

DOWNTIME

ACME BOOKS

The Art of Selling

(your book)



BY GLENN RIFKIN

I sat at the author table at a major San Francisco technology conference in late September, fighting off a forlorn expression. It was my first event to promote my new book, *Future Forward*, a look at the life and leadership lessons of Patrick McGovern, a remarkable entrepreneur and visionary. And here at the Moscone Center, a bookstore table for author signings was set up to attract droves of conventioners passing by.

Unfortunately, due to circumstances beyond my control, no advance word on the book got out. Thousands of attendees moved between sessions and breaks, but stopping by to buy my book was not on the agenda.

For all you wannabe business-book authors, be warned: the road to the *New York Times* best-sellers list is littered with broken dreams, tens of thousands of out-of-print titles, and remainder bins filled with tomes that didn't quite make the grade. Book signings are just one of many treacherous steps in this journey.

Most aspiring writers assume that the publisher is responsible for the marketing of a book, and that assumption is wrong. A couple of decades ago, publishers did mount book campaigns for novices and veterans alike, which included waves of press materials and review copies sent to influencers, book tours, and aggressive pushes with the media. Authors like Walter Isaacson, writing a Steve Jobs biography, still get that kind of treatment, but the rest of us are essentially on our own. If

we don't champion our books, nobody else will.

So many chief executives and business leaders believe they have a story to tell, a lesson to impart, and a secret sauce of insight and wisdom just

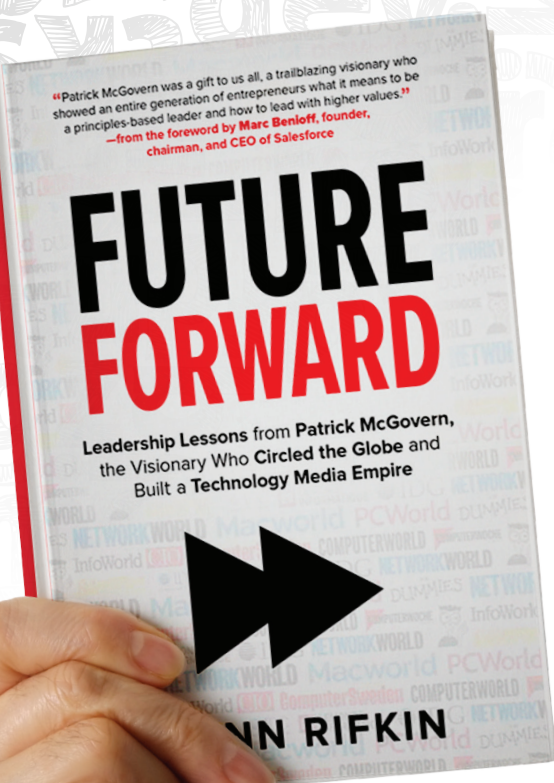
waiting to be shared with the masses of business readers seeking effective takeaways. Some hire ghostwriters, while others actually take pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) and

find a way to turn those concepts into readable prose. Many overcome the challenge of finding an agent and a publisher and end up holding an actual book in their hands, replete with a byline and a deep feeling of accomplishment. A book, after all, has a long shelf life (pun intended) and is considered a benchmark of accomplishment.

But the marketing and selling of a business book is a different



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challenge that can catch an unsuspecting neophyte writer by surprise. My latest book is a case in point. Though I'm not a CEO, I've been a business journalist for more than 40 years and authored or coauthored more than a dozen business books. I have experienced the joyous feeling of speaking in front of rapt crowds at a bookstore or conference room, and the heartache of sitting at the author's table while only three people bought my book. I've enjoyed the immediate response of an interview on NPR and the frustration of vainly chasing a reporter to get some ink in a major newspaper or business magazine.

When Amazon became the bookseller of choice 25 years ago, things began to change. Today, a large collection of five-star reviews on Amazon can be more valuable than a single review in *Publishers Weekly*. An appearance on a popular podcast can sell more books than a book signing. Finding the best podcasts and getting booked for an interview is the new paper chase. Making those connections requires diligence, persistence, and patience. And it is almost always on the author to make it happen. I'm learning all this on the fly.

For *Future Forward*, I pulled out all the stops, reaching out to a wide-ranging list of media contacts I know, while hitting all corners of social media. My

pitch was short and to the point, always focused on how Pat McGovern's story would appeal to their readers or listeners. Some hit, some didn't. Among the positive results was an appearance on NPR's *Here & Now*, a national radio show with 4.5 million weekly listeners. On the day that aired, *Future Forward* reached the No. 1 spot on the Amazon best-sellers list in the business entrepreneur category, demonstrating the continuing influence of public radio.

I did several book signings, of course (much more successful than the first), and landed a podcast with Larry Magid, a veteran technology journalist whose podcast, *Larry's World*, has a large audience. And I wasn't shy about using sources tied to McGovern, including the global technology publishing company he founded (its editors ran stories about the book) and the McGovern Institute for Brain Research at MIT (it collaborated on a hugely successful event).

In the end, though, you need to have realistic expectations in this world. *Future Forward* has generated strong and positive feedback—and while it reached best-seller status on Amazon, I know that is a fleeting accomplishment driven by inexplicable algorithms. Mostly, I wanted to tell a story, illuminate a remarkable business life, and hopefully find a receptive audience. Mission accomplished. ▀

Key Steps to Promoting Your Book

-  **Build** a well-designed website for the book.
-  **Compile** a short, well-written news release to be sent to a long list of media contacts.
-  **Create** a list of key influencers and make sure they get review copies of the book.
-  **Promote** the book on social media.
-  **Arrange** a book promotion at popular bookstores, whether local or in places you plan to travel.
-  **Think** outside the box, such as reaching out to alumni associations if the book profiles a member of theirs.