

# How to Publish Your Own Book

*Secrets from the Inside*

Stewart Ferris



summersdale

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Summersdale Publishers Ltd  
46 West Street  
Chichester  
West Sussex  
PO19 1RP  
UK

[www.summersdale.com](http://www.summersdale.com)

ISBN: 1-84024-519-0

ISBN: 978-1-84024-519-6

Printed and bound in Great Britain.

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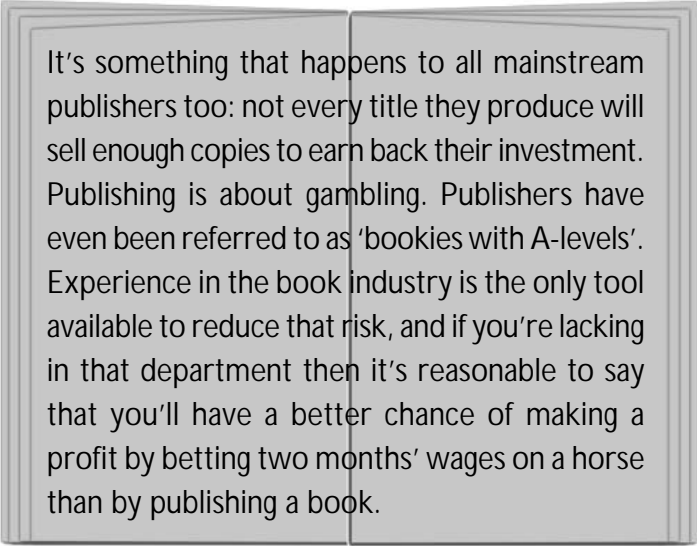
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## What is self-publishing?

AS AN AUTHOR you already know that it isn't easy to persuade a publisher to splash out a considerable chunk of money on editing, designing, printing and marketing your book. It can take years before you strike it lucky, and even if you finally get a contract signed it will be a reminder of who is in charge: the publisher. They will typically hang on to as much as ninety per cent of the income from sales of the book. They have to. They have to pay staff, office bills, print bills, marketing bills and the mortgage on their second home in France. That leaves you, the author, coming to terms with the reality that you won't be able to afford to give up your day job on the royalties from one book alone. Even if you had a dozen published books, assuming they had average sales rather than being bestsellers, you would have to think twice before telling your boss where to stick it and marching confidently home to your new working environment; your shed.

Why not turn the whole thing on its head and put yourself in the position of publisher as well as author? That way you'll keep that ninety per cent as well as your author's ten per cent. Deals don't get much sweeter than that, do they? But, of course, there's a time and a financial investment associated

with publishing your own book, and with any investment comes risk. By committing your own cash to the project you have to be prepared for the possibility that you will never see that money again.



It's something that happens to all mainstream publishers too: not every title they produce will sell enough copies to earn back their investment. Publishing is about gambling. Publishers have even been referred to as 'bookies with A-levels'. Experience in the book industry is the only tool available to reduce that risk, and if you're lacking in that department then it's reasonable to say that you'll have a better chance of making a profit by betting two months' wages on a horse than by publishing a book.

Self-publishing means that you, the author, pay for and control all aspects of turning your written words into a format suitable for dissemination amongst the general public. The format could be a printed and bound book or an electronic simulation of a book, known as an eBook, which can be bought and downloaded from the Internet.

Whichever format of book you create, you will be starting a publishing company. Most people do this as sole traders, with no legal formalities to worry about when starting up. Printing isn't difficult, either – you just have to pay a printing firm to do it.

So why do you need this book to help you publish your masterpiece?

What you do between finishing the writing of your book and handing it over to a printer can be the difference between success and failure. Success means a profitable project that actually results in people reading your work; failure means you end up with a pallet of books that sits in your garage gathering dust until you eventually decide to use the unsold copies as firelighters. Worse still, failure means that hardly anyone reads your book.

There's no point in spending your life savings on publishing a book if no one buys it. You want people to enjoy your writing, to think of you as a bona fide author. You want to recoup your investment so that the exercise doesn't appear to your friends as folly.

The self-publishing secrets that can mean the difference between success and failure will be revealed in this book. How do I know those secrets? In 1992 I co-founded Britain's first company to offer all the services an author needs to publish their own

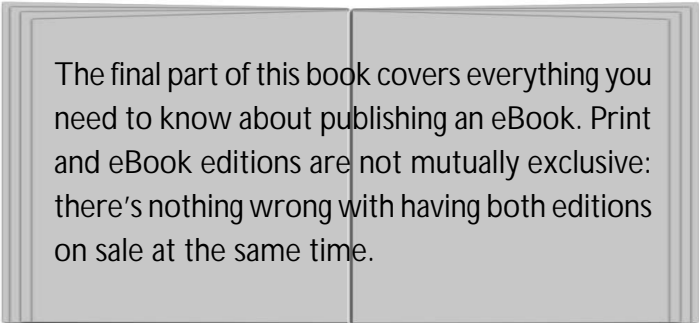
book. Over the next decade we ran this self-publishing company alongside our main publishing business, helping hundreds of authors to become publishers and producing books for them in all genres, some of which won awards for self-publishing.

I've watched authors make terrible mistakes in their cover designs which have cost them dearly in terms of lost sales (they would often insist on using their own artwork or photo on the cover, no matter how inappropriate or amateurish). I've seen books poorly edited and full of irrelevant content. But most of all I've seen authors who don't have the faintest idea how to sell their books when they arrive on the lorry from the printers.

I'll tell you all you need to know about the book trade, how to publicise your book (for free), and how to sell it both to shops and to customers directly. You'll also learn the essentials of page layout, cover design, editing and ways to ensure your book does not look self-published – because to a book trade professional, self-published books often stand out a mile and for all the wrong reasons.

This guide will provide you with the equivalent of years of experience in the book industry. The insider tips on the following pages are crucial in reducing the level of risk to which your financial

investment will be exposed. I'll start by explaining how to get your book printed and bound. Depending on how much of the process you decide to outsource, some chapters may not appear to be as relevant to you as others, but I'd strongly recommend reading this book as a whole because you can use the information to talk knowledgeably to any freelancers you hire and to demonstrate that you understand what they are doing and that you expect professional results. Since publishing a book is an expensive process, it's necessary also to explain how to recoup that investment by maximising the number of copies sold. Furthermore, we'll be looking at other sources of income from which publishers can benefit: there are many potential revenue streams that ownership of copyright text can generate, and most self-publishers are completely unaware of them.



The final part of this book covers everything you need to know about publishing an eBook. Print and eBook editions are not mutually exclusive: there's nothing wrong with having both editions on sale at the same time.

## Reasons why people write books

1. A journey of self-discovery
2. The challenge of completing a whole book
3. A cathartic method of coming to terms with life experiences
4. The desire to tell a good story or impart specialist knowledge
5. The hope that the book will make a profit
6. The satisfaction of knowing that people are reading the book

Of all those reasons, the satisfaction that comes when people read your book is the most powerful motivation of all. It's one thing to know that your friends and family are reading your book, but to find out that a complete stranger has bought it, read it and enjoyed it is a unique thrill that only a published writer can know. Self-publishing can't guarantee that this thrill will happen to you because the process is full of potential pitfalls that can prevent your book achieving a wide exposure, but with this book to guide you safely through them you'll have the best possible chance of success.

## What's the difference between vanity publishing and self-publishing?

BEFORE WE GO any further it's important to understand exactly what *vanity publishing* is and how it differs from self-publishing. Vanity publishing, sometimes known as *subsidy publishing* or *partnership publishing*, can work something like this:

1. An author sees an advert in a Sunday paper that reads something along the lines of 'Authors wanted – all genres considered'. (You should know that real publishers don't pay to advertise for authors to submit manuscripts. Even small publishers receive plenty more submissions than they could ever hope to publish.)
2. This rather optimistic author, who has just finished writing a book, submits it to the address in the advert.
3. The author receives a glowing letter of praise for the book together with an offer to publish. (This letter of praise is often completely generic because no one at the publishing company has actually read the book.)

4. A contract arrives, promising high royalty rates for sales, and the author gets excited because their dream seems to be coming true.
5. The author spots a small snag in the contract: instead of the publisher paying the author an advance on royalties, this publisher is requesting that the author ‘shares the cost’ of publishing the book by paying a sum of money to them. It is worded carefully to make it sound like a joint venture with at least half of the risk being taken on by the publisher, but what the author doesn’t realise is that the amount of money they are being asked to hand over is enough to pay for the entire production costs of the book plus the publisher’s profit margin. Nevertheless, the author is blinded by the flattering comments about the book and by the prospect of seeing it in print, and therefore reaches for their credit card before noticing the next slight problem in the contract...
6. The publisher only prints a handful of copies of the book. After these initial copies have been sold, books will be printed to order, one at a time.

There's nothing wrong with vanity publishing if you want to see your book printed in the nicest, simplest way. Just hand over the cash and wait for it to arrive. But remember that the vanity publisher has no interest in selling your book. They have already made their profit from you and don't need to go to the effort of actually visiting bookshops and sending out press releases. Your book will be available for any high street or Internet bookshops to buy, but this simply means it's on a database with every other book in print so that if a customer asks for it the shop can order it. Vanity publishing is an expensive, luxury service which gives you almost zero chance of earning back your investment. You don't even own outright the books that you've paid to have printed.

Compare this to self-publishing, and you'll see why the two should not be confused. A self-publishing author can still employ the services of experts who will arrange the cover design, typesetting and printing of the books, just as a publisher would, but at the end of the process you will own all of the stock that you paid to have printed. Not only that, you'll have more books for your money. Hundreds or even thousands more. All the money earned from sales is yours to keep and the responsibility for selling them lies in your hands, as does the motivation.

The term 'vanity publishing' applies to companies that specialise in producing books using only money supplied by their authors. However, occasionally a mainstream publisher will strike a deal with an author that requires them to pay a subsidy. This might happen because the book fits the publisher's list but its market is too narrow to be likely to generate a profit, or the publisher's print budgets are fully allocated and the only option open to them is to share costs with the author. Sometimes the author has access to more customers than the publisher could reach and therefore it makes sense for the author to be the primary investor in the project. In these circumstances the cost-sharing author is more likely to make a return on the investment because the publisher has a sales and marketing infrastructure.

## Why should I self-publish?

GETTING A BOOK accepted by a mainstream publishing company is a slow and often frustrating process. It's not just the fact that a string of rejections is hurtful – the weeks and months between each negative decision can test your patience and drain your enthusiasm for the book you've worked so hard to write.

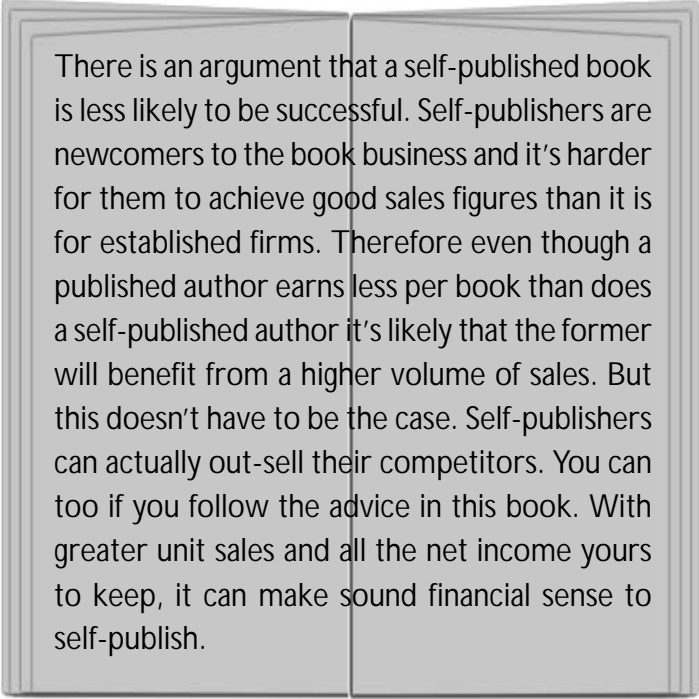
Self-publishing is about taking control over what happens to your book. You remove the need for someone else to fall in love with your writing. Besides, even if an editor in a publishing house were to read your book and think it was exquisitely written, the decision to sign you up would also depend on factors beyond your control such as the success of similar books on the market, the cash flow and budget of the company, and the decisions of senior management who can, on a whim, decide to cease publishing books like yours.

In addition to reducing the time between finishing the final edit of your book and seeing it on sale in a bookshop, self-publishing means that you can potentially make more substantial profits than an author on a royalty. Why accept ten or fifteen per cent of the income from sales when you could have one hundred per cent? I made the decision to

self-publish my first book when I realised that I might make more money than I'd receive on a meagre royalty.

Of course this is meaningless if you don't make enough from sales to cover the costs of typesetting and printing. If the book doesn't sell well, an author on a royalty will do better than a self-published author. This is because the author on a royalty will usually receive an advance which is non-returnable in the event that the book fails to sell, whereas the self-published author will have paid out a significant amount of cash. But if a book is successful, and success is usually measured in terms of at least one or two thousand copies sold, the self-published author stands to make more money.

## WHY SHOULD I SELF-PUBLISH?

An illustration of an open book. The left page contains text, while the right page is blank. The book is shown from a slightly elevated perspective, with the pages curving slightly.

There is an argument that a self-published book is less likely to be successful. Self-publishers are newcomers to the book business and it's harder for them to achieve good sales figures than it is for established firms. Therefore even though a published author earns less per book than does a self-published author it's likely that the former will benefit from a higher volume of sales. But this doesn't have to be the case. Self-publishers can actually out-sell their competitors. You can too if you follow the advice in this book. With greater unit sales and all the net income yours to keep, it can make sound financial sense to self-publish.