

Self-Publishing: The New American Idol

Contributed by Brent Sampson
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Self-publishing companies are thriving, and that is because they give writers their shot, their fifteen minutes, their chance. They are American Idol for writers.

SELF-PUBLISHING: THE NEW AMERICAN IDOL There was a recent article in the New York Times about the self-publishing industry, which received a lot of attention and has sparked ongoing controversy.

In spite of all evidence to the contrary, it appears conventionally published authors (and those striving to become such) still view self-publishing services with contempt because they feel authors are cheating somehow. After all, getting a book published traditionally is hard work. Those who have done it (or long to) perhaps feel as if self-published authors haven't paid their dues.

But are they really cheating, or are they simply taking advantage of wide-spread changes taking place throughout the entertainment and business worlds?

Lets examine other industries:

The same Do-it-Yourself (DIY) fever is sweeping through the music industry. Or, to be more accurate, has already swept through the music industry. Talented musicians are no longer waiting for acceptance from the establishment and instead, are distributing their music through iTunes, finding their audiences through Myspace, and broadcasting their music videos via YouTube. It is safe to say the music industry has irrevocably changed. Musicians no longer give 95% of their royalties to the industry and customers no longer buy CDs from brick-and-mortar music stores.

Are these musicians cheating? No. They are still paying their dues, but now the invoice comes after their music has already become available. They still must market aggressively to obtain listeners, but at least they have something to market. The audience determines which of those musicians succeed and which of them fail.

This is no different from the self-publishing book industry.

I think it is safe to say that becoming a rock star is a dream that almost everyone can acknowledge, if not personally identify with; although if the ratings for American Idol are any indication, it might actually be a dream nearly everyone can identify with, too.

Other common dreams are becoming an actor, becoming a model, becoming a professional athlete, and yes, even becoming a published author.

Can you imagine the uproar that would ensue if all that was required to start playing for the New York Knicks was writing a check for \$1000 to some internet company? Can you imagine the fervor if all that was required to obtain a recording contract was standing in line at some reality show try-out? Wait a minute! That's already happening. Reality television has altered the search for talent and now, in rare instances, getting discovered is no harder than filling out an application.

Nowadays, instead of submitting audition tapes to countless producers, lyricists stand in line and face the possibility of public humiliation at the hands of Simon, Paula, and Randy.

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Is this cheating, per se, or has the do-it-yourself mentality simply removed unnecessary hurdles that prevented talent from being discovered faster? You see, talent is the one common denominator and talent cannot be purchased. Cast members of Survivor have their fifteen minutes of fame and then disappear back into the abyss. The try-outs for American Idol feature thousands upon thousands of hopefuls standing in lines around city blocks and yet the main competition is comprised of just a handful. Most had their opportunity to shine, and their audience rejected them. But at least they received a shot.

As the New York Times article states, self-publishing companies are thriving, and that is because we give writers their shot, their fifteen minutes, their chance. We are American Idol for writers. We make it easy to publish a book. If publishing a book is your dream, you're going to be happy with the result. And if your dream is to be successful, famous, rich, or a combination of the three, you're going to receive your chance, but just like everyone else who is successful, famous, or rich, you are going to need to bring something special to the table.

Most reasonable people recognize this. Those who don't may become disillusioned, but listen if it were easy to become a bestselling author, a multi-platinum recording artist, a player for the New York Knicks, or a highly-sought-after runway model, then everyone would do it.

Just because iTunes makes the distribution of music easy doesn't mean every artist is going to become a success overnight. And just because standing in line for American Idol is easy doesn't mean all those people are going to win an Oscar and sing the National Anthem for the Super Bowl. Lord knows there is only one Jennifer Hudson. American Idol didn't make her a success; talent pours from her soul. She would have found success tripping through the dark blindfolded. But American Idol shined a light on her, and she reflected back.

Self-publishing companies shine a light on writers. It is the writers job to shine back. Some authors do, like Gang Chen, who earned over \$39,000 in royalties from Outskirts Press in the 4th quarter of 2008. That's \$13,000 a month. Has his book sold a million copies? No. Is he making a lot of money as a self-published author? Yes. By any reasonable benchmark, Gang Chen is a successful self-published author who has given specific permission to have his successes shared.

And this brings me to my last point. All publishing companies are different, just like all writers are different, and just like all contestants on American Idol are different. Success is never guaranteed. But if you are going to self-publish your book, you're better off publishing with a company where your chances for success increase. Above all, you have to believe in yourself and you have to work hard. Success rarely comes easily for anyone, but now, thanks to self-publishing companies, everyone has an equal chance. Well shine the light on you. What you do with that light is up to you.

About the author

Brent Sampson is the best-selling author of "Sell Your Book on Amazon" and the award-winning "Self-Publishing Simplified." As the president & CEO of Outskirts Press, Brent offers turn-key, on-demand custom book publishing services to authors seeking a cost-effective, fast, and powerful way to publish and distribute their books worldwide. Outskirts Press has helped thousands of authors realize their dreams of publishing profitably and is the third fastest growing privately-held company in Colorado. Visit www.outskirtspress.com for more information.