockwork*. What you'll notice on the *Clockwork* cover, and I, I should have put one of my hands, it's right over there I'm pointing to the bookshelf, is we, we figured out a formula that we consistently have in the books where there's a large image in the middle with the title. So, the title's expressed in a large fashion, usually.

**AJ Harper** ([07:10](#)):

So, a title treatment.

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**Mike Michalowicz** ([07:11](#)):

Yep. Yep, yep. Exactly. And this case was gears. The author name is in the lower third, but it's large and significant. And then we put the subtitle usually in the very top of the book.

**AJ Harper** ([07:22](#)):

Oh, top, yeah. Mm-Hmm.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([07:24](#)):

So what I like about that is a cover has to cover a lot of ground, particularly nowadays in that people do judge a book by its cover. That is the first glance, the first appeal to a book or not. Does it speak to me? And nowadays, it used to be, you know, it's just on the bookshelf now. It's the thumbnail that is doing most of the lifting. Barnes & Noble or Bookshop.org or Amazon. When you're looking for a book, you have these, these images that, you know, for the most part are about an inch, maybe tall, half inch tall.

**AJ Harper** ([07:58](#)):

Half inch. Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([08:00](#)):

And you've got to pack a lot in there. So what I want to do is dig into what makes a good cover design versus, versus not. And maybe we can start off with the here's things not to do? Okay. So what are your thoughts?

**AJ Harper** ([08:13](#)):

Well, first of all, if you have a traditional publisher, you aren't going to have a ton of say in the matter. They're going to give you comps. You can give your opinion. You can ask for things. They probably will take some of it into consideration, but ultimately they're in charge of the cover. You can also get a designer you've done that we did on *Pumpkin Plan*. Because remember *Pumpkin Plan*, the first, I think I still have it. Do you remember the cover they wanted to go with?

**Mike Michalowicz** ([08:39](#)):

No. The original cover? No. Oh, the Cracked Pumpkin, that one?

**AJ Harper** ([08:43](#)):

No. Oh, it was Pumpkin Monster. It was like like a, oh,

**Mike Michalowicz** ([08:47](#)):

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The Vine over the--?

**AJ Harper** ([08:49](#)):

No, it was like this as if you took a closeup of a scary jack o' lantern.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([08:55](#)):

I don't remember this one.

**AJ Harper** ([08:56](#)):

And I remember thinking, what is happening <laugh>? Like, what's, what's going on? And then we had a conversation, first of all, bad <laugh>, bad vibe, monster, like big teeth. And it was scary. And then we realized that you couldn't tell that it was actually a giant pumpkin, because that's part of the deal. It's in the *Pumpkin Plan*. It's about how do people, using the analogy of how farmers actually grow those big giant pumpkins and how it, like you liken them to growing big businesses. But if all you saw was this scary freaking jack o' lantern, how would you know that it was actually bigger than anything? It looked like a closeup. So had to do, oh, what could it be? Oh, maybe a pumpkin in the New York skyline. Skyline. That's bigger than buildings. And then you actually had an artist create that and brought it to them. But ultimately they could have still vetoed.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([09:55](#)):

Yeah.

**AJ Harper** ([09:55](#)):

Yeah. If you bring them a cover idea that they don't like, they're not going to say yes.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([10:01](#)):

We recently, maybe this is why this episodes got bumped so many times, unintentionally, is we recently through Pen With Purpose, are representing an author who we won't share who the publisher is. We've actually disbanded that. We went to a breakdown, a breakup. We should actually talk about a publisher breakup on whatever episode breakup. You can do that. You can, we went through a breakup. This publisher the experience for this one particular author, I hope is an anomaly, was bad. And it started with the cover, and then ultimately played out into the manuscript. I was shocked. But with the cover, we told the editor, this is exactly what we need for the cover to look like. And the, the publisher said, okay. And came back and it was a whole different version of it. Missing spot spots and stuff. So we came back, we said we had our own designers design it. Here's a picture of it. Then we bullet pointed 1, 2, 3, 4, every single element. And they said, oh, okay. We get it. And they came back and it was half of the stuff.

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**AJ Harper** ([10:58](#)):

<Affirmative>

**Mike Michalowicz** ([10:58](#)):

What, what's very clear is this publisher was outsourcing to a third party. And not giving them direction. They were just transferring it over. And then the publisher came back and had Audacity said, this is what we want. And it's like, no, it doesn't even make sense. It's like a blend of what you've thought of initially and what we're proposing. It's just elements. So it's now, it's worse. It's the worst of two potential outcomes. Like it's the worst. So the point is, you're right. The publisher can just assert authority and say, we're going with this, this cover, but God, it better you as an author, need to do everything you can to facilitate a great cover design. because it's going to sell books.

**AJ Harper** ([11:37](#)):

Well, that, you know, and then that brings up, with hybrid you have control. Although a good hybrid should have their own team.

**AJ Harper** ([11:47](#)):

Not outsourcing. You need an actual design team. It could be one person on that team <laugh>. But you need somebody who's, you know, invested in that. If you're just outsourcing it constantly, I mean, people in publishing outsource all the time, that's fine. But there needs to be someone in the marketing department that cares about the book. That's all. I mean, yeah. And it's someone that cares about the book. Self-Publishing. What happens, people do a terrible job a lot of the time with their covers because they're not cover designers. So this is what I see happen. They get an idea for a cover, and they fall in love, just like they fall in love with a title. Right? And so they want that cover no matter what. They can't, they can't see outside of that. They're stuck in that box. Or they have a friend or an associate who's a graphic designer, or they get something on Fiverr.

**AJ Harper** ([12:41](#)):

Graphic designer does not equal cover designer. Cover Designers understand how to do a cover. Hopefully they understand your genre because they're up on the trends. Your book has to not only differentiate from other books but look like it belongs in the books that are coming out. Otherwise it's dated. And so a cover designer needs to be up on all the trends. And then they also need to understand what are the key elements of a <laugh> book cover and how to go get, if you're self-publishing, you have to go get specific specs from either your offset printer or from IngramSpark or Amazon KDP and get, "These are your specs. These are the meaning, these are the dimensions." Right. And they have to know how to work with that. They also have to know color saturation. I once had a self-published author I was working with who used a graphic

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designer, and the color saturation was off. So when the books were printed, everything was bleeding. So it's just, you need a person who knows. Yeah. So don't hire somebody who's just as good as a cover designer. Yeah. Get a cover designer.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([13:54](#)):

In my experience with a traditional publisher, the art department doesn't, it's not, you're not having the same person if you're doing multiple books, the same person designing book after book. So it's always a fresh start. And I haven't experienced that. I can think of a single case where the design team looked at the history, the back catalog of books and say, okay, "Here's where we're our starting point is, so we have some standardization." So that's not a, a jab. I'm just saying that as an author, be prepared for that. If you have a history of books, bring about standardization, because people make quick assessments of what the A book is and what it's about and who it's from by the way it looks. So if they're disjointed, it's confusing for a reader. But when, when they go to, for example, the Amazon Buy Box or the frequently bought together section. If they see three books that look the same, maybe they're different topics, but they look the same,

**AJ Harper** ([14:50](#)):

The same color palette.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([14:51](#)):

Same color palette, same design. Like mine, the author name, the same font at the bottom, every single time. Like, oh, that's, that's another one from Mike. The likelihood of them buying it, I just simply assume increases. They've got to figure out who wrote that book too.

**AJ Harper** ([15:06](#)):

Well, Brene Brown also, she, that's a good person to go look at. If you go look at her catalog, it's all in harmony. They're distinctive books. But in her catalog is cohesive.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([15:16](#)):

Yep.

**AJ Harper** ([15:17](#)):

I think except for the first couple. But once she got famous. <laugh>

**Mike Michalowicz** ([15:20](#)):

That's true. And that's what you see it happen.

**AJ Harper** ([15:22](#)):

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Malcolm Gladwell, you see is the same thing. Same the white cover off white cover. White cover white cover one image in the center. Even the trim size is the same every time.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([15:28](#)):

And, and actually, talk about trim size.

**AJ Harper** ([15:29](#)):

Steve Pressfield does the same thing.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([15:31](#)):

That's right. Yeah. That's right. Talking about trim size, you know, when you work on your book, you're going to have different trim sizes, you'll have different formats. You'll have a hardcover versus soft cover. A hardcover, you have a flap componentry where you don't having a soft cover. So you do need a book cover designer that can understand those elements.

**AJ Harper** ([15:48](#)):

Yeah. A hundred percent.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([15:49](#)):

I used 99 Designs once. And I've got to say, that was a good experience. So they had cover designers there that did everything. So maybe something to look into. Okay. So let's talk about your cover

**AJ Harper** ([16:03](#)):

For *Write a Must-Read*.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([16:04](#)):

Yeah. And I love, I love the—

**AJ Harper** ([16:07](#)):

<Laugh>. You didn't get the, you didn't vote for this cover. That didn't happen.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([16:11](#)):

I, I know I like a different cover. I love the tactile feel of your book. Oh yeah. That was such a good move. Very few books use that. John Brigg's new book, *The 3.3 Rule* has that same tactile feel. It almost, I want to say has a grit or stickiness. I don't know what the term is without being sticky or grit.

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**AJ Harper** ([16:26](#)):

That was my publisher.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([16:28](#)):

It's great. It's like a rubberized cover. So

**AJ Harper** ([16:32](#)):

<Laugh>,

**Mike Michalowicz** ([16:33](#)):

Is that the right word? Rubberized. It's like rubber sheets.

**AJ Harper** ([16:35](#)):

It's not.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([16:37](#)):

It's like rubber sheets. AJ, I'll tell you what.

**AJ Harper** ([16:41](#)):

It's not rubber. It's not rubber, it's just—

**Mike Michalowicz** ([16:44](#)):

But it has a, a unique feel. I don't even know how to explain it.

**AJ Harper** ([16:47](#)):

Yeah. I should ask what the term is. I didn't actually choose it, but I am thrilled that they went with it.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([16:53](#)):

Here's what not to use, is don't use a glossy cover. So we had that on *Clockwork*, the first edition. It was a mistake. So what they were trying to do, or they committed to do, was the gears were going to be a metallic foil that barely happened. They say it is metallic, but that's questionable. It's a metallic.

**AJ Harper** ([17:13](#)):

It's made a color called metallic.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([17:15](#)):

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Yeah, yeah. Yeah. That's questionable. So that was a fail. And I, and I specified matte finish on all books They did glossy. And once it was in the print run, forget it. The reason to avoid glossy is because it gets smudges on it easily. And when people do selfie pictures, you'll get smudges or the reflection of lights in it, and it blurs out your cover. So selfies and people taking pictures and images of your book are important. You'll see on TikTok all the time, people are throwing a, moving a book around on a video and you're getting glare off of it. You can't see the book cover.

**AJ Harper (17:45):**

Yeah. So matte is the option.

**Mike Michalowicz (17:47):**

Matte's the option. Rubber matte.

**AJ Harper (17:48):**

Well, *Write a Must-Read*. I'm not, you know, I'm not good at covers <laugh>. Let's just be, why say that? Well, when, when I used to, when I had up my publishing company, which I co-founded with two other people, I would be in these cover meetings and just, I, I should not be in this cover meeting. I, I absolutely cannot articulate what should be in the cover for this. And I had nothing <laugh> nothing to offer. I had no ideas. I just don't see that it's, it's, it's a block. I don't know. It's a block. Okay. So when I went into my own cover meeting, I was really not helpful. And I remember saying, I tried to give them the things I knew I didn't want. I didn't want a clip art typewriter. Right. I didn't want other hokey stuff. So they came back with pretty much a title treatment for my book and lots of different color combinations.

**AJ Harper (18:39):**

And then I tested it, which we've said before on the podcast to use split testing, use Pickfu, other sources, use your own community to vote on covers. It also helps you keep people in the loop that the book's coming out, making people feel invested. So I had done all that. I went to my community. I went to the public. I went to Pickfu, we got it all settled. I love my cover. And then McMillan is the sales team, big five publisher came back to my publisher and said, no, <laugh>, this is not, this is not the cover. Flat out said, this is not, we want a different cover. I, I was flabbergasted because we had spent months on it. So then we went back to the drawing board and then it was painful. And I feel bad for the designer who's amazing at Page Two.

**AJ Harper (19:26):**

And one of the ideas was to have Post-it Notes. So to look like it would look like my book had all these post-it notes in it. I love that. That's my favorite. Because what I try to tell people is write the book that people loved. Right? That has Post-it Notes underlined, folded over pages, but it did look a little <laugh>. The only Post-it note colors seem to be like primary. So it started to

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look like a primary colors, like a children's preschool book. And ultimately we, I said, well, maybe we could do a typewriter. And he said, but you didn't want a clip art typewriter. So I had actually messed with it. I messed with their genius. In the end, what I have is an illustrated typewriter. A typewriter that looks very cool and vintage. They solved it. They said, "Okay, let's try this."

**AJ Harper** ([20:12](#)):

Yeah. And I didn't love the cover for a really long time. I was at that point, you can reach your frustration point. You've been there. We're like, oh my God. We went back and forth. Yeah, you're just done. And I went with it. But man, people love that cover. Yeah. I think it's great. And I will tell you that it was worth all of it because I remember one of my students Dr. Kerry Burnett, she has a book coming out next year. She's America's Gerontologist. She's amazing. She found me because she was in Barnes & Noble at The Grove in LA, and my book was on the shelf. And she had been trying to write hers and her daughter saw it and said, "Hey, mom. This title."

**Mike Michalowicz** ([20:54](#)):

Yeah.

**AJ Harper** ([20:54](#)):

And the cover really stands out because it has like a peachy red.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([21:00](#)):

The color is beautiful. Well, rubber. They call it rubber color. <laugh>

**AJ Harper** ([21:04](#)):

But see, that's why covers matter because people pick it up. because they're intrigued. It looks amazing. And then, and then I was happy <laugh>. I say, okay, people are loving this cover. They're picking it up.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([21:18](#)):

What's great about it, I'm looking at it right now on Amazon and it runs consistently with another book called *Write Useful Books*.

**AJ Harper** ([21:29](#)):

Yep. That's a great book.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([21:30](#)):

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What's nice is for, it's a couple things. A--your book has color elements from that book, which is, I don't know if you've ever noticed that, but they have highlights in red and blue, which are very similar to your book. So almost looks like there's a connection between the two.

**AJ Harper** ([21:42](#)):

But the red and turquoise in my book are actually my brand colors.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([21:46](#)):

Yeah. I'm just saying this by chance. But my favorite thing is on a thumbnail size, you can see your title so easily. *Write a Must-Read*. The other book that's selling in parallel. It's a yellow book. I cannot read it. And when I read the title below, it says *The Workshop Survival Guide*. But when you look at the book image, you cannot see it. It's just a, it's a, it's a hand holding a piece of paper with too much text on it. Your book, easy to read and consume. The, the other thing is a lot of the books in your space seem to be white as I'm looking at other author books. And yours is red, so it has that pop feeling. So that's good. So one is to stay within your genre. I mean, like be consistent so people kind of realize it's for them. But secondly, do something that's different that makes it stand out. I noticed your title is about one third of the page size. I think that's perfect. Up to one half. What you did is, is powerful. And I rarely do, I think I've only on one book is you have an endorsement on the front cover. Tell us about that.

**AJ Harper** ([22:48](#)):

That's, that's Pressfield.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([22:49](#)):

<Laugh>.

**AJ Harper** ([22:49](#)):

That's Pressfield. Yeah. When it belongs on the cover. I mean, look, if you, not only is he, you know, featured in my book, but, and is probably the reason I wrote it at all, you know, for a writer or a person who is writing a non-fiction book, a prescriptive non-fiction book, which is what I talk about in my book, Pressfield is somebody they admire. So, and it was a dang good endorsement. And so my publisher said, that has to be on the cover. The endorsement is not to make you feel good and say, "I've got these famous people to say my book is awesome." It has to be people that your readers would also be interested in hearing from on that topic. So that's why we put him on the cover.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([23:38](#)):

One mistake, and I bet you everyone listening, if you're doing your first book, don't do that. Mistake about the, or the, I was just trying to get our own podcast title in here. Don't write,

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don't make This Mistake. Is they downplay the author name I did with *The Toilet Paper Entrepreneur*.

**AJ Harper** ([23:54](#)):

Oh, you. Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([23:54](#)):

And I think is at least the psychology is well, oh, it's really about the book. It's not about me. And I've come realize no, it is also about you. You're the brand representation. An author is a brand representative, and I believe authors need to put their name on there nice and big.

**AJ Harper** ([24:12](#)):

I agree with you. And I think publishers will, will make a name bigger if the person is bigger. Yeah. Because they think it's going to attract people.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([24:22](#)):

But actually it's a detraction if the name's too small.

**AJ Harper** ([24:22](#)):

Yeah. And you're the one that pushed me to make mine bigger.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([24:25](#)):

Make, yeah. Make yours bigger. Kasey Compton, who we're representing the publisher came back and we said, we want a bigger name. And they said, okay, here's a little bit more. We said, no bigger. A little bigger. And they came back and said, she's not that famous yet.

**AJ Harper** ([24:38](#)):

Yet. Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([24:39](#)):

And I was like, <laugh>, she will be. She definitely will be. Oh, yeah. But the, the funny thing was like, to your point, the publisher's like, but your name size is associated with your influence. And I would argue your influence is dictated in part by your name, size. So get your name on there.

**AJ Harper** ([24:55](#)):

Hers is a great cover to look at. By the way, everybody, if you want to look up her book *In Search of You*, *In Search of You* by Kasey Compton, because that's also a title treatment. Yeah. And it

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really speaks to the mood of the book. So you can do that just with the title. You don't have to have an image.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([25:13](#)):

Yeah. So explain what a title treatment is exactly. I mean, so it's built into the words, but can you just explain it so we all know?

**AJ Harper** ([25:18](#)):

So basically the artistry is in the title. The way that you're treating the title, the way you're designing the title becomes the main focus.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([25:28](#)):

What next question for you is some books will get after the fact, an endorsement. Maybe Stephen Pressfield reaches out to you after fact said, I read your book. This is amazing. I want to endorse it. Or you may get some kind of recognition. You may get a ranking in *New York Times* or something. Should you proactively save space for that? Or is that something you figure out after the fact? What's your thoughts?

**AJ Harper** ([25:53](#)):

I think you should save space for it, because people put too much in their cover anyway. Yeah. There, there needs to be more space. Don't try to shove everything in yeah. Save space for your *New York Times* bestseller note. Yeah, for sure.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([26:06](#)):

Yeah, I think so too. And endorsements, I've had endorsements come in after the fact we move to who we move to the front of one book. I can't remember one book has—

**AJ Harper** ([26:17](#)):

Oh, yeah. On your second printing, you can, you can change it up. Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([26:20](#)):

Yeah.

**AJ Harper** ([26:20](#)):

But I, I can I talk about the back cover please?

**Mike Michalowicz** ([26:22](#)):

Yeah. Right. I was about to go with that. Yes.

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**AJ Harper** ([26:24](#)):

Okay. So it's different for hardcover versus paperback. But I just, I just really want to make this point. If you are self-publishing or if you have a hybrid publisher that maybe isn't as familiar with how to do this, this is a critical flaw that I see with self-publishing. Again, shoving too much content onto the back. It's not about how much can I fit on here? Yeah. Your picture should be smaller. This is huge. Bio people put their whole bio. Yeah. Put their whole bio two paragraphs, no one, maybe two sentences of just the stuff that's most important to read on the back. Relevant to the book topic. Then put your whole bio inside the book at the end. On the page on a regular page.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([27:14](#)):

Brilliant.

**AJ Harper** ([27:15](#)):

It free up the space. And then also, you know, an endorsement at the top, but maybe a tagline. So on the back of mine I have, it's a hardcover, so on the back I have all endorsements, but in the middle I have my core message that's can be really effective. So I have my book summary and my bio or on the flaps. But we're about to do, I didn't tell you we're going to do a paperback of my book.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([27:43](#)):

Oh, I did not know that.

**AJ Harper** ([27:44](#)):

Yeah. So, and that is released, you know, has its own timeline and schedule. You can't just put it out there. You have to, it'll be out in May next year.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([27:54](#)):

I don't want to diverge from our content too much, but why go from hardcover to paper?

**AJ Harper** ([27:59](#)):

Because it's time, you know, it's selling well enough that, that we think it can get more momentum, more sales because it'll be less expensive.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([28:07](#)):

Lower cost point.

**AJ Harper** ([28:08](#)):

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Yeah. So that means that now we have to think about what are we going to do. One thing you can do with paperbacks is you can have the kind of cover that has flaps,

**Mike Michalowicz** ([28:17](#)):

Right? The foldout flaps. I think they are right.

**AJ Harper** ([28:19](#)):

Yeah. They're the full, they're really cool. You can get a good example of that. One of my students from my workshop just published *The Resilience Plan*. That's Marie Helene, Dr. Peletier. Gorgeous, gorgeous. Cover flaps. Really beautiful. So you do have options. I'll probably do something like that. I'm thinking, just so that my back cover is clean, but we'll see.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([28:42](#)):

My experience too, I don't want to diver too far is that paper back or So soft cover books, the printing costs are not that much better than hardcover.

**AJ Harper** ([28:55](#)):

I don't think so.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([28:56](#)):

You think there is a big difference?

**AJ Harper** ([28:58](#)):

Well, okay. It depends on if it's print on demand or offset.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([29:00](#)):

I'm thinking offset, I'm thinking offset.

**AJ Harper** ([29:02](#)):

So no, that's not true.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([29:04](#)):

So we did offset on, on hardcover based on the volume at, at \$2.50 a book when we printed 10,000 units on hardcover of *Toilet Paper Entrepreneur*.

**AJ Harper** ([29:14](#)):

Okay. But that's a, there's not that many pages in that book. There are more pages in mine. So mine is like \$4.

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**Mike Michalowicz** ([29:20](#)):

For a hardcover. Yeah.

**AJ Harper** ([29:22](#)):

And I did 7,000 copies.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([29:25](#)):

Oh, okay. Well that's great.

**AJ Harper** ([29:26](#)):

So I did volume.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([29:27](#)):

What was it on?

**AJ Harper** ([29:29](#)):

I mean that was the first print run.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([29:30](#)):

What's on soft cover?

**AJ Harper** ([29:32](#)):

I don't know. We haven't, we haven't gotten there yet.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([29:34](#)):

Okay.

**AJ Harper** ([29:35](#)):

We'll see. But it will, it'll be less than \$2.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([29:38](#)):

Okay. Less than two. So you save \$2. The interesting thing is the retail price will drop probably more than \$2. You're not going to sell the hardcover for \$30 and the soft cover for \$28. Right. So you sell for \$14, you make a lot less on the soft cover.

**AJ Harper** ([29:52](#)):

Yeah. But honestly, having been in as a publisher myself, I can promise you, you can get it down with the volume on paperback and it's, that's the key. Pretty significant. Pretty significant. But

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the other thing that happens that we're off, we're off topic, but I do want to say it's also you can fit more paperbacks in a case.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([30:11](#)):

I know, I know we're off topic. Oh, shipping costs.

**AJ Harper** ([30:12](#)):

Yeah. Everything's cheaper.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([30:14](#)):

That's huge. The shipping costs. I didn't think about that. With cover design, I believe there's this progression that people go through and tell me if you affirm or experience the same things people look at the front cover. Generally, it depends how the book is presented themselves. Sometimes the spine first, then what I do at least flip it. I don't even look at the spine. I flip to the back. Scan it. Then I'll either look at the spine, but more likely front flip to the front flap inside flap and read through that. And if, if it has to me far enough, then I'll start leafing to Table of Contents. Yes. Do you, do you find that to be the progression most people

**AJ Harper** ([30:46](#)):

Follow? Yeah, pretty much. I mean, obviously if you're online it's a different progression, but yeah, it's cover, then it's total number of reviews on Amazon. Then it's—

**Mike Michalowicz** ([30:58](#)):

Quality of review book.

**AJ Harper** ([31:00](#)):

Well, yeah. Total number of reviews and average. They're consuming that at the same time. That's right. And then description.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([31:06](#)):

Yep. With the physical book, I think what we as authors have to understand is the goal is to get what they're looking at the front cover is to get them to flip it. The goal is not to get them to buy the book, it's to get them to flip it. Because if you flip it, that's when the endorsements come per usually. You can put whatever you want back there. Can that be compelling enough that people say, oh, I want to learn more about this. The flap is now the learning experience. You start, you know, you have these problems, these challenges, this author fixes it, blah, blah, blah. Author's credibility can be built out a little bit more sometimes in flap copy. Yeah. And by then, can you get them to make the purchase?

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**AJ Harper** ([31:37](#)):

Yeah. And of course it's different with fiction. You know, fiction has a different job.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([31:41](#)):

How's fiction work?

**AJ Harper** ([31:42](#)):

Well, I mean some, all these same rules apply, but you know, you have to evoke the, you might have to have characters on the cover. You've got to be really, really careful about genre. So a fantasy cover is going to be different than say a YA contemporary. So it has to fit with the genre. That's, so that's another reason why you need to have a person who understands not just cover design, but what are the genre you are designing in. And it has to evoke something of the story. So it's, it's got actually more of a job, I would say in fiction.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([32:15](#)):

A couple other elements for our book cover, you need the ISBN. That's on the back typically.

**AJ Harper** ([32:20](#)):

Yeah. On the barcode.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([32:21](#)):

The barcode. One thing we put on all my books is a website to get more on the book. I put using the back cover. Sometimes the flap copy. Sometimes both. Because if maybe the person's not going to buy the book, maybe they'll visit your website, and you can get an email address and convince them buy in the future. One last thing we did with *Clockwork*, we did it with *Get Different* is we did also an inside or the flip of the cover. So it's a poster. Effectively you've take the entire dust cover off the hardcover book. Oh yeah. There's a poster on the inside. What's interesting is very few people know that. So make a note saying poster on other side in the book. And what's interesting is people will send me pictures of them holding the dust cover up now, like a poster and a dust cover, end to end, could be a foot half.

**AJ Harper** ([33:06](#)):

It's a mini poster.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([33:07](#)):

It's a mini poster. It's a foot and a half long.

**AJ Harper** ([33:09](#)):

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It's a Tiger Beat poster. <Laugh>

**Mike Michalowicz** ([33:11](#)):

I remember. Sadly. I remember a Tiger beat. Yeah. So that's a cool technique. Ways to test your your cover. We talked about Pickfu. We use, Google has a a testing platform too. I think it's called Google Survey. What's nice about Pickfu <laugh> pick fu is that Pickfu man is that people give anonymous feedback

**AJ Harper** ([33:37](#)):

Yeah, they don't just pick it, they give a comment. Right. Right. And they're strangers, they're not known to you. They don't necessarily even want your

**Mike Michalowicz** ([33:44](#)):

Book. So you can get some really great feedback. Another technique that was used by Tim Ferris, and he talks about one of his blog pass posts is he used Google Ads and just put the title up there to test the title. And it said *Four-Hour Work Week* was not... Like he made a book about the four-hour work week. He started off with 40 Hour Work Week, he tried Seven-Hour Work Week. He tried all these different things to see what got the most clicks. And *Four-Hour Work Week* got more clicks than the three-hour or two-hour work week. So that became—

**AJ Harper** ([34:15](#)):

Did he really start with 40? I think what you're thinking of is a, a weird title that, that we were assigned. That we were given.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([34:20](#)):

Oh my God. He tried many. I know that. Yeah. He tried many and he's just looking for clickability.

**AJ Harper** ([34:27](#)):

I, I will say I really encourage the Pickfu. So you're in an echo chamber when you're testing with your community, whether it's personal friends or colleagues or people who work with you. They might be nervous to tell you one thing or another. They're also familiar with what you do. So it's still valuable. I think you should do it. And it's, and again, a promotional tool to say, "Hey, pick my book."

**Mike Michalowicz** ([34:51](#)):

You can use, oh, sorry.

**AJ Harper** ([34:52](#)):

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But you have to, you have to go outside of the echo chamber. And so using one of those other methods, I will tell you it was Pickfu that helped me get my current cover, the coloring right.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([35:04](#)):

Oh. Interesting.

**AJ Harper** ([35:04](#)):

I didn't, wouldn't have picked it.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([35:06](#)):

Interesting. Pull Fish. That was the other one. Yeah. Poll-fish.

**AJ Harper** ([35:09](#)):

Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([35:10](#)):

Thumbnail testing. So a technique you can use is go on Amazon, identify a, a comp of yours, a comparative book, and pull up the section near the bottom of that page. Or in the middle nowadays where it shows consumers also bought books or similar books bought by customers and see them all listed there. Have an editor, maybe you can do it yourself. It's pretty easy. Put your book in there in one of those spots to see what it looks like among other books. So that's a real good way to get perspective on that. What about hiring your own designer? We were talking about earlier, if you have a traditional publisher or a hybrid, is that something you should still do? Or is that something that's just a, a last ditch effort?

**AJ Harper** ([35:51](#)):

I would say last ditch effort, but I'm frugal. I'm not going to hire somebody. What if my publisher comes up with something great, so I then have money lost.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([35:58](#)):

So we come up with a, we hire a cover front, cover one designer for just that one thing. Not the entire book page, but just to get some concepts going. And that's worked very well. We've, we've moved more efficiently as a result.

**AJ Harper** ([36:11](#)):

Sure. That's... Yeah. You could do it.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([36:13](#)):

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And we also do is we tell Penguin, we're like, Hey, just give us your initial 20 ideas, but we just want random ideas knowing they're not going to look at the history of our books or anything. Just give us random ideas. And sometimes some good ideas come out of it. Yeah. you know, to also *Profit First*, that was their design. I mean, that was minor edits, but the current cover of *Profit First* is they're designed fully and the book is selling kind of Well,

**AJ Harper (36:36):**

Yeah. And we didn't like it.

**Mike Michalowicz (36:38):**

And I didn't like it <laugh>. I didn't like it. I'm like, we're, you know.

**AJ Harper (36:41):**

But they do know. I mean, I remember again, I'll mention this publishing house. We were a small press. We award-winning press, which we sold. We had an author again, will not name, who was brought their own image to us. And said, this has to be on the cover. And our cover designer who incidentally award-winning Cover Designer. Big Deal Award-winning cover Designer <laugh> said, I'm not like, what? How, how is this going to work? And several meetings and testy email exchanges, this author—not even known. Okay. So no reason to assert. Yeah. Yeah. Said I'm, it has to be this, this from my travels image. Finally, our cover designer, amazing, gave up and was like, all right, this is, I'm not going to, we're not going to win this. Yeah. It was too, even though we had the right to go with whatever we wanted, according to our contract, it was so much stress.

**Mike Michalowicz (37:48):**

Yeah. Right. Right. Not worth it.

**AJ Harper (37:49):**

And we know as a publisher, this is something to point out. We know that an author who doesn't like their cover or less, like, less likely to promote it. So we're like, oh man, okay. Terrible. Book did ter—we were right. Book did almost sold almost nothing. Yeah. But it is a factor. If you don't like your cover, you are less likely to promote it even if you're not doing it consciously. Yeah. So if you, you know, push for what you want, but then don't push trust the publisher enough. As long as you've looked at their other covers and you feel, you know, there's been some success, but then at some point trust them enough and then promote it anyway. You've got to tell yourself, okay, I don't love it. Kind of like with *Profit First*. I remember the conversation like, “Mike, why did they circle?” Remember it's circling certain words. Yeah, yeah. Like why did they circle that word? Yeah. And then I remember you went back and asked them to change some, and you said, okay, well we got them to change one, but the rest has to stay.

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Yeah. And we were like, right. Yeah. Yeah. Because we loved our piggy bank cover, which was the self-published version.

**AJ Harper** ([38:55](#)):

And people do keep them because they love that cover too. But actually the publisher was right.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([39:01](#)):

Publisher was Right. You can change covers. I don't know, with traditional publishing, if you'd done it, you can do it. But I've seen publishers, I think

**AJ Harper** ([39:08](#)):

You'd have to have a compelling reason for it.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([39:10](#)):

There was a, there's a book called *Fast Lane Millionaire*, or Millionaire Fa *The Millionaire Fast Lane*. I always forget the name. It's a pretty good book. It's a little bro-y for me even. But <laugh>. But it's a really good book. And the initial cover was like a lambo, I think a dude stand in front of a Lamborghini. It was like, you know, whole [bleh], exactly. Jet I'm sure was flying over. The new book is, or the new cover that the author took, I think is a road, just a roadway. Much better. Much better. And I, I only can assume I, I don't know the author, but I can only assume as the, the cover wasn't performing well. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Or there was a certain market that wasn't buying that and they changed the cover and the book sells real. It's a good book. It's a good book. They got rid of the Bro-y cover.

**AJ Harper** ([39:57](#)):

I think we need to change one of our covers.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([39:59](#)):

Which

**AJ Harper** ([39:59](#)):

One *Get Different*.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([40:01](#)):

Yeah. You think so? I do. What do you think it should be?

**AJ Harper** ([40:04](#)):

I don't know, but I just think it's just not,

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**Mike Michalowicz** ([40:07](#)):

I think that title should be Get Noticed.

**AJ Harper** ([40:10](#)):

Well we can change that. I know.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([40:12](#)):

Can we, I don't know. Can we?

**AJ Harper** ([40:13](#)):

I mean, I don't think so. The, that would be a metadata nightmare.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([40:17](#)):

Yeah.

**AJ Harper** ([40:18](#)):

But I wonder if there's a way to, because that is a title treatment. And it's a wacky title treatment. Yeah. Yeah. I wonder if there's a way to diminish the title treatment and make it more image focused.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([40:33](#)):

Hmm. Hmm. We like, yeah, let, let's talk about that. Yeah.

**AJ Harper** ([40:38](#)):

I mean I think you should think about it.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([40:40](#)):

Yeah. That book needs a, it needs a booster shot. Yeah. . because It ain't earn out <laugh>. It ain't earning out.

**AJ Harper** ([40:46](#)):

It's not. And there are factors, but I still think you could maybe go to them and say, Hey, you know, I really think that would be a case where you would need to get your own designer and say, this is what I want to do.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([40:57](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. And what, what? Yeah. You know what? That's a good idea. Let's talk about that. Because it does come up every so often. And that, that book came out four years ago, three

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years ago. In conversations I still get with Noah, it's like, oh, you know, *Get Different*. Didn't earn out and we don't think it ever is going to earn out Mike.

**AJ Harper** ([41:14](#)):

And well... Remember the last time that you were told something wasn't going to work. And it was me who told you. It was when I said, "Can you please cancel your order for 20,000 copies of *Toilet Paper?*"

**Mike Michalowicz** ([41:27](#)):

You know what? What did I do?

**AJ Harper** ([41:28](#)):

You sold them.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([41:29](#)):

Yeah, it's true. Yeah, that's true.

**AJ Harper** ([41:31](#)):

And you just talked about on this call, having to purchase more of them to sell. So, you know. All right.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([41:38](#)):

Good point.

**AJ Harper** ([41:39](#)):

Challenge accepted.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([41:40](#)):

I like that. Alright, my friends, we hope you enjoyed the challenge of designing your own cover or with your team. That is remarkable. And hopefully you have some strategies to do it now. Now here's the deal. We'd love for you to visit our website and or send us an email. It's d wtb. Don't write that book podcast.com. So go to dw tb podcast.com, rate and review the show. Be honored if you do that with whatever podcaster you're listening in at. You can email me at aj at hello@dwtpodcast.com. Thanks for joining us today. We'll see you guys next week. And as a reminder, don't write that book. Write this one.