

## Why This Successful Self-Published Author Said NO to Traditional Publishing

Contributed by  
Thursday, 22 June 2006  
Last Updated Monday, 26 February 2007

Why did successful self-publisher Michael Sterns tell traditional publishers to look the other way? While most authors are bending over backwards (and hurting themselves) to get contracts with traditional publishers, Michael Sterns went the other direction. You'll be surprised by his reasoning.  
Successful Self-Publisher says no to traditional publishing

[Ed. Note: also in this issue you'll find our interview with  
Michael Sterns: Serendipity and Passion - Two Peas in a Pod ]

I worked long and hard with a client last year to help her get a \$30,000 advance from Wiley & Sons publishers for her nonfiction book. The proposal itself took several weeks to complete, but the effort paid off in what was then the largest advance ever given to a first-time author from Wiley.

Then, we had to write the book.

Most people would scream with joy at such a large advance. In fact, most first-time authors get far less, and sometimes nothing at all. My client was pleased, but also knew that after paying her agent and me she'd still have to have a chunk of money to spend on marketing. Unless your publisher believes you've got the next best seller, they won't do much more than hand you a stack of post cards and a fistful of good wishes.

Michael Sterns figured it this way:

Let's say you get picked up by a big-name publisher, and you sell 50,000 copies of the book. That may seem like quite a bit of money, until you figure that (unless you're a really good negotiator), you'll get 8-10% of the NET sales of the book. Michael did his calculations. If the book sells for \$16, the wholesalers get about a 60% cut. That leaves about \$6. Then, best case, you get 10% of that, or 60 cents per book. Multiply that by 50,000 books (a wild dream in almost all cases), and you'll end up with \$30,000. That, Michael figured, would barely get him out of debt.

"The decision at that point wasn't hard," Michael says. "All I had to do was see that even in the best case scenario, I couldn't pay my rent and I'd still be living on peanut butter sandwiches."

Math and finances aside, there was also the issue of control. Like many self-publishers, Michael wanted complete control over the book. Many authors become frustrated with the changes publishers want to make to their babies. Publishers are in it to make a profit, and not necessarily to make their authors happy; unless, that is, the author sells a lot of books. Then, maybe, both parties will walk away smiling.

Michael Sterns took the self publishing route for what are now obvious reasons. He also decided to use high-quality offset printers instead of print on demand. "I believe that to be successful, your book can't look like it is self-published," he says. While print on demand quality is about on a par with offset printing in black and white, Michael felt that the quality simply wasn't there for full color.

His emphasis on quality, and of course his passion for his work, are perhaps two major reasons that Michael Sterns has sold over 33,000 copies of his first book, *Kokopelli and the Butterfly*, and almost 9,000 copies of the book's sequel.

If you have children, nephews, nieces, or friends with kids, you'll do them, yourself (and of course, Michael) by ordering several copies of his book. You won't be sorry. Order his books at: <http://www.grasshopperdreams.com>