

BEN HARRIS'
WINNING
PRODUCTS
A GUIDE

Over 30 years
experience
creating and
publishing magic
in a **WINNING**
WAY!

product a **WINNER.**

Hi there.

*Please enjoy these free
pages from the book.*

Cheers



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Ben Harris
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A GUIDE

Over 30 years
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publishing magic
in a **WINNING**
WAY!

Learn how to make **YOUR** product a **WINNER**.
Right here, right **NOW!**

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by Ben Harris**

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FOREWORD
by
Ran Pink

Ben Harris approaches everything he does with devoted care and passion. Over the years I've discovered that he is very passionate about his family, his guitars, music, his photos of the planets and the stars, creative writing, design, magic and more. He truly is a man of so many talents. Ben has been creating and releasing his own original, beautifully designed magic for over 30 years. His “out of the box” thinking has influenced us all in ways that go beyond his magical teachings.

Our eyes have been drawn to the countless packaging designs he has overseen for the biggest names in magic. I'm willing to bet that at some point in your magical career you've experienced several books, effects or gimmicks from another creator that came in a Ben Harris designed package.

This is a man who understands the key ingredients for creating and releasing a successful product from concept to the shelves. He is an expert on how to create a buzz around a release with his innovative and

practical marketing skills. If only I had this book when I first began releasing my material to the magic world... Ben has been a mentor to me.

Like a Zen Master, he somehow knew that I needed this book right now as I have several concepts brewing and have been debating the value of my ideas, format, the price point, etc... and Ben has set me straight.

EVERYONE who plans on releasing magic products, books, dvds, effects and collectables, NEEDS THIS BOOK RIGHT NOW. Thankfully, you already have it and are on your way to approaching your venture on the right path! It's Ben's care and passion for our magical community that has driven him to write this book in order to elevate the quality of what is released in the magic market.

Here you'll find the recipe for creating a meaningful magic release that will stand the test of time. Ben is sharing his trade secrets here, so pay very close attention.

Ran Pink

California, U.S.A., 2012

INTRODUCTION

Our job is to figure out what they're going to want before they do. I think Henry Ford once said, "If I'd asked customers what they wanted, they would have told me, 'A faster horse!' " People don't know what they want until you show it to them.¹ – Steve Jobs

WINNING PRODUCTS: I've had a few. I began creating, publishing and marketing magic in 1979. I'm still at it thirty three years later. It's been a CAREER.

And, I've done alright. My house and car are owned outright – no mortgages. I indulge in expensive hobbies like collecting rare watches, vintage guitars, valve amplifiers and aged whiskey. I want for nothing. So, if you want to measure things on a materialistic scale, I guess that's relatively successful. On a far more meaningful level, creating magic has taken me around the world three times – introducing me to the most wonderful people, cultures, cuisines and experiences.

1. *Steve Jobs* by Walter Isaacson, 2011.

And that, my friend, is living!

It's been hard, fun, serious work and I've learned a lot over the decades – especially about HOW to get a magic product “out there” in WINNING way. Stuff like: creating demand, interest, and supply. Fitting the components together – making a finely oiled machine. Unfortunately, there is NO set formula ensuring a 100% success rate. I too have had my share of “bombs.” It's par for the course. The wise words:

*“You cannot please all of the people
all of the time,”*

certainly apply here! Experience though, has revealed a useful – but loose – set of guidelines, nuances and strategies. If taken on board, these can GREATLY INCREASE the chance of a product (YOURS) being successful.

In a perfect world you'd be proficient, experienced and fluent in the intricacies of the magical arts. You'd have thorough knowledge and performing skills. You'd be damned good. This learning curve is something that takes about ten years (according to Michael Weber in a recent radio interview). If such an EXPERIENCED magician (YOU) decided to create and release a magic product we could be fairly well assured that it would be

something worthwhile.

Of course, our world is far from perfect and here's a little thought experiment to ponder:

Can you remember thirty products released over the last two years?

If you can't – that's tantamount to admitting you've forgotten (or didn't notice) the other one hundred and seventy “latest and greatest” products from the time-frame. And yes, you calculated correctly! There were 200 plus NEW products released in magic over the last two years! Circa 85% of all magic products released fall off the radar. Not a very good success rate. The figures prove the saying, “Most magic released today is crap!” We don't need any more crap. It's not healthy, it's dysentery.

The book you hold right now is aimed at helping you land YOUR PRODUCT in the winning 15%. We'll do this by examining how the market works and how you can best birth and adapt your product to ensure ORIGINALITY, sales, kudos and profit – WINNING PRODUCTS.

Ben Harris

Brisbane, Australia, 2012





PART ONE

Market and Product Definitions



PART ONE

Market and Product Definitions

Before proceeding, it's important to define exactly what I mean by the words “PRODUCT(S)” and “WINNING.”

THE WORD: PRODUCT

For our purposes the word PRODUCT will refer to a PHYSICAL entity. This is one that needs to be MANUFACTURED and then DELIVERED to the consumer. These are such things as BOOKS, SINGLE TRICKS WITH INSTRUCTION, DVDS, etc. The stuff, that for decades, has lined dealers walls and filled their cabinets. These are the goodies that ARRIVE IN THE MAIL when you order from an on-line dealer. I am NOT including digital downloads and streaming. This book is about PHYSICAL Product.

So, a PRODUCT (Winning or otherwise) is this:

A. Manufactured (Trick, Book, DVD)

B. Delivered (Retail/Wholesale/Direct Mail)

THE WORD: WINNING

In regards a magic product, a WINNING Product is one that makes a DIFFERENCE.

Stop and think about that for a moment.

A WINNING Product pulls at the fabric of its genre, warping it slightly, engaging the industry and creative types – inviting tinkering and further development. It does this by simply being itself, irrespective of any advertising or hype. It will become a SIGNPOST that others will point to in years (or decades) to come. They will cite it as a reference, a starting point for their own ideas. Your product will become part of the fabric. (Consider, for instance, the *Fearson* example on page 101). Obviously, such a product also SELLS very well in order to create the saturation required for this widespread adulation.

So, a WINNING Product does this:

- C. Generates industry/creative MOMENTUM
- D. Becomes a SIGNPOST for citation and creative evolution for YEARS to come
- E. SELLS very well

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It is interesting to note that a WINNING Product has the opportunity to further evolve, becoming a CLASSIC Product. This is achieved when point D. changes to: “Becomes a SIGNPOST for citation and creative evolution for DECADES to come.” Signs of the classics reverberate through dealer's lists and catalogs often long after the inventor has died. Classics become part of our legacy. Create just ONE such effect in your lifetime and you'll be doing well. (Paul Harris's *Solid Deception* is a suitable example. This has morphed over the decades becoming the *Omni Deck* and a myriad other products).

So, let's get YOUR Winning Product *out there...*

OUTWHERE?

Good question. I like the way you think.

If we are going to maximize the WINNINGNESS of your product, we need to OPTIMIZE it for it's intended market place. Thus we should KNOW a little about the great “out there.”

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The “out there” is the MARKET PLACE in its entirety. Your product will not be of interest to everyone, but you'll want to keep its appeal as broad as possible. The broader the appeal, the greater the potential sales.

The make up of the MARKET PLACE has changed considerably since I first started to create and publish decades ago. The market STILL consists of keen hobbyists, serious students, professional performers. But the ratio has changed. The largest group is now MUCH larger due to the complete dumbing down of magic to the street level. The ratio is about:

01% Pro Performers

19% Serious Students

80% Casual /Enthusiastic Hobbyists/Fanboys

What is glaringly DIFFERENT TODAY, compared with way back then, is the way we communicate with each other. Changes in technology have changed the face of HOW we get things done. As an example. Back in the 1980s you'd be waiting by your mail box for an ANNUAL printed catalog or maybe a monthly PRINTED brochure. We'd WAIT for months or YEARS for new books and tricks. It COST a lot of money to publish, print and bind a book. It cost a

FORTUNE to print and mail thousands of catalogs. Everything took SERIOUS effort which meant (for the most part) the WHEAT WAS SORTED FROM THE CHAFF. Editors edited. Publishers and distributors seriously considered the details and worthiness of products in order to decide if they were worth spending the money on. Only the BEST ideas went ahead. In other words, anticipation was usually rewarded with well thought out and well produced end product.

Creators would plan to release product to coincide with annual catalogs (and annual conventions). Miss a deadline and you'd be invisible for a YEAR! Financially, that could spell disaster if you created magic for a living.

TODAY, it's totally different. Desktop publishing, digital printing and printing on demand have changed everything. No longer do you need a typesetter to make your type look tasteful. No longer do you need an editor to tighten prose, organize thoughts, correct typos and so on. No longer do you need a film house to “rip” plates for your printer. You can do it all yourself.

Technology has eliminated all these steps. Now anyone can publish cheaply, easily, and (definitely) indiscriminately! Communication now-a-days is

instant, cheap, far-reaching. You, I, dealers and distributors, can all reach THOUSANDS of customers with a single click of a button. And this is what's happening. NEW PRODUCTS are fed into the system daily, in a totally haphazard and unplanned manner. Everyone is madly scrambling for the latest – ON AN ALMOST WEEKLY BASIS!

The result: ANTICIPATION HAS EVAPORATED.

Here's how the chain of supply works in today's market. There are a couple of world-wide super wholesalers. These guys dominate. Yes, there are smaller, niche wholesalers, but, the general market is dominated by a couple of large distributors.

These guys can sell a THOUSAND pieces of your product INSTANTLY, so it is likely that you may want to do business with them at some point. It is they who supply hundreds of dealers (both bricks and mortar and cyber-dealers) with product. They supply all the basics plus all the LATEST products. An electronic newsletter is sent out every seven to ten days advising all these dealers of the LATEST PRODUCTS. There can be five to seven NEW PRODUCTS thrown at the dealers EVERY WEEK OR SO. These products are then cut and pasted into the DEALER'S own

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newsletters which are emailed to their customers (or posted online). The concerning thing is that “this week’s products” are FORGOTTEN just ONE WEEK LATER. This is when the NEXT newsletter arrives in the in-box. It has been this way for the last few years – speeding up as the pace of communication increases.

YOUR PRODUCT can easily become lost in this cycle. A WINNING PRODUCT can survive it by working the parameters to advantage.

Remember this:

So far as the market is concerned, YOUR product will be relegated to the “searchable index” in approximately TEN DAYS TIME! (So, let's hope the consumer can REMEMBER the name of your product and how to spell it). Right now, the global financial crisis has placed a slight damper on this frantic activity, but expect it to be back to “normal” in due course.

Once more:

You have a ONE TO TWO WEEK WINDOW in which to grab everyone's attention at the business end of the game.

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Now, about YOUR product.

As we have seen, only a small percentage of “latest products” will actually be WINNING PRODUCTS. So, what separates them from the chaff that consists of the balance. ALL THE PRODUCTS, good and bad, WINNING and non-winning share attributes A & B.

These are:

A. Manufactured (Trick, Book, DVD)

B. Delivered (Retail/Wholesale/Mail)

WINNING PRODUCTS also have the following attributes:

C. Generates industry/creative MOMENTUM

D. Becomes a SIGNPOST for citation and creative evolution for YEARS to come

E. SELLS very well

It is these THAT MAKE THE DIFFERENCE.

YOUR product needs to SATISFY requirements C, D, & E in order to MAKE THE DIFFERENCE required to ensure long-term success.

Can it do this? If it can't, then maybe one should ask, "Is this product worth releasing?" The ONLY alternative (if it does not have the characteristics to satisfy points C, D & E) is it will POTENTIALLY become one of the forgotten products very quickly. And, what good is that to anyone?

This, of course, brings us to MOTIVE. That is, WHY do you want to release a magic product? Do you desire to add to our craft, help it evolve, help it grow? Or, do you think you can make a quick buck? It's one or the other, or somewhere in between. Personally, I don't care what YOUR motives are.

If you just want to make a quick buck, that's fine by me. It probably won't be worth the effort, and you'll more than likely fall flat on your face. But if that's your path, so be it. HOWEVER, by making your product a WINNING PRODUCT, it will satisfy requirements C, D & E anyway. A benefit all round. So, go to it. Make a few bucks. SATISFY too, then the market place will let you do it again and again.

If your motive is the former, all the better. Knowing that you are making a difference by contributing genuinely will be of assistance when the first flurry of sales abruptly ends.

For people to be excited about your product it will need to exhibit one of these attributes (or triggers):

1. It's a FAR MORE AMAZING CLIMAX (than normally associated with this trick).
2. It's a FAR BETTER METHOD (compared to what already exists to achieve the particular trick).
3. It's ORIGINAL (either the effect or method (or both) have not appeared previously).
4. It's of HISTORIC importance.

To explain:

(1.) If your trick's CLIMAX is bigger, better, greater or more baffling than normally elicited from the effect in question, then you'll broaden your chances of having a winner. But the increase in IMPACT must be profound, not marginal. An example from the world of stage illusions is J. Pendragon's CLEAR version of the *Sawing A Lady In Half* Illusion. This is an astounding visual step forward to the pre-existing and regular presentations of the illusion. In the Pendragon version, the thin box covering the girl is completely clear, she never leaves your sight. This clarity IMPROVES the

visuals. There appears to be no “wobble room” (excuse the pun). So how can she possibly be divided in two? It's like a whole NEW effect, even though the method actually remains pretty much the same as the regular “*thin*” version.

(2.) If your METHOD for a particular effect is FAR BETTER, and I mean WAY, WAY, BETTER than everyone's current favorite method, then you are going to have the industry talking. It needs to be immediately obvious that YOUR product is an ADVANCE.

You don't need to tell anyone your super-secret method, they can appreciate that you are doing something profoundly different to the norm – just by watching performances, just by observing the details. Method is all about getting from point A to Point B in the most EFFICIENT manner. Your product should be a damned fine example of this philosophy and NOT a minor variation of something already established.

(3.) To be NEW and ORIGINAL, the product must have (either) an EFFECT never seen before or a METHOD never previously used. Such an item will have what's known as high NOVELTY value. In other words, it will pique interest BIG TIME!

A personal example, using one of my own products from 1981, is *Epic Flight*. This was an ORIGINAL application of a scientific principle that had NEVER been used in a magic trick before.

The novel aspect of making a marked key transpose with an unmarked key – through the back of a spectator's own hand – with a NEW SCIENTIFIC METHOD was irresistible ad copy. It also happened to be true. The effect became a best-seller of its day and the method has become (30 years later) an established tool in the magician's arsenal (predominantly in the field of “mentalism”).

(4.) Products of HISTORIC nature are a curious lot. These can be books or DVDs about specific performers, an era in time, a genre. It could be a reproduction of a very old poster or classic text. These types of products will do well in their intended (small) market – the collectors and historians.

Part One Summary

By considering the above we can see that a product – meeting certain criteria – has a greater chance of being successful. We can also see that there is a particular WINDOW when all market forces will coalesce

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behind the product. It will be your aim to meet this window in a creative way – **MAXIMIZING** impact and sales. But firstly, you'll need to get your product **MARKET READY**.





PART TWO

Product Realization



PART TWO

Product Realization

Your product must be “realized” in a format to best represent it. The recent proliferation of “one trick DVDs” (containing just minutes of running time) are an example of BAD realization – shoddy and ill thought out. Remember, DVD was designed as a MASS storage medium. Most of these “one trick” DVDs belong in the 85% of LOSING products dominating the market. This is due partly to poor format choice, but mostly to garbage material. We’ve all seen the shite “shot on my cell phone” examples.

The CORRECT matching of “format to product” will ensure cost-effectiveness at your end and perceived value at the customer’s end.

Let's look at matching up your product with the format best suited. This could be a SINGLE TRICK WITH INSTRUCTIONS, a BOOK, or a DVD. There are many fine points to consider. Your product must walk a tightrope, balancing budget with value for the customer.

It all starts with the PROJECTED RETAIL PRICE.

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This is the price that the end user pays to buy your product at RETAIL. Unless you intend to sell your product yourself (via web promotion, lecturing, or others means) then you'll also have to factor in the WHOLESALE and JOBBER margins.

In fact, even if you never consider selling at wholesale, you MUST factor this in just in case you change your mind later. You cannot jack up the price of a product (to allow for a wholesale cut) because you suddenly get an order for five hundred pieces.

You need to be PREPARED.

So, this is how it works. Imagine your finished product in your mind. Now consider what other products of a similar nature sell for. You should settle on about the same price point.

For the sake of this example, let's consider your product will have a retail price of \$20.00. At this point it could be a single effect with instructions, a book or a DVD, it doesn't matter. What matters is how you must break down the retail price to locate the wholesale, jobber, production and advertising budgets.

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A \$20.00 Product breaks down like this:

Retail – \$20.00

Wholesale – \$12.00

Jobber – \$8.00

Ad Budget – \$2.00

Manufacturing – \$2.00

The RETAIL price (the full \$20) is what the end user pays the dealer (or you) for the product.

The WHOLESAL price (40% off retail) is what dealers pay for your product when buying from a distributor or direct from you.

The JOBBER price (60% off retail) is what the big distributors or wholesalers pay you for your product when ordering a minimum of 144 pieces.

The ADVERTISING BUDGET (10% of the retail value) is what you allow to promote your product. This could be through magazine or internet advertising. You could also defer this part of the cut to a “touring budget.” This is a fund you've set aside to cover travel costs if undertaking a lecture tour or a convention dealership.

MANUFACTURING your product (10% of the retail

value) is the budget you **MUST** adhere to when deciding exactly how you will make **AND PACKAGE** your product. In the case of a \$20.00 product, your unit allocation is \$2.00. You must make \$2.00's worth look like \$20.00's worth of great material.

Assuming you are producing **ONE THOUSAND** pieces of your product, then you will have **NO MORE** to spend than \$2,000.00 to produce and pack the thousand units. You will be prepared to spend another \$2,000.00 on advertising. The **MINIMUM** price you will ever be selling your product for is \$8.00 a unit (the jobber rate). Your **TOTAL COST** will be no more than \$4.00 a unit. Thus, **YOU WILL ALWAYS MAKE 100%** on your investment at the very **MINIMUM**. It's important to understand this breakdown. Follow the basic guidelines and you'll never be caught with your pants down.

More importantly, you'll always be ready to respond to any kind of purchase order (be it retail, wholesale or jobber) in a professional and profitable manner.

ESTABLISHING THE BUDGET for your product is as simple as deciding on an appropriate retail price, calculating 10% of that, and multiplying the result by the quantity you intend to produce.

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Here's another example, this time with a product at a \$30.00 retail price point and a production run of 1000 units:

$\$30.00 \times 10\% = \$3.00 \times 1000 = \$3,000.00$. This is your manufacturing budget. Your advertising budget is an identical amount. So that means your total budget (manufacturing \$3,000.00 + advertising \$3,000.00) is \$6,000.00.

And, an example with a product at a \$10.00 retail price point and a production run of 2000 units:

$\$10.00 \times 10\% = \$1.00 \times 2000 = \$2,000.00$. This is your manufacturing budget. Your advertising budget is an identical amount. So that means your total budget (manufacturing \$2,000.00 + advertising \$2,000.00) is \$4,000.00.

UNDERSTAND: the MORE we produce, the larger our budget. This means we can take advantage of the cost savings that are inherent in larger print runs or production runs. It may cost you \$1,200.00 to print ONE THOUSAND little booklets (unit cost \$1.20 ea). But it may only be \$1800.00 to have TWO THOUSAND produced (unit cost \$0.90 ea). The reason for this is that the hard work has already been

done. The printing plates are already made. The press is already inked, it's just a matter of additional paper at this point.

The more units you initially produce, the cheaper the actual unit price becomes. This applies to almost any field of manufacturing and printing, even DVDs.

THE BEST FORMAT FOR YOU?

Now that you have established a budget to RESTRAIN yourself – 10% of the retail multiplied by the number of units – you can work out how to cost-effectively produce your idea. Assuming our original \$20.00 RETAIL price point, and the subsequent \$2.00 A UNIT MANUFACTURING BUDGET we know:

Your product CANNOT be a hard-bound book of 360 pages with color plates and dustjacket.

Your product COULD be a small saddle-stitched booklet of say, 24 pages.

Your product COULD be a supplied gimmick and sheet of instructions.

Your product COULD be a DVD.

Of course, it could also be a poster, a specially printed deck of cards, or an illusion plan! For the most part though it will either be a trick with a sheet of instructions, a booklet, a book, or a DVD.

Throughout, I shall also discuss the idea of IMPUTING your product. This means to impose certain subtle elements that create an illusion of greater value. If you are in magic for the long haul then this will be of interest to you. Think of how Steve Jobs infused *Apple Inc* products with an illusion of awe. Unpacking an *Apple Inc* product implies the feeling that someone HAS taken care, that in your hands is something truly SPECIAL. (Steve was so fastidious that he even insisted that the INSIDES of his products – the guts that NO ONE EVER SEES – also be immaculately finished).

In a way, imputing is about an artist truly caring: attending the details, honing the already polished bits.

Now, let's examine the common formats in a little more detail.



Products from *Apple Inc.* are always an exciting experience to unpack. They have been “imputed” with visual and tactile detail.



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your complimentary
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"Ben has been creating and releasing his own original, beautifully designed magic for over 30 years. His "out of the box" thinking has influenced us all in ways that go beyond his magical teachings. Our eyes have been drawn to the countless packaging designs he has overseen for the biggest names in magic. I'm willing to bet that at some point in your magical career you've experienced several books, effects or gimmicks from another creator that came in a Ben Harris designed package. This is a man who understands the key ingredients for creating and releasing a successful product from concept to the shelves. He is an expert on how to create a buzz around a release with his innovative and practical marketing skills. If only I had this book when I first began releasing my material to the magic world..."

"The content is so easy to read and filled with valuable information on how to produce a successful product. Even after many years of releasing, I still feel I've learned a lot reading this book."

TITANAS (Greece)

"What a great book. I have never seen this information given anywhere else. I started selling magic in 1991 and I wish I had had access to this information back then - it would have made my life so much easier!"

PETER DUFFIE (Scotland)

"This is something I needed 16 years ago!"

WAYNE ROGERS Chicane Enterprises (New Zealand)



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