

Self-Publishing 101: The Fundamentals

Kim Bookless – June 2014

Self-publishing offers amazing opportunities to authors who are willing to invest time, money, and effort into producing a quality book. It requires an entrepreneurial mindset, the ability to be comfortable with a certain amount of risk, and accepting that not everyone will love your book. Understanding how self-publishing works—and how to find and work with excellent service providers—will save you thousands of dollars and lots of frustration.

Traditional Publishing: Publisher buys the book from you, pays to produce it, takes 80%+ of royalties.

Self-Publishing: You own the book and pay to produce it; you do not have to share royalties with a publisher but you will be required to share with distributors, if you use them.

The most important questions: Why are you publishing the book? What are your goals for it?

The answers will determine everything – which self-publishing method you should use, how much money you'll need, how long the process will take, whether you should hire marketing help, and more.

Ebook, Print Book, or Both? It depends on your budget, time frame, and goals for the book.

Self-Publishing Methods:

1. **Do It Yourself** – You'll save money, but it's a lot of work, has a significant learning curve, and does not yield good results. If you must DIY, visit here for info: www.thebookdesigner.com.
2. **A la carte** – Can give great results if you're working with professional service providers, but requires you or a consultant to do a lot of coordination and project management.
3. **Self-publishing company** – Can give great results and removes some of your project management burden, but it requires thorough vetting and due diligence to ensure it's a reputable company. I recommend only www.millicitypress.net & www.adamspress.com.

The Process for Self-Publishing a Quality Book:

Manuscript evaluation→developmental edit→copyedit→cover/interior design→proofread→publish

Ten Basic Steps of Self-Publishing – they happen more or less in this order:

1. **Manuscript evaluation** – I consider this to be a critical first step for authors. A developmental editor will read your manuscript and send you a report showing its strengths, areas in need of improvement, and recommended revisions to make it more competitive. For a relatively small amount of money, an evaluation gives you valuable information from a professional editor on what work should be done to your manuscript before you start spending money to publish it.
2. **Editing** – Extremely important. **All** books need at least one round of copyediting, and all could benefit from developmental editing. Hire a professional editor like www.jwelsheditorial.com.
3. **Logistics**
 - **ISBNs** – Buy your own ISBNs so that you are the publisher of record. You'll need more than one so purchase a block of ten for \$295 at www.myidentifiers.com/product_isbn.
 - **Bar codes** – A bar code incorporates your ISBN and is needed to sell print your book. Purchase one for \$25 at www.myidentifiers.com/cart.
 - **Copyright registration** – Optional, but highly recommended. Register for \$35 at www.copyright.gov. Wait until your interior layout is finished before you register.
 - **Manuscript formatting** – Self-publishing companies and independent book designers will ask you to format your manuscript before you submit it for design. The level of formatting needed ranges from relatively easy to very complex. If your budget allows, hire a professional.

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4. **Cover design** – Extremely important, so don't DIY unless you happen to be a book designer. Hire a professional designer like www.erikanygaard.com or www.adamspress.com.
5. **Interior layout** – Interior layout is complex and can be difficult to do in Microsoft Word. Proper interior layout requires using Adobe InDesign, so hire a professional book designer like www.erikanygaard.com or www.adamspress.com. If you must DIY, Joel Friedlander offers good templates: www.bookdesigntemplates.com.
6. **Proofreading** – Extremely important. This is the last chance to catch design and content errors before publication. There's no good way to do this yourself, so hire a professional proofreader.
7. **Ebook conversion** – This has a significant learning curve that requires knowledge of HTML, so hire a professional: www.adamspress.com, www.erikanygaard.com, or www.publishgreen.com.
8. **Printing** – Print on Demand (POD) is a great option if you need only small quantities of books and don't want to make a big investment in printing. If you need more than a few hundred books, using a digital or offset printer is usually more cost effective.
9. **Distribution** – Distributing a Print on Demand (POD) book is usually inexpensive, but limits you to selling only online and in person. Using a traditional distribution company can increase the possibility of your book being carried in bricks-and-mortar bookstores and libraries, but it can be costly and there's no guarantee of success—and you share royalties with the distributor.
10. **Marketing** – Marketing and publicity are critically important, but they do not guarantee success. Even if you hire help, you must be prepared to do much of the marketing work yourself—it's an unavoidable part of self-publishing. If you don't have a marketing background or an author platform, or if you struggle with the idea of promoting yourself and your book, contact a book marketing consultant or book publicist. Services range from an hour or two of consultation to create an overall marketing strategy, to an all-out book publicity campaign—and fees vary accordingly. www.linkedin.com/in/paulakrapf is fantastic, & also check out www.publiceye.com.

My Absolute Best Self-Publishing Advice

1. Read *The Fine Print of Self-Publishing: A Primer on Contracts, Printing Costs, Royalties, Distribution, Ebooks, and Marketing*, 2014, Mark Levine: www.bookpublisherscompared.com.
2. Make sure your sales expectations are realistic. Don't spend money you can't afford to lose.
3. Get a manuscript evaluation before investing in self-publishing, and listen to your editor.
4. If you're using images, illustrations, or anything created by anyone but you, make sure you have permission in writing to use them in your book. If there is any gray area, consult your attorney.
5. Hire professional service providers (editors, designers, ebook formatters, publicists, etc.).
6. If you can't afford to hire professionals and/or are not sure how well your book will be received by readers, then publish an ebook and use it to test the market before publishing a print book.
7. Thoroughly read all service providers' contracts and consult an attorney on anything you don't understand or have concerns about. If a service provider or self-publishing company won't answer your questions and show you a contract, walk away.
8. Make sure the person/company you pay to produce the book will give you all of your book's original production files. This is critically important—check the contract to be sure it's spelled out.
9. If you use a self-publishing company or book distributor, be sure to understand the royalty policy and fee structure.
10. If your budget permits, consider hiring a publishing consultant to be your project manager.

Kim Bookless is a Chicago-based publishing consultant. She guides authors through the self-publishing process, including creating publishing strategies and managing book production on the authors' behalf. She is an Executive Director at [Chicago Women in Publishing \(CWIP\) \[www.cwip.org\]](http://Chicago Women in Publishing (CWIP) [www.cwip.org]) and leads the [Chicago Self-Publishing Group \[www.meetup.com/chicago-self-publishing\]](http://Chicago Self-Publishing Group [www.meetup.com/chicago-self-publishing]).