PUBLISHING A CANADIAN BUSINESS MEMOIR:
A CASE STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

This project report examines the publication of the Canadian business memoir *Straight from the Top* by Robert Milton, CEO of Air Canada, published in 2004 by Greystone Books. Part 1 of the report concerns background issues such as the presence of books by public figures in non-fiction best-seller lists, the requirements when a publishing company works with a public figure and his or her advisers, and the use of a co-author. Part 2 covers the publication of *Straight from the Top*, from acquisition through writing and editing, publication, marketing, and media coverage. It pays particular attention to one of the most significant decisions made, which was to delay the book by a season in order to include complete and current information on a story that was still evolving. Publishing the book was a challenging project that was ultimately successful.

Keywords:

Publishers and publishing -- Canada, Book industries and trade -- Canada -- Case studies, Businessmen -- Canada -- Biography, Air Canada -- Officials and employees -- Biography, Authorship -- Collaboration.
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INTRODUCTION

This project report is a case study of the publication of a Canadian business memoir by a public figure. It examines *Straight from the Top: The Truth About Air Canada*, by Air Canada CEO Robert Milton. The book was published in fall 2004 by Greystone Books/Douglas & McIntyre Publishing Group. This report follows the book’s creation, from original idea to successful publication and marketing. *Straight from the Top* is a book about a prominent figure in Canadian business, a well-known Canada-based company, and a developing national news story. It is also an example of a writing collaboration between a businessman and a professional author. All of these aspects of *Straight from the Top* are analyzed in this report. While the case study approach may not allow complete generalizations of observations to other Canadian business memoirs, it is a useful starting point for a larger analysis of the genre.

Although most relevant to business memoirs, the analyses of *Straight from the Top* reveal aspects of publishing that apply to many books. For example, each book has its challenges, and there are no “easy” books to publish. This is what makes publishing an exciting field to work in—there is a constant need to adapt, strategize, and innovate. Another issue that generally arises with non-fiction publishing is determining when the book’s story is “over”, and in which season a book would most optimally be published.

One can never definitively predict how a book will be received once it is published—how much and what type of media attention it will get, what the reviews will
say, how well it will sell. Each decision from proposal to marketing during the creation of *Straight from the Top* involved several volatile variables, and Greystone attempted to optimize their effects on the outcome.

This project report describes the process of publishing the book in order for readers to gain insight into its particular challenges and successes.
PART 1: BOOKS BY PUBLIC FIGURES AND THE
CHALLENGES THEY POSE TO PUBLISHING
COMPANIES

In this section, I introduce background issues that are pertinent to *Straight from the Top*. The book itself will be discussed in detail in Part 2 of this paper.

**History**

This era of blogging enables us to refocus our understanding of memoirs. Anyone with a computer and Internet access can make public as much of his or her life as he or she desires, and, indeed, this has become quite popular—Technorati, a Web site that tracks blogging trends, reports that in July 2005 there were approximately 14 million blogs on the Internet, of which around 55% were active, and that the number of blogs is doubling about once every five months (Sifry 2005). As well, print-on-demand technology (which allows small, relatively inexpensive print runs to be done on short notice) makes publishing one’s memoirs relatively inexpensive. Since anyone can create a blog, and the barriers to entry for self-publishing are low, what are the strengths of a publishing company? They are the same as for any book—the ability to invest in high-quality editing, design, and physical production of the book; access to distribution channels; the ability to market effectively; and the implied approval of the quality of the book. Recently, in fact, publishers have been scouting authors by reading their blogs, sometimes turning the entries into a book, as in *Salam Pax: The Baghdad Blog*, compiled
from the author’s popular blog, begun in 2002, based on his experiences in Baghdad during the war in Iraq.

What kinds of memoirs are successful in the marketplace? For example, the memoirs that placed on the Publishers Weekly non-fiction best-seller list during the last decade—the 1990s—were written by a mix of public figures/celebrities and people not known to the general public (discussed in further detail below) (Korda 2001). It is easy to infer why the list contains many more well-known people than unknown people—there is already significant interest in these people, which indicates to a publisher that there will be interest in books about them. Besides the appeal to a browsing book-buyer of a recognizable name on the cover, it seems that people are drawn to memoirs of famous people more than to those of average citizens, although such books have had some success (also discussed in further detail below).

Memoir publication has a long history. According to Korda’s 80 Years of Best Sellers: 1895–1975, memoirs appeared on the Publishers Weekly non-fiction best-seller lists beginning in the second decade of the 20th century, the decade in which the first non-fiction lists were published (Hackett and Burke 1977).

Over the course of the twentieth century, while the fiction best-seller lists were dominated by established writers, the non-fiction best-seller lists were dominated by public figures; likewise, public figures authored most of the memoirs on the list. Speaking of the lists in the 1980s, Michael Korda writes,

…the [fiction] bestseller list began to resemble a club that was hard to break into…For 1988, only one of the fifteen novels on the list was by a newcomer and unknown. As for the nonfiction list, it was becoming
increasingly celebrity driven: Elizabeth Taylor, George Burns, Michael Jackson, Lee Iacocca, Donald Trump. (172)

Similarly,

The nonfiction list [in 1992]...was still dominated by celebrities—Rush Limbaugh, General Norman Schwarzkopf, Sam Walton, Madonna, Kathie Lee Gifford... (197)

In both fiction and non-fiction, “brand-name” authors give publishers a sense of security about a book’s chance of success in the marketplace. This is doubly true in the case of memoirs, since the author’s celebrity attracts readers’ attention and the person’s life itself, which is the subject of the book, also attracts attention. In many cases, the person’s life has received coverage from media sources.

Thus, as one would expect, the best-seller lists include very few “nobody” memoirs among the many celebrity memoirs. The Publishers Weekly lists from the 1990s include memoirs by sports stars (Bo Jackson, Michael Jordan, Ekaterina Gordeeva), musicians (Dolly Parton, Jimmy Buffett, Barbara Mandrell), military figures (Norman Schwarzkopf, Oliver North), religious leaders (Pope John Paul II, Billy Graham), media figures (Howard Stern, Walter Kronkite, Charles Kuralt), and politicians and their relatives (Ronald Reagan, Barbara Bush, Colin Powell). Scattered among them are a few memoirs by non-celebrities: Frank McCourt (Angela’s Ashes; ’Tis), Jon Krakauer (Into Thin Air), and Monty Roberts (The Man Who Listens to Horses). While it is impossible to infer a cause-and-effect relationship from this kind of data, it is evident that the majority of memoirs reaching the top of the best-seller lists in recent decades are (purportedly) written by celebrities. Ghost authors frequently are the actual authors.
In the 1980s, two best-selling business memoirs made the US best-seller list: *Iacocca: An Autobiography*, by Lee Iacocca (number 1 best-seller of both 1984 and 1985) and *Trump: The Art of the Deal*, by Donald Trump. Only one memoir by a business figure was a best-seller in the 1990s: *Sam Walton: Made in America*, by the founder of Wal-Mart. This does not mean that few business memoirs are published, or that those that are published perform poorly; it indicates that few of these books reach the top of the lists. While people with a general interest in business are likely to purchase a business memoir, it may take a spectacular event, such as the Enron collapse (described in the best-seller *The Smartest Guys in the Room*), or an easily recognized name for readers in general to show significant interest. In other words, unless they have essentially transformed themselves into entertainment stars (e.g., Donald Trump), business figures are less likely to attract attention from book buyers, and their memoirs are less likely to reach the top of best-seller lists.

**The decision to publish the memoir of a public figure**

For book publishers, acquisitions are a key aspect of business. A book that is valuable monetarily, both in its frontlist season (the season in which it is first published) and afterwards as a backlist title that continues to sell, is an asset to the company. Frontlist and backlist titles taken together form an identity for the publishing company within the industry, and in some cases for the public (for instance, brands such as Penguin and Harlequin). As well, the publisher’s list attracts new authors and their books to the house. For all of these reasons, acquiring the right books is essential to a company’s success.
For publishers that publish non-fiction, acquisitions are a tricky business. While a work of fiction may arrive at the publishing company (via an agent, contacts, or the slush pile) as a complete manuscript, non-fiction books are often not written before being proposed to a publisher; therefore, the first glimpse of a work of non-fiction is often a brief proposal, table of contents, sample chapter, and testimony or evidence as to the writer’s skills and experience. The publisher is then faced with the task of evaluating a manuscript that does not yet exist using the materials at hand. Sometimes, the process is partially reversed and someone from within the publishing house proposes an idea to a prospective author. Although in this scenario the publisher is involved in creating the concept of the book, predicting how the author will execute the concept remains difficult. Acquisitions are an investment decision for the company and, like stocks, some books pay off while others provide little return or even become a burden.

When evaluating proposals that are submitted or evaluating ideas proposed by someone from within the publishing house itself, certain things are considered. An evaluation is likely to include some of the following:

1) Quality of the concept

2) Quality of the author’s writing

3) Marketability/sales potential of the book

4) Suitability of the book to the list in terms of genre

5) Timing
6) Marketability of the author

7) Ability of the company to successfully execute the required publishing process

(Flight, September and December 2004)

Of particular concern when considering a book by a public figure is how the book will “age”, since the person’s level of prominence may change over time.

...there's the question of backlistability, which celebrity autobios rarely have. With this kind of book, the first few months are the thing; like the TV shows and movies the authors come from, if they don't open well, they end up virtually invisible within months. And even if they do succeed at first, the paperbacks usually have short shelf lives. (Nelson 2005)

In addition, events may change the public’s perception of a celebrity figure. For example, business figures such as Kenneth Lay (former Enron Corporation CEO) and Conrad Black (former Hollinger International CEO) were transformed from industry leaders (and even heroes) into villains. While a negative shift in public perception of a celebrity author may increase general awareness of the person, a backlist title singing his praises, or even telling his story in an even-handed manner, will likely perform poorly against newer books exposing his faults or describing his downfall.

If a proposal or idea is strong on all of the above counts, the acquisition decision is likely to be an easy one. However, one or more of the above may be less than ideal. In this case, the strengths of the project are weighed against its challenges, and the company makes a strategic decision about whether or not to proceed with publishing the book.
Compensating for lack of writing experience

Working in the book publishing industry, one becomes increasingly aware, often at unrelated social events, that many members of the general public have ideas for books. While publishers could potentially be interested in some of these people's ideas, most of these ideas will never reach the proposal stage. Outside of exceptional cases like the Chicken Soup for the Soul series, which actively solicits contributions from inexperienced writers, and publishers that specialize in first novels who necessarily seek out first-timers, publishers prefer to work with veterans rather than beginners.

In non-fiction book publishing, authors are often writers by profession, whether they are journalists, academics, or full-time book authors. The benefits of acquiring a book by this type of person are clear: the person's writing is likely to be strong, and she is likely to be familiar with the publishing process (whether through newspaper, magazine, or book industry experience). This is often the type of person who approaches a publishing company with a proposal, or who is approached by the company.

Another type of prospective non-fiction author, attractive not for his or her writing experience but for other reasons, is the public figure. While some, such as Bill Clinton, undertake writing a book themselves, many public figures have insufficient writing experience or ability. This challenge can be addressed, however, either at the editing stage by allotting extra time, or at the writing stage, with a ghostwriter/co-author (in the past, “ghostwriter” implied that the participation of a co-author was kept secret and not publicly acknowledged, while today, the two terms are often used interchangeably). Recent co-written books by Canadian public figures include the
following: *Straight from the Heart*, by Jean Chrétien; *All in Good Time*, by Brian Tobin; *Worth Fighting For* by Sheila Copps; and *Shake Hands With the Devil*, by Roméo Dallaire. Pairing a public figure with a co-author allows him or her to “write” a book and make what he or she has to say public in a way that would otherwise be impossible.

Like every book idea, the possibility of publishing a co-written book by a public figure must be evaluated by weighing its strengths and challenges. Generally, the strength of this kind of book is the high sales potential implied by the strong marketability of the author. As discussed above, proper timing of the book’s release is key to maximizing the effects of the author’s celebrity. Central to achieving this goal, the book’s concept must exploit the context surrounding its publication and therefore include recent newsworthy events. The quality of the public figure’s writing is likely to be weak relative to that of a professional writer. Pairing the public figure with a professional writer, who will serve as co-author, may address this challenge. Suitability of the book for the company’s list is often associated with the company’s ability to execute the project: past experience provides strength in executing similar projects, and the presence of similar books will build the strength of a genre within the company’s list.

**Working with advisers**

Substantial public figures have an entourage of advisers that manages the discourse surrounding the public figure. Their job is to ensure that the public figure remains credible and likeable, and appears competent, not just for reasons of ego but for the financial interests of the company, institution, or movement they direct. Working on a book with a public figure means listening to his or her advisers’ input, and taking
seriously their concern for the person’s career and image, as well as the well-being of the organization he or she represents.

Publishers are accustomed to working with authors, some of whom are concerned with public image and reputation, but working with the advisers of a public figure who is not a writer ushers in a different set of issues. Editors and co-authors are likely to be unaware of delicate issues surrounding the public figure’s work and life. Conversely, advisers are likely to be blind to many requirements of the publishing process. Including advisers in the process adds more people and provides greater opportunity for miscommunication and disagreement. However, advisers can also be helpful. They act as additional sets of eyes scrutinizing the manuscript for accuracy and completeness, and this can be a great help to the author, editor, and publishing company. With a good working relationship between the publisher and the advisers, the advisers may bring significant resources to the project and effectively become unpaid staff dedicated to the book.

**Working with the public figure’s schedule**

One of the major challenges that must be anticipated by a publishing company working with a public figure who has a time-consuming career is working around that person’s schedule. While the publisher may draw up timelines and the public figure may agree to meet deadlines, factors can stand in the way of meeting those deadlines. The public figure’s other commitments may take precedence over keeping to the book’s production schedule. As well, events taking place may put the story in play, making completion of the manuscript difficult since the story is still evolving.
Delays to the publication schedule can have serious consequences for the success of the book: starting with that season’s catalogues, the publisher promotes the book using a certain publication date on which booksellers will start selling the book. If the book is late, these plans will be disrupted. Planned advertising and publication of excerpts in magazines or newspapers will have to be rescheduled, and possibly renegotiated. Events scheduled around the book, such as an author tour, readings, and interviews, will also be put in jeopardy. Once the contract has been signed and the advance paid, money and time have been committed and cash-flow problems may result if the book falls behind schedule. The longer a book remains unpublished, the longer the publisher’s cash is tied up and prevented from being used on new projects.

In general, publishers need to keep abreast of potential scheduling difficulties and be willing to adjust to changes that may come up.

Managing resources

Every publishing project requires a certain amount of resources to complete, and the publisher must bear the cost of these resources. Costs include the author’s advance; editing, copyediting, and proofreading; design; paper, printing, and binding; and marketing.

The potential rewards of undertaking a project with a public figure are such that publishers are willing to bear the cost of devoting extra resources to it: time spent discussing the project with the author, co-author, and the author’s advisers; the cost of engaging a co-author; costs of delays in the schedule; and costs associated with changes to the manuscript that may be necessary at various stages in the project. There should be
a willingness to be flexible in all parts of the publishing company, a willingness to accommodate the author, and a willingness to adjust schedules if necessary.

Ideally, the publisher will be able to manage resources effectively, adjusting to scheduling difficulties the public figure may have, and successfully publish a high-quality book on time.

**Summary**

When considering undertaking a publishing project involving a public figure, a publisher must take into account some potential strengths and challenges that are not present with all books. In general, the publisher will have to allot extra resources to the project and be flexible with regards to the public figure’s schedule and needs. Books written by public figures are challenging collaborations between a publishing house, a public figure and his or her organization, and often a co-author. Such books offer increased risk as well as potential reward.
PART 2: PUBLISHING STRAIGHT FROM THE TOP

This section is a description and discussion of the publication of Straight from the Top.
The publication of Straight from the Top provides a real-life high-stakes example of publishing a Canadian business memoir. As an assistant to the book’s editor throughout the project, I observed much of the publishing process first-hand. My observations are supplemented by interviews with key figures at Greystone Books/Douglas & McIntyre, archived materials related to the publication of the book, and media coverage of the book. Here, the publishing process is analyzed in light of the more general concepts outlined in Part 1.

Brief history of Greystone Books

The Western Producer, a newspaper located in Saskatoon and serving farmers in the Canadian Prairies, began publishing books for a similar audience in 1954. Its book-publishing program continued to develop, with the establishment of Western Producer Prairie Books as an independent department within the newspaper in 1975. It continued as such until 1991, when its assets were sold to the well-established Vancouver publishing company Douglas & McIntyre Limited (now Douglas & McIntyre Publishing Group). Douglas & McIntyre rebranded Western Producer Prairie Books as an imprint called Greystone Books. Although it had changed names and owners, Greystone Books maintained the rights to the Western Producer Prairie Books list and also remained under
the direction of publisher Rob Sanders, who had run Western Producer Prairie Books since 1975 (University of Regina 1994, 2002).

At the time of the writing of this paper, Greystone Books is approaching its fifteenth year of existence. It is a small imprint, with three employees in-house: Rob Sanders (Publisher), Nancy Flight (Associate Publisher), and a publisher’s assistant. Greystone shares office space with its parent company, Douglas & McIntyre Publishing Group. It also shares in-house design, production, sales, marketing, and financial departments. The editorial work done by Nancy Flight is supplemented by out-of-house freelancers.

Greystone publishes approximately twenty books per year. In the seasons fall 2004 and spring 2005 together, the frontlist comprised twenty-one books; of these, eleven were originated by Greystone, seven were new-format reprints or new editions, and three were buy-ins from other publishers. In spring 2005, Greystone had approximately 260 books in print (Greystone Books, Fall 2004 and Spring 2005).

Although Greystone Books’ list has diverged from that of Western Producer Prairie Books, it is easy to see Western Producer Prairie Books’ influence. The latter’s purpose was “...to publish books that would contribute to the enjoyment and enlightenment of western Canadian farmers, to preserve a record of western tradition and history, and to encourage western writers” (University of Regina 1994, 2002). While Greystone does not focus on farming or the Prairies, its genre strengths include “adult non-fiction in the areas of natural history, natural science and environmental issues” in addition to “popular culture, health, sports and personal memoir” (Greystone Books Web
Additionally, Greystone has continued to publish successful Prairie-themed books that cater to central Canada. In keeping with the themes of nature and the environment, Greystone has built an ongoing co-publishing relationship with the David Suzuki Foundation, publishing books by a number of different authors, including Suzuki himself. Greystone sells its books internationally, as well as selling foreign rights to many of its books.

Maintaining a link to its Prairie heritage, Greystone has successfully kept its appeal east of the Rockies while building a strong West Coast foundation with authors such as Suzuki. As a national science icon, Suzuki is an example of Greystone’s reach across the country with primarily non-fiction titles that are of interest to readers from coast to coast. Indeed, it is this general appeal that allows Greystone to sell many of its books (or rights to its books) internationally.

From its roots as a Prairie publisher to its present-day West Coast imprint incarnation, Greystone Books has remained small but prolific.

Proposing the book

Robert Milton, currently Chairman, President, and CEO of ACE Aviation Holdings Inc., the parent company of Air Canada, and Chairman of the airline, was formerly President and CEO of Air Canada. An American who grew up in various cities around the world (Brussels, Hong Kong, Singapore, London, and others), he became interested in the airline industry at a young age and studied Industrial Management at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Moving up the ranks at Air Canada quickly, he was given a “Canada’s Top 40 Under 40” award, which recognizes successful young business executives (Air
Heading Air Canada, a national symbol and Canada’s only national airline after the demise of Canadian Airlines, during a turbulent decade for the industry, Milton has often spoken publicly on behalf of the airline and has been a controversial and often criticized figure.

In 1995, Rob Sanders spoke with Robert Milton on the telephone. Sanders had made a customer service complaint to the airline, and Milton (who at the time was Senior Vice President, Marketing and In-Flight Service, at Air Canada) personally responded to it. Through the course of that conversation, Sanders realized Milton was an interesting person with an interesting story to tell.

Sanders later saw the potential for a book that revealed the “untold” story and provided an “insider’s view” of Air Canada. Because Air Canada is Canada’s national airline, and one of only a few that operate in this vast country, it is an integral part of Canadian travel and many Canadians feel they have a personal stake in how the company fares; in general, there is a lot of interest in the trials and tribulations of the airline. Air Canada’s presence in Canadians’ collective unconscious and the continuing press the airline receives provide instant marketability for a book about the airline.

Still, the success of such a book is difficult to predict when the proposed author is such a controversial public figure. While Milton was viewed as an industry saviour by some, he was extremely disliked by others. According to a 2003 article in Quill & Quire on Brian Mulroney’s signing of a deal to write his autobiography for McClelland and Stewart,
Since Mulroney is hardly the most beloved of recent prime ministers, the size of the audience for his autobiography is uncertain. But [president and publisher Douglas] Gibson cites his lengthy tenure in office as a key element of the book’s potential appeal. “He affected the lives of generations of Canadians,” says Gibson, “and yet he has never revealed his side of the story.” According to Gibson, Mulroney wants to tell “his account of how he, the prime minister, saw things unfold from the centre of it all.” (Treleaven 2003)

Gibson’s predictions about Mulroney’s memoirs (due out in fall 2006) echo Greystone’s hope that although Milton was a controversial figure, his book would appeal to Canadians since it would reveal the untold story of someone who has had a significant impact on the lives of Canadians.

However, the risks of publishing a book by a controversial and possibly disliked figure are ever-present, expressed in a letter to the editor printed in the *Globe and Mail* in April 2005:

No wonder Canadian publishers keep going down the tube—they produce books no one would want to read. I expect Key Porter will be the next casualty, having agreed to print Paul Cellucci’s memoir...Canadians have waited in a state of anxious agitation for years to see the back of this abrasive ambassadorial big-mouth. Why would anyone in Canada want to support Mr. Cellucci by purchasing a bound collection of his neo-conservative lunch-club ramblings? (Sexsmith 2005)

What is perhaps missed by the author of the above is that disliked figures can be of intense interest to the public. Villain, saint, or something in between, Milton is the head of an organization to which almost all Canadians feel a connection. Who hasn’t run through Pearson to make a connection, flown to Montreal to visit a dying relative, come home from abroad to the welcoming First Nations sculptures of YVR, had their luggage accidentally re-routed to Whitehorse, or experienced some other emotionally charged
incident involving Air Canada? In making the acquisition decision, Greystone had to weigh the inherent interest in Air Canada and its leader against the potential for Canadians to shun books by controversial American ambassadors and executives of Canadian airlines alike.

One factor that affects the appeal of someone like Milton as an author is whether people want to read a book by an “insider” or “expert”. On the surface, a book by a major player in the events being discussed would seem to provide readers with information and insight unavailable from any other source. However, an “insider”, particularly one who is not well liked by the public, may easily be labelled “biased”. Books not written by the person in question often actively advertise themselves as “unofficial” accounts, and their appeal is that it is assumed the authors have nothing to hide when telling the “whole” story. Mulroney’s “official” memoirs have recently been pre-empted by a year by Peter C. Newman’s *The Secret Mulroney Tapes*, which has made quite a splash in the media; the appeal lies within the subtitle: *Unguarded Confessions of a Prime Minister*. As an “official” book about Air Canada, *Straight from the Top* is in competition with “unofficial” accounts of the airline’s recent history. For example, a book about Air Canada’s troubles by Keith McArthur, a *Globe and Mail* business reporter, published in March 2004, might be viewed by potential readers as a less biased account than Milton’s book. It is up to the marketing department to promote the strengths of an “official” insider’s account such as *Straight from the Top*.

Sensing Milton’s strong potential as an author, Sanders began to pursue Milton, first meeting with him and his advisers in April 2001. Over the course of subsequent meetings and correspondence, Sanders proposed some book ideas to them. The idea they
agreed on was for Milton to tell an insider’s story of Air Canada’s acquisition of Canadian Airlines (in December 1999), as well as the story of Milton’s involvement in the airline industry. But the concept expanded because of events that transpired: the severe disruption of the airline industry following September 11, 2001; further damage to the airline industry due to (partially air-travel spread) Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreaks in spring 2003, which included a large outbreak in Toronto, one of Air Canada’s hubs; and Air Canada’s filing under the CCAA (Companies’ Creditors Arrangement Act), a form of bankruptcy protection for Canadian companies, in April 2003. This series of rapidly unfolding events quickly made the acquisition of Canadian Airlines seem out of date and relatively insignificant. The concept of the book evolved into a more general memoir of Milton’s career progression and his time at Air Canada through a number of significant events for the airline and for the industry.

Engaging a co-author and signing the contract

There are those who have a story to tell—a good story, worth publishing, and maybe even bound to make a few bucks. And there are those who know how to tell a good story. Sometimes the two converge. Often they don’t. Thus is born the ghostwriter. (Dwyer 2005)

Because Milton was extremely busy in his role as CEO of Air Canada and was not a writer by profession, Milton and Sanders decided that another person would write the book. Greystone came up with a list of potential co-authors and discussed them with Milton and his advisers. John Lawrence Reynolds was chosen for his experience as a co-author, as well his experience with business- and biography-writing. He is the author of Free Rider: How a Bay Street Whiz Kid Stole and Spent $20 Million, which won the National Business Book Award, and the co-author of Brian Tobin’s autobiography, All in
Good Time (Greystone Books Web site 2005). In addition to his experience, Reynolds lives in Ontario, so he was reasonably close to Milton in Montreal, making distance and time zones less of an obstacle for conducting interviews. It was decided that Reynolds would be acknowledged on the cover of the book, unlike a deep ghostwriter, whose existence is not revealed to the public. According to an article in Canadian Business, “...Greystone insisted from the start that Reynolds’ work be acknowledged, because he had recently won a National Business Book Award for Free Rider” (Dwyer 2005).

Milton and Reynolds signed a contract with Greystone Books on June 12, 2003. The delivery date of the manuscript was September 30, 2003, for publication in June 2004. This three-and-a-half month period in which the manuscript was to be written was shorter than the routine six-month deadline Greystone authors commonly write to, so that the book would be ready by the publication date (Flight, personal interview, December 2004). The eight-month time period from manuscript submission to publication was average.

Another significant aspect of the contract was that Milton chose to donate his royalties from the book to Dreams Take Flight, a children’s charity run by Air Canada employees. Aside from being a generous act of charity, it could also have a positive effect on the marketability of the book. Potential readers would have the added bonus of donating to charity when purchasing the book, and people who had a negative view of Milton could still buy the book out of interest while avoiding lining his pockets.
Initiation of and difficulties during the writing process

Reynolds was to write the book from information gathered through interviews with Milton and access to Air Canada file materials. During summer 2003, Reynolds travelled to Air Canada headquarters in Montreal a number of times to interview Milton. The interviews were often conducted on the go, whenever Milton could spare a few minutes with Reynolds.

Prior to the signing of the book contract, Air Canada was granted creditor protection (CCAA) on April 1, 2003, allowing it to begin restructuring in order to become profitable again. Summer 2003 saw several cost-cutting measures at Air Canada, including large job cuts. Despite these actions, the airline continued to record deep financial losses. Through all this, the process of writing Straight from the Top moved forward, with Milton and Reynolds making progress on the manuscript despite the constraints on Milton’s time. The first draft Greystone received was the untitled “Draft 1.1”, dated August 25, 2003. This draft was reviewed by Rob Sanders and Nancy Flight, and comments were given to Reynolds. This was followed by “Draft 1.2” entitled “Flight Plan” on September 29, 2003.

Sanders and Flight discussed the draft, and Flight gathered their feedback into a letter. In the letter to Reynolds, dated October 9, 2004, Flight suggested organizing the manuscript chronologically rather than both chronologically and thematically, as it was in the draft in question. She also asked for more factual material about a number of events in the airline’s recent history and the inclusion of some additional topics. Discussions continued between Flight and Reynolds, and there was a delay while Reynolds waited for
Milton to become available for an interview, which took place on October 30. Reynolds met with Milton a number of times, revising the manuscript each time. “Draft 2.0: Clearing the Air” is dated October 23, and “Draft 2.1: Straight from the Top”, dated November 21, 2003, included the first appearance of what would be the eventual title of the book.

As noted above, during the time Reynolds was researching and writing the manuscript, Air Canada was encountering serious financial troubles, and Milton had little time to spend on the book. As well, the book’s content was, in a sense, a moving target—When would the story be complete? Where would the book end? Air Canada was under CCAA and was engaging in various types of restructuring and cost reduction. In December 2003, for example, Victor Li’s Trinity Time Investments and Cerberus Capital Management emerged as possible investors in the troubled airline. Air Canada’s story remained incomplete at the beginning of 2004, with Trinity Time Investments walking away from the table and CCAA being extended once again. Air Canada’s situation was changing, and there was concern that by the time the book came out, it would be out of date and tell an incomplete story.

“Draft 2.2: Straight from the Top”, dated January 5, 2004, was submitted to Flight. This was, in effect, the full manuscript that had had a delivery date of September 30.

**Input of advisers and legal reading**

Starting with the proposal stage, a number of Robert Milton’s associates at Air Canada were involved in the process of creating *Straight from the Top*. As it would contain a large amount of information about the airline, some of it previously not publicly
available, their involvement was necessary to protect Air Canada’s interests. The advisers were also necessary for doing work on the Air Canada side that Milton could not do himself. It would hardly have been efficient for Air Canada’s CEO to spend his time rooting through old files and cross-referencing dates.

One senior adviser, Vice-President Duncan Dee, was present at the first meetings between Sanders and Milton. Subsequently both he and Milton received and made comments on outlines and drafts by Reynolds. In later stages, Dee and another member of Milton’s team, Senior Director of Corporate Communication Priscille LeBlanc, received copies of drafts and submitted comments to Greystone. There were clear advantages to their involvement in the project. Their comments added another level of rigour, and they improved the clarity of certain events recounted in the book. Essentially, they provided a fact-checking loop free of charge to Greystone. However, there were times when the involvement of so many people introduced delays into the publishing process.

Aside from maintaining the accuracy of the events described, it was also the advisers’ job to monitor Air Canada’s and Milton’s portrayal in the book. This was because the potential existed for a careless passage to create a public-relations disaster. On several occasions, the advisers expressed concern about how Milton came across in certain passages of the book and suggested changes. Although one might think Greystone would be disappointed to lose pieces of interesting content, that concern was far outweighed by the need to maintain a collaboration with Air Canada that would result in a successful outcome for both the publisher and the airline.
As with many books, and especially one of this nature, *Straight from the Top* was subject to a legal reading in order to protect Greystone and the author. Legal readings are meant to anticipate any legal challenges that might result from a book and attempt to prevent them. Underlining the added risks of publishing books that may adversely affect well-funded, highly protective organizations, complaints were filed by the Air Canada Pilots Association (ACPA) and three of its members a few months after the book's publication, in February 2005, with the Canadian Industrial Relations Board about the portrayal of ACPA members in the book (Sorensen 2005). One of the members' complaints was dropped in June 2005, while the others remain active (Jang 2005). Milton comments on so many people and companies in the book, in a sense it is a testament to the rigour of the editorial process that no other complaints have been made, and that those that have been made have so far been unsuccessful.

**Delay of the book to the next season**

Nancy Flight began doing the substantive edit on the manuscript in January 2004 and completed it in the first week of February. Meanwhile, Reynolds continued to add information to the manuscript from conversations with Milton about recent events at the airline.

Deadlines in the schedule for publication in June were fast approaching. In the first two weeks of February, the decision was made to delay the book’s publication until September. (In the middle of August, the release date was again changed to October 30.) Delaying publication from the spring to the fall would give Milton and Reynolds more time to complete the manuscript and allow the story of Air Canada to be told in a more
complete way. The airline would be in the news in the fall because CCAA had been extended to September 30, and the end of CCAA seemed like a natural conclusion to the book. With fall publication, publicity for the book would piggyback on media coverage of the end of Air Canada’s CCAA protection. Milton would be able to tour in the fall, while there was concern about whether he would have time to promote the book in June, in the middle of restructuring and negotiations with investors. As well, fall is a bigger book-buying season than spring, so the sales potential of the book would be greater.

There were concerns, however, about the book coming out in the fall. The fall market is more crowded, especially for biographies and memoirs. It was possible there would be overexposure of Air Canada and Milton in the news by the fall, as well as bad feeling towards him because of cost-cutting measures and restructuring in which many Air Canada employees would lose their jobs. Also, if the company did not emerge from CCAA, it would be difficult for Milton to enthusiastically promote the book after the company’s collapse.

A delay in publication would also have an effect on publication of the book in French—world French-language rights had been sold by Greystone to Éditions Libre Expression, an imprint of Quebecor Media. Originally, Libre Expression had planned to publish the French version of the book in June 2004, simultaneously with Greystone’s English version. When publication of the English version was moved to fall 2004, they too planned to publish in the fall. But because the manuscript was not finalized until the end of August, Libre Expression was unable to translate and publish the book for the October 30 publication date. The company eventually published the French translation, Du haut des airs: la vérité sur Air Canada, in August 2005. It is unfortunate that the two
versions could not appear simultaneously: Air Canada’s headquarters is in Montreal, a bilingual city, and Air Canada’s staff includes both anglophones and francophones.

Overall, although Greystone’s decision to alter the publication date of *Straight from the Top* was not without disadvantages, a fall publication date had more strategic advantages than the original spring publication date.

**Changes to the manuscript and effects on the publishing process**

In February, after Nancy Flight’s substantive edit was finished, the manuscript was sent to Reynolds and Milton. Reynolds made some minor changes in consultation with Flight in March. During April, Reynolds worked on incorporating changes from Milton and his advisers. During much of April and May, Milton and Reynolds made various attempts to arrange time to work on the manuscript, but these were frequently prevented by Milton’s responsibilities at the airline.

At the end of May, Milton responded to Reynolds with extensive changes to the unedited version of the manuscript (the version Reynolds had submitted on January 5, 2004). In the meantime, Reynolds had also made his own additional changes, which were not highlighted in any way. Reynolds then incorporated Milton’s changes to the unedited manuscript into the electronic version of the edited manuscript using a Microsoft Word function called “Compare and Merge Documents.” While Reynolds’s actions were intended to be helpful, this created a great deal of confusing work for Flight as she juggled a number of versions, trying to discern which changes had already been made and which still needed to be made, and incorporate the necessary changes into the master
manuscript held by Greystone. With deadlines fast approaching, sorting through multiple versions of the manuscript was a frustrating process.

In July, with the October 2004 publication deadline looming, Milton made more time to work on the book, to ensure the story’s integrity and accuracy. He took over making final revisions to the manuscript. Milton was no more experienced with the modern process of revising a book than he was with the process of generating an original manuscript. As the CEO of a large company, he certainly didn’t have time to learn the finer details of it, either. Milton did it the only way he had time for: he sent revisions in by fax, with handwritten changes in the margins of the document. It was up to Greystone to adjust to Milton and develop a system that would ensure the proper incorporation of his changes. Once Greystone received Milton’s faxes, longer changes were typed, to be edited by Flight and inserted into the document, while shorter changes were marked onto a paper copy of the document by Flight, and then edited. The marked-up document was then sent to an inputter. Although effective, the system added a lot of extra work to the process, and in a sense Flight was editing the book a second time.

The amount of revision was much more than had been expected. During July and August, Milton made a number of rounds of changes to the manuscript. While the changes improved the book, deadlines in the production schedule were put in jeopardy. Adding to this problem, a number of Milton’s advisers also continued to review the manuscript and independently submit changes. Again, the burden fell on Nancy Flight to ensure the manuscript’s integrity. Like Milton’s revisions, changes from advisers submitted on marked-up copies of the manuscript were evaluated and incorporated. From the middle of June to the end of August, Flight’s time was, for the most part, completely
occupied with the extended editing of *Straight from the Top*. As a result, her time for working on other book projects was limited.

Milton continued to make changes to the manuscript until the end of August. The manuscript was in first lasers (the first designed version of the book, as opposed to the raw text) on September 1, followed by the customary second and third sets of lasers, interspersed with proofreading. Following the three sets of lasers, the manuscript was sent to the printer, Friesens, on September 15. Milton made changes to each of the three sets of lasers and to the bluelines (bluelines are a type of proof created by the printing company), as well as when the files were at the printer and the book was about to be printed. Friesens made a significant contribution to the book’s being on time by printing it in two weeks rather than the usual four to five weeks, despite the changes to the manuscript at the printing stage.

Needless to say, the manner in which the manuscript progressed defied the traditional organization of workflow. Authors are generally discouraged from making changes to the manuscript once it goes into lasers because of cost and disruption of the process. They are asked to “sign off” on the manuscript before lasers and at various stages after that, approving the manuscript’s progression to the next stage. However, many authors request the ability to make changes throughout these stages, as Milton did.

Changes in computer and printing technology over the last decade have made the steps in the publishing process more fluid and less costly, which enabled material to be added and changed right through to the end of the publishing process. Editor Gordon Graham describes how the stages in the process have become less clear:
Transmittal [from author and editor to Production] is difficult to pinpoint now, when electronic techniques permeate authorship, editorship and production. There is still a moment of parturition, when a text ceases to be written or edited or manipulated and begins to be transmuted into the format in which it will be released, but the old roles are blurred. (Graham 1996)

In the case of *Straight from the Top*, the publishing project often seemed to double back on itself with the addition of new material, defying the traditional linear progression of a manuscript from creation through to completion. This was partly due to ongoing events that needed to be included in the book. It is not unusual for a book’s production schedule to change or for deadlines to be tight, but it is highly challenging when the book’s text takes much longer than expected to be finalized.

**The finished product**

One way of gauging a book’s success is by simply assessing its financial performance. However, these numbers are not available as just twelve months have passed since *Straight from the Top* was published, and thus returns may still come back from booksellers. Yet besides the financial aspects of the business, publishers often have non-financial goals for a book. It is difficult to assess the editorial quality of a book, as it would seem a highly subjective matter, varying from person to person—books often receive both positive and negative reviews. While it is impossible for a book to suit everyone’s taste, a book should fulfill the author’s and publishing company’s goals for the project. Evaluating the finished book on the basis of these goals allows a publishing company to assess the success of the project and the quality of the product. As described above, *Straight from the Top* was intended to be a behind-the-scenes look at Robert Milton’s Air Canada.
In the Acknowledgements section of *Straight from the Top*, Milton states his goals for the book:

More than anything, I wanted this book to be written for the employees and retirees of Air Canada...I want them to know more of what was going on behind the scenes and what we were collectively up against, whether it was takeover artists, terrorism, war, viruses, or the government of Canada. I hope that this book helps to provide clarity and comfort about the way things were ultimately handled and that it instills confidence in Air Canada’s future. (Milton with Reynolds 2004, xiv)

By writing the book, Milton intended to “set the record straight” for past, current, and future employees. Writing a book seems a somewhat unusual way of communicating with employees, but perhaps the book achieves what an internal document could not have. While working with Greystone resulted in a lengthy, high-quality document, putting that document in book form gave it a sense of durability and permanence. Besides Air Canada employees and retirees, Milton’s intended audience included all Canadians, since this is a general trade book. Thus, his goals included conveying the information in the book to the general public. Making the book available to the scrutiny of the general public may also have made Milton’s message to his employees more powerful—statements made in the public arena possess added credibility that private statements do not.

A tagline on the back cover of the book describes it as “Robert Milton’s direct, no-holds-barred inside story of his experience at the helm of Air Canada”; Greystone’s editorial goals were to publish an untold story, the side of Milton and Air Canada that the media do not have access to, and provide Canadians with a behind-the-scenes look at a company that holds significance for them. The book certainly fulfills Milton’s and
Greystone’s goal of illuminating what was going on behind the scenes during some of the airline’s most difficult hours. Milton is undoubtedly painfully aware of the negative press he and the airline have received, and counters this with descriptions of various crises and challenges from his point of view. As well, for a significant portion of the book, he focuses on explaining seemingly inscrutable aspects of air travel such as ticket pricing, on-board food, and the differences between Air Canada and the low-cost carriers. This serves as a tutorial in the challenges of the industry, details of which are perhaps not known even to Air Canada employees. That these topics are conveyed in a readable, engaging manner is a victory for both author and publisher; the book could easily have been dry and difficult to read.

In addition to being interesting, the book is also convincing on a number of points, especially actions by the Canadian government that put Air Canada at a disadvantage. These points include the portrayal of Transport Canada as unwilling to give financial assistance to Air Canada when it encountered difficulties faced by the industry as a whole after September 11, while the airline was competing with American airlines that were being well supported by their government (Milton with Reynolds 2004, 149). Milton is perhaps less convincing when he dwells on the actions of particular people, such as then–minister of transport, David Collenette, and then–Pearson Airport CEO, Louis Turpen. He focuses on them too much, which betrays the sense of objectivity present in much of the book, and makes it appear that he doesn’t understand their likely complex motivations, simply believing that they are persecuting him and Air Canada.
Straight from the Top, with the author’s and the publisher’s goal of telling Air Canada employees and Canadians in general the story behind Air Canada’s recent struggles, was an ambitious undertaking that is, for the most part, successful.

Marketing and publicity plan

As detailed in Part 1 of this paper, an important factor in the decision to acquire a book is the marketability of its author. The marketability of a public figure is generally strong, since the person has attracted media attention in the past; therefore, the media is likely to take an interest during the book’s promotion campaign. As well, the author has interacted with the media before, while an average person would lack that experience. Even the fact that the person’s name is known to those browsing bookstore shelves can have a positive impact on the book’s sales. In the case of Robert Milton, his name is widely known, he has extensive experience dealing with the media, and there is continuing media interest in him and in Air Canada.

The marketing of Straight from the Top was planned and executed primarily by Douglas & McIntyre Publishing Group’s Director of Marketing, North America, Liza Algar. Generally speaking, the goal of marketing is to raise awareness of a product: bringing it to the attention of the target audience, multiple times if possible, and conveying key information about the product to the audience. Two common marketing strategies in the Canadian book industry are sending out Advance Review Copies (ARCs), often accompanied by press releases and media kits (though sometimes just a press release or media kit is sent, to save on costs), and trying to get interviews with media for the author, either in the city where the author lives, by satellite, or by sending
the author on tour to different cities. These two strategies are aimed at fulfilling the goal mentioned above—bringing the book to the target market’s attention. The ultimate goal of the marketing campaign is to sell as many copies of the book as possible.

During summer 2004, Liza Algar began to solicit offers for first serial rights for the book. At this point, the manuscript had not yet been finalized. An embargo was used to ensure that those in the national media who read parts of the book while considering buying serial rights were prevented from writing about it. The final version of the text would be supplied in time for publication of an excerpt; members of the media who wanted to read parts of the book had to agree to the embargo first.

The National Post purchased first serial rights. The embargo held, and the Post was the first to publish anything on the content of the book. The excerpt was published on October 23, one week before the publication date, October 30. The on-sale date of the book (the day on which booksellers are permitted to begin selling the book) was October 22, in order to ensure that people who read the excerpt would be able to purchase the book immediately.

Scheduling the author tour was somewhat of a challenge because of Milton’s obligations to Air Canada. The tour was originally planned for the week October 15–21, but that week was ruled out because of Air Canada’s launch of its new uniforms and colours, which included Céline Dion performing for airline employees in Toronto, Montreal, Calgary, and Vancouver. The two weeks following the rebranding launch were out of the question for a tour since the US election on November 2 would dominate the
news at that time. Although the rebranding launch delayed the tour, it did stimulate media coverage related to Air Canada just prior to the book’s release.

The tour began on November 5 in Montreal and included Toronto, Ottawa, Calgary, and Vancouver. Air Canada was, as expected, in the news at the time because of the Céline Dion launch, the emergence of the airline from CCAA, and the airline’s lawsuit against rival WestJet.

Two potential difficulties were successfully overcome: the embargo on the book held, and the tour was scheduled and executed in a way that worked with Milton’s schedule and benefited the promotion of the book.

Assessment of media coverage

To date, media coverage related to Straight from the Top has had three noteworthy peaks. The first consisted of 13 mentions made on March 13 and 14, 2004, following Greystone’s announcement that it would publish a book by Robert Milton in fall 2004. These mainly brief mentions appeared in the Vancouver Sun, Victoria Times-Colonist, Nanaimo Daily News, Edmonton Journal, Calgary Herald, Leader Post (Regina), Toronto Star, Ottawa Citizen, Sudbury Star, Kingston Whig-Standard, Gazette (Montreal), La Presse, and Le Journal de Quebec, indicating an interest in the book across Canada, and in both English Canada and French Canada. This is what one would hope for the book—that there would be interest in this national story from media across Canada. In addition to wide coverage, the adoption of the story by these papers provided a positive sign that each publication perceived its readership to be interested in the book. Because of Air Canada’s prominence in the Canadian psyche, this interest was expected;
disinterest by the Canadian media would have been extremely disappointing. At the time (mid-March 2004), Air Canada was in the news for a number of reasons, including the fact that it seemed close to making a deal with a potential buyer (Victor Li) who would save it financially, but ultimately the deal was not to be. As predicted, the announcement of the publication of Milton’s memoir coincided with other Air Canada–related press coverage. Media coverage of *Straight from the Top* and coverage of the airline’s business dealings resulted in a kind of synergy of all things related to Air Canada and Milton.

Seven months later, the second wave of media coverage occurred as a result of the publication of *Straight from the Top* and related marketing strategies: a mailout of press kits and copies of the book, ads placed in media, an author tour, and a public lecture by Milton. This peak began with the publication of an excerpt (described in the previous section) in the *National Post* on October 23, 2004, and trailed off in the middle of December. (An outline of *Straight from the Top*’s media coverage since its publication is provided in Table 1, “Impact of the Marketing Campaign,” on page 39.) This second peak of coverage included ten articles, once again in papers across the country, both in French and English (one article in *Le Devoir*, one in the *Vancouver Sun*, and two in each of the following: *Edmonton Journal*, *National Post*, *Calgary Herald*, *Calgary Sun*), a review in the *Globe and Mail* and the *Edmonton Journal*, and a live interview with Milton on the nationally broadcast CTV program *Canada AM*. At first glance, it is surprising that the first peak consisted of 13 mentions while the second peak, related to the actual publication of the book, garnered only 10. However, the 10 mentions in the second peak represent significantly more in-depth coverage: while most articles in the
first peak have lengths of between 50 and 500 words, those in the second peak are generally between 400 and 2,000 words.

The third peak began with a review of the book in the *Edmonton Journal* on January 9, 2005, but the apex occurred on January 21 and 22, with a total of five items published by the media on those two days. Four out of five of the items concerned a launch event for the book, while one mentioned the launch in passing but focused on a wildcat strike by Air Canada ground crews earlier that week (another example of media coverage of Air Canada feeding into publicity for the book). All five items were located in the business or finance sections of the publications, and four out of five of them featured a photograph; indeed, one consisted solely of a large photograph and no article.

The reason for all this attention was a highly-media-friendly book launch held on January 21, 2005, at the Eaton Centre location of Indigo Books & Music in Toronto. Milton, along with Chapters/Indigo owner Heather Reisman, and her husband, Gerry Schwartz, whose company Onex had once attempted a takeover of Air Canada, spoke at the launch. The Air Canada–Onex–Indigo connection provided an entertaining irony that propelled interest in the event. Although not as large as the first and second waves of media coverage, this third peak was highly targeted. The majority of the coverage was located in the business and finance sections of the publications and was much more focused compared to the other two peaks. This highlights the fact that one of the challenges of marketing a book that would seem to appeal to all Canadians is understanding potential sub-audiences and making them aware of the book through effective channels of communication. Many potential buyers of *Straight from the Top* are unlikely to spend time perusing the book reviews section of a newspaper; business-
centred coverage was vital in reaching the book’s business-centred audience. Another facet of marketing the book to a business audience was Milton’s “Speakers Forum” lecture on November 15, 2004, in Toronto. Hosting events with speakers such as business leaders, economic strategists, and politicians, the series is an effective way to connect with people who are interested in high-profile business personalities such as Milton.
Table 1: Impact of the marketing campaign

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Publication (Section)</th>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Headline, description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 23/04</td>
<td>National Post (Financial Post)</td>
<td>FP1, 6</td>
<td>“Milton’s bittersweet victory; Exclusive excerpt” First serial rights: excerpt printed with short preface; includes 17 cm x 10 cm photo of Milton sitting at a desk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 30/04</td>
<td>Globe and Mail (Books)</td>
<td>D12</td>
<td>Get the Inside Story (Ad) 10.5 cm x 18 cm; includes cover image, quotation from book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 30/04</td>
<td>Globe and Mail (Books)</td>
<td>D10</td>
<td>“Air Canada defence soars, plummets” In-depth review of the book; includes 15 cm x 8 cm photo of Milton standing among model planes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 8/04</td>
<td>CTV’s Canada AM</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>“Air Canada CEO’s book ‘largely for employees’ and charity” Interview of Robert Milton by host Beverly Thomson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 15/04</td>
<td>Le Devoir</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>“La vérité à propos d’Air Canada, version revue et adoucie” Based on an interview with Milton, focuses on the content of the book and his reasons for writing it; includes photo of him being interviewed (undetermined size)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 15/04</td>
<td>Speakers Forum, Toronto</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>“The Truth About Air Canada” Lecture by Milton; no mention of the book, but covers many of the book’s contents and main topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 17/04</td>
<td>Vancouver Sun (Westcoast News)</td>
<td>B1, B6</td>
<td>“Vancouver’s a tough airline market” Focuses on the nature of air travel out of Vancouver, why this is a challenge to Air Canada; mentions Milton is in town to promote book; second page includes 9.5 cm x 6.5 cm photo of Milton displaying the cover of the book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Publication</td>
<td>Pages</td>
<td>Headline, description</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov.18/04</td>
<td><em>Calgary Herald</em> (Business); <em>Edmonton Journal</em> (Business); <em>National Post</em> (Business)</td>
<td>E1, E5</td>
<td>“Milton to WestJet: ‘Come clean’ ” Focuses on Air Canada/WestJet lawsuit; mentions Milton is in town to promote book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov.18/04</td>
<td><em>Calgary Sun</em> (News)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“City skies to open up” No mention of the book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov.18/04</td>
<td><em>Edmonton Journal</em> (Business); <em>National Post</em> (Business)</td>
<td>G2, A9</td>
<td>“Air Canada may expand lawsuit against WestJet: New information strengthens case, says Milton Focuses on Air Canada/WestJet lawsuit; mentions Milton is in town to promote book; photo of Milton (undetermined size)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov.21/04</td>
<td><em>Calgary Herald</em> (Business)</td>
<td>C1, C8</td>
<td>“Robert Milton’s Year of Living Dangerously” In-depth interview with Milton; first two questions are about the book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov.21/04</td>
<td><em>Calgary Sun</em> (Money/Business)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>“CEO biography clears air” 12.5 cm x 19 cm reproduction of book cover; focuses on why Milton wrote the book and the book’s controversial content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 4/04</td>
<td><em>Globe and Mail</em> (Books)</td>
<td>D29</td>
<td>Get the inside story on Air Canada (Ad) 15.5 cm x 29.5 cm, includes cover image, quotation from book, <em>Globe and Mail</em> review quote, directs readers to bookstores and to an excerpt on Greystone Books’ Web site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 9/05</td>
<td><em>Edmonton Journal</em> (Books and Authors)</td>
<td>D11</td>
<td>“Milton’s bumpy joyride: CEO tells story of his time at the helm of Air Canada” Review of the book, with photo of Milton (undetermined size)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Publication (Section)</td>
<td>Pages</td>
<td>Headline, description</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 21/05</td>
<td>Digital Journal (Business)</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>“Air Canada CEO launches book and clears the air” Describes Indigo book launch with Milton, Gerry Schwartz, and Heather Reisman; includes cover image of book (undetermined size)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 22/05</td>
<td>Globe and Mail (Report on Business)</td>
<td>B5</td>
<td>“What’s a little failed takeover between corporate titans?” Describes Indigo book launch, includes 21 cm x 15 cm photo of Milton and Schwartz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 22/05</td>
<td>National Post (Financial Post)</td>
<td>FP1</td>
<td>“Milton’s all thumbs—up—for his latest venture” 24 cm x 16.5 cm photo of Milton and Schwartz, plus caption, no article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 22/05</td>
<td>National Post (Financial Post)</td>
<td>FP2</td>
<td>“Milton, union at odds on labour situation” Article focuses on a wildcat strike by Air Canada ground crews earlier that week; briefly mentions Indigo book launch; includes 4.5 cm x 7 cm photo of Milton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 22/05</td>
<td>Toronto Star (Business)</td>
<td>D03</td>
<td>“Airline gladiators bury axe” Article focuses on Indigo book launch and content of book, includes photo of Milton and Schwartz</td>
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It is, perhaps, difficult to determine what is “good” press coverage for a book. Logically, press coverage that focuses on the book (how it came about, its contents) would seem to be the most valuable. As well, coverage that gives readers a sense of the book but leaves them wanting more is probably ideal. In these respects, the coverage from Calgary newspapers in November 2004, though unfortunately not national, was especially notable. Both the Calgary Herald and Calgary Sun conducted in-depth
interviews with Milton and conveyed a lot of information to readers, the Herald's article even taking a question-and-answer form. One possible reason why the Calgary papers devoted so much space and depth to the book is Calgary's traditional focus on business and its growing identity as one of Canada's most prominent business centres.

Two reviews of the book were published, in the book sections of the Globe and Mail and the Edmonton Journal in October 2004 and January 2005, respectively. The Globe review states that “the author’s enthusiastic description of his ascension [to the position of Air Canada CEO] makes the components of airline profitability and their pursuit seem compelling and real”, but relates that

[Milton] assails politicians whose public utterances were critical of Air Canada, but fails to explain why such criticism resonates with their constituents. Something other than his grand design and operation is seemingly always at fault for the airline’s perceived failings. (Janigan 2004)

The Edmonton Journal’s review is more favourable and, in fact, celebrates Milton’s strong personality, calling him a “born scrapper”:

No question, Milton is driven. He blasts more foes in this book than the U.S. army has offed in Iraq. And he's got an ego the size of a prairie sky. But maybe that's what you need to run an airline these days. It's a hellish industry that eats more capital than an NHL payroll. (Lamphier 2005)

Reviewers often react differently to the same book, and that is true of readers as well.

Somewhat surprisingly, data indicate that both positive and negative reviews of a book have a positive effect on the book’s sales; it seems that the old saying claiming there is no such thing as bad publicity holds true for book reviews. In a 2004 paper,
Sorensen and Rasmussen examine the effect of being reviewed in the New York Times on sales of 175 hardcover fiction books, using Nielsen BookScan data. They found that ...

...a positive review leads to a 62.9 percent increase in sales in the week following the review (relative to what sales would have been in the absence of any review), versus a 34.4 percent increase for a negative review. (3)

As expected, a positive review is better for a book than a negative review, but oddly, a negative review is significantly better than no review at all. This was good news for Straight from the Top since the reviews of it were mixed and, as well, a number of articles paid less attention to the book than to Air Canada’s trials and tribulations. While it would be dangerous to infer too much since the above-mentioned study was concerned with fiction, it suggests that even a negative, neutral, or brief mention of the book can have an “informative effect...[serving] to inform consumers of [the] book’s existence and content” (Sorensen and Rasmussen 2004, 11).

As can be seen in Table 1, much of the coverage was limited to a brief mention of the book as part of a story on another issue related to Air Canada. Most commonly, asides took a form such as this: “...in town today to discuss his book Straight from the Top”, and nothing more. A quick look at news stories about Air Canada during fall 2004 and spring 2005, when the book was being promoted, shows that the book was part of a near-deluge of Air Canada–related news: the rebranding of the airline’s uniforms and airplanes launched through press conferences with Céline Dion (controversial because of the undisclosed cost of hiring her); Air Canada’s lawsuit against WestJet for its alleged infiltration of Air Canada’s booking systems; WestJet’s countersuit; Air Canada’s still-shaky financial health; a wildcat strike by Air Canada ground crews that paralyzed
Pearson Airport for a day; Air Canada’s efforts to sell Aeroplan, its frequent-flyer-miles program; the airline’s purchase of new Boeing planes rather than Airbus planes; and human rights complaints by passengers against the airline.

Douglas & McIntyre’s Marketing Director, Liza Algar, related that some interviewers focused on the Céline Dion launch and other Air Canada–related news rather than *Straight from the Top*, which is frustrating but understandable since interviewers were likely trying to make the most of an opportunity to interview the CEO of Air Canada. This situation highlights the challenge of getting the book noticed in the middle of the huge amount of media coverage of the airline. On the other hand, the book was, in a sense, able to piggyback on the intense media interest in the airline.

While most of the Air Canada–related media coverage did not focus primarily on the book, some articles did. For example, some articles let Milton do most of the talking (e.g., “Robert Milton’s Year of Living Dangerously,” in the *Calgary Herald*). There were many newsworthy stories related to the book itself. Reporters questioned Milton about writing the book while he was still CEO, rather than after he had retired from the post. As well, they were interested in why he had written the book, why he feels Air Canada has had such serious financial troubles, and what the future holds for the airline.

Best-seller lists are another aspect of media coverage of a popular book. Currently, there are no reliable point-of-sale data for books in Canada. As a result, best-seller lists are, at best, rough estimates of actual sales figures. With the planned 2005 launch of BookNet Canada, best-seller lists should become significantly more reliable. Regardless, the appearance of a book on a best-seller list raises public awareness of it and
implies that the book has a certain level of popularity and quality. Indeed, the general public likely takes the term “best-seller” at face value and would be surprised to know that best-seller lists do not indisputably contain Canada’s true best-sellers.

*Straight from the Top* appeared on a number of best-seller lists in late 2004 and early 2005. Following its October 30, 2004, publication date, the book appeared on the *Quill & Quire* business books chart at #8 in the week November 21–27, 2004, and then at #6 and #9 in the subsequent two weeks, before exiting the chart. The same week (November 22–December 5, 2004), the book appeared on the *Canadian Business* chart, first at #2, and then finally at #5 the following week. It appeared on the *National Post’s* business books chart in the #6 position on December 9, 2004, and in the #2 spot on the *Calgary Herald’s* business books chart more than a month later, on January 17, 2005. In particular, it faced strong competition from two books also published in October 2004: Joel Bakan’s *The Corporation* and *Trump: Think Like a Billionaire*, by Donald Trump. As mentioned above, currently the creation of best-seller lists is not an exact science by any means. However, if any insight can be gained from *Straight from the Top’s* movement on the best-seller lists, it is that its presence there appears to be related to the book’s appearance in stores and the second media coverage peak; the January 17, 2005, chart appearance seems anomalous.

In addition to providing publicity themselves, best-seller lists also offer a rough estimate of the overall success of a book’s marketing campaign. Although there are weaknesses to the information presented in each of the lists, they collectively provide evidence that *Straight from the Top* was one of Canada’s top business books during fall and winter 2004–05.
Summary

In publishing *Straight from the Top*, Greystone Books encountered a number of challenges, including working with an extremely busy author who had extensive job commitments, engaging a co-author, working with the author’s advisers, delaying publication by a season, and taking full advantage of complex marketing opportunities. Still, the book was successfully published and appears to have been well received by both the media and readers.
CONCLUSION

The process of publishing Straight from the Top: The Truth About Air Canada provides a number of insights into the challenges of publishing a Canadian business memoir, as well as lessons in how to overcome those challenges.

At this point, just over one year after publication, Straight from the Top has gone through two hardcover printings and will be published as a trade paperback in spring 2006. More than 9,000 copies of the hardcover have been shipped to bookstores, which is a strong figure for a book in Canada.

Although not a “how-to” manual for publishing a Canadian business memoir, this project report provides an in-depth look at the successful execution of a project in that genre. The aim is to provide readers, including Canada’s next generation of book publishers, with some valuable insight into future publishing projects.

Publishers who are considering acquiring a Canadian business memoir should take into account certain challenges that they are likely to face during the process of publishing the book. The publisher should be prepared to work with a public figure who has never written a book before and who knows little about the publishing process; as well, the publisher will likely be working with the public figure’s advisers, who will probably have a similarly low level of knowledge about book publishing. The publisher must be willing to incorporate the advisers into the editorial process, and take into
consideration their desire to protect the public figure and his or her company, and the impact this will have on the manuscript. The demands of the public figure’s likely hectic job may disrupt the book’s production schedule, so ideally extra time will be built into various parts of the schedule. A willingness to be flexible is also important when it comes to scheduling promotional activities for the book, such as an author tour. In terms of the book’s content, the publisher may need to allocate extra resources to the production of the manuscript, in the form of a ghostwriter or extra editing time. This will be key to the delivery of an on-time, high-quality manuscript. In terms of the bigger picture, the publisher should realize that the reactions of the reading public and the media to a memoir by a public figure are difficult to predict, especially if that person has been controversial. However, as shown by Straight from the Top, surmounting these challenges is both possible and rewarding.
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