

Self-Publishing Presentation

Introduction: Benefits and challenges of self-publishing

- “Congratulations, you are all publishing houses. As self-publishers, you have become your own Random House, Scholastic, Rodale, IDG Books, and so on.”
- Benefits
 - You can publish the books you want, presumably your own.
 - You have full creative control of everything to content to cover design to pricing to distribution.
 - You get a bigger cut (well, usually a slightly bigger cut) of your book sales.
- Challenges
 - Everything that a large publishing house does, you have to do. Not just making books, but marketing, sales, printing, distribution, business planning, and accounting.
 - You assume all the costs. A large publisher can pay for editing, cover design, marketing, and even review copies. But when you self-publish, all those costs come out of your pocket.
 - Publishing is a tough business – and always has been. (Reference to NPR’s series about famous flops including the King James Bible and *Moby Dick*.)
- To address challenges
 - Educate yourself about self-publishing. What tasks are required to publish a book? What skills do you need?
 - Must make decisions about how you want to pursue your self-publishing venture – even before you write your book.
 - Put together a business plan showing how you will produce, distribute, and market your book.
 - Be aware of tradeoffs in costs and potential revenues as you make your plans.

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Decisions you have to make before you self-publish

- What are your goals?
 - Do you want your book on the shelves of every Barnes and Noble and sell a million copies? (Difficult, but not impossible.)
 - Do you want a book for back of the room sales?
 - Do you want a free book as a marketing piece? (You also need to set a price for that book. “A \$7.95 value – free!”)
 - Your goals shape all aspects of your planning process.
- What is your unique selling proposition?
 - What makes your book special? Why would someone buy it instead of something else?
 - Consider: What is the unique selling proposition of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series? The *Harry Potter* series? *Natural Cures “They” Don’t Want You to Know About*?
 - How does your unique selling proposal fit with your personal or company’s identity? (“I am the leading expert in...”)
 - Consider offering freebies, like reader’s guides and other downloadable materials.
- How much money do you have available to invest in your venture?
 - Consider your return on investment. How much revenue do you expect to earn? (Either through direct sales or by increased speaking revenue from offering the book.) How much revenue must you generate to cover costs?
 - Make sure your planned costs are in line with your goals. If you’re just making a free promotional piece, you’ll want to lower your costs but still produce sufficient quality. If you want to compete with the best sellers, you may have to spend their amount of money.
 - Include costs of business expenses, such as copyright and ISBN registration, in your plan.

- Be aware of tradeoffs. You may have to cut down on some expenses to stay within your budget, but it may limit your revenue. (Example: Paying a lower cost for an ISBN through a POD that they own instead of buying your own from Bowker.)
- Look at sources of funding: partners, investors, other speaking and writing projects. (My presentation at WritersUA funded *Offline*.) Borrowing is a last resort, but...
- Never bet more than you can afford to lose. Large publishers may have best sellers that cover the costs if a book flops. You don't.
- Make or buy?
 - What tasks can you do, and what must you hire? (Example: I've been doing page design and layout even before desktop publishing started. So, I'm comfortable doing my own templates.)
 - How much time do you have available to do these tasks. (Self-publishing is a full-time job, which is tough to do when you have a full-time job.)
 - What fits into your budget and priorities?
 - What services can you barter or exchange for?
- What startup costs do you have?
 - If you plan to do your own artwork, layout, and production, figure in the costs of any tools and equipment you need to do your work. This includes desktop publishing software, PDF generation software, graphic editing software, digital camera, scanner, fonts, and clipart collections (check royalty requirements first).
 - If you plan to start a business, you may need to get a business license.
 - Also plan for startup tasks such as designing templates for your books, company logos and branding, and Web site design. If you handle your own distribution, you must develop your customer service policies, including returns.

- How do you plan to produce and distribute your book?
 - Depends on your goals:
 - For back of the room sales, you handle the distribution. You can look for the best price for a printer and handle the storage and distribution yourself.
 - For bookstore and widespread sales, you'll want to partner with a company that can handle production, fulfillment, and distribution like Lulu.
 - Be aware of per unit printing costs, which affect your profits.
 - Offset offers the best per unit cost after a certain quantity. But you would have to store the inventory.
 - Print on demand has a higher per-unit cost, but you don't have to carry inventory.
 - E-books have no per-unit costs. (But they're not free to produce. There are costs in editing, layout, generation, and fulfillment.) They may be a good option for free books, especially for Web-based services.
 - If you choose a printing or POD service, like Lulu, iUniverse, or AuthorHouse, watch out for the following
 - Read the fine print? Do you keep all of your rights?
 - What services are included in the costs? Which ones do you have to pay extra?
 - What is their reputation for quality and service? Have there been any serious complaints? Ask around the message boards.
 - Are the costs in line with your goals and budget?
 - Try ordering a book through them. How satisfied are you with their service and quality?
 - What is their return policy? (Most PODs don't allow returns.)

- What services do you really need? Example: You don't need an ISBN unless you plan to sell through bookstores.

Steps to put your self-publishing plans in motion

1. Write a business plan for your self-publishing project. (Show example of my plan.)
 - Who are your target readers, and how do you plan to reach them?
 - What is your price for your book, and how many units can you sell at that price?
 - What are your costs?
 - Which tasks will you do, and which ones will you hire out?
 - If you are handling your own distribution, what are your policies for returns and other customer service matters?
 - What is your marketing plan?
2. Complete any necessary paperwork.
 - Business license?
 - Seller permit?
3. Produce your work, but it's more than nice words and a pretty cover...
 - Editing is critical. Sloppy copy can hurt your book. Editing is a task you must outsource because you can't edit your own work.
 - Must be aware of laws governing writing, such as libel, inaccuracies, and misusing trademarks. If something goes wrong, it's on your back.
 - Follow the production guidelines provided by your printer, which can include trim size, room for margins, and instructions for generating PDF and graphic files (resolution, file format, font embedding, etc.). Not following the rules can lead to quality problems, delays, and additional costs.
 - Make sure your production files are as free of flaws as possible before you send them to the printer. Author's corrections can cost you.

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- Do you need to register your copyright? No, but it offers additional protection.
4. Execute your business plan.
- Plan your roll out. (Think of the last Harry Potter book – or movie for that matter.) Produce your Web site, send out your press releases, start contacting bookstores and potential customers before your book is done. (A Fred Gleec technique: trying to make your book a number 1 bestseller on Amazon by asking people to buy it at the same time when it first comes out.)
 - Look for opportunities for publicity. Book signings. Speaking engagements. Donations (like as an opportunity drawing prize at a Toastmasters speech contest). Drawings. Contests. Writing letters and op-ed pieces for newspapers. (*A Piano for Mrs. Cimino* author Robert Oliphant wrote an op-ed piece for the *Los Angeles Times* about aging.)
 - Monitor your income and expenses. Are you following your plan? If not, what adjustments or changes are needed?
 - Be patient and persistent. It's hard for first-time writers to break in, especially self-published ones. As a self-publisher you have the advantage of letting your work build momentum over time. Large publishers have so many books, if one doesn't sell in six weeks, they remainder it and go on to the next one.
 - Do a post-mortem on your projects. What went well? What didn't? What would you change next time?
 - Start work on your next book. Being an author is an ongoing learning process, and you learn from experience. If your first book isn't successful, use what you learned for your next project.

Resources (on handout).

- Books
- Web sites/discussion groups
- Organizations
- Where to find service providers (editors, illustrators, marketing managers, printers, etc.)