

Self-Publishing

What happens *after* you have completed your manuscript

Introduction:

The author of a book in 1979 wrote: 'Probably everyone has a novel in them, and no doubt a lot of publishers wish it would stay that way.' There are people, though, who ignore that sentiment and decide to write a book at some time in their life. Many more have the intention to do so, but become daunted by the realisation of two significant hurdles:

First: Putting thoughts down on paper rarely comes easy; nothing eventuates without considerable persistence, though practice helps.

Second: With a manuscript in hand, you are only half way there. Getting it published is really difficult, exhausting, frustrating and very rarely financially rewarding.

The one thing all best-selling authors have in common is their persistence and determination to never give up on their dream.

- Agatha Christie experienced five years of continual rejections before she struck it lucky. Her book sales now exceed \$2 billion.
- Louis L'Amour received 200 rejections. Now he has 330 million sales.

And, here is a quote from Stephen King: "The nail in my wall would no longer support the weight of the rejection slips impaled upon it. I replaced the nail with a spike and kept on writing."

I think you have got the gist; the publication step is actually harder to overcome than was the hurdle of writing the manuscript in the first place.

Self-publishing is often seen as an option.

- Beatrix Potter was rejected so many times she decided to self-publish 250 copies of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. It has now sold 45 million.

What is involved?

You have three options:- (1) pay a professional, known as a 'literary agent' to manage the entire process; (2) manage part of the process yourself and pay an agent to manage other aspects; or (3) manage each step of the production process yourself and deal directly with editors, designers, printers and others. Regardless of which option you choose, you are still the publisher of the book. Even if you do choose to use an agent, make a point of understanding each step of the process, so that you can be comfortable with handing the publication effort to somebody else. Doing everything yourself offers a cost advantage, but it takes a lot of your time and most authors will prefer to spend their time writing rather than running around doing errands. The greatest advantage of 'doing it yourself' is having complete control over the production of your book and if you are intending to write a second book, the next one will be much easier to manage.

Now let us break down this process into discrete bits.

Editing:

It is always advisable to pay an experienced editor, or at least a fresh pair of eyes, to take a look at your manuscript. If you only want an editor to check for basic grammar, spelling, typographical errors and inconsistencies in style – 'copyediting' as it is

called – stress that *this* is all you want. If you want suggestions as to how you can improve your text – structural editing – tell the editor this. The editor will provide a ‘marked-up’ copy of your manuscript for you to consider and make changes. There is a Society of Editors in most states in Australia. Expect a cost in range \$200 to \$800, maybe more if structural editing is called for.

Design:

An eye-catching cover is very important and it will pay to consult a knowledgeable graphic designer. By all means, show examples of what you like and don’t like about other books, but try to allow the designer some creative freedom. You should indicate a preferred physical size for your book (page width and height). There are websites that can show existing cover designs (e.g., <http://bookcoverarchive.com/>) and other sites where you can purchase a design concept, or image, for your own use. It is also advisable, though not essential, that your designer work on the inside look of the book. A designer may be able to vastly improve the appearance of any illustrations or photographs in your text.

Copyright:

Copyright is an internationally recognised system of protecting the rights of creators of artistic works such as books. As a self-publisher, remember that you are legally obliged to obtain permission to use others’ copyright-protected material in your book. The duration of copyright protection in the case of books lasts for the lifetime of the creator or author of the book, plus 70 years. Australian copyright works are protected in most other countries. Although there is no legal requirement to do so, most authors insert near the front of the book the international copyright symbol ©, the copyright owner’s name, and the year of publication. This serves the function of indicating who the copyright owner is.

ISBN

The allocation of an International Standard Book Number to a work automatically ensures its inclusion in the Australian Books in Print directory, along with the title details supplied by the publisher. This information is then reproduced in international bibliographies (such as Global Books in Print). Subscribers to this service, anywhere in the world, can thus locate the exact version or format of a title (or author, or subject, etc), and easily contact the publisher, which is you if you are a self-publisher.

ISBNs in Australia are supplied by *one* organisation – Thorpe Bowker www.myidentifiers.com.au – As a self-publisher you need to supply title details with your application for an ISBN. The cost for one number is \$42, but a set of ten numbers costs only \$84. Book shops and book distributors will usually require that you place a barcode depicting your ISBN on the back cover of your book. A barcode can cost an extra \$40 or so from Thorpe-Bowker, *however* there is a way of obtaining your barcode for free (see Printing, Sec. 2 below).

Printing:

Section 1. Conventional Offset Printing.

To use an offset printing firm and keep the cost per copy down, you need to order a large number of copies. Hence, you need to accept a large overall ‘up-front’ cost for printing your book. This is a real hassle! What if you cannot *sell* all the books?

The most important decisions you must make with regard to printing are: what sort of paper is to be used (glossy, matt or uncoated, for instance); the basis weight or thickness of the paper (which influences the amount of see-through or transparency of pages and the ‘feel’); the type of cover (hardback, softcover); the

quality of binding you require and finally specify the number of copies to be produced in a print run.

Section 2. Print-on-Demand (“P.O.D.”).

A very interesting alternative to that of approaching a conventional offset printing firm is now offered by print-on-demand organisations (“P.O.D.”). I have used two such organisations (**Blurb** and **Ingram Spark**) with fully acceptable results including some distinct advantages, one key advantage being that you can order as few copies of your book as you wish without having to pay an exorbitant price.

Here is an example. Three years ago, I had 300 copies of one of my manuscripts offset printed conventionally in Australia for a cost of \$3,900 (\$13 each). I still have 200 copies on hand! If you intend distributing your book yourself, then by using a P.O.D. printer, you can order 50 copies, say, and then re-order when your stock gets down to about 10 copies. The up-front cost is no longer a problem!

Cost if I had used a P.O.D. printer

<u>Printer</u>	<u>Cost of printing and delivery to me of 50 copies</u>
Blurb	\$8/copy
Ingram Spark	\$6.30/copy

- a) **Blurb**: The website www.blurb.com is operated by an American company. To use it, you first convert your manuscript into a specific format (defined by Blurb) and upload it to the Blurb website. Delivery is usually within three weeks. Blurb will put a barcode image on your back cover at no charge; no need to purchase a barcode from Thorpe-Bowker!
- b) **Ingram Spark**: There is a P.O.D. Global platform www.ingramspark.com/. Lightning Source is the parent platform with offices in the UK, USA, and Australia. I used the Australian office (in Melbourne). With one agreement, you are connected to international markets and millions of potential customers and their readers via Lightning Source’s 39,000 partners – independent bookstores, online stores, e-book retailers, libraries, schools, and universities. As publisher, you receive your ‘Publisher Compensation’ (i.e., net receipts less the cost of print), paid into your nominated bank account on a 30 day cycle. If your preferred bookseller doesn’t have an account, they can email wholesale.au@ingramcontent.com to set up a free account.

To use Ingram Spark, you first convert your manuscript into a specific format, defined by Ingram Spark (easier to use than Blurb’s format), and upload it to the Ingram Spark website. Ingram Spark automatically creates the barcode image on your back cover at no charge, and they have some handy tools to make working with them as easy as possible. To review the Print and Shipping calculator, Publisher Compensation calculator or the Cover template generator, go to www.ingramspark.com/resources/tools. Delivery is typically 5 to 10 business days.

Legal deposit:

There is a legal requirement to ensure that one copy of your publication is deposited in the National Library of Australia and another copy in your State Library. This should be done soon after publication. There is no charge for legal deposit, but the libraries do not pay you for the copies either.

Selling the book:

If you decide to make your book available outside of a small circle of friends or relatives, you must invest time and energy into promoting and selling your book. Quite often, this task is one with which authors are not comfortable.

There are many avenues for publicising your book, and you should plan your publicity strategy even before the book has been printed. Press releases are one way, but pay as much attention to writing your press release as you did to writing your book. If you are not confident about speaking on radio or appearing on television, don't approach these outlets.

Set aside a number of copies of your book for promotional purposes. Sending out review copies can prove to be an expensive exercise, so an option is to send a written explanation only, stating that a review copy is available on request. Many bookshops like to support self-publishers, particularly local authors, so check the possibility of promoting your book with them. You can benefit from doing a reading and book signing session in their store, especially if there is a local theme to your book.

Distribution:

It is essential that you can provide copies of your book quickly and efficiently to outlets such as bookshops. You can choose to distribute your book yourself, or employ a distributor. The big disadvantage of managing distribution yourself is that it takes time and is an ongoing job; lugging cartons of books through city streets is exhausting; you need to be easily contactable and able to provide quick turnaround of orders. You will also need to be vigilant in your accounting and offer standard terms of trade to booksellers.

'Terms of trade' are the conditions under which you are prepared to supply your book to booksellers. Consider what discount* you will offer, whether you wish to charge for freight, whether you have a 'small order surcharge', and what your 'returns' policy is. If you choose to do the distribution yourself, you need to understand these terms and think carefully about them.

**Discounts may range from 10% up to 60%, but the 'standard' discount is 33-40%. Newsagents who sell books may take a smaller fee, say 25%.*

The advantage of using a distributor or commissioned agent to sell your book is that they have the expertise, resources and contacts to do the job efficiently. You need to be confident that a distributor will do justice to your book and you should establish whether you are free to promote and sell your book as well, because some distributors may prefer an 'exclusive' arrangement. The big drawback is that you will need to allow the distributor to retain a substantial portion of the retail price as payment for his service. It is very likely you will end up receiving *less than* 30% of the book's retail price – 10% is often mentioned by authors. If you feel that is a poor reward for all your effort in writing the book, you will almost certainly need to distribute books yourself *and* sell direct to readers too if you can.

'Soft-copy' options:

So far, I've dealt with the issues around publishing of a traditional book – a 'hard copy' in current-day terminology. An option exists to utilise some form of digital media – the so-called 'soft copy' media. Two examples are compact discs (CDs) and e-books.

CDs

Anyone with a computer can produce multiple copies of the text and illustrations on CDs, and at a ridiculously low price compared to the cost of producing books. One

disadvantage is that the purchaser of a CD has to either read the text on a computer screen or go to the trouble of printing out a copy on paper. There is also a difficulty in selling through third parties, as few retailers are set up to sell CDs of books; music yes, a novel no.

e-Books

In recent times, a great number of internet websites have appeared; each one offering authors an opportunity to sell their manuscripts, as e-books, around the world. Amazon and Smashwords <https://www.smashwords.com/> are two examples.

Typically these sites accept works on any subject from anyone, fiction or non-fiction, picture books, poetry, etc. The website will require that your work is uploaded in a specific format, Microsoft Word say, and the website will then convert your work into other digital formats suitable for use on a Kindle, for instance, or downloadable as a PDF file. There is no up-front fee payable by the author, who retains copyright, but the website retains a portion of the price the readers pay to access the e-book. The author sets the price to be paid by the reader, typically around \$2 a copy and the website will remit monthly (via PayPal direct to the author's bank account) the amount owing to the author.

As mentioned above, Ingram Spark also offers an e-book service for a charge that depends on the number of pages.

An e-book offers a trouble-free way of producing, distributing and selling your book, though it suffers from the same weakness as CDs – the reader has to be prepared to read your book via a computer or i-pad screen. The key benefit over CDs is the worldwide access to readers of e-books. One drawback is that your book is soon displaced from the website's 'front page' by more and more new arrivals (typically around 100 each day) and your book enters the site's massive hard disc archive housing millions of books. Visitors to the website can enter search words and find your book, if they enter suitable keywords such as your name, but how many people in the world will *know* that you have a book on Smashwords? To have any chance of success, your cover image must be *extremely* eye-catching and inviting!

You might be wondering what about ISBNs and Legal Deposit rules for these electronic publications? ISBNs are routinely supplied by the websites hosting e-books, though the author can provide his/her own ISBN. Producers of CDs need to obtain ISBNs in the same way as for a hard copy book.

Australian law requires that copies of an electronic publication in a *physical* format, such as a CD, are to be sent to the relevant libraries, just as with a book. These key libraries at present may elect to collect online material, but this is purely voluntary.

===//===

Parts of the above text were based on information available on the Thorpe-Bowker website.