

Are publishers open to republishing books that have gone out of print?

Q: I have a children's novel that is out-of-print. Do you have any information on publishing houses that are open to working with formerly published books?

I surveyed a number of publishers on SCBWI's list to find out how likely they were to consider publishing a book that had gone out-of-print with another house. Of the twenty-eight that responded, most said they'd consider the submission, but most said they had "almost never" published a book like that. Reasons given were that it is very difficult to sell a book that has been previously published; it is hard to get reviews on a reissue; and because libraries might still have the earlier version, so they would not buy the new edition.

In response to a question about publisher recommendations on how to submit this kind of book, I received the following suggestions

- Include all background on the book and previous marketing material
- Tell the publisher about the book's sales history and about any awards the book won
- Let the publisher know how long the book has been out-of-print and if there was a particular reason for that decision
- Send the actual book along with information on what you've done since and information on what you could do to help promote the book
- Explain why you feel the book should be brought back into print, and include information on how the book might be timely, or still be able to fill a need in the marketplace
- List any subsidiary rights or foreign sales information
- Be sure to specify whether you own the rights

One publisher noted that "a book should have enjoyed at least some success (ie. 15-20,000 copies sold of a picture book, and 5,000 of a novel) to be really viable when returning to the marketplace". Another publisher made the point that "the best you can hope for in sales for a re-release is 1,500-2,500 copies, and that rate of sale doesn't justify advertising expenditure, only a catalog listing".

It's important to note that publishers views on this may change as print-on-demand and other electronic options allow for inexpensive production of books. Authors also have the option to self-publish the book, or to use services like the Authors Guild Back-in-Print program to place the books with a print-on-demand publisher. 3:4/01