

Self-Publishing: How to Turn One Book Into a Full-Time Living

Contributed by Peter Bowerman
Tuesday, 27 February 2007
Last Updated Thursday, 19 April 2007

Fact or Fiction: "The only reason to self-publish is because you can't land a publisher." In this article, author Peter Bowerman provides ample evidence to prove this statement wrong.

Self-Publishing Secrets - How to Turn One Book Into Full-Time Work

[Editor's Note: Self-Publishing can be the best option for the nonfiction writer. If you're in business, and your business can grow if you've got a book, then you can benefit from publishing your own book. As self-published author Peter Bowerman points out in this article, you can take one book to a full-time business if you do things right. The key is in the marketing, and not necessarily in the writing or publishing of the book. Of course, timely and well-written books can do well on their own. But, most authors, particularly business people, will need to be innovative and creative in their marketing efforts. Peter does a great job in identifying the keys to self-publishing success.]

Why Self-Publishing?

Fact or Fiction: "The only reason to self-publish is because you can't land a publisher."

Every time I hear that, I've gotta smile. The unspoken message, of course, is that the preferred route is to land a publisher. Well, call me crazy, but I disagree. For me, self-publishing was the first choice. I actually did not pursue the conventional publishing route with any more than halfhearted zeal. Given the subsequent success of the book, I have zero doubt that I could have attracted any number of conventional publishers should I have decided to go that route. But I knew pretty early on in the process that I wanted to keep more control over the whole project, keep the rights to my work, and, most importantly, keep most of the profits.

A Full-Time Income

For over four years, my first book supported me full-time. Not "picking-out-chateaux-in-the-South-of-France" kind of money, but the book paid all my bills (including an average of two book printings each year), allowed me to still take some nice vacations, save a chunk of money and incur no new debt. When your per book profit (after all expenses) is three, four, or five times what you could make with a conventional publisher, you can be nicely profitable with much lower numbers.

A few caveats. My genre - non-fiction "how-to" - is, arguably, the easiest to self-publish (with straight non-fiction second). Why? Not only is there an insatiable appetite for information in the buying public, but also with non-fiction "how-to," it's relatively easy to identify and pursue specific target audiences. Fiction is harder to self-publish but for first-time novelists, it's also far harder to attract a conventional publisher.

Second & Third Caveats

All this advice applies if your goal is to have your book be a commercial success and if you have a decent chunk of time to market your masterpiece. If neither is the case, you'd be better off with a conventional publisher or in a POD scenario, where your upfront financial obligations are far lower or nonexistent (as will be, in all likelihood, your backend profits...). As for the time thing, though, if you're thinking - scratch that, fantasizing - that you'll find a publisher who will allow you to simply drop off your manuscript while they handle that whole "icky marketing thingy," think again.

Read a great article on self-promotion by author Jessica Hatchigan (How to be Your Own Publicist) in the September 2003 issue of *The Writer* entitled, "Bestsellers are made, not born." In it, she observes, "Unfortunately, authors who receive modest advances for their books - and that's most authors - can expect scandalously little in marketing support from most publishers. (One insider recently told me that many publishing houses today, because their profit margins are so thin, don't even bother to send out review copies of their newbie authors' books.)"

Wanted: Multitalented Authors

Most publishers these days want to work with authors who come to them with, not only their book, but also a plan for promoting and marketing that book. So, if I still have to do most of the work for anemic royalty rates, self-publishing is worth a look.

Conventional Publishing Today

The "shotgun" approach to promotion and publicity certainly appears to be the order of the day with most publishing companies. Mass e-mailed press releases to mainstream media outlets seem to be the norm. And then there's the often-mystifying approach for sending review copies (and usually with little or no follow up...). I've probably received a dozen unsolicited review copies over the past few years due to some casual affiliations with certain associations or lists. The books arrive, typically with nothing more than a brief cover letter, if that. Given that I wasn't expecting it and likely have little interest in it, the chance that I'll review it is mighty slim.

Never Send It Unsolicited

Unlike the "shotgun" approach to promotion taken by most publishing companies, EVERY single one of the roughly 500+ review copies I have sent out over the past few years has gone to someone with whom I had communicated in advance. Yes, that approach takes more time, but yields far superior "bang for the book."

As a self-publisher, you have the luxury (arguably, a necessity) most conventional publishers don't enjoy: the ability to focus on your title and find the most effective ways to promote it, as opposed to the pub company model: hitting only mainstream media (already over-contacted), and indiscriminately sending out review copies. By contrast, as a self-publisher, I go where the traffic is lighter, the reception is warmer and the people speak my language. I say there's virtually no way you couldn't do a better job than most publishers.

The Goal: To Be Seen "Everywhere!"

A year or so back, after asking a buyer where she found the book, she replied: "Everywhere!" Music to an author's ears. I kept hearing different iterations of the same basic theme. One woman wrote: "I first heard about your book on [writersdigest.com](#), then on [writerswrite.com](#), and finally on [writersweekly.com](#). After the third time, I figured I needed to see what the fuss was all about." Sounds like people need to receive multiple impressions before they take action. Very useful information. How did I do it? Through the Internet, of course - the Great Equalizer for the little guy.

Let's take my book as an example: *The Well-Fed Writer: Financial Self-Sufficiency As a Freelance Writer in Six Months or Less* - a step-by-step "how-to" for establishing a lucrative full- or part-time freelance corporate writing business. With all the downsizing of the past decade, Corporate America is outsourcing plenty of writing projects at hourly rates of \$50-100+.

Okay, so who's my audience? For starters, how about any and all "wannabe" writers looking to make a handsome living with their pen? Add seasoned freelancers looking to diversify beyond magazines into higher-paying work. Plus at-home moms and home-based business seekers looking for a flexible, well-paying career from home.

Go to Your Market

To land reviews (and interviews, blurbs, mentions, green lights to write articles, etc.), go to where your various target communities hang out. Scour the Internet for web sites, associations, newsletters, and newsgroups for folks in your target audience(s). Visit these sites, find the "Contact Us" link and make your pitch by e-mail. Make up one standard pitch letter, vary it slightly for your different audiences, and "cut 'n paste."

Try any URLs that sound right for your topic. Actual examples for me: [writers.com](#), [freelancewriting.com](#), [athomemoms.com](#), [writing.com](#), [homebusiness.com](#), etc. And just simply repeat the process over and over and over again.

Mainstream Media?

Certainly you should pursue mainstream media (MM) coverage in addition to your Internet contacts but know that the media is exponentially more fickle than if you can zero in on your target audience via the above-described process - where you'll get a FAR better response. And that's no surprise - I'd picked groups that, by definition, would have an interest in my book. MM is just that - mainstream, not focused.

Here's the reality: the chance that an unknown author will attract the attention of a reasonably major-market newspaper is slim. Not impossible, but not worth the return when a far better one is waiting. And btw, if you are going to pursue MM, forget the book editor. They don't care (except to post event listings in their calendars). Instead, figure out which editor - Food, Jobs, Career, Business, Features, Computers, Lifestyle - a would be a fit for your topic. Contact them and pitch, not the book, but an angle represented by the book. They simply don't care that you've written a book; they want to know why the book is relevant now.

Your Web Site

A web site is mandatory. Period. It's the linchpin of any Internet marketing push. Mine (www.wellfedwriter.com) has sample chapter, table of contents, reviews, cover art, Q&A, sample radio/TV footage and much more. Check out the "Attn: Media" link on my site, which makes their job much easier (and hence, more likely to happen). Always add your URL to your e-mail signature going out on every e-mail you send. You'd be surprised where interest in your title comes from.

Landing a publisher has never been harder, but thanks to the Internet, that's no longer your only option. Self-publishing is easier, more accessible, and more lucrative than ever before. Isn't it time for a raise?

Want to get published, and make a living from it? Check out a free report "How to Turn One Book into a Full-Time Living" at www.wellfedsp.com, home of author Peter Bowerman's August 2006 release, *The Well-Fed Self-Publisher* (and powerful companion marketing guide, *The Well-Fed SP Biz-in-a-Box*). Bowerman is the self-published author of *The Well-Fed Writer* and *TFWW: Back For Seconds* (www.wellfedwriter.com), multiple-award winning selections of Book-of-the-Month Club and others, and acclaimed "standards" in the field of lucrative commercial freelancing. Over 50,000 copies of his first two books in print have earned him a full-time living for over five years