

# THE LITERARY PROFESSIONAL

The writer everyone wants.

Presented by: Casey W. Cowan  
President & CEO, Oghma Creative Media, Inc.

# CASEY W. COWAN

CO-FOUNDER, PRESIDENT & CEO  
OGHMA CREATIVE MEDIA, INC.

- Academically versed in military history and critical thinking;
- Twenty-three years of professional experience as a graphic designer, reporter, editor, and photographer;
- Has worked for:
  - Newspapers;
  - Magazines;
  - Phonebooks;
  - Advertising Agencies;
  - Large-scale printing companies;
  - Sign companies;
- Got burnt out working for Corporate America;
- Co-founded **Oghma Creative Media** as a marketing firm for creatives in mid-2013.





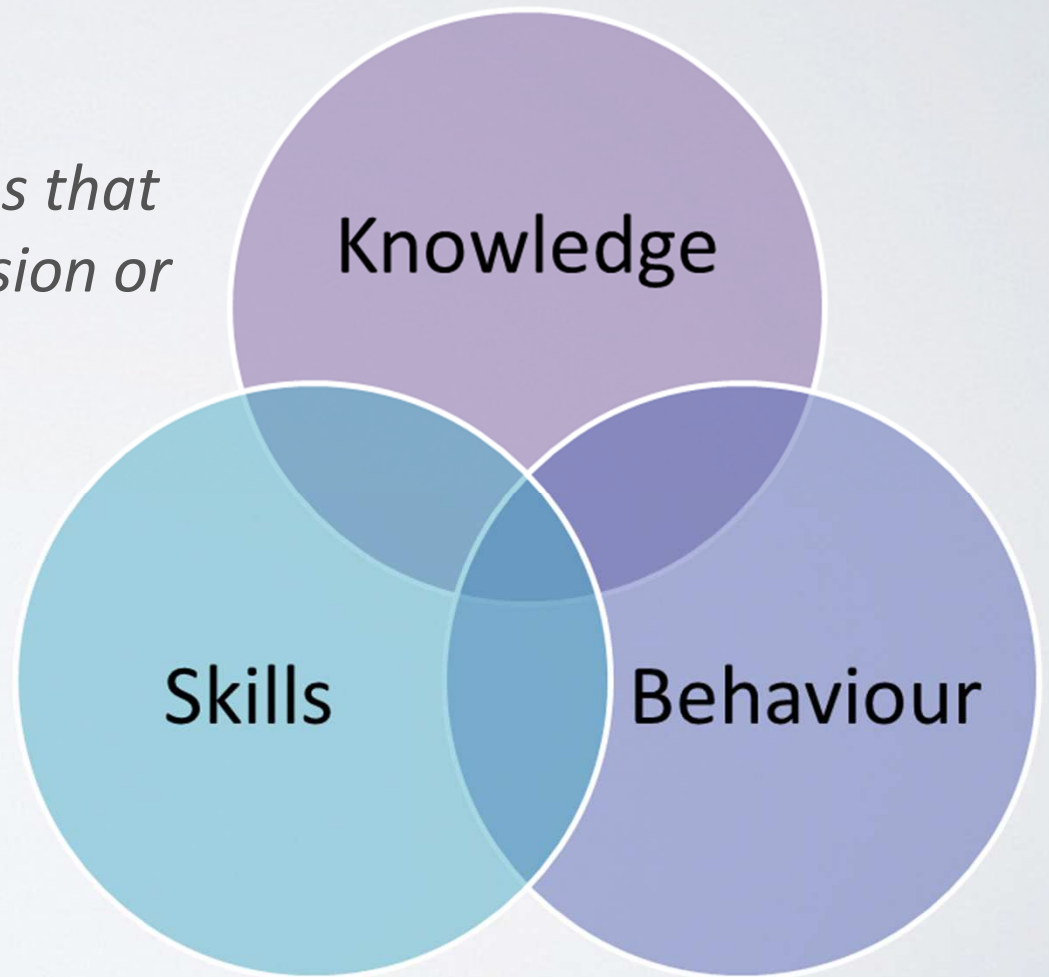
# OGHMA CREATIVE MEDIA, INC.

An Award-Winning, Independent Mid-Sized Publisher

- Founded in mid-2013 as a marketing firm for creatives;
- Grew out of Northwest Arkansas Writers Workshop;
- Named for the Celtic God of eloquence & inspiration;
- Transitioned to a small press in early-2014;
- Signed first two authors in March, 2014;
- Published first two books August 26, 2014;
- As of today, Oghma's catalog includes:
  - 75 authors;
  - Staff of 20 (all writers)
  - 135 books published;
  - 400+ books under contract through 2028;
  - 18 audiobooks;
  - *Saddlebag Dispatches* magazine;
- Two Western Writers of America Spur Awards (2016/2017);
  - Finalist for a third (2018);
- 5 Will Rogers Medallion Awards (2015, 2016, 2017).

# PROFESSIONALISM

*The conduct, aims, or qualities that characterize or mark a profession or a professional person.*



# 12 PILLARS OF AUTHOR PROFESSIONALISM



- Decision—*What kind of writer are you?*
- Wisdom—*What can you expect as a professional author?*
- Intelligence—*Know your industry*
- Tools—*The ins and outs of Microsoft Word*
- Craft—*Find your voice, hone your craft*
- Commitment—*Cultivate grace under pressure*
- Planning—*Avoid the rush*
- Knowledge—*Know your product*
- Branding—*You're going to have to put yourself out there*
- Realism—*Managing your expectations*
- Trust—*Your Publisher and Editor DO know what they're doing*
- Kindness—*Publishers are people, too.*

# DECISION

## WHAT KIND OF WRITER ARE YOU?

You Have Three Options

- **Hobby** writer?
- **Semi-serious** writer?
- **Writer seeking a career?**

*If you can be honest with yourself as well as your publisher about which you are, you'll not only have more realistic expectations about your writing journey, your publisher will, too. This will lead to a much more harmonious relationship for you both down the road.*



# WISDOM

## WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT AS A PROFESSIONAL AUTHOR?



Find Honest Answers to the Following Questions

- *What is the life of a published author really like?*
- *How does the publisher/author relationship work?*
- *Is hiring an agent the right move for you?*
- *Is there really hope of being signed in New York?*
- *Who are the best publishers?*
- *I'll get an advance, right?*
- *How do royalties work?*
- *How does the publishing process work?*
- *How long does it take to publish a book?*
- *What's involved in professional editing?*
- *How does distribution work?*
- *Will I make the bestseller list?*
- *How big will my first royalty check be?*
- *What's involved in marketing?*
- *Will I do a book signing tour?*

# INTELLIGENCE

## KNOW YOUR INDUSTRY

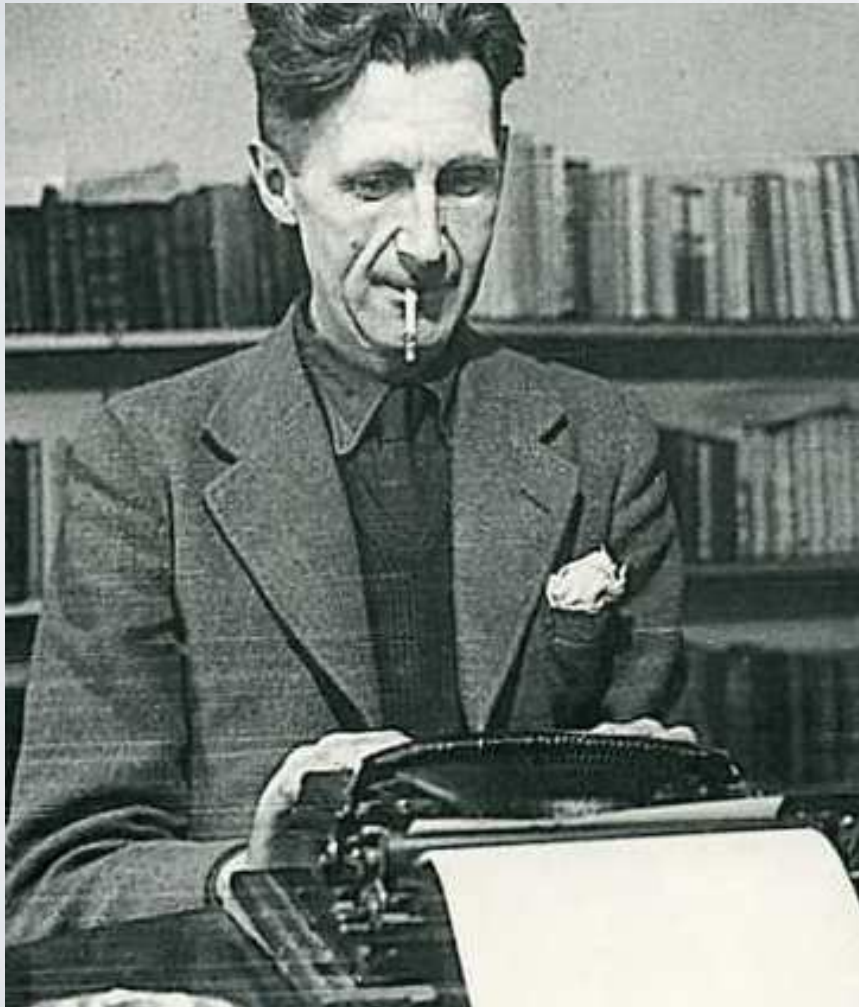
As with any business, market research in publishing is essential for the writer.

- *What is your target market?*
- *Who is your ideal reader?*
- *What is your genre? Your subgenre?*
- *Who are the top authors in your genre?*
- *Is the genre oversaturated?*
- *Has your genre peaked in popularity?*
- *What writing style is standard for your genre?*
- *What is the normal POV for your genre?*
- *How long are most books in your genre?*
- *Are series the norm for your genre?*
- *What can you bring new to the genre?*
- *What are publishers looking for?*



# TOOLS

## THE INS & OUTS OF MICROSOFT WORD



Oghma editors, on average, waste sixty-six minutes per manuscript fixing formatting issues.

- *Hit “Save” right now. You’ll thank me later;*
- *Spellcheck is your friend. Visit early and often;*
- *Tabs are evil. Avoid at all costs;*
- *First-line indents make your layout artist happy;*
- *Master the Track Changes feature;*
- *Learn how to delete comments from your manuscript;*
- *Universal Find & Replace is better than chocolate;*
- *Use date and draft numbers in your file names;*
- *Know the difference between .doc, .docx, pdf, and rtf;*
- *Industry standard formatting includes:*
  - *12-pt Times New Roman font;*
  - *Double spacing;*
  - *1-inch margins on all sides;*

# CRAFT

## FIND YOUR VOICE, HONE YOUR CRAFT

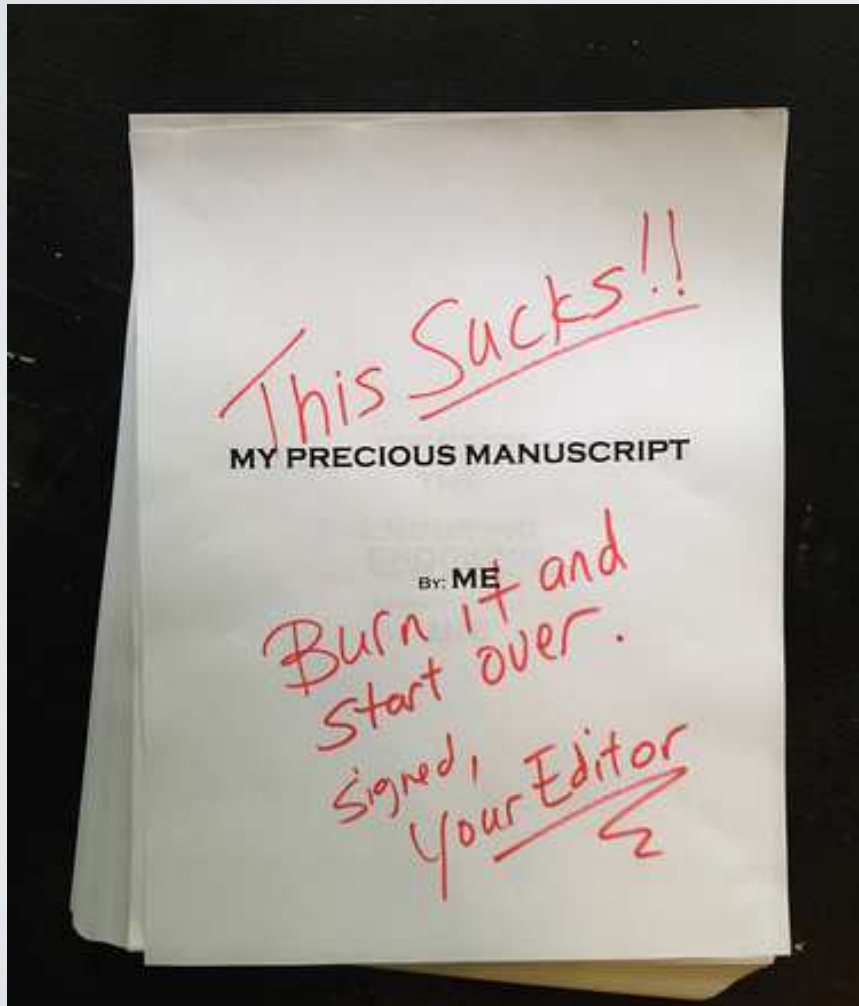
Trust me... there is ALWAYS room for improvement

- *Find a critique group or a writing buddy;*
  - *Be prepared for lots of red ink;*
  - *Listen to what they say;*
- *Read lots of books, in your genre and out;*
- *Buy (or check out) books about writing;*
  - *Stephen King's On Writing;*
  - *On plot;*
  - *On 3-act structure;*
  - *On crafting dialogue;*
  - *On character arcs;*
- *Kill your darlings;*
- *Try out different POVs and tenses;*
- *Keep writing;*
- *Find your voice.*



# COMMITMENT

## CULTIVATE GRACE UNDER PRESSURE



You're going to want to quit.

- *Writing is as much about commitment and mental toughness as it is wordsmithing;*
- *Expect lots of criticism—constructive and otherwise—well before you even get to a publisher;*
- *It WILL BE demoralizing. Don't let it stop you. Harness the criticism to make your book better;*
- *Don't stop writing to edit. Finish the book. Put it away. Come back later and edit with a ruthless eye;*
- *Commit to finishing your books. Set a daily writing goal and stick to it;*
- *Expect your professional editor to tear your work apart all over again;*
- *Consistency over time is nearly as important to your publishing career as quality.*

# PLANNING

## AVOID THE RUSH

*“By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.” —Benjamin Franklin*

- *A career in writing is a long-term investment for both you and your publisher;*
- *In today’s market, few serious publishers consider single-book contracts, especially on unknown authors;*
- *Always know what comes next;*
- *Missed deadlines equal delayed books and/or cancelled contracts;*
- *Be flexible, but always have a short- and long-term plan in mind. This is music to any publisher’s ear.*



# KNOWLEDGE

## KNOW YOUR PRODUCT



*“Know your product better than anyone, know your customer, and have a burning desire to succeed.” —Dave Thomas*

- *Know everything about your book there is to know.*
  - *Story;*
  - *Plot;*
  - *Characters and their arcs;*
  - *Your writing style;*
  - *Potential problems or controversies;*
  - *Well-known comparisons;*
  - *Your market, genre, and reader;*
  - *Length (in words, not pages);*
  - *Follow-ups;*
  - *Dates you can deliver upon;*
- *Craft a two-minute elevator pitch for your book or series. Polish and practice it until it’s second nature.*

# BRANDING

## YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO PUT YOURSELF OUT THERE

*Marketing will ALWAYS be part of the job, whether you like it or not.*

- *Understand that you will eventually need the following:*

- *A professional website;*
- *An author Facebook page;*
- *At least 2 other social media*

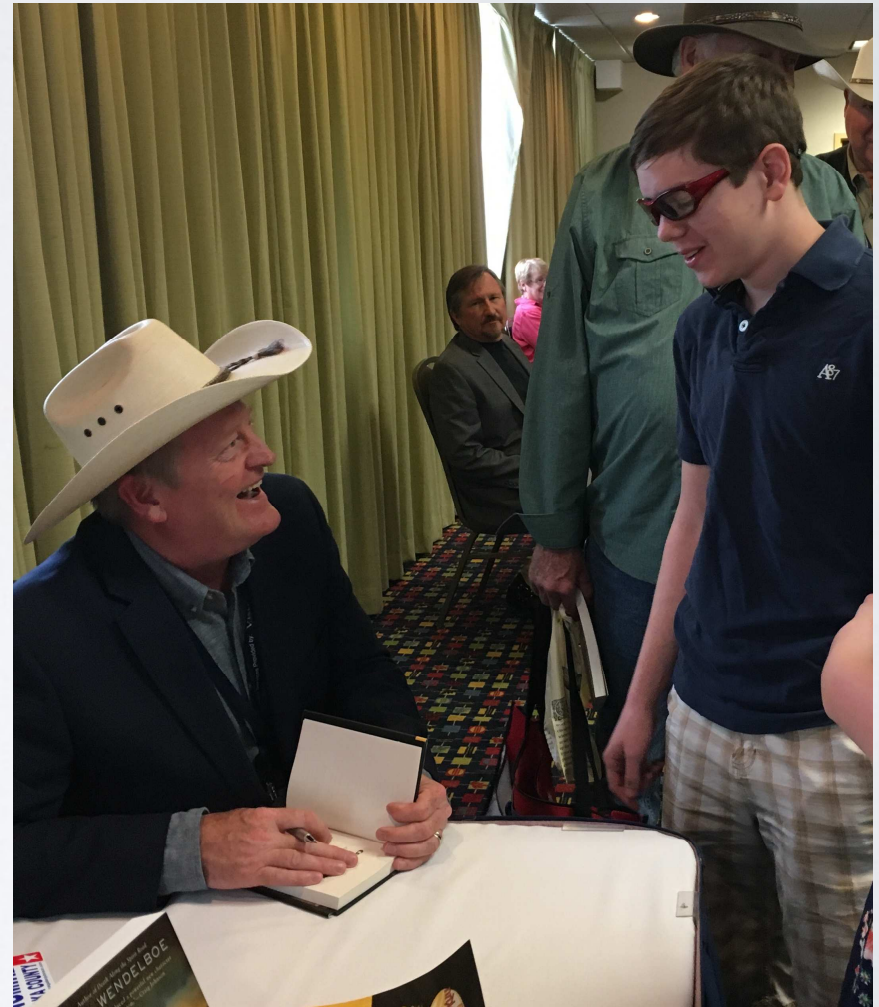
*accounts;*

- *A professional headshot;*
- *An author biography;*
- *E-mail lists;*

- *Potential Readers;*
- *Potential Buyers*

*(Stores/Libraries);*

- *Media;*
- *Influencers;*
- *A professional demeanor;*
  - *In person;*
  - *Online.*



# REALISM

## MANAGE YOUR EXPECTATIONS



Skewed expectations are the bane of the publishing industry.

- *As of last year, the Bureau of Labor Statistics counted 281,300 “writers and authors” in the U.S. (up from 145,900 in 2012). 75% of that number earned less than \$43,130;*
- *A staggering 81% of Americans would like to be an author in the future;*
- *Over a million new or re-released books were published in the US in 2017 (2/3 self-published);*
- *1/3 of American adults didn’t read a book in 2017;*
- *7 out of 10 books published in New York fail to earn back their advances;*
- *99% of writers quit writing before building enough of a fanbase to be noticed and signed by New York;*
- *In 2004, Nielson Bookscan reported that of 1.2 million books tracked, only 25,000—barely more than 2 percent—sold more than 5,000 copies.*

# TRUST

## YOUR PUBLISHER AND EDITOR REALLY DO KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOING

*Just as with parents and children, experience makes a world of difference.*

- *We've published 135 books in 4 years—an average of 34 books a year or almost three books per month;*
- *Our styles, guidelines, and operating procedures have been put in place due to hard-won experience, not arbitrary ways of torturing our authors;*
- *Our overriding goal is to help you succeed; suggestions are solely for the sake of better books and higher sales;*
- *Delays happen for various reasons. In the publishing industry, everything takes time. Don't take it personally, it's an opportunity to make your book that much better.*



# KINDNESS

## PUBLISHERS ARE PEOPLE, TOO

The Golden Rule should apply to us, too.  
No... REALLY.



- *Most small to mid-sized presses can support only a handful of full-time employees, if that. Many of their staff members have day jobs in addition to their publishing duties;*
- *Publishing employees have families, lives, careers, and responsibilities just like you, and life happens;*
- *Sometimes people must work on different schedules;*
- *You and your book are special, but you and it are always one of many in a publisher's queue;*
- *Face-to-face meetings are not always possible;*
- *Most small to mid-sized presses have limited budgets;*
- *Often when you don't hear from your publisher for a while, there's nothing new to report.*

# THE BOTTOM LINE



By the time you take the step of hiring an agent, pitching to a professional publisher, or even self-publishing, you should be in the same place a small business is when it approaches a bank or potential investor for startup or expansion capital. You should have multiple polished products, as well as plans to improve them, market them, hone your craft, expand your platform, and produce more of your product. This approach is not only advantageous to your future as a writer in general, it's also respectful of your potential business partner, and makes you stand out from the crowd. And as with that bank or potential investor, you have to be able to convince someone of why they should take a chance on you and your work. What do you bring to the table? How are you going to improve their business?

In addition, once you're signed with a publisher, following these precepts of professionalism and work ethic will help to ensure a positive, mutually-beneficial long-term relationship with them, built upon respect, knowledge, understanding, and the bonds of shared goals and labor.