

Hungry Minds' superior branding and marketing skills represented a quantum leap over Wiley's branding capabilities and were transferable to Wiley's other publishing businesses. A state-of-the-art production operation, with special talents in rapid turnaround and full color, came with the Indianapolis offices and was soon leveraged for

a wide range of P/T titles and for some from Higher Education. Hungry Minds introduced Wiley to a proven teaching methodology which was embedded in every For Dummies title and to a sophisticated form of book "packaging." Each title was carefully organized with chapter outlines, step-by-step instruction, paragraphs

# PROFILE

## FOR DUMMIES

CHAPTER EIGHT

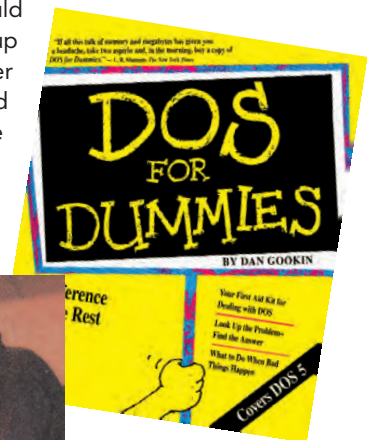
The brand that launched a thousand titles had its genesis in a chance remark. In 1987, John Kilcullen, then a national accounts manager for Bantam Doubleday Dell's new electronic publishing division, heard from a friend about a customer in a Software Etc. store who was looking for a basic book on the DOS operating system—"Something like DOS for dummies," as the friend put it. The words stuck. Opportunity followed later, when Kilcullen was invited to sign on as founding vice president of sales and marketing for IDG

Books Worldwide, Inc., launched in early 1990 by IDG (International Data Group), a publisher of magazines such as *PC World* and *Macworld*. Promoted almost immediately to publisher, he began putting out a series of computer books, co-branded with the magazines and in niche topic areas, with mixed results.

Needing a hit to sustain the venture, Kilcullen retrieved the For Dummies idea, linking it to Microsoft's upcoming release of MS-DOS 5.0. "It took him some time to find the right author for *DOS For Dummies*," recalled Marc Mikulich, known as "original employee number nine" for his May 1991 start at IDG Books, and later vice president of brand management at Wiley. "Then he

heard Dan Gookin speaking at a conference, talking about how he would write great material and editors would then 'wave a creative magnet over it.' Dan's irreverent humor clicked with John's own perspective, and what he wanted *DOS For Dummies* to be."<sup>118</sup>

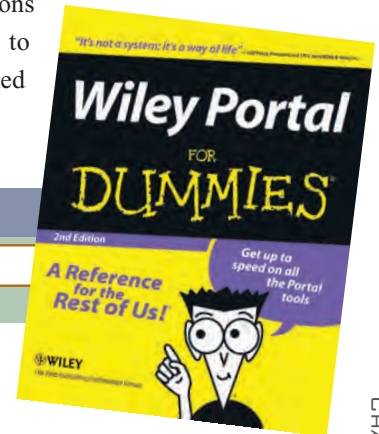
But *DOS For Dummies* launched with two strikes against it. First, it violated conventional "day-and-date" wisdom that the release of a book on software should coincide with the release of the software itself. MS-DOS 5.0 had been out for five months by the time *DOS For Dummies* appeared in November 1991. Second, there was considerable resistance to the title, both within IDG and from bookstore chains, where it was feared customers would be embarrassed to walk up to the checkout counter with it. But Kilcullen stood by his conviction that the word "dummies" would be perceived as sympa-



**Steven Berkowitz**  
(president) and  
**John J. Kilcullen**  
(CEO) of Dummies,  
1998.

marked “Remember,” “Technical Stuff,” “Tip,” etc. for easy use. Not only could For Dummies titles be sold to students; their template influenced the way in which some new Higher Education textbooks were shaped to be more effective teaching tools. Also new to Wiley was the way in which the For Dummies series was built

around an editorial process that required close contact between editors, authors, and freelancers. For Dummies authors were commissioned, while Wiley retained all rights. For Dummies translations were carefully monitored to ensure that the books retained



thetic, a “term of endearment,” even, as it has since been called.

“The board finally agreed to a print run of 7,500 copies,” Mikulich said. “They were gone in a week. The same thing happened with the next 7,500. And then we got an order for 50,000 copies, from Costco.” Success followed success with *Macs For Dummies*, and the brand was off and running. Soon other publishers were gunning for IDG with copycat series like *Complete Idiot’s Guides*, but none gained traction. “We had two advantages,” Mikulich explained. “We were first, and people bonded with For Dummies. But we also did what we did very well. The first book was the template for the entire series, with its eye-catching yellow and black cover, its icons, cartoons, trademark humor, and the ‘Dummies Man’ character. We delivered consistency.”

Hungry Minds touted For Dummies as a “Reference for the Rest of Us,” and its “need-to-know” orientation attracted Wiley. Millions of perfectly smart consumers flocked to the series for help, a timely response to a world chock full of problems that Dummies authors, following a carefully crafted pedagogical template, reduced to clear and simple instructions. As the editors explain, “For Dummies products give you the easiest and best way (or two) to get the job done, so that you can move on with more important things—like your life! . . . For Dummies gives you everything you need to know without making it seem like a big deal.” That was a great way to pitch to the MTV generation and a society that has always valued “know-how” while simultaneously deprecating intellectuals as “nerds,” “geeks,” and “brainiacs.”<sup>119</sup>

**F**or Dummies even provided a guide to Wiley’s home portal for Wiley colleagues.

The brand also moved with the market. Emerging just as the personal computer was making the transition from “geek gadget” to essential business productivity tool, it followed a run of technology titles with *Personal Finance For Dummies* in 1994, and caught the wave of the Internet with *The Internet For Dummies*. Dr. Ruth’s 1995 bestseller, *Sex For Dummies*, was a prime example of the brand’s successful extension into almost every area of human interest.

In fact, saying that the brand has launched a thousand titles is an understatement. A 2007 “For Dummies” search on the Wiley Web site, [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com), yielded 1,368 matches. More than 125 million For Dummies books were in print, in categories such as “At Home,” “Health, Mind & Spirit,” and “Travel,” translated into 39 languages, and distributed in over 40 countries.<sup>120</sup>



**A**rthur Frommer, founder of the Frommer’s travel guides, and Dr. Ruth Westheimer, both For Dummies authors, celebrate Wiley’s anniversary.