



Planning to publish a book?

**Andy Coote looks at the options
for getting your words out
to your audience effectively**

It can be a little daunting to learn, after the effort of writing a book, that getting it published can be as difficult, if not more so, as the writing. This article considers the various approaches that you might take to become a published author and gives some advice on the decisions you may need to make along the way. The considerations apply to a non fiction book based around your expertise but may be more widely applicable.

Is it Marketable?

What is it that you can say that is different and useful to your target reader? Do you have a target reader? You need to be passionate about your subject and able to apply expertise to it. A book allows you to get your views out there and help people in a crowded market for your expertise and it allows you to demonstrate that expertise and becomes a way of providing credibility. There will be a revenue stream but it is unlikely to be enough to allow you to give up the day job. However, if your day job involves speaking to audiences or working with groups, it does allow you to use the power of now to sell copies at the back of the room. You'll be surprised how many people will want a signed copy, too.

More Publishing Choices

Once, not that long ago, the choices for publishing your book were between finding a mainstream publisher and using a vanity publishing service. Publishing now offers many more options, which have, mostly, been enabled by three technologies - graphics and desktop publishing software, Print On Demand (POD) and Internet shops.

Mainstream Publishers

Mainstream publishers - Hodder, Random House, Butterworths and others - will invest in an author, possibly even paying an advance. Given this commitment, they will be looking for the top sellers in their category and have a limited number of books they will publish each year. All the costs of the book will be repaid from sales before the author receives a penny in royalty. If you can get a deal with a mainstream publisher, this may or may not be the right move for you. Mainstream publishers often work to longer timescales - anything from 9 months to a year or even longer - and marketing may not be as comprehensive as you expect. Big publishers tend to put their marketing budgets behind blockbusters and smaller publishers have smaller budgets.

Vanity Publishing

At the other end of the scale, vanity publishing has rightly gained a very poor reputation through the activities of some unscrupulous firms. A vanity publisher takes money to produce books often with no commitment to marketing and no expectation of sales beyond your initial order. Those initial orders could, in some cases, be very large indeed.

Being Your Own Publisher

Self-publishing has been possible for a long time. I have a copy of a book by Wendy Grant - 'Are You in Control' - that was self published in the early 1990s and sold into garages and service areas in Wendy's local area in Somerset (and maybe more widely). I have no idea how many copies she sold or if she turned a profit. What I do know is that she, or someone close to her, would have had to become a publisher, a

print buyer and a sales representative to get the book available and make sales.

Printing in Batches of one

Print on demand is a spin off from digital printing. When book printing involved making plates - a process involving creating an image on the plate and then raising the surface to be printed often by etching away the surrounding area using acid - it was impossible to imagine printing a single copy of a book. So books were printed in batches and the more that were printed, the lower the cost per unit because the relatively high cost of plate making could be spread across more units. With digital printing, the image arrives as a computer file and is printed in much the same way as you print from a home computer but with greater speed and quality. The cost to print one copy is much the same as to print one hundred or one thousand. Print on demand is an option where orders of a single copy can be printed and dispatched within days of order. No more 'out of print' waiting for new copies and no expensive printed stock.

The 'Long Tail'

Couple that with the internet and things really changed. Amazon has blazed the trail for online purchasing of books and has a massive share of the market globally. The technology they use, with some exceptions, is also available to anyone who wants to set up a web shop. Chris Anderson of Wired Magazine wrote a book - *The Long Tail* (Random House, 2006) - to show what happens when people have access to a wide range of titles online against the space-limited stock in a bookshop. The Long Tail describes the graph of sales that begins with the relatively few high sellers and continues with the plentiful lower sellers. Most bookshops

carry fewer than 100,000 titles. Amazon make 25% of their sales beyond the top 100,000 books in their range and that trend seems to be growing.

With these developments, more authors are taking the opportunity to self publish, producing books for themselves and marketing them at events and speaking engagements.

Growth of e Books

E Books have grown in numbers with the ability of an audience to download them or read them online. The value of e Book can range from free to many times the price of an equivalent physical book - showing a vast difference in attitudes to the value of online data. The production costs are, of course, much lower. Shorter books (30 - 50 pages) work better as ebooks because of the need to either read on screen or print out to read. For a 150-page book, the cost of printing at home may exceed the retail price of the equivalent physical book. Some books are produced in both forms - with the e book version acting as a sales tool for the physical version by allowing the reader to try before they buy'. The death of physical, printed books still seems to be a long way off.

Getting Help with Publishing

Although, it is now easier than ever to self publish your own physical book, you do, however, need to get to grips with the publishing process and manage the sub-contractors who will help to produce the book. You may also need to cope with the job of fulfilling all book orders yourself or engage someone else to do that.

Outsourced Self Publishing

Lulu.com is the next stage of this process. It is outsourced self-publishing with a limited amount of book design and some listing

services. To publish a professional looking book in Lulu will still require typesetting and cover design and you will need to acquire an ISBN (International Serial Book Number) and possibly include it in a barcode form on your cover.

Cooperative Publishers

If you think it would be nice to let someone else worry about all that and just send you the royalty cheques, then cooperative publishing may be better for you. Cooperative publishers use Print on Demand technology to minimise the need for expensive stock and manage the production process so that you don't have to become a publisher to get your book published. For a fixed fee, they will design your cover and the look of your book, put them together, set them up at a quality printer and arrange distribution through a reputable book wholesaler.

Cooperative publishers, such as my own company Ecademy Press, produce books on a regular basis, have a relationship with the key people in the process including Designers, Typesetters and, of course, the Printer. They can provide the ISBN for your book and ensure that it is properly applied to the cover as a barcode. They will also have access to Editors, Indexers and Proof Readers whose services may be part of a fixed fee service or available additionally.

Some cooperative publishers provide a website to operate as a marketing and selling channel and most have a relationship with Amazon. Books that have an ISBN are available to order through bookshops and will appear on the Amazon.co.uk site. Most will now also appear

on other Amazon sites around the world.

Additional marketing expertise, in both of the main UK and USA markets, is often available to help you to maximise your sales.

For books that you order for resale or giveaways to clients, you should be able to purchase at a special price which is much lower than retail. The fixed fee often means that there are no costs to be covered before the publisher pays you a royalty on sales they make on your behalf. Your contract with the publisher should set all this out clearly for you.

Making the Right Choice

To sum up, the range of choices for publishing a book has never been wider. You may be looking to sell most copies of the book yourself, to give them away as an extended capability document or to create a sale through traditional channels. You may be looking for all three. Whether you publish through traditional, self or cooperative publishing, it is important to remember that your book is one in over half a million being published this year. Getting it noticed will need a variety of skills beginning in the planning and writing and continuing through book and cover design and into marketing. The emotional high that comes from seeing your name - and book - in print, however, is unaffected by any other consideration.

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