

This Book Means Business:

Clever ways to plan and write a book that works harder for your business

By Alison Jones

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Alison Jones's excellent work *This Book Means Business* ('TBMB') is packed with 'a selection of tools, techniques and tips on the business of writing business books' (p xv) gained through Jones' many years in the publishing industry (with OUP, Macmillan et al). TBMB reflects what the author has learned from establishing her own business; hosting a popular podcast (The Extraordinary Business Book Club); and being Head Judge of the Business Book Awards. It's fair to say that Alison knows her stuff – and it shows!

The advice provided is aimed firmly at those writing 'business' as opposed to 'academic' books.

TBMB provides an eclectic mix of factors to think about when planning and writing a book, as well as things to consider when marketing for maximum reach and influence. As Christians we should not 'hide our light under a bushel'. The same is true when trying to get our ideas across to impact the marketplace for good.

TBMB comprises two broad parts, each split into four sections and then several mini-chapters which conclude with practical exercises. These 'Over to you' sections reinforce the point that there is no easy way to write a book: authors must take time to work out their ideas and approach.

Part 1: Your business and you (pp 1 – 148) assumes you are writing a book to help develop your business. It is based around the concept of a growth

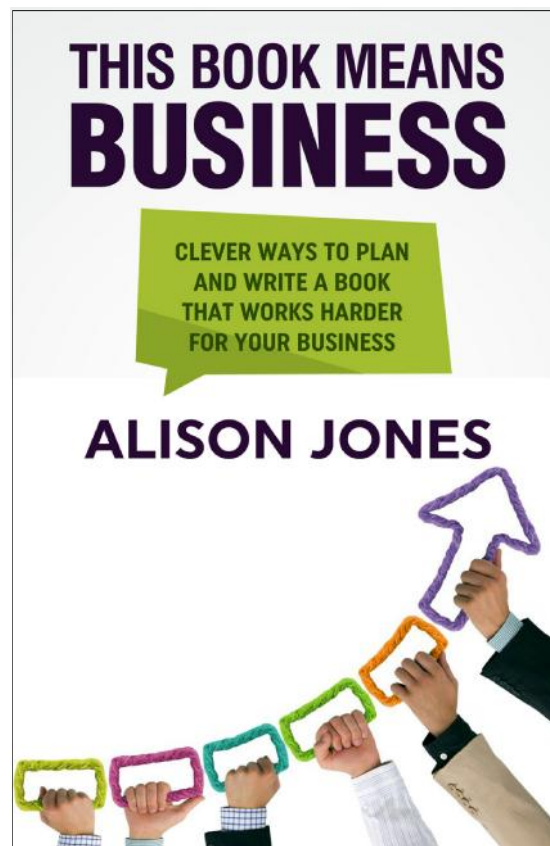
connections is highlighted throughout.

Many of the ideas are as applicable to internal business documents as they are to books. The widely-used SWOT analysis makes an appearance (pp 16–19) and helps emphasise that TBMB is a book about business as well as for business. By mentioning elements of publishing, TBMB also relates to the business of books. The title works well in several ways.

In a crowded market, a book has to stand out. Jones shows that it is insufficient just to write a technically good volume – it must be made known to target readers. A useful starting point is to define your target reader and develop a persona for them (pp 7–12). This will help to ensure that your content and writing style appeal to the intended audience.

Another marketing device is a 'street team' (pp 77–78) whose members can provide early

feedback on ideas and chapters and who act as ambassadors to market the book through their social media outlets and contacts. (Hands up, I was part of Alison's team! (p 247)). For balance and realism, include "a couple of friends who have nothing whatsoever to do with business books but who can always be counted on to give an honest opinion and bracing encouragement"(p 78).



spiral covering your business, your platform, your network and yourself.

There are regular references to building trust (p 63), helping others, being generous with time and feedback, and ensuring that those you seek advice from get something in return (pp 71 –73) . Encouragingly, the importance of building relationships and not just

(Hebrews 10:25 comes to mind and again relationship building is essential.)

Part 2: Writing your book (pp 149-239) is very helpful. As an accountant more used to analysing and communicating numerical information in formal reports, I enjoyed the advice on the technicalities of writing in **Section 1: Getting clear**. As a portfolio director with little free time, I found many useful tips in **Section 2: Making it happen**.

Peter exhorts us "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do it with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15). Similarly, authors should be ready to comment on matters related to their writing and should be prepared for when a journalist seeks an interview or a conference requests a speaker.

Section 4: Beyond the book provides some beneficial suggestions.

TBMB concludes with appendices listing useful online tools and other resources.

Books aimed at Christians working in the market place vary tremendously. Some emphasise the theological whilst others discuss general Christian principles without very much application. TBMB has a number of suggestions to help us stay focused on what we are aiming to say.

Given the importance of storytelling in getting ideas across (Jesus'

parables are the prime example), TBMB is packed with personal anecdotes and stories from others gleaned over time. Joanna Penn recommends (p 193): "... if you haven't got enough personal anecdotes then go out and do some stuff... go and do something that you can then bring back and use in your book." This is good advice - especially to those who write in an overly formal style and/or who are writing without much first-hand knowledge of the subject.

Through her comments, Alison Jones reveals something of herself as a person. This helps to build connection and trust by 'walking the talk'.

I liked the reference (p 190) to running legend Ron Hill (a boyhood hero of mine!) relating to repetition and habit. This sound advice is applicable to writers as well as Christians seeking to read the Bible, pray or help others more regularly.

The note of admonishment (p 233) about writing in books (sorry, I'm guilty of this) and breaking their spines (I try not to) struck a chord. I know people with very firm views on these things!

For those wanting hands-on practical assistance, Alison runs a 10 Day Business Book Proposal Challenge and a writing boot-camp. Having been encouraged to write a book three years ago, I took the Challenge in January and was greatly helped through focused daily tasks

(with very useful feedback from Alison and fellow Challengers) to finalise my proposal and kick-start my writing.

Many authors could benefit from 'reading it out aloud' (pp 201-203): "There's a tendency when you write to use big words and a more formal register, and only when you read it back do you realize you sound ...pompous." So, always keep in mind the person you are writing for and the reason you are writing.

Business books should be about helping others to develop their organisations in some way; they are not to demonstrate your knowledge of arcane subjects. A bit like prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:3-4), business books should be practical, speak the truth and help the reader.

Although this is the author's first business book, she has published many others, including books on pharmaceutical marketing, communicating financial advice, and leadership. These reflect her company's name "Practical Inspiration"!

I greatly enjoyed reading TBMB and highly recommend it, especially for the many practical suggestions and inspirational encouragement.

This Book Means Business may not be the type of book normally reviewed in FiBQ, but reading it could lead to many that are! I'm off now to progress my own books. What about you? 📖👉



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