

Article AB-102

361 words

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## Beware of Working Titles

by Dan Poynter

Be careful what you make permanent. Working titles are dangerous. They can become too familiar to us while being misleading or meaningless to potential customers.

*Choices, a Teen Woman's Journal for Self-awareness and Personal Planning* was a hot seller and spawned a publishing company as a subsidiary for the Girls Club of Santa Barbara. The company thrived but soon found that *Choices* could not be used in schools unless there was a version for the boys. So the authors, Mindy Bingham, Sandy Stryker and Judy Edmonson, wrote a matching masculine edition.

Working titles ranged from *Choices II*, to *Choices Too*, and even *Son of Choices*. What sounded ridiculous or humorous in the beginning became familiar and sounded fairly good.

Finally the three female authors settled on *Changes* but found that men did not like the proposed title. After discussions with a number of men (including Mindy's father), they agreed to change the title to *Challenges, a Teen Man's Journal for Self-awareness and Personal Planning*. The female authors discovered that while many women want a change, most men do not like change. Men prefer challenges.

<http://www.academicinnovations.com>

The title must be easy to remember and easy to say. It has to grab the attention of the potential buyer and it must project an image the buyer can relate to. Authors and publishers often argue over titles. Authors may be closer to the subject matter and publishers may be closer to the buyers.

*Authors, as a rule, are poor judges of titles and often go for the cute or clever rather than the practical.*

—Nat Bodian, *The Joy of Publishing*

So far *Choices* has sold over one million copies and *Challenges* over a half million. They are used side-by-side in many schools.

A "working title" is for the manuscript, not necessarily for the book.

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