

How to Publish a Book - A Blow-by-Blow Process Summary

Contributed by
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How do you get your book published? We've encapsulated the essence of the process from our recent teleseminar on publishing. In this article you'll learn the steps that you and your prospective publisher will go through from the time you introduce yourself until your book hits the streets.

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The following article is an excerpt from our recent teleconference on publishing. In the teleconference, we discussed both traditional publishing and self-publishing. What follows is a summary of our discussion about getting published by a traditional publisher, including the big publishers and the many "Indie" or independent book publishers.

The teleconference was hosted by Sid Smith and featured Peter Hornsberger, president and founder of Cold Tree Press (<http://www.coldtreepress.com>).

Who Publishes Books?

Today there are three major avenues to getting a book published:

- a. Using one of the big publishers, such as Random House and Penguin.
- b. Publishing with a smaller, independent book publisher.
- c. Self-publishing your book.

The big publishers - Random House, Penguin, Simon & Schuster, etc. - are like large gorillas that carry a lot of clout. The overall costs for book publishing have been going up, while the price of a book has remained relatively static over the past ten years. Competition got so fierce with the latest installment of Harry Potter that some book stores refused to carry the book because they'd lose money on the sale.

Where does the money from the sale go? Most of it will go to the publisher and a small percentage (usually 5-7 percent) will go to the author. The publisher sells the book to retail outlets, including Amazon, at a discount - typically 40%. Many book stores will turn around and offer the public a 30% discount off the cover price, giving them a 10% net profit on the sale of the book.

The reason we're talking about this is to show how small the profit margins are for everyone in the publishing industry. For every book that is a best seller there are a thousand that lose money. Thus, the big publishers are focused on books that have a higher chance of making a profit. It's simple business sense.

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They know that they have a better chance of winning if they publish books by proven authors. They'll often only take a chance on a first-time author if that author has already proven him or herself by selling a certain number of books through an independent publisher. The first Harry Potter book, for example, was initially published by a small independent publisher.

What this means for the typical first-time author is that you've got a much better shot at getting your book published by a smaller, independent publisher.

Independent Publishers

There are a lot of independent presses out there that are made up of smaller group of people that truly are independent presses. They're not part of a large corporation. They look for different genres, and most Indie presses will specialize in a certain genre of book. Some do fiction, some do children's, some do how-to. There's even Indie presses for cookbooks. These are the companies that would most likely pick up a new author.

Now, that's not to say that the big companies wouldn't publish your book, because they still are looking for new authors. But a new author has a better chance of success with an Indie publisher.

Which Publisher?

The number one rule of thumb is to find a publisher who specializes in your genre. We can guarantee that if you write a mystery thriller and send it to a publishing company who specializes in cook books, your letter won't get more than a quick glance. It's a waste of your time and the time of the publisher.

Please take the time to research your publishers. Use online searches to find publishers, or take a trip to your library where you'll find lists with names and addresses. Always get current information, though, by going online or calling the company. Any Indie publisher would be happy to give you the name and email or mailing address of the appropriate person. Make sure you send your query letter to the right person.

As to which publisher beyond one that fits your genre, I wouldn't be too picky beyond finding a good fit for your genre. Find out what other books they've published and how well those books have sold. Some publishers are more adept at others with their marketing.

However, be aware that once the book has been out for a few months, your publisher will likely be focused on one or more new books. Their survival depends on having a steady stream of books, so be prepared to do a lot of your own marketing.

The Book Publishing Process

You will write a "query" letter, which is more of a sales letter than a plea for help. Many people think that a query letter is not much more than a letter that says, "Hi. Here's my really great book. I would like you to publish it."

Your query letter is a sales letter. You must sell your book, your writing, and yourself. In a few short paragraphs you need to demonstrate that you can write well, that your book will be a hit, and that you've got your marketing act together.

Besides making sure that your letter and manuscript is a fit for the publisher, you need to make an outstanding first impression. If your query letter isn't well crafted, contains spelling or grammatical errors, or is downright boring, then it won't get more than 10 seconds.

The following process is a generalization. Every publisher has their own process, but the flow will go something like this:

1. The Acquisitions Editor

The acquisitions editor will read your query, read your sample chapter and make a determination whether they feel the book has any potential at all. If they do, they'll contact the author.

2. The Review Committee

If the acquisitions editor is interested in your book they'll pass it into a review committee. They will evaluate the proposal and determine whether they should go forward, or it should be rejected. A positive report from this committee means that they're ready to go forward. Many times the acquisition editor will contact the author to flush it out. They'll then ask for the full manuscript to establish its current state. In other words, you won't write your query letter until your book is written and thoroughly edited - by you (15-20 passes) and by one or more outside editing sources.

3. Your book is accepted

Once the acquisition editor gets done with your book it will probably go into a full edit. It will be evaluated for character flow, story development, and continuity. Grammar and punctuation will be cleaned up later by a copy editor.

They may ask you to make a number of changes. The publisher will evaluate the book and determine what you need to do to bring it up to snuff. It's at this point that your contract is often signed. They won't ask you to revise the book until you have a contract, but at that point the book is theirs.

You will be assigned a copy editor, with whom you'll work to make the desired changes to your book. They'll ask for changes, adjustments, and anything they believe will make the book better. If you've got a big ego, then this process probably isn't for you.

Once you sign that contract with a traditional publisher, you've given up your rights. You pretty much have to do what they say. But like anything else, it depends on the publishing house. Some, especially smaller publishers, will have much more flexibility. Consider, though, that they're in the business of selling books, and not of making authors happy.

There may be some things that you're not going to like to do, but that you're going to be required to do. Oh, and they have control over your title as well.

4. Pre-press and printing of your book

Once your book goes through the copy edit process and has been signed off, it will go into the pre-press work, which is the type setting. First, it goes into proof reading, and then they'll format the book.

They'll generate galleys and pre-galleys. At that point it will start going out to the marketing people who will pass it on to reviewers and start generating some buzz on your book. And while these final stages are going on and while this book is being assembled and printed, your marketing campaign will have already started and will launch at the release date.

What you'll get paid

Traditional publishers generally pay 5 to 6 percent in royalties after they've paid their bills (that's 5-6 percent of net, not

gross). If you're an established author, you can get a higher percentage, or get paid a percent of the gross sales, instead of net sales. It doesn't amount to much. Few authors can support themselves by writing books. Becoming rich and famous is, therefore, not the best of reasons to write a book. You write because you have something to say, or because you love to write.

On the other hand, you'll get between 15 and 30% of the gross sales with self-publishing. You can actually make some decent money as a self-publisher, although self-publishing still has a bad reputation in the publishing industry (for good reason).

Anyone can self-publish a book, and there are thousands of poorly written self-published books available. Most don't sell more than 25-30 books. If you're serious about becoming a published author, you'll give traditional publishing a shot before you self-publish your book.

Fiction versus non-fiction publishing

We often get asked if there is a difference. Yes, there is. Nonfiction books generally require a more elaborate book proposal, but don't necessarily have to be complete at the time the proposal is written. You'll need a couple of sample chapters, a complete book outline, and a thorough marketing plan.

Again, look for a publisher who specializes in your type of book, whether it's academic or a business book. Don't waste your time scattering your book out to every publisher because most won't be interested.

We hope that you've found this article of interest. Please let us know if there is more specific information you'd like about publishing your book.