

Self-Publishing vs. Agents/ Publishers

Chapter excerpt from “Part VII: Create Your Own Products” of *Marketing Magic* aka *Selling IS Helping: The Magnificent Mind Set and Savvy Skills You Need for Successful Social Service Marketing*, by Jody Johnston Pawel, LSW, CFLE, © 2003 Ambris Publishing. www.RelationshipToolshop.com

Publishing a book or producing audios or videos can give you a broader market for your message, plus more clout and better back-of-the-room sales. It can mean major media, greater credibility. That said, it can be tough to publish self-help material if you don't have academic or medical credentials, or a PhD.¹

Who Will Publish Your Book?

You need to have this decision in mind when *writing* your book. There are three main options we will explore in this chapter.

- Find a publisher *with* an agent – you'll need a “good enough” book proposal to get the agent, who will help you improve it.
- Find a publisher *without* an agent, independently. You'll need a stellar, impressive book proposal.
- Independently publish

Did you know?

- The hundreds of major royalty publishers in the United States have now consolidated into only 7 houses.
- 6 million manuscripts are submitted to royalty publishers annually — but only 1% of them or 60,000 new titles are accepted and printed each year!
- There are approximately 570 literary agents in the U.S. The average rejection rate for books submitted to literary agents is 98%.
- A literary agent generally takes a minimum 15% commission, but without one, an author won't even get in the door of a royalty publisher.
- Royalty publishers may arrange a small book-signing tour, but other marketing is primarily the author's responsibility.
- Publishing today is 95% marketing.
- Nonfiction is easier to sell and market than fiction.
- To be accepted by a major publisher you must be a celebrity or have proven sales of at least 5,000 books per year. So how do you publish and sell 5,000+ books without a publisher? Self-publish.

Consider:

- Self-publishing = 80% or more profit (depending on production/marketing costs).
- Publisher = 15-20% royalty on either retail or actual sales price. Advances are *against* predicted royalties. If the book doesn't sell that much, you may have to pay back part of your advance.
- Agent = *another* 15% cut.

¹ “How to Publish a Self-help Book Without a PHD,” by Suzanne Falter-Barns

- Publishers produce a smaller percentage of more guaranteed sales, which may amount to more than a higher percentage of unguaranteed sales from self-publishing
- A book goes through 4 stages: writing, producing, distributing and promoting. Publishers produce and distribute. Authors write and promote — regardless of who is publishing their book.

1. Types of Publishers

- **Vanity** – Authors pay a company to print their books for ego purposes or family gifts. Books are usually poetry or short stories and print runs are usually 100 books or less.
- **Royalty** – A large publisher who pays an author (usually a celebrity) a fee plus residuals to *own* the publishing rights to their work.
- **Subsidy** – Authors pay a company to produce the book but have no control of the project. Authors take the financial risk, most books look alike and are poor quality.
- **Partnerships** – Co-publishing agreements where author and publisher both contribute to the project either financially or in the distribution of the book.
- **Independent** – Author pays to produce the book, but maintains control of all aspects of the project. The author gets all net profits and maintains publishing rights.

OPTION 1: Signing on With an Agent/Publisher

Many authors want to sign with an agent or big-name publisher so they will get an advance and royalties. True, authors who get signed get paid to write, while independently-published authors *pay to* write. But consider the following points:

- Advances are based on what the publisher predicts the writer is likely to earn within the book's *first year* in print. Package yourself and your material to project as much potential value as possible.
- Your book proposal is not the only thing that will sell you to an agent or publisher. It is a popularity contest. You must radiate a persona of confidence, professionalism and overall winning image. They must see that you can and will market your book — without little assistance from them.
- Contracts can make you or break you. There are countless horror stories about authors who lost the right to publish their book from a publisher who decided to take it out of print. Understand the contract — and negotiate. Publishers will try to offer what they can get away with. Show them what they can't get away with.

a. The Process

- (1) You need a killer idea with a unique spin.
- (2) You need a great title.
- (3) You need a professional book proposal. This is a systematic presentation of your material that spans 15-30 pages, and covers not only the outline of chapters and basic premise of your book, but also tells:
 - (a) why you are qualified to write it,
 - (b) who the market is,
 - (c) unique selling ideas,
 - (d) special markets (group sales),

- (e) competing titles and their performance,
- (f) an overview of the book
- (g) an outline of the book
- (h) 1-3 sample chapters

It is as much a marketing pitch as a chance to convey the power of your work.

- (4) You need a literary agent. Publishers almost never buy books from authors; instead, they make deals with agents who represent you. You pay these people 10-20% of your fee, but without them, there truly is no deal. They also sell ancillary rights for additional income.
- (5) You can find that agent by honing in on who sells your type of material by looking in the acknowledgments page of similar books to yours. Authors often list their agent. Then check that agent's current location in *Literary Market Place*. (Most libraries have a copy in the reference section.)
- (6) Send a great package. Include a brief cover letter that is attention getting, plus a beautifully presented proposal. You can also include a few chapters. You only get one quick shot.

b. **The Odds**

- (1) If all else fails, hit the small presses. Big publishers regularly re-publish such books, especially if they have a proven track record, i.e. book club sales, a word of mouth readership, a built-up author e-zine list, etc.
- (2) Approach the agents again, with book and sales in hand.

c. **The Contract²**

Always hire a literary attorney and look at each point — many are negotiable. Publishers often see what they can get away with. Be careful what rights you might be giving up and what happens when the publisher decides to take your book out of print.

- (1) **Cover and internal art:** Contracts often contain provisions giving one party the right to be “consulted” on such issues, but giving the other party the right to make *final decisions* about them. Since a book cover may be much more valuable than the contents of the book in terms of merchandising via posters, T-shirts, school lunch pails, etc., the contract should spell out which party has rights and what share the other party may have in the gross or net revenue derived from these rights.
- (2) **Printing Issues** – when to declare a book out-of-print. Authors may negotiate for restrictions on these rights.
- (3) **Author copies** – free copies an author will get, author may buy additional copies, royalty provisions, whether the author is entitled to use the books in some restricted manner, such as only in classroom or lecture settings.

² “Marketing Provisions in Book Contracts,” Ivan Hoffman, *Publishers Marketing Association Newsletter*, March 2002.

- (4) **Web Site Issues** - Author can do on their own Web sites are related to author-copies issues. Specify if an author can sell books on sites and whether the author and the publisher have rights to approve each other's sites with regard to the book.
- (5) **Book Signings** - Make it clear which part has the obligation, if any, to arrange signings and other appearances and what obligations, if any, the other party has to cooperate. Including the right to be notified of events in sufficient time, the right to make public-appearance obligations subject to legitimate other business opportunities and the right to be paid or have expenses covered by the publisher. Whether the publisher can recoup the money from money otherwise payable to the author, such as royalties.

OPTION 2: Independent Publishing

Why Independently Publish?

- **Time** – It usually takes a *minimum* of 18–24 months to get accepted by a publisher, *after* writing a proposal. Then, most commercial publishers (royalty, vanity, and subsidy) are on an 18–24 month production cycle. This can mean a 2-4 year wait from the time a book is conceived or written to the time it actually appears in print. Independent publishers can have a completed manuscript in book form within 4–8 months.
- **Control** – Independent publishers have the freedom to make decisions concerning the direction of their project. They have ultimate final say regarding all aspects of the book's development. The trade off, however, is that these business decisions can take significant time away from writing, speaking, and producing more products.
- **Money** – Large publishing houses only pay a royalty of 5–15% of the retail *or* wholesale price. Almost *all* royalty publishers require an agent represent the author (who takes an additional 15% cut on the royalties and advance.) Independent publishers can receive a 20–80% (or greater) profit. Successful independent publishers have more power to bargain for bigger royalties from royalty publishing houses, once they have a book that is a proven success.
- **Purpose** – Money is *always* the motivation for big royalty publishers and their stockholders. Personal expression and maintaining quality and integrity of one's work is more often the purpose for the author. Sharing knowledge with others can be its own reward!
- **Ownership** – Independent publishers can sell all, part, or none of the rights to their book *at any time*. If a commercial publisher owns the rights to a book, they can place a title out of print whenever they lose interest in it. Then the author has no way to publish their own work unless they buy back the printing rights from the publisher. If the publisher goes out of business or goes bankrupt, there may be no way for the author to regain publishing rights to their work. Copyrights are different than publishing rights.
- **Promotion** – Regardless of whether an author works with a publisher or *is* the publisher, he/she will do most of the marketing and promotion of the book. Publishers will usually set up a book-signing tour and a few minor media appearances. If the book is not an immediate success, the publisher often drops all promotional efforts and leaves the success of the book's sales to the author. Publishers usually do *not* seek special sales markets for their books. This is up to the author to research and pursue. If authors has to do all this promotion regardless of who publishes them, many wonder why they should not also get the benefit of increased profit margins for their efforts.

Factors to Consider:

Who is Your Target Market?

Geographically:

Demographically?

Will you do this in phases or stages? (i.e.) Local test, then expand.

What is Your Marketing Plan?

Write the marketing plan *before* writing the book.

Consider all possible markets (See “Marketing Plan” section for a list.)

Which target markets will result in greatest sales the quickest? Prioritize your budget.

What is your budget? Can you finance a short print run to establish a sales record?

How Will People Buy the Book?

Direct mail: If direct mail, who will handle order fulfillment and where will you store books?

Request it: How will people know it’s available? Do you have an 800#?

Libraries. If you want libraries to purchase a copy, it can’t be a fill-in-blank workbook

Bookstores. If bookstores: you must have . . .

Bookstore Distribution Options

(1) Definitions

(a) **A "wholesaler"** simply warehouses books and fulfills orders but the author or publisher is *solely* responsible for generating sales.

(b) **A "distributor"** actually goes to bookstores, libraries, and some special markets and "sells" your book to them. They also warehouse books and fulfill orders.

(2) Weighing the Options

Service	Wholesaler	Distributor
Warehouse & order fulfillment	X	X
Difficulty getting accepted	somewhat difficult	very difficult, especially for independent publishers
Who generates sales?	Author/publisher	Distributor’s sales force will only promote pre-pub and first year. Author must do most of marketing throughout life of book.
Percentage cut	55%	65%

Major bookstore chains will *only* buy books from a distributor or wholesaler. Only a few local, privately owned bookstores will buy books from a one-book author/publisher — and it will be on consignment. It generally takes six months or more to be paid and even then they may return the books for a refund if they don't sell quickly. (That's why you want to coordinate your publicity with the actual presence of the book at some point-of-purchase location for customers.)

(1) Product Qualities: To have your books accepted by bookstores, it must have:

Spine: This is the first thing the customer sees. You need a title that “pops” and is readable from a bookshelf.

ISBN # ([International Standard Book Number](#))

Professional book cover

People *do* judge a book by its cover — in 8 SECONDS!
The quality of your product is NOT what will sell it — the cover sells it.

— Kathy Dunn, Dunn & Associates, Inc.³

Publicity brings this great product to someone's attention. Good distribution makes it possible for people to easily find and purchase the product. Then, a professionally produced cover is what will ultimately sell the book. When people pick up a book, they look at the cover. In *8 seconds*, they decide whether to turn it over to read the back cover. If they do, they spend *13 seconds* looking at the back cover to decide whether they want to look inside. Then, they usually spend 30 seconds to four minutes scanning the inside, to make their final decision.

Keep the cover simple and clean. Brainstorm ideas and post samples around the room. Stand six feet away. Which one pops?

Your cover is what will sell your book — especially if you are selling by direct mail (that and the quality of the direct mail materials) — regardless of the quality of the contents. Whether they tell *others* to buy it is based on the content.

Production Issues

- **Print run:** How many are you *positive* you can sell? ____ Start small (1,500?) Subsequent runs with no changes are less per book, because plates are already set.
- **Type of printing:**
 - photocopying (poor quality)
 - typeset, plates
- **Who Will Do the Layout and Editing?**
- Hire a professional **editor** who is familiar with publishing industry standards to make recommendations. Do *not* simply ask English teachers or good grammarians to edit. Book editing is far more than good grammar. There are several kinds of editing: content (concise), copy editing (grammar), proofreading (typos and mistakes in layout)
- **Layout:** most printers require documents in PageMaker or QuarkExpress (both usually Mac-based). Other programs, when converted to printing machines, don't maintain their layout and pagination. Hire a professional layout designer. (Many editors can do this while editing for \$30-\$60/hr.) They can make all your page numbers accurate, all headings, fonts, and layout styles consistent throughout document, check page references in text ("see page ____"), and can generate and check indexes.
- **What type of binding do you want/need?**
 - binder
 - lay-flat paperback
 - spiral
 - comb binding
 - hard cover

³ Kathi Dunn, Dunn & Associates, www.dunn-design.com

- Whichever you decide be sure it:
 - Is easy to use
 - Is difficult to copy ([Register book with U.S. Copyright Office](#))
 - Has a spine, if you want it sold in bookstores.

How Will You Promote Your Book?

- Remember:
 - Whether you self-publish or have a publisher (not just a printer), *you* are the person primarily responsible for promoting/marketing your book.
 - People have to hear about something *seven* times before remembering and purchasing it.
 - Promotion *must* coincide with distribution. Don't promote the product if isn't easily accessible.
- **Book Signings.** Be selective about when and where you do a book signing. Schedule for a day when there will be lots of traffic. Make a commotion; use balloons, pictures, props, food or handouts. Schedule media appearances before the signing. Befriend the bookstore owners and salespeople.
- **Newspaper announcements** (See the "Media" chapter.)
- **Radio/TV** (See the "Media" chapter.)
 - Only book media appearances *after* books are distributed or ready for sale.
 - Consider arranging a satellite media tour. You can host an event (two hours) and book interviews during that time with TV stations around the country.
- **Internet** (See the "Internet Marketing" chapter.)
- **Workshops/Public Speaking** (See the "Public Speaking" chapter.)
- **Special Sales** (See the "Direct Mail" chapter.)
- **Direct Mail** (See the "Direct Mail" chapter.)
- **Book Reviews:** Allow adequate lead times for print reviews and articles.
 - Pre-publication reviews occur 3-9 months before publication (uncorrected, bound galleys)
 - Magazines and some newspapers require 2-4 months lead time.
 - Get reviews and magazine articles in the airline magazines.
- **Advertising:** Use testimonials on your back cover and in publicity materials.
- **Selling Subsidiary Rights⁴.**
 - You can sell "**First-Serial Rights**" **before the book is published.** Book editors at magazines, newspapers and syndicates usually oversee first serial rights. The lead time is two months (for trade journals and metropolitan magazines) to nine months (for travel, home, and fashion glossies). Negotiating the licensing fee depends on the publication's circulation, whether it is exclusive, how long they retain the rights, and how much text they are reprinting. Add a provision that if the excerpt runs on the publication's Web site, they will pay an added charge, since

⁴ *Selling Subsidiary Rights: An Insider's Guide*, by Thomas Woll, ©2000 by Fisher Books

electronic rights are a separate area of subsidiary rights. If they pay little or nothing for the reprint rights, see if they'll trade for advertising.

- You can sell **"Second-Serial Rights" after the publication date**. While less important than first-serial rights, they can still bring in substantial income.
- You can sell **other Subsidiary Rights**, such as:
 - Mass-market rights (to sell in Wal-Mart or K-Mart)
 - Book Club Rights offer non-returnable sales. Clubs often pay for the printing for the copies they order. The royalty is usually 5% of club's price. Publishers usually receive an advance, usually half of that is expected to be earned based on the book club's first order. The first run usually averages between 3,000 and 5,000 copies. If the club distributes a book under the "four books for a dollar" deal, the royalty is reduced to 4% of club's price. Read *Literary Market Place's* book club lists. Then submit a review copy and follow up with club directors.
 - Foreign Rights
 - Audio Rights
 - Film Rights
 - Condensation Rights
 - Hardcover Reprint Rights
 - Electronic Rights
 - Merchandising Rights.

RESOURCES

Resources for Publishing with an Agent/Publisher

- [Write the Perfect Book Proposal: 10 That Sold and Why](#), by Jeff Herman (Wiley, 2016)

Resources for Self-Publishing:

- [Dan Poynter: Self-Publishing Manual, Volume II : How to Write, Print, and Sell Your Own Book Employing the Latest Technologies and the Newest Techniques \(Paperback\); 2009 Edition](#), by Dan Poynter. Free e-newsletter called PUBLISHING POYNTERS. Information: DanPoynter@ParaPublishing.com; <http://www.parapublishing.com/>; 800-PARAPUB.
- SPAN: Small Publishers Association of North America. <http://www.spannet.org/>
- Independent Book Publishers Association. <https://www.ibpa-online.org/>
- For assistance with independent publishing: Jenkins Group: <http://www.bookpublishing.com>
- *Book Marketing Update* Newsletter, John Kremer, editor, Book Marketing Update Newsletter and author, *1001 Ways to Market Your Books*. <http://www.bookmarket.com/>
- Trademark information (logos and brand names) <http://www.uspto.gov/web/menu/tm.html>
- Copyright information (publications): <http://www.loc.gov/copyright/>
- [Selling Your Book's Subsidiary Rights](#), audio CD, ©2009 by Jeff Davidson.
- Book Cover Designer & Speaker Kit Designer. Kathi Dunn, Dunn & Associates, www.dunn-design.com
- Copywriter (for publicity materials, product covers and speaker kits) Susan Kendrick of <http://www.writetoyourmarket.com/>

*****2019 UPDATE*****

The publishing industry has become even harder to enter, because it now caters to celebrities, self-published authors who have already sold tens of thousands of copies, or have millions of social media followers. It/They are really just book store distributors and still expect the author to do most of the marketing and sales, with the marketing section of a proposal being the most important and needing to show you have a marketing budget in the tens of thousands. They don't always care if you are a good author, because there are ghost writers! They might not even care if you are an expert. They just want you to document in your proposal (submitted with or without an agent) that they will make huge profits from their investment, while only giving you 5-8% royalties.

Self-publishing, on the other hand, is much easier and inexpensive to use, with companies like Amazon.com and their [Kindle Direct Publishing](#) (aka KDP, formerly CreateSpace) service, which is one of several all-in-one [doc-to-print services](#). There are countless free templates for formatting the [interior of your book](#), [creating your own book covers](#), including the [spine](#), using [directions](#) and templates from [KDP](#) or that use [PhotoShop](#) or [Word](#)). Then [format your book for e-books](#) (Kindle, Nook, etc.), audiobook (Audible), and print, and use [print on demand printers](#) and [services](#)! Then [publish and/or market through Amazon](#) and other outlets. With self-publishing, it costs more to print each book, but you use money from a sale already made, instead of printing an inventory of books you might not sell. There may also be monthly fees, but it's usually depends on how much you sell, so you would have income to pay the fee. So today you have much lower out-of-pocket costs and keep 100% of net profits.

Resources: All links of recommended resources have been checked and updated.