

Follow the Money: The Marketing Of Deep Throat

Publishers and Producers Eager for Secret Source's Story

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On Tuesday, an old man emerged from the shadows to solve a mystery that had long intrigued political experts, journalists and just plain Americans. Yesterday, as he was chauffeured away from his house in Santa Rosa, Calif., he rolled down his car window and jovially told reporters that he now plans to "write a book or something and get all the money I can."



W. Mark Felt admits he was Woodward's famous source.

Welcome, Deep Throat, to the modern media marketing machine.

No one knows yet what W. Mark Felt — aka Deep Throat, The Washington Post's long-secret Watergate source — has to say, or how well he can say it, given that he's 91 years old and suffering from both physical and mental deterioration. But everyone, it seems, wants to know more about his story.

Major publishing houses — HarperCollins, Random House and Little, Brown among them — fielded calls from David Kuhn, a media agent representing Felt's family and his attorney, in New York yesterday. They may have listened with skepticism, or excitement, or a mixture of both, but many signed up for meetings later this week. Court TV executives listened to multiple pitches from producers interested in making Deep Throat/Watergate made-for-television movies. Alice Mayhew, editor on Bob Woodward's multiple

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best-selling books for Simon & Schuster, came down to Washington from New York to pay a personal visit to her client — and read Woodward's previously undisclosed manuscript about the relationship he had with his famous source.

BlackBerrys buzzed from Los Angeles to Washington to New York.

"Whenever you have a celebrity book — and in a way this is a celebrity book, although perhaps a celebrity book with a 202 area code — there is often a lack of material on the page," said Geoff Shandler, editor in chief at Little, Brown. "You're buying into the concept as much as anything."

The landslide started with the advance release Tuesday of an article slated for the July edition of *Vanity Fair*, in which Felt acknowledges that he was Deep Throat. In the article, written by family attorney John D. O'Connor, family members acknowledge that a factor in going public now, rather than after Felt's death (which was long the understanding between Felt and Woodward), was financial gain.

The sweeps started fast.

Kuhn, a former magazine editor who now has his own agency, Kuhn Projects, was making calls less than 24 hours after the story broke. Though Kuhn had no comment on the family's plans, meetings involving him, O'Connor and several publishers are scheduled for late this week and early next. The family is also reportedly interested in television and film projects.

One publishing house that did not get a call from Kuhn is Simon & Schuster, publisher of the previous 12 bestsellers by Woodward. Woodward confirmed yesterday that he and Carl Bernstein plan to tell their story, but the how and when, he said, has not yet been settled. Nevertheless, the industry was abuzz about what the book will say and how soon it will hit the shelves.

"Bob Woodward owns the story," said Jonathan Karp, a senior editor at Random House, a competitor of Simon & Schuster. "I'll be on line the first day it's on sale at Barnes & Noble. I'll even pay the full retail price."



BY JUSTIN SULLIVAN — GETTY IMAGES

Joan Felt, Deep Throat's daughter, talks to reporters in Santa Rosa. The family went public partly for financial gain.

Several editors expressed some significant reservations about the viability of a Felt book on several fronts, but that doesn't mean they're passing on a meeting.

"I think any publisher will have that [skepticism]," Shandler said. "And reasonably so — especially if Woodward has a book coming out, because you know it'll be a best-seller."

He also acknowledged that his house, Little, Brown, is among those who have agreed to a meeting with Kuhn and O'Connor.

"If you asked me two days ago how much you'd pay for Deep Throat's memoir, I'd say the sky's the limit," said David Hirshey, senior vice president at HarperCollins. "Now that the great mystery has been solved, I'm sure the sky is a little bit lower. But Deep Throat is still one of the biggest 'gets' of all time and I expect major publishers to chase it like Ahab did the whale. And I'll be one to have the harpoon out."

Hirshey said he expected the Felt book to be sold for more than \$1 million, and some agreed with him. Others in the publishing in-

dustry questioned that number, but acknowledged that it's hard to know, yet, what the book will be worth.

"It's all about source material," said David Black, of the David Black Literary Agency. "Did he keep a diary? Were there records? Did he keep audio conversations with Woodward? Hoover was a great record-keeper, right? Was this guy?"

Then there's the Woodward factor.

"Bob's book is sure to be coming out in a matter of weeks," said Peter Osnos, who has published previous books about Deep Throat and is currently the publisher of PublicAffairs (Osnos worked at The Washington Post at the time of Watergate). "In that case, Felt's story comes along later, and has all the earmarks of something that was a scramble.

"But," Osnos added, "someone will buy it for a lot of money."

Television producers have another dilemma: Is what they term a "period piece" a good gamble in an age when the demographic everyone is chasing is 18-to-49-year-olds?

These are viewers, in many cases, whose knowledge of Watergate comes from the Robert Redford-Dustin Hoffman 1976 movie classic, "All the President's Men." If they have any knowledge at all.

"As fascinated as we are by this, is there a movie for a contemporary 2005 audience?" said Robert Sertner, a partner in the production house Von Zerneck/Sertner Films, one of the most prolific producers of television movies. "Everybody is intrigued, but scared."

But, Sertner acknowledged, "right now a lot of agents and lawyers are trying to get their fingers into this."

"We've already gotten about three solid pitches, two from fairly well-established Hollywood-based producers," said Henry Schleiff, chairman and CEO of Court TV, though none of those came from anyone representing the Felts. "Outside of the Loch Ness Monster and Bigfoot, this is the third best mystery out there."

Staff writers Lynne Duke, Mark Leibovich and Lisa de Moraes contributed to this report.