

How to choose a self-publishing company

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Creating a book is like building a house. You start with a dream - an idea percolating in the back of your mind. Then you plan, sketching rough ideas on paper. Next comes setting the details. Finally, the day arrives that you hire the builder to come in and make your dreams, ideas, and hard work a tangible reality. That's self-publishing in a nutshell...

The Insider's Guide to Self-Publishing What to look for in self-publishing companies

I liken the creation of a book to the building of a house (except it takes less time to build a house.) You start with a dream - an idea percolating in the back of your mind. Then you plan, sketching rough ideas on paper. Next comes setting the details down - adding substance and depth to the dream. Finally, the day arrives that you hire the builder to come in and make your dreams, ideas, and hard work a tangible reality.

{sidebar id=11}That's where self-publishing companies come in - bringing life to your dreams, creating substance from your ideas, creativity, and hard won words.

Lots of terms for "hiring a company to produce your book" float around the publishing world - and the most common often have negative connotations - vanity press, subsidy press, and self-publishing company. There are lots of others who do the same thing, but in 'bits-and-pieces' - copyeditor, book designer, cover designer or artist, printer, distributor, marketing consultant.

To Self-Publish or Not

Is there a difference in what any of these companies do for authors? Not really, but the words "vanity press" really insults what authors are trying to do when they choose to self-publish their books. Obviously, I believe strongly in the value that self-publishing companies bring to authors, and I also understand that many authors often choose to take another route and go into business for themselves. For the typical self-published author, however, a significant amount of frustration, time, and money can be saved by using self-publishing companies.

Also known as "author services companies", self-publishing companies help those authors who prefer to hire publishing professionals to perform the "book building" and fulfillment tasks for their books.

Most every author dreams of seeing their book stacked high and deep in the big bookstores, with a shiny logo from one of the worlds largest publishers - and we encourage every author with this dream to try the traditional route. You can't leave your dreams behind without giving them a fair shot. But, we stand ready to help you bring your manuscript to life.

Almost every self-publishing company uses the exact same technologies to produce and print books. But each company has a unique approach to the market, and a distinct personality. They each have distinct benefits - and in some cases drawbacks.

Here is what I believe is important in choosing a company to self-publish your book.

1) My first is CONTRACT - do you keep all your rights and can you terminate your agreement at any time without penalty? The author contract should be short and easy to understand. It should never have a "duration" that locks you

into keeping your book with the publishing house. You should be able to leave without penalty at any time. Beware the publisher that pays you a single dollar to have the rights to your book for years. You should own every single piece of the process, from copyedited manuscript to the files used to print your book - and you should be able to get them at ANY time, not just after canceling your contract.

- 2) The second item - RETAIL PRICE. Can you set your own retail? Does the publisher force you into ridiculously high retail prices? Remember, to sell in retail outlets you need to set your book's retail price at about 2.5 X your cost... chains, big retail outlets, and wholesalers want at least a 50% discount, and many times you pay freight. So - if your book costs \$4 to print, you need to be able to sell it at \$9.95 to pretty much break even... which brings us to...
- 3) The third item - your BOOK PRINTING COSTS. Your Retail is almost always a function of your cost to print the book. If your book costs more to print, you need to push your retail price higher just to break even. Tied directly into this - can this publisher offer OFFSET PRINTING (also called "traditional printing") services? Going to a "traditional press" is the only way to actually get a great price on a large volume of books. Not many of the big self-publishers offer this advantage.
- 4) The fourth item - your AUTHOR PROFIT. ROYALTY, NET SALES PAYMENT, PROFIT. Whatever it's called - it's the amount you receive from each book sale. Be careful of any company that gives a huge royalty but forces unreasonable retail prices on your book. It makes no sense to get a "50%" royalty on a book that will never sell. Also watch for royalties that are increased by REDUCING your WHOLESale DISCOUNT - again, if no store will buy it, what's the point of a royalty? Final note - on what is the royalty paid? Most often it's paid on the NET SALE, NOT the Retail Price. This also begs the question - why shouldn't you get ALL the profit from a sale? Why should a publishing services company get more profit when you sell your book for a higher price? Their costs are fixed - it's the same to them to print and distribute a 100 page book that retails for \$10 as a 100 page book that retails for \$50! Look for a publishing company that pays you based upon a 'fixed cost' basis - and who forwards all the remaining profit to you.
- 5) Fifth - can you actually speak with someone who actually knows something about the book industry? Do you have access to "decision makers" that can make things happen for your book? How long has the person you are speaking to worked at the company (let alone how long they've been in the publishing industry).
- 6) Sixth - what is their business model? Everyone is in business to make money - and that's an honorable thing... but watch WHERE they make their money - look for hidden charges, or charges that show up to actually create an effective and salable book for you.
- 7) Last, but not least - CREATIVE CONTROL - can you set your design? can you pick your own retail price? can you set your own profit margin? do you control the discount offered to retailers and wholesale accounts?

One thing you'll note I didn't mention "Publishing Costs" anywhere - the reason being that these are the least of your worries. In almost every case, your BOOK PRINTING PRICES (and consequently author profit) is infinitely more important. The minor difference in self-publishers production costs to the author will have little or no impact on your ultimate costs after even just a few books.

There are plenty of resources on the internet for helping decide who you should use to publish your book - here's a few:

Dog Ear Publishing - www.DogEarPublishing.net/morecomparisons.aspx - this page takes this article to even greater detail and compares some self publishing companies.

Dan Poynter - www.danpoynter.com - he tends to advocate doing all the work yourself, or hiring individual contractors. A good counterpoint to my Dog Ear site

The Fine Print of Self Publishing - www.book-publishers-compared.com - by Mark Levine. He ranks the contracts and services of 48 self publishing companies. (fair disclosure, he likes Dog Ear Publishing).

About the Author:

Ray Robinson is a partner in Dog Ear Publishing, a company providing publishing services to authors and book publishers. Dog Ear Publishing puts control and profit back into the author's hands - visit us at <http://www.DogEarPublishing.net>