

Episode 139

Book Blurbs 101 for Business Owners Writing Books

Jodi Brandon [00:00:05]:

Welcome to the right Publish Market podcast. If you're an entrepreneur considering writing a book to serve your business, you're in the right place. Or maybe you've already decided that's even better. I'm your host, Jody Brandon, book publishing partner for entrepreneurs and 20 year veteran of the book publishing industry on the right published Market podcast. In addition to learning from me, you'll meet entrepreneurs just like you and hear about their experiences as we explore all facets of writing, publishing, and marketing a book that will help your business grow in ways you might not even have dreamed of yet.

Jodi Brandon [00:00:39]:

Our guest today is Jessie Kniff, a professional blurb writer and book blurb coach from Sydney, Australia, say that three times. A passionate advocate of the indie author community, Jessie has dedicated herself to taking the pain out of blurb writing with her custom blurb services and two signature courses, Book Blurb Magic and the Spicy Blurb Playbook. When she's not writing or dreaming up the next BBM product, Jessie can be found journaling, exploring new ocean pools, and playing her guitar. She's been a contributor to the arts pages of one of Australia's most highly respected newspapers for the past decade, and on the occasion that Jessie manages to grab some reading time, she's probably buried in PG Woodhouse or Agatha Christie. Welcome, Jesse. So, Jesse, welcome. I'm so happy to be talking to you.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:01:28]:

Oh, thank you so much. I'm very excited to be, like, I.

Jodi Brandon [00:01:32]:

Was just mentioning before I hit the old record button there topic book blurbs that we've never really talked about on the podcast before. So I want to start basic, like Book blurbs 101. What are we actually talking about? Because I talk all the time to people about how book publishing has sort of its own language. And I feel like this might be one of those terms that people are like, I think I know, but I'm not totally sure. So take it away.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:01:59]:

Book blurb. It's a fun term because it's actually got a couple of different meanings and it's kind of a little bit confusing, to be perfectly honest. So the original blurbs were just endorsements. So the quotes that you get from famous people or people in your niche, they're like, I couldn't put this book down. That was kind of the original way that books were sold. If we're looking at the covers, and to be frank, there are still people in the traditional publishing world who do still use

that terminology. So they might say to you, we have to get someone to blurb your book. And that means they want somebody to endorse your book, we need to get a good quote from someone.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:02:39]:

So I suppose perhaps the clue is if they're using blurb as a verb, then that might be an indicator of what they're meaning. But then subsequently it has kind of morphed into meaning. The sales copy that's on the back cover of your book and on Amazon, like the actual book description. Right. Sometimes called a synopsis. We can get into why that's incorrect a little bit later, but essentially it's the three paragraphs or so that sell your book to people. So especially in the indie self publishing world, blurb tends to mean pretty much exclusively the latter. But it is good to be aware of the other meaning, just in case.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:03:17]:

Yeah, you cross wires with someone somewhere. It's a little bit of a nebulous term, but when I talk about blurbs, I mean the book description, we're not talking about the endorsement quotes here.

Jodi Brandon [00:03:26]:

Got it. I love that. I love, too. Like the telltale sign is if you're hearing it used as a verb, perfect.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:03:34]:

That's kind of the only sort of different way I've heard it used that I can. That's the only clue I've come across.

Jodi Brandon [00:03:41]:

That is hilarious. That's so funny. Okay, so you mentioned three paragraphs. Can we talk about, is there a good formula, or is it really just case by case basis?

Jessie Cuniffe [00:03:56]:

Look, the whole truth is that it's a little bit of both, but there is a good formula you can kind of stick to where you can't go too far wrong. When I'm writing blurbs for clients, I take it very case by case, and sometimes I deviate from the formula, sometimes I don't. But I mean, I've written hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of blurbs by now, so I've got a few under my belt to kind of make decisions based on. But if you're totally new to this, then I do recommend I have a free cheat sheet that I'm just going to direct your listeners to so they don't panic about taking a bunch of notes in this next section. If you head to anatomyofob.com or the link in my Instagram bio, it takes you to anatomyofofookflurb.com that will actually take you to my free cheat sheet that actually has the fiction formula, too, if you're interested. But fiction and nonfiction do have

slightly different approaches, and that'll just give you the outline. So I'll talk you through it. So, essentially, the most important thing upfront on any book blurb is to have a good hook.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:04:48]:

So this is kind of like the clickbaity headline that gets people really interested. And this is particularly important on something like Amazon, where when people click into your book listing, they can only see the first couple of lines of the book description before they have to click. Read more. It's kind of roughly three lines. It sort of seems to vary whether you're on mobile or laptop or whatever else. But essentially, this is one or two sentences that should really kind of catch your readers maybe a little bit by surprise. So how can you sort of hook them in with something, maybe a controversial or surprising comment, like, what's your unique take on this situation? Or how can you arouse their curiosity in some way that they actually want to read more? So the hooks. One goal is to get people to read the rest of the blurb.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:05:36]:

It's technically part of the blurb, but it does kind of operate a little bit separately as well. So this is not just about bolding the first sentence of your blurb. The hook is a very distinct kind of separate. I like to really focus on using some kind of juxtaposition or surprise in the hook so that people are kind of met with something a little bit unexpected. And there's a thousand different ways to do a hook. Generally speaking, we want a punchy one, two sentences. The hook needs to be effortless to read. And if you look around Amazon, you'll see a whole variety of really terrible hooks and others that make you really curious.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:06:10]:

So start sort of thinking critically about what about this hook made me want to read the next bit. What kind of piece of information did it give me that actually made me want to read? Or was it super general and it was just know the only handbook you'll ever need to do X kind of thing. So a great way to start, especially for sort of nonfiction. Self help manuals, life coaching books, all that kind of stuff is to kind of take an assumption that, you know, your ideal reader has and to turn that on its head and kind of get them really curious as to how you address things and how you do things. So, I mean, I have a whole specialty masterclass on just hooks. There's a lot we could unpack, but suffice to say, it needs to be that headline that has them hooked from the start.

Jodi Brandon [00:06:48]:

Okay.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:06:49]:

And then we kind of move into the sort of the paragraph sections. So what a lot of people do with nonfiction books is they kind of dive straight into what this book will give you. But I really like to meet readers where they're at. Because not everyone knows that they need the help that you're offering, for example, when they might sort of have a vague idea. But what we want to do in the first paragraph, which I call the setup, is we're looking at approximately three sentences, and we want to show the reader, why are we here? The main goal is to really resonate. We want it to show them that, you know how they feel. Like if you're stuck with such and such, or sort of talk them through what they have been experiencing as specifically as you can. And this is where it is really important to know your target market and really get them saying, yes, that's me.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:07:32]:

So you've sort of surprised them, hooked them in. You've shown them that you know exactly where they are. And then paragraph two is all about qualifying that. So I call it the qualifier. So, again, we're probably looking at three or four sentences. This is where you can mention relevant qualifications, your life experience. If you don't have a piece of paper qualifying you to do what you're writing about, but you do have extensive experience, this is where you can draw that in. So I never like nonfiction authors to feel too intimidated about, oh, I don't have the degree or I don't have the qualification, but this is where you can tell readers about your experience, why you're sitting here telling them this information.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:08:12]:

And sometimes it's actually not even about making about you. It can be, perhaps qualifying your method, for example, of doing something. So here is where we're kind of focusing on what the book will actually do for readers. It's like, I hear you. I know where you're at. Here's why this book will help. Here's what it's going to offer you. Seven steps to do this, or proven method for X, or a completely different way to change your mindset to do this.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:08:40]:

So this is where we start qualifying things. And then it's a really great idea to move into bullet points, because people who are looking for nonfiction books often skim a little bit more than fiction readers tend to do. Fiction readers are there for the story, so they're kind of committing to the full narrative of the blurb. Nonfiction readers might be like, you know what? They might just actually have picked up your book and go, I want to learn to do this one thing. And your book might teach them to do ten things, but they're just looking for that one thing. So bullet points are a great way to highlight the main benefits your book has to offer. So this is where we want to focus on your actionable advice, any concrete strategies you offer, templates that are in your book, any sort of theories. Now, at the same time, you want to avoid any jargon that requires explanation.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:09:28]:

So if it's buzzwords that only people in your niche are going to know, try to avoid those. If it's a really technical book and the people that you're attracting have some background knowledge in that particular area, then using jargon that's reasonable to assume they would know can signal to them that this is the book for them, that you do really know what you're talking about. So it's a bit of a fine line, but you want to sort of ask yourself, again, it's about knowing your ideal readers and knowing what kind of background they have. You want to ask yourself whether is this jargon indicating sort of confidence and familiarity with the niche, or are you trying to make yourself sound impressive? And I say that with zero judgment. We've all been there. We've all been sitting there writing our blurb and gone, I want to make this sound so good, but clarity trumps jargon every time. So a good ballpark is to have five dot points. I like to kind of head to the table of contents and grab perhaps five of the most easily condensable chapters.

Jessie Cunliffe [00:10:28]:

And when I say easily condensable, I mean like they've got simple ideas that I can grab and are really attractive. Maybe you have some denser chapters that don't have a lovely juicy bit that will fit into a nice bullet point. So grabbing those five sort of main ideas, it doesn't have to be chapter by chapter, I just tend to kind of use that as perhaps a jumping off point. But if you know that you've got five central ideas to your book, that's a great way to do as well and something to just be careful of with bullet points. Because I do see people sort of throwing bullet points in and they'll just say a seven step method for this and doesn't actually tell readers what it will give them. A seven step method so that you can lose five kilos in two weeks, whatever it is, really sort of quantify what it is, the result. Exactly. So that's something bullet points aren't about.

Jessie Cunliffe [00:11:15]:

Just here's five ideas, or in my book, it's also what can they do for your reader? And by the time you've got to there, you're probably pretty much eaten up most of the word count. I would recommend keeping your blurb under 200 words. That's kind of like the absolute Max 180 is even better. But with nonfiction, I do find they tend to push up against 200, and that's totally okay. But we want to sum up with just one strong concluding sentence to catch them after the bullet points. Sometimes using two contrasting statements or a question works well to get them to take action. So are you ready to do X? That kind of thing can be a real we want them to leave on a high and feeling like, yes, I'm ready to take action now. Then you follow that up with your call to action.

Jessie Cunliffe [00:11:59]:

So this applies more to the online book description than the physical copy, but just a simple because on Amazon, for example, by the time they've read the description, they've had to scroll down the page, so they've got to scroll back up to buy. So I often just put scroll up and click buy now to start X today, just a tiny little nudge in the right direction. It can feel really weird for authors, I know, but people like to be told what to do next, so make.

Jodi Brandon [00:12:27]:

It easy for them.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:12:28]:

So that's kind of the overview of how to structure your nonfiction blurb. There's lots of different nuances we could get into, but if you follow that kind of framework, you can't go all.

Jodi Brandon [00:12:39]:

That far is, you know what? As you were talking, I'm thinking about books that I bought, like on Amazon, and how they are structured just like you're. That's. Listen, I've seen plenty that are not structured this way as well, but I have definitely seen lots that are. Hey, business owner, if you've listened to this podcast for a while now, you know how important I think a writing routine is, preferably one that's in place before you begin that book writing, though, it's never too late. So if you'd like some guidance in developing one, I've created the ready set write challenge for you to help you figure out where, when, and how you're the most productive writer that's going to make your book writing so much more efficient. Check out jodybrandoneeditorial.com. Ready, set, write. Now back to the show.

Jodi Brandon [00:13:32]:

Okay, are we using the same copy on Amazon, let's say, as we are on the back cover of the book for the most part, or no?

Jessie Cuniffe [00:13:41]:

Yes. Okay, so, I mean, if you've kept it under 200 words, your cover designer shouldn't have much of an issue fitting it on the back cover of your book, depending on how extravagant the design is. But under, there is usually something reasonable to expect someone to fit onto the physical cover. Like I say, the call to action I usually use exclusively for online, just because it's so easy to nudge them in the right direction. But having said that, it's also completely valid on the physical back cover to also say, so buy such and such today to do this. That's also AOk. So you might be tweaking the call to action a bit, but generally speaking, yes, same copy goes on back cover and your online book description.

Jodi Brandon [00:14:24]:

Okay, and are we using it anywhere else you can?

Jessie Cuniffe [00:14:28]:

And I'm glad you asked that because so many authors slap the blurb on the back of the book and online, and then that's where it goes to die. That's all we hear from it. And if you're on social media, if you are doing any kind of marketing, like the blurb is your perfect piece of marketing copy for your book. So use those same sentences, use those same descriptors of your method. For example, use those same pain points in the setup, in all your marketing, in your emails, in your social media. I was talking to a social media expert the other month, and she was saying you could do a social media post on almost every sentence of your blurb, which blew my mind. I was like, there's so much content there. You can have one thing on the hook you can talk about that.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:15:15]:

You can split apart all the pain points you put in the setup, talk about your qualifications and your background and your story. Like every bullet point has its own story. So there's so much, I suppose if you're willing to get creative with it. So I think people often forget to use it because in its entirety, you're probably going to use it on the back cover of the book. Online, you might put it on. If you're trying to get your book into physical bookstores, you might have a kind of flyer that has your blurb, your cover, other background information on it. I've seen people use their blurb there as well, to great success. You might send it out in an email blast.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:15:54]:

But the real power of the blurb in terms of marketing, aside from your actual copy of the book, is to actually break it down and be using all of those individual parts consistently. It becomes your messaging, essentially. It becomes your messaging throughout all of your marketing. And the more consistent you can be, the easier it is for you. You don't have to reinvent the wheel and rethink how to describe your method 50 different ways, and B people like consistency. It gives them a sense of familiarity and confidence in your work. And people need to hear things multiple times before they buy lots and lots and lots of times. So that kind of repetition is actually really powerful.

Jodi Brandon [00:16:30]:

Well, and also, we're all constantly trying to think of things to talk about with regard to the book. So now we have some built in posts ready to go if we have the blurb.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:16:41]:

Exactly. There's just so much content there.

Jodi Brandon [00:16:45]:

Yeah. Well, as you were talking, you made it. I was thinking to myself, that's so much content from a 200 word or 180 word thing. That's amazing.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:16:56]:

It is so much. And it kind of breaks my heart that so many people don't use it. And it's fantastic. It's helping the book. It's getting you sales, but it can do so much more. And if you're self publishing, you guys know that there's just so much marketing material that you end up generating or paying someone to generate. And how good is it that you have these custom made messaging ready to go that you can split up, divide and conquer, and use in lots of different places?

Jodi Brandon [00:17:24]:

Yeah. Well, you've completely convinced me, and I hope the listeners as well, that it shouldn't be an afterthought, which I think is sometimes what happens, especially probably with nonfiction books. Right. Because we're so focused on the. We get the book done now we're getting back to our business and trying to market that book. But the blurb is almost like an afterthought. That's, like, on our to do list. And you're like, okay, wrote that check.

Jodi Brandon [00:17:48]:

Post it to Amazon.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:17:49]:

It's not just nonfiction authors who do that. It's everyone. And, you know, the actual point in the process where people get caught is their cover designer goes, hey, have you got the blurb ready? Like, here's my deadline. I've got to put it on the book. People panic.

Jodi Brandon [00:18:05]:

Right.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:18:05]:

And then start early.

Jodi Brandon [00:18:06]:

That's my advice.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:18:07]:

Yeah. And you don't want to rush this, right?

Jodi Brandon [00:18:10]:

Yeah. Well, no, I mean, you've made it seem like all of these things we can do with it. It's so important. We definitely shouldn't be rushing.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:18:17]:

Is it? Is.

Jodi Brandon [00:18:20]:

Okay. Is there any point, Jesse, at which we should think about revising the blurb?

Jessie Cuniffe [00:18:29]:

That is such a great question. I've never been asked that question on a podcast before, and I feel like I should have been. That's a great question. And I think, especially never, literally never. And I think it is such an interesting one. So the really cool thing about your blurb is that it's a really simple process to revise your online book description. I know a lot of people kind of go, oh, do I have to redo my physical covers? So if something is up with your sales and look, figuring out why or why your book is selling or not selling is a bit of a complex task. But for example, if you're running absolutely.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:19:04]:

And you're getting great click through rate so you know the COVID is working, the title is working, your subject matter is in demand, but then people aren't actually purchasing. The blurb is probably the stumbling block. So if you kind of get to that point and go right, I think there's something going on with the blurb. That's a great point to revise. And I always tell people not to stress about then going and redoing their whole physical cover, because to be honest, if people are buying online, they're not looking at the back cover on Amazon, they're looking at the online book description. And that's kind of the priority. If you then hit on an amazing blurb that is just selling your book like hotcakes, then go and redesign your physical cover and put that blurb on it, too. But if you're selling primarily online, the really cool thing is it's just a really simple change on KDP or wherever.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:19:50]:

So that would kind of be a know. It's always good to experiment with the blurb and do some testing and get your data where you can. Again, sometimes it's tricky to figure out what's doing what, but change one thing at a time and see what you can do. I have clients done that, and they're like, yep, I can confidently say the blurb has caused this increase in sales. But also, if you come out with a new edition of your book, if there's something that changes about your book, if there's a major change in your niche, for example, and all of a sudden you realize that

you have actually hit on something that's now really trendy in your book. But maybe it's not as highlighted in the blurb, maybe it's not hitting sort of those keywords, then go ahead and revise it and put an emphasis on that. So that's probably another good time to kind of go in and have a play with it. I think the only instances I can think of, but don't be afraid to revise, I guess, would be my main advice.

Jessie Cuncliffe [00:20:42]:

Don't be afraid to revise it.

Jodi Brandon [00:20:43]:

I think that testing and experimentation, I think, is just, that's such good advice. Such good advice. And that applies, obviously, to lots of other pieces of the book puzzle, but for sure.

Jessie Cuncliffe [00:20:55]:

Oh, yes.

Jodi Brandon [00:20:55]:

Wow.

Jessie Cuncliffe [00:20:56]:

Yes.

Jodi Brandon [00:20:59]:

I am absolutely blown away. And I know that I have to go revise my own book blurb now based on this conversation.

Jessie Cuncliffe [00:21:06]:

I do that to people.

Jodi Brandon [00:21:08]:

No, listen, that's a good problem to have, right? To know where. Now I know what needs to be changed for sure, so.

Jessie Cuncliffe [00:21:16]:

That's so funny.

Jodi Brandon [00:21:17]:

Okay, before I ask you for a reading recommendation, Jesse, I know that you have a code, very generously are providing a code for our listeners. So tell us a little bit about that.

Jessie Cunniffe [00:21:27]:

Absolutely, yes. So if you use the code, Jody. So, Jodi, you can get 10% off book blurb magic, which is my DIY course, so that One you get lifetime access to. It does have instructions for fiction and nonfiction, but they're split up, so you can easily just skip the fiction sections and go straight to nonfiction if that's your jam. And if you want to work with me one on one, I offer two services which, heads up, are almost booked out for the year for 2023 at this point. So I'm not sure when this episode is coming out, but I'm not a last minute person. So if you do want to work with me one on one, get in early. But I offer a one to one blurb audit.

Jessie Cunniffe [00:22:03]:

So if you have a blurb and you want to troubleshoot it with me, then we hop on an hour call together, we completely transform it. And then you have two weeks after the fact we work in a Google Doc together. If there's any last tweaks or things that need to be made. That is one of my most popular. Yeah, it's totally transformative for the blurb, and it's so fun to do it in real time. It's one of my favorite things. I love working fast. And then if you have listened to all of this and gone, writing your blurb sounds like a horrible ordeal.

Jessie Cunniffe [00:22:30]:

I'd never want to do that ever in my life. I can also do the entire thing for you. So I do have a custom blurb service as well. So in both of those services, there are discounted bundles if you want to use the code. Jody it just works on a single blurb audit or a single custom blurb so that you can just get 10% off your first one and try it out and see if it's for you. And you can find all of those services@bookblurbmagic.com. And also on my Instagram there's services highlight DM Me anytime. Send me an email, Jesse@bookburbmagic.com.

Jessie Cunniffe [00:23:00]:

If you're not sure which option to do, I'm more than happy to have a chat.

Jodi Brandon [00:23:03]:

Awesome. We're going to link all of that in the show notes also. Thank you for doing that. That's so generous. I appreciate that so much.

Jessie Cunniffe [00:23:09]:

Oh, you're very.

Jodi Brandon [00:23:09]:

Also, this is a complete aside, but I love how quickly you talk and can throw out book blurb without even stumbling over it. I cannot tell you how many times I had to record the intro your bio to this episode because I kept stumbling over book blurb magic. I don't know why. I don't know if I was going too fast or I just, like, had my coffee, hadn't kicked in. I don't know.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:23:35]:

But this is something that everyone but me seems to have struggled with. When I named my business, I did not anticipate that it would be. And I don't know if it's because as Australians, we don't pronounce the R in blurb as much as you guys do. And I don't know whether that, like, the different mouth shape makes it easier to say, but every single podcast I have been on, the poor presenter has had to do the intro like two or three times because it comes out of book blurb magic and everything in between. So I do apologize. I did not foresee that difficulty in my future.

Jodi Brandon [00:24:08]:

No, do not apologize. First of all, I love alliteration and all of your services and everything are named so cleverly, but I was cracking up and I was like, am I the only one struggling? And then you've been saying it. It's no big deal. The whole time we've been so, anyway.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:24:28]:

Lots of practice, hundreds of.

Jodi Brandon [00:24:31]:

Yes, I would imagine. Yes. So again, thank you for that code. That's very generous. We're going to link all of that information in the show notes as well. And then, Jesse, I can't let you go without a book recommendation. I know that you obviously read probably even more than I do, so give me something.

Jessie Cuniffe [00:24:47]:

Not as much as I'd like, always, but I always have two books on the go. I always got a fiction and a nonfiction, so I'm going to give you two. So I realized at the record age of 31 that I've never read any Hemingway, which just seems just a complete deficiency in my literary education. So I'm currently reading Immovable Feast. Loving it. Not very far in yet, but I'm loving it. And my nonfiction book is how I Found Freedom in an Unfree World by Harry Brown. It's brown with an E.

Jessie Cunniffe [00:25:14]:

Amazing book on personal freedom and mindset. If you're an entrepreneur or a business coach. You're going to absolutely love it, but it's for everyone. It's for absolutely everyone. So highly recommend both of those books.

Jodi Brandon [00:25:26]:

Okay, yeah. The Hemingway Book I have read, although not in probably more than a decade, but that Harry Brown book I have not read. So that's a great recommendation. That sounds fantastic. Awesome. Thank you.

Jessie Cunniffe [00:25:37]:

It's amazing. Highly recommend.

Jodi Brandon [00:25:39]:

Well, awesome. I'm going to check that out. Well, Jesse, thank you. This has been a fantastic discussion. I've learned a ton and I know that everyone listening did as well. And very nice of you also to provide the link to your freebie as well so that people were not trying know take notes while they're absorbing as they go. So fantastic conversation. Thank you.

Jessie Cunniffe [00:25:59]:

My pleasure. Thanks so much for having me.

Jodi Brandon [00:26:02]:

Thanks for listening to today's episode of the right Publish Market podcast. I know just how busy your schedule is as a business owner, so I'm grateful you've taken some time out of yours to journey into the world of book publishing with me today.

Jodi Brandon [00:26:14]:

If you are looking for even more book writing, marketing and publishing information and support, check out my mentorship-membership, the Author-Entrepreneurs Lab, where each month we take a deep dive into one element of the book world with Education, A-Q-A session with me, your book publishing expert resources, co writing times, and so much more. You can learn more at the link in the show notes. I hope to see you inside the lab.