

The Glowing Scarlet Letter

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A Self-Publishing Rebuttal to Mike Resnick

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With all due respect, that's nonsense. Outdated thinking. Once considered the industry's bastard stepchild, self-publishing is growing more legitimate with each passing year. Mr. Resnick's claim that if you self-publish, you are in essence declaring the "book is so bad that no commercial publisher in the world would pay...money for it" flies in the face of reality. New York is now actively "cherry picking" self-pubbed and small press authors, bringing them into the fold not only for their writing abilities, but for their marketing expertise. With the consolidation of the industry, it's no longer good enough to bring an excellent manuscript to an editor; you also need to demonstrate marketing savvy. One of the ways to obtain that savvy is through small press or self-publishing experience. Self-publishing can be a viable means to build your writing career, if judiciously managed.

I will agree with Mr. Resnick that a goodly number of self-published books are ghastly. Just because you can type doesn't make you an author. However, many self-pubbed works are top notch. The readers consistently winnow the wheat from the chaff, just like they do with big press.

For a moment, let's assume you are an editor at XYZ Big Publishing. You have a dilemma. There are two dynamite manuscripts in front of you, both of equal quality. You can only publish one. Author "A" is a newbie. He's never done a book signing, personal appearance, conducted a workshop or attended a convention. He has no fan base and no clue how to market his work. Author "B" has a track record - he self-published his first two books, sold a respectable number of copies and won a national award. He's a regular on the convention circuit, has a reader base, a working knowledge of the publishing industry and connections in bookstores across the country.

Do you choose the newbie or the author with street experience? Any editor desiring profitability will choose someone with "platform."

Self-Publishing to create a platform

I purposely chose to self-publish my first three novels specifically to build that "platform." My manuscripts were not submitted across the globe and rejected by all and sundry. My goal was not to sell thousands of copies. My experiment was two-fold: I wanted to know if I had the guts to weather this business and if my stories would captivate readers. Rather than wasting vast lengths of time waiting to receive a "yes/no/keep your day job" reply from New York, I became my own publisher. I contracted the cover art, the distribution and typesetting. Once the books were delivered, I marketed them. I garnered national reviews and awards. I learned what I did best and where I needed improvement. I addressed those needed improvements and signed my first traditional contract four years later.

Truly great writers will continue to advance their careers, one rung of the publishing ladder at a time. Mr. Resnick's derision toward those who have not followed in his footsteps is unfortunate. Not all of us tread the same path, but we're all headed toward the same goal. How we reach that goal is an individual choice. To tar all self-published authors with the same brush is a disservice, some may say an insult, to those of us who take our careers very seriously.

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