

## "Artisinal" Publishing: A Scientist Writes Fiction

William Curatolo, The Bayberry Institute, U.S.A.



"With what I've seen, I should write a book." I've said it, and I would venture a guess that many of you have said it too. Over the course of my 27 years on planes and trains for Big Pharma, I saw and heard lots of surprising things, and I kept a little spiral-bound notebook with me to write down a few words to jar my memory later. For the record, most of the strange things I saw and heard related to companies other than the one I worked for—mostly little

companies developing formulations or one-off drug candidates, generics developing low-quality knockoffs, and internet pharmacies. I also took notes to remind me of casual conversations I could not help overhearing in airports and other public places (unavoidable loud cellphone conversations). At some point, I felt that I had enough material to start writing a novel about scientists and physicians behaving badly in the international drug industry. It turned out to be a lot more difficult than I anticipated (as all things generally are).

A first problem was unlearning my hard-earned scientific writing skills. After 30 years, these skills were in my DNA (perhaps via histone methylation). There is nothing wrong with writing clearly and concisely, but let's face it, scientific writing is pretty dry (although I did use the word "haiku" in a journal article once). In addition to journal articles, I had written many scientific sections of patent applications, where the style and semantics are even further removed from everyday life. Writing fiction is a different animal—all about action and dialogue. Didactic chapters providing scientific background drag a story down. In rewriting and rewriting, I learned two important things: let the characters provide the background and don't get hung up on all the science being correct. If science is an important part of the background of the story, it just has to be plausible, not necessarily feasible in the present. Think Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park*.

Once you have a novel in hand, you are faced with publishing and distributing it, two activities that in the past were "left to the professionals." Within just the last few years, two cataclysmic technical advances have occurred in publishing. The first is the advent of e-books, which have removed the need for printing presses and warehouses (and bookstores for that matter). The less well-known second advance is just-in-time printing. Today, a single copy of a paperback book, with its cover, can be printed at a low cost. In addition, a significant business process advance (which bookstore lovers, including myself, decry) is internet book sales, evidenced by the unprecedented success of the company Amazon.

Up until about 10 years ago, there were two publishing worlds: traditional publishing and "vanity" publishing. The traditional publishers were the gatekeepers who owned the printing presses, the warehouses, and the distribution channels. It was very difficult (and still is) to get a publishing contract because these large publishers need manuscripts that can justify large printing runs and the expense of advertising and distribution. "Vanity" publishers produced books for authors who were willing to pay for the service, and readers and critics generally thought of these books as low-quality items. There were of course exceptions, such as Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and John James Audubon's *Birds of America*. Admittedly, the exceptions were relatively rare.

Because of the advent of e-books, the existence of just-in-time printing, and the availability of online "bookstores," it is no longer necessary to have a large potential audience to publish a book. For example, if your hobby is collecting the franking machines used to stamp letters sent by passengers on zeppelins, and you wish to write a book about this for the small number of other people across the world who are interested, you can now proceed without having to go through the traditional publishing company gatekeepers. You can format your book online and create a cover using a free service such as Createspace (createspace.com), owned by Amazon. Alternatively, there are other relatively inexpensive companies that will more actively help you for a fee. If you go the Createspace route, you can have your book seamlessly listed on Amazon, where you set your price and royalty for both paperback and e-versions. While I am sure that Amazon would like to sell lots of books to make lots of money, their efficient online sales model permits the listing and sale of books with small, even miniscule, markets. The 25 people who are interested in zeppelin-based franking machines can buy your nicely produced paperback book on the subject. If only one copy is ordered in a particular week, it doesn't matter—that copy will be prepared using just-in-time printing.

To bring this subject closer to home, if you have a desire to publish a book on some aspect of drug formulation design or execution, even an unusually short book, the mechanism exists to accomplish it. In my first self-publishing effort, I published a novel—relatively simple technically because there are no figures, pictures, or graphs. A nonfiction book is of course more involved but still relatively straightforward for an author willing to learn layout using a well-known program such as Microsoft Word. For more detailed information on how to self-publish, I strongly recommend the book *APE: Author, Publisher, Entrepreneur* by Guy Kawasaki, formerly Chief Evangelist at Apple Inc. Kawasaki says to forget about "vanity" publishing and to call it "artisinal" publishing instead.

I was surprised to discover that the most difficult part of self-publishing a novel or nonfiction treatise may be marketing. Like other aspects of life, it is critical to know what your goals are and



to be willing to put in the needed effort to accomplish them. If you write a family history, you can simply announce it in e-mails to your family. If you write a treatise on some aspect of drug delivery, you can use your LinkedIn contact list to reach interested people. If you are looking for broader distribution, an approach is to use Google AdWords, a feature in which you have a brief three-line ad (with a link if you wish) that appears when someone searches one of a series of keyword phrases that you have set. You only pay Google when someone clicks on your ad. The world of social media provides further opportunities and is constantly changing. The bottom line is that the marketing aspect of self-publishing is tough and requires creativity and

financial investment if you want broad distribution. I now understand why traditional publishers (and agents) are so selective. Just do the math. It is very difficult to succeed if your goal is to make money.

*Bill Curatolo's novel Campanilismo is set against the background of international biotech and involves broken clinical studies, illegal internet pharmacies, and New Jersey hoods. A biophysicist by training, Dr. Curatolo served for six years on the staff at MIT and for 27 years in the R&D Division at Pfizer. He is the author of numerous scientific publications and holds 32 U.S. patents. ■*

## CRS Advances in Delivery Science and Technology Book Series



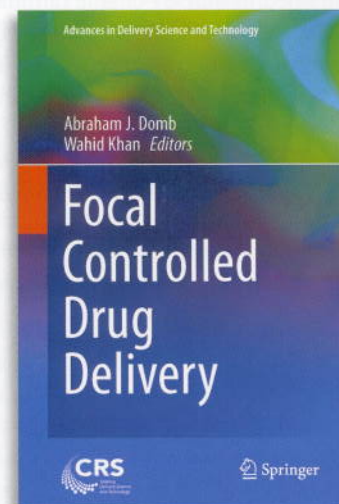
► **NEW TITLE** ◀

### Focal Controlled Drug Delivery

Edited by A.J. Domb, School of Pharmacy-Faculty of Medicine, Jerusalem, Israel; W. Khan, School of Pharmacy-Faculty of Medicine, Jerusalem, Israel

- Includes fundamental introductory chapters for focal drug delivery
- Describes drug delivery to body sites/system
- Provides an authoritative account of the essential pharmaceutical, technological, physiological, and biological sciences

2014, XVII, hardcover, 700 pages.



CRS members qualify for a **25% discount** on all books in the *Advances in Delivery Science and Technology* series from CRS, along with all Springer book titles if you purchase through Springer's online site and use the exclusive CRS member discount token when ordering. CRS members must sign in to the CRS site to gain access to the discount token before ordering at the Springer site.

[controlledreleasesociety.org](http://controlledreleasesociety.org)