

5 Steps to Self Publishing Success, or How You Can Earn \$30,000 a Month through POD Publishing

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Are you interested in self publishing? This author gives you the low down on how you can get started self publishing your book.

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The economy was not so bad when I started thinking about self publishing my first book, "Planting Design Illustrated". I had gotten some interest from traditional publishers but they wanted to make quite a lot of changes and add a co-author. These were changes that would have made me dislike my own book! So, I turned to self publishing. At the time, making a lot of money was not at the top of my priorities. I simply wanted to publish my own book in my own way.

Things change. Sure, I still want to have all the control and keep all my rights, but the royalty checks have a way of becoming more important, especially with the economic climate that we're in. I self published my second book, "LEED AP Exam Guide" with Outskirts Press in September of 2008. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) is the most important trend in development and is currently revolutionizing the construction industry. My book had the benefit of being published at the right time, at the right price. In one month (January 2009), I earned over \$30,000 in royalties (\$31,207.68, to be precise). I earned even more in February.

These are the steps I followed:

1. WRITE A VALUABLE BOOK

This step is easily overlooked, but it is Number One on this list for a reason. Your book must provide some sort of value or benefit for the reader. In my case, my books are both non-fiction, and fairly niche. I earn the lion's share of my royalties from my LEED AP Exam Guide, which provides a mock exam, study guides, and sample questions for the LEED AP Exam, required to obtain one's title of LEED AP (Accredited Professional). Did I say it was niche? It is, and for people seeking the information contained in my book, it is also invaluable.

I don't think I'm saying anything revolutionary when I say that publishing non-fiction is an easier proposition on the self publishing front than fiction. But even fiction books are valuable, if they provide the type of escape your reader is seeking. Whether you write non-fiction, fiction, poetry, or something else entirely, the book must deliver on its promise. You might do everything else on this list, and you might even find some short-lived success, but ultimately, the success of your book comes down to the strength of your book and the marketing efforts you put forth.

2. IDENTIFY YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

Who is your reader? If your answer is everybody you need to reevaluate your goals and recalibrate your expectations. Even the bestselling book of all time appeals to less than 1/5 of the planet's population. You know the book? The Bible. No book is meant for everybody. In fact, perhaps counter-intuitively, the smaller your audience, the more success you will find. Look at my books: "Planting Design Illustrated" and "LEED AP Exam". That small, target audience is precisely the reason my books are well-known in the proper circles. Do I care that someone who reads Harry Potter has never heard of me? No. Is it incredibly important to me that students and professionals in the field of green building design and construction have heard of me? Yes.

Who do you think it is easier to find and market to a person who reads Harry Potter, or a student/professional in the field of green building design and construction? Exactly. The smaller your pond, the bigger your fish. Or something like that.

3. RECOGNIZE THE TYPE OF BOOK YOU ARE PUBLISHING

You should be realistic about the type of book you are writing, and the type of publishing you are doing. If you are self publishing your book (regardless of whether you are doing it yourself or through the publishing services of a POD company like I did), don't try to force your book to be something that it's not. Your book is not a mass market paperback like those you find in a grocery store. Nor is it the latest hardback, discounted 80%, like those you find at Costco. As a self publishing author, both of those scenarios are too risky, and to be frank, you probably don't possess the means to take on that kind of risk. So why try? Self publishing authors publish trade paperback and hardback books that can be available regionally (perhaps), locally (probably), and online (definitely).

4. PRICE YOUR BOOK APPROPRIATELY

No, this does not mean you should simply make your book as affordable as possible. It means you should do market research to determine the prices of similar books in your category. Look on Amazon.com for similar books (you'll need to be aware of these books anyway, when it comes to marketing yours). Examine their page count and price point. Make an honest assessment of your book in relation to the other books in your category. Does your content justify a higher price? Does your page count suggest a lower price? Your method of publishing should be considered but should not play a definitive role in the price of your book, the marketplace should. It doesn't matter where you published your book if no one is buying it (just like it doesn't matter where you published your book if "many" people are buying it!). Just be sure you are comparing apples to apples (see #3 above).

5. PUBLISH YOUR BOOK WISELY

My main consideration when choosing my publisher was not how much my royalties were going to be. That only became important to me after the book was published. But they say hindsight is 20-20, so I'm going to share with you one of the main reasons my royalties are so high. The publisher I chose, Outskirts Press, pays me 100% of the profits of the book and lets me set my own pricing. iUniverse pays 20% of the profit. Xlibris pays 10% of the retail price. But, by paying 100% of the profit, Outskirts Press allowed me to set the retail price to whatever I wanted, and now I earn the entire benefit of increasing my price.

Here's another way to look at it: If I had published my same exact book with iUniverse at the same exact retail price, instead of earning \$31,207.68 in January I would have earned approximately \$5,300. If I had published my same book with Xlibris, I would have earned approximately \$4,600. Yes, without knowing any better, I would have still considered myself a successfully self published author, but probably not enough to write this article.

Self publishing is working for me. My royalties are increasing every month and I'm working on my third book, which I will also publish with Outskirts Press. If hindsight "is" indeed 20-20, I can only imagine what my royalties will be for book #3! Wish me luck, and I do the same for you.

About the Author

Gang Chen is a LEED AP and a member of the American Institute of Architects (AIA). He is the internationally acclaimed author of LEED AP Exam Guide and Planting Design Illustrated. Gang Chen holds a Masters Degree from the School of Architecture, University of Southern California (USC), Los Angeles, and a Bachelors Degree from the Department of Architecture, South China University of Technology. He has over 20 years of professional experience. Many of the projects he was in charge of, or participated in, have been published extensively in Architecture, Architectural Record, The Los Angeles Times and The Orange County Register, etc. He has worked on a variety of unusual projects, including well-known large-scale healthcare and hospitality projects with over one billion dollars in construction costs, award-winning school design, highly-acclaimed urban design and streetscape projects, multi-family housing and high-end custom homes, and regional and neighborhood shopping centers. Visit <http://outskirtspress.com/GangChen> for more information.

