

BY MICHAEL KRAUSS

✉ michael.krauss@mkt-strat.com

## Breaking Through with Thought Leadership Marketing



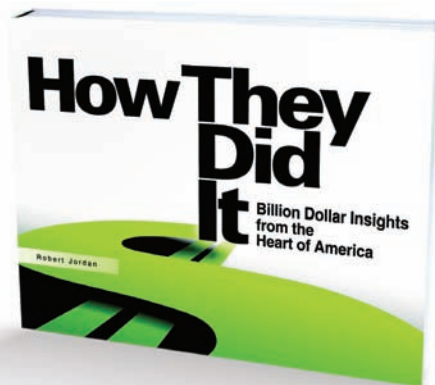
**Michael Krauss** is president of Market Strategy Group based in Chicago. To read past columns, go to [MarketingPower.com/marketingnews](http://MarketingPower.com/marketingnews) and click on "Featured Contributors."

Let's publish a book! It's a good idea, in theory. Books lend thought leadership credibility to their authors. Yet, too often the idea of publishing a book to anchor a marketing program gets set aside. The concentration of effort and barriers seem too daunting.

That wasn't the case for Robert Jordan, author of *How They Did It: Billion Dollar Insights from the Heart of America*, a tome he self-published. It sold only 3,000 copies, but it has established Jordan as an expert on start-up companies, a target audience critical to his business success as CEO of Northbrook, Ill.-based InterimCEO Inc., a job placement firm that gets experienced executives to step into senior roles on a temporary basis. It took Jordan four years to take the book from concept to publication, but he says it was worth the effort.

Jordan is a serial technology entrepreneur. In 1996, he sold his first company, OnlineAccess, a publication that tracked the world of online technology long before many of us heard of the Internet let alone understood its potential, to CMP Media.

Jordan had an idea. He wanted to tell the stories of successful Midwest-based entrepreneurs like Eric Lefkofsky, co-founder of Groupon; Jeff Aronin, founder of Ovation Pharmaceuticals;



Viresh Bhatia, co-founder of InstallShield Software Corp.; Gian Fulgoni, co-founder of comScore; Dick Costolo, founder of FeedBurner (now CEO of Twitter); and Joe Mansueto, founder of Morningstar Inc. There are 45 entrepreneurs profiled in his book.

Jordan figured if he could pull together the stories of executives who built businesses that either scaled to at least \$100 million in revenue, were sold for \$100 million or more, or had initial public offerings valued at \$300

million or more, it would make for a good read. It also would be good for his business.

Aside from InterimCEO, Jordan runs RedFlash, a company that helps entrepreneurial firms launch new products, raise funds and negotiate sales and mergers. The publication of the book enhanced his credibility as an entrepreneur, deal advisor and talent placer.

The process he took from idea to implementation is instructive. Here are the steps he followed:

**Get the idea:** Jordan got the inspiration for the book while paging through a book of famous quotations at the Seattle airport in December 2006. He thought: "What if I could read quotes from company founders? What inspired them? What challenges did they overcome? What advice do they have? It started selfishly," Jordan says. "I wanted to know."

**Test and validate:** Next, Jordan spoke with a group of experts to test and validate the idea. He asked for feedback from people in marketing, publishing and from fellow entrepreneurs. They encouraged him.

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ROBERT JORDAN

**Engage supporters:** Jordan reached out to prospective supporters. "I asked for help from Dow Jones and investment firms William Blair and Goldman Sachs. They jumped in. They helped form the list of 45 companies," he says.

**Hire enthusiastic talent:** He hired a group of university students to do desk research. They were low-cost, energetic and motivated.

**Create an event:** In September 2008, Jordan invited 45 entrepreneurs to attend a luncheon at the Four Seasons hotel in Chicago. He made the event fun, calling it "Milkshake," and, not surprisingly, served milkshakes.

He outsourced the initial drafting of the book to the entrepreneurs by holding small roundtable discussions over lunch. He obtained their permission to record their stories and used facilitators to move discussions along. "I thought we might speedwrite the book," he says.

**Obtain design and writing help:** With the raw stories in hand, Jordan gained help from professional writers, designers and editors. Jordan says the ultimate writing, review and approval for each entrepreneur's chapter was tedious, but crucial. He got each entrepreneur's sign off.

**Publish (yourself if required):** Jordan shopped the concept of the book. He assessed literary agents. He spoke with major publishing houses. He got turned down. He established a publishing brand within his company, RedFlash Press. He published in November 2010.

**Gain distribution:** Jordan didn't accept conventional wisdom. "We were told Barnes & Noble never takes books from self-publishers. We submitted. They said, 'Yes.'"

**Retain a publicist:** Jordan hired a publicist who's helped him land more than 30 media interviews since publication.

**Seek reviews and endorsements:** Marketing guru Seth Godin gave the book its cover quote: "There's hard fought, useful wisdom on every single page. Every one. What a find," Godin wrote.

**Host launch events:** Jordan hosted multiple launch events where he moderated panel discussions with the entrepreneurs from his book.

**Invoke social media:** Jordan set up a Facebook page and has nearly 4,000 followers of the book and his posse of entrepreneurs.

His book won't ever be on *The New York Times* bestseller list, yet Jordan is certain the effort was worth it. The book fostered engagement between his company and his target audience, and it's positioned him as an expert. Plus it was a labor of love. He feels that spreading the word about entrepreneurship is a reward in itself.

"Marketers spend much of their time trying to avoid failing. They think that's a recipe for succeeding. It absolutely, categorically is not," Jordan says. "Learn from these entrepreneurial founders. If you have an idea for a book and a thought leadership marketing plan, go for it." **m**