

**WHY NOW  
IS THE TIME  
TO PUBLISH  
YOUR  
BOOK**

**THE RISE OF  
SELF-PUBLISHING**

Guide to Publishing in the Digital Age

**ANDREW VERB**

# **The Rise of Self-Publishing**

## Guide to Publishing in the Digital Age

Andrew Verb

The Rise of Self-Publishing

By Andrew Verb

Copyright © 2013 Andrew Verb

ISBN 978-1-4675-7366-5

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission of the author.



**INDEPENDENT PUBLISHER**

875 N. Michigan Avenue #2950  
Chicago, IL 60611

## **Your Guide to Self-Publishing Success**

Congratulations! You have finished writing your book! What to do next? Despite the fact that you probably have an obvious love of writing, as an author, one of your main goals is to present your work to the world and sell it to earn money, right? Your best chance for success is with self-publishing, and this guidebook is going to give you all of the information you need to make that happen. Your dream of sharing your writing with others and receiving accolades will surely motivate you to persevere through the long haul of writing, but attempting to get your work published with a traditional publishing company is not only a long-shot, but also pretty intimidating. Until fairly recently, in order to get your book published, you would've had to either sign with a traditional (usually New York-based) publishing house, or work with a vanity press. Thankfully, your options have now expanded to include more accessible (and more lucrative!) ways to self-publish. The sky's the limit now! Let's dive in.



# Table of Contents

<b>I. Introduction and Overview .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Overview .....	1
Who Self- Publishes and Why .....	2
<b>II. Types of Publishing.....</b>	<b>7</b>
The Success Stories of Self-Publishing.....	7
An Overview of Traditional Publishing.....	14
Defining Types of Self-Publishing.....	17
<b>III. The Final Professional Touch .....</b>	<b>25</b>
Tools Available Online .....	26
<i>Editing</i> .....	26
<i>E-book Formatting Services</i> .....	29
<i>Obtaining an ISBN</i> .....	36
<i>Reviewing Services</i> .....	37
Design Services.....	40
<i>Interior Design Options</i> .....	40
<i>Cover Design Options</i> .....	43
Assessing Services.....	45
<i>Rubric</i> .....	45

*Research the Options*..... 47

*Writing and Reading Communities*..... 47

**IV. Self-Marketing** ..... 51

*The Importance of the Product*..... 51

Define your Audience and Get the Ball Rolling! ..... 51

Unpaid/Volunteer Reviews ..... 54

Price Promotions and Giveaways ..... 59

User-Reviews Drive Your Sales ..... 61

Accurate Reviews Stand Out ..... 61

Compare and Contrast Review Services ..... 62

**VI. Summary**..... 65

# I. Introduction and Overview

---

## Overview

This book offers detailed information and advice on how to successfully self-publish your book. First, you will receive some background information on traditional publishing versus self-publishing. This information will help you to better understand the weakening state of the traditional publishing industry, as well as the rise of the self-publishing movement. By exploring the various ways you can self-publish your book, you can begin putting together a plan that will set real visibility and sales into motion.

As a self-publisher, you have an increasing number of services available at varying costs and quality levels. These options are investigated in depth, with particular focus on editing, formatting, review and design services that are essential to publishing a polished manuscript.

Marketing takes on a significant role when it comes to self-publishing. You will be creating and implementing your own effective marketing plans to successfully produce sales. Don't feel overwhelmed by this! It's much better to have control over your own marketing than to hand it over to a large publishing company who might see you as a small fish in a big sea of authors. We'll help give you the tools you need to get the word out about your book (no pun intended!) including information on obtaining reviews, e-book formats and pricing strategies. We'll pay particular attention to the importance of book re-

views, since they're essential to driving sales and generating interest.

## Who Self- Publishes and Why

In the past, if you could not obtain a traditional publishing deal, then self-publishing offered the only option. The problem was, self-published books didn't have a very good reputation since they had not met the stringent requirements for publication. Some of this stigma is still carried over into today's changing publishing market. For example, even now major newspapers rarely review self-published books. In fact, some have policies against it.

Yet that stigma is diminishing quite rapidly, mostly due to the rise of electronic (e-book) publishing and the realization that it's quite difficult to get noticed and published by a major house. Not too long ago, even *The New York Times* Bestseller list recognized the impact e-book publishing is having on the industry, and it now publishes a separate bestseller list for e-books. Along with the difficulty of actually obtaining a contract with a traditional publishing company, there's been a bit of controversy recently regarding the low royalty rates and restrictive contracts that traditional publishing houses offer to authors. Self-published books are receiving well-deserved positive attention. In fact, some book awards are now specifically given to self-published works *And All The Stars* a self-published book by Andrea K Höst, recently became a finalist for a 2012 Aurealis Award, Australia's top award for science fiction and fantasy. The industry increasingly recognizes that mainstream publishers leave some high quality work un-

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

published and that self-publishing allows authors a sound opportunity to share their work.

Recent technological advances have made self-publishing more affordable and accessible. You can utilize online, service-based publishing companies to produce books at much lower costs than before – most importantly with e-book publishing. These companies offer an efficient turnaround time for production and numerous options for you to customize both in print and digital forms.

Along with advances in the publishing arena come better book distribution options for you. With the explosion of online retailers such as Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Smashwords and new entrant Ella Distribution, you can find a much more attainable path to your market – the readers.

Both established and novice writers self-publish. Known authors have a number of motivations to do so. One reason is that you receive a much greater percentage of the book price compared to royalties from mainstream publishers. For example, royalties from Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) may be 70 percent, while traditional book royalties usually offer between 10 to 15 percent. Book prices are generally much lower with KDP. Yet with the ever-increasing number of e-readers and tablets sold, together with the growing popularity of e-books, your overall revenues can potentially be greater from digital sales. In fact, several well-known authors, including Barry Eisler and J.A. Konrath have recently declined large potential book contracts in favor of self-publishing.

You may find that self-publishing offers your only realistic chance to publish. Signing with an agent can prove challenging – if not impossible – given the number of manuscripts each agent receives, and the restrictions/formats/guidelines for submission can be grueling. Similarly, sending manuscripts directly to publishers can leave you with a stack of rejection letters and time lost. Many agents and publishing houses have strict policies regarding unsolicited manuscript submissions, and it can be time-consuming and frustrating to research each one. However, you may manage to get a contract with a mainstream publisher after generating interest through self-publishing.

You may want to specifically publish print copies of your work (although trust us – you’ll make more money if you publish digitally as well!). If you want that tangible, emotional experience of holding your printed book, the ability to easily share it with your friends and family, and the chance to conveniently sell copies at events, then printing might be a good option. Self-publishing offers you an effective means to produce print copies in quantities that match demand. You’ll have complete control over how many physical copies are printed. No more overproduced returns!

Overall, given the changing environment of the publishing industry, you may find increasing motives to self-publish. In the past, traditional publishing meant just handing over the manuscript and letting the publisher handle everything – even if you wanted a say in how some things were done. Now, even with a mainstream publishing contract, a lesser-known author may discover that they still must seriously market their work. It’s

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

going to mean a bigger commitment, but you'll have control over the kinds of marketing you want to do. Furthermore, the previously closed-off, "cliquey" environment of the publishing world is now much more open with freer movement of information between parties.

Once upon a time, an author would sit quietly at home, uninvolved in the marketing strategy talks and sales discussions that execs were having about your book. You had no control over copyright or distribution, and it certainly wasn't your place to speak up! After all, you weren't the expert. There was no chance of you communicating with reviewers or booksellers or advertising agents. You often wouldn't even have a say on your own cover art! Now, with self-publishing, you can more easily connect with the publishing industry and become a part of it through real and virtual communities. Also, self-publishing allows you to maintain a greater level of control over your rights and your product. If you don't want your book to be published in Europe, it doesn't have to be! If you'd like your work sold as an audiobook as well, great! You have full control with a self-published work. With the abundance of accessible online resources available to novices, your barriers to entry have been greatly reduced. The doors are wide open!



## II. Types of Publishing

---

### The Success Stories of Self-Publishing

You might have noticed some tantalizing media reports of self-publishing mega hits lately. Hugh Howey's blockbuster success from his book, *Wool*, recently made headlines. The book has sold over half a million copies and garnered more than 5000 reviews. *Alien* film producer Ridley Scott optioned the movie rights. Howey has signed an unusual print-only deal with the publisher Simon & Schuster. Known as a hybrid or co-publishing deal, Howey retains the digital rights, selling only the hardcover and paperback rights. Other authors have started to take notice of the advantages of e-publishing and have begun to negotiate similar deals.

Amanda Hocking has achieved massive success with her numerous young adult fiction novels. She started self-publishing her books in 2010 and in about a year had sold over a million copies. She went on to sign a two million dollar book contract with Macmillan owned publisher St. Martin's Press. Crime-fiction author John Locke, the first self-published author to sell a million Kindle books, uses a low pricing strategy with Amazon's KDP. He has also signed a hybrid deal with Simon & Schuster for print-only publishing. Joanna Penn, author of the *Arkane* Thriller series and Lisa Genova, author of *Still Alice* are two more of many self-published authors who took their self-publishing success and parlayed it into mainstream publisher book deals.

Joe Konrath (J.A. Konrath) is also a big proponent and advocate of self-publishing. He's not only open to discussing the discouraging challenges and loss of income he experienced with traditional publishing houses, but goes out of his way to educate both new and seasoned authors on how to begin making the switch to self-publishing. Konrath maintains a blog that provides invaluable, practical advice and anecdotes about self-publishing vs. traditional publishing. You can find Joe's blog at this link: [A Newbie's Guide to Publishing.](#)

Although self-publishing may seem like a recent phenomenon, it really has been around for years. A *New York Times* article from 1990, "THE MEDIA BUSINESS: The Rise of the Self-Published Best Seller" by Edwin McDowell, addresses many of the same industry issues that make headlines today. With the spread of word processors and home computers, authors began producing their own books and selling them through bookstores or by mail order. Although rare back then, even some of these early self-published books made bestseller lists, garnered attention and captured traditional book contracts.

Other factors converged to boost the development of the self-publishing industry. As publishing houses consolidated, it became harder to acquire a contract with a mainstream publisher. One bought out another who bought out another, and suddenly the big players on the market are known as the "Big Five." (Harper Collins, Penguin/Random House, Hachette, Simon & Schuster and Macmillan) All of those publishers have dozens of imprints and divisions that can be too confusing to

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

keep straight. As the publishing houses grew more consolidated, authors became more media savvy and discovered more generous royalties from the advent of e-publishing. Internet-based author service providers, including print on demand (POD) technology, became more prolific and easier to use. Google, Amazon and Sony have been busy digitizing books while tablets and e-reading devices (like the Kindle and Nook) have become more reasonably priced and user friendly. Apps even allow e-book reading on smartphones and iPads. Online retailers enabled sales to increase exponentially, and even libraries have started providing e-readers and e-books for patrons to check-out.

According to *Publishers Weekly*, in most cases unit sales for printed books still outpace e-book sales, but the trend shows a narrowing gap— and it will continue to narrow. At the moment, most books with both formats still have stronger sales in print, but a growing development is for e-book sales to outperform printed versions. A recent example is *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn, which sold over 1 million digital versions compared to 900,000 print copies. Examples like this are expected to rise.

The publishing industry is going through a process called “disintermediation” where elements along the supply chain attempt to cut each other out. It’s a jungle out there! The big retail giant, Amazon, headed this way by creating its own publishing division, Amazon Publishing. You can avoid the difficulties associated with industry skirmishes and frustrations by going the route of self-publishing, including using print on demand services. Amazon Publishing has grown so signifi-

cantly that they now have a robust marketing team and budget, and have created several different imprints for the influx of genre manuscripts they work with. For example, Thomas & Mercer is their mystery/thriller imprint, and Montlake Romance publishes chick-lit and romance under the Amazon Publishing umbrella. In some cases, Amazon Publishing has offered contracts to self-publishers whose works were gaining popularity, but didn't have the marketing budget or team behind it to push it forward further (this is the mission behind their first publishing department, Amazon Encore). Amazon also turns its role as an international bookseller into an international publisher with their Amazon Crossing division that translates foreign bestsellers and brings them to new markets.

Self-publishing allows you to provide your work to bookstores, who in turn sell that content to readers. Through self-publishing, you can decide for yourself how best to reach your audience. The traditional publishing model adds several intermediary levels including agents, publishers, and distributors. Each intermediary may have its own potential problems and obstacles. For example, acquiring an agent may prove to be difficult if not impossible if you are a novice writer. Finding an agent can feel like finding a four-leaf clover out in your yard. It's just not likely. Also, publishers and distributors regularly engage in disputes that can negatively impact you and your book sales.

In addition to those areas, you probably want more control over important details such as your author's rights, cover art, international rights and other contract details. As mentioned earlier, Hugh Howey made a hybrid deal where the he kept the

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

e-book rights and sold only print rights. Other rights include your ability to move to a different publisher and rights surrounding both your past and future works. These issues are becoming more significant to authors as greater potential opportunities arise to exploit sales. For example, Amanda Hocking probably wouldn't have been able to switch so effortlessly to St. Martin's Press if she were under contract with another publisher, rather than self-publishing. Given that self-published titles accounted for a quarter of Amazon's top selling books last year, authors feel they have a greater ability to successfully self-publish. Thus, you have more incentives to carefully manage your rights.

You will find a number of additional benefits of self-publishing. In a *Huffington Post* interview, bestselling author Barry Eisler highlights that authors who write more than one book can reap the benefits of cross-selling much more easily by self-publishing and selling the books online. Sales of one of your books generate further interest in your other ones. While physical bookstores may not have space available to stock other items by the same author, virtual bookstores do. In this way, readers easily connect with your other books while cross selling creates additional sales and more widespread interest in your work.

Eisler also notes how quickly books move through physical bookstores while e-books can linger in virtual bookstores, generating income for you for years. Remember, a physical bookstore's space is limited. They're constantly going to manage, shift and pull inventory in order to make way for new bestsellers. However, there's an unlimited amount of space

online, and your book can remain available for decades, if so desired. Through self-publishing, you can also rekindle interest and sales in your backlisted books, generating new rounds of royalties. Finally, as a self-published author, you set your own prices. This is a pretty big thing! Ever shop for a Kindle book on Amazon and see the notice that the reason the book costs \$12.99 versus \$9.99 is because the publisher determines the price of your book. If you thought that listing your e-book for more than ten dollars might hurt sales, there wouldn't be a thing you could do about it. If you self-published, you can adjust the price of your book up or down based on what you thought was right (be sure to read up on Joe Konrath's blog about e-book prices – he's got some great advice!). Therefore, while traditional publishers may be motivated to set their e-book prices high enough to protect sales of their print versions, you may have more motivation to offer a lower price with the hope of gaining much greater sales and exposure.

Eisler also relishes the control he now has over his works. This includes cover art. One of the stories that he tells is of how one particular traditional publishing house designed a cover for his book without ever reading it. It was so misinterpreted and unrelated to the story that he felt angry and cheated by the apathetic attempts toward such an important piece of marketing. Many authors feel that way, and it seems that the larger the publishing house, the less control over the cover art an author has. Cover art is important, so when self-publishing, keep in mind that old adage about judging a book by its cover. We may all be warned against it, but everyone does it. Attractive covers are more sellable!

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

Joe Konrath also has quite a bit to say about the advantages of self-publishing. He openly shares his thoughts about how “legacy publishing” with the traditional print publishers can severely affect the success of an author. With diminishing advances, generic rejection letters, outrageously low royalties, broken promises and unethical contracts, these publishing houses literally take advantage of new authors and make millions more than those who actually wrote the books. In addition to that, Konrath voices his dislike over the legacy “returns” program that many traditional booksellers and publishing houses have used for years, over printing books and then pulling them for returns after only a few months – creating waste and costing the author thousands in potential royalties.

A disturbing development for the traditional publishing industry is the increasing trend for high profile authors to abandon it for self-publishing. Most traditionally published books do not earn back their advances, so mainstream publishers rely on bestsellers to support the company. Well-known authors, though, have growing reasons to leave the large houses and self-publish, especially greater royalties. Some argue this could leave publishers unable to survive. Major publishing houses have actually been consolidating, including the recent merger of Random House and Penguin. Mainstream publishers still retain their publishing expertise. They may also head more strongly towards e-books, especially for unproven authors, in order to save on production costs. Yet when famous writers jump ship, people notice. Perhaps it’s simply time for the traditional publishing houses to adjust their traditional models so that they better align with today’s industry.

Until that happens, though, self-publishing is the more achievable and flexible route to take.

## **An Overview of Traditional Publishing**

In traditional publishing, one of the major publishing houses or a small press buys the rights to publish your book. They handle all aspects of publication after you hand over your manuscript. This includes getting an ISBN (International Standard Book Number), designing the cover, editing, typesetting, writing the cover blurbs, printing, marketing and listing the book with their distribution agency for that country. You receive payment through advances and royalties, but you do not pay the publisher. You lose control over your rights to the book as well as decisions regarding its publication.

Traditional publishers make major financial investments in their publications through advances so books undergo rigorous consideration before acceptance. Only a small percentage of manuscripts offered to traditional publishers receive approval. Ever hear the horror stories of rejection after rejection after rejection? It's true. They make money by selling as many books as possible to readers through their distribution channels and getting stock into bookstores, so they're extremely selective about the books they spend their time, money and effort on promoting.

From your perspective, an editor accepts your manuscript and you sign a contract, which turns over publication rights and offers you an advance and/or royalties. The publisher then takes over everything. Securing a literary agent offers you an

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

alternative path and a little more protection, but it's sometimes as difficult to get a contract with an agent as it is signing deal with a publisher. An increasing number of fiction publishers require submissions to be agented, so finding an agent may be necessary before an editor can accept your manuscript. The agent requirement adds another layer of complexity and scrutiny to the process. Like mainstream publishers, agents receive numerous submissions and only accept a few. From there, publishers only accept a few from the agents.

## An Overview of Traditional Publishing

### PROS

- + The book becomes associated with a large publishing house that carries a known name and reputation, which confers legitimacy.
- + Traditional publishers uphold professional standards (working with experienced editors, copywriters, etc).
- + The selectivity of the acceptance process is widely understood, which brings cachet.
- + Book sales benefit from well established distribution systems and books sell in physical bookstores as well as online markets.
- + You can focus more on writing, instead of other aspects of publication.

### CONS

- Publishing houses do not create direct connections with their end customers: the readers (Amazon Publishing is an exception).
- You may still have to pay your own promotional budget and be involved in self-promoting and marketing.
- The process takes a lot of time and usually results in multiple rejections.
- You may still be subject to the vagaries of the publishing house, particularly during disputes that can negatively impact sales.

### Defining Types of Self-Publishing

#### *Vanity Presses*

Instead of you being paid by the publishing house as in traditional publishing, you must pay the vanity press to be published. The term comes from the sense that the vanity derived from seeing your name in print, not the quality of the writing, drives you to publish your work. Let's just say that vanity presses haven't had the best reputation in the past, because the quality wasn't always above par. With a traditional publishing house, you do not end up with a book that has errors, or that is cut/bound badly, or that has off-set printing. It's not that vanity presses are guaranteed to be a mess – some can produce a physically polished product. Vanity presses simply earn their by providing publishing services to you, not by selling books. So the editing process isn't there. To put it another way, they make their money from the authors, not the readers. If you've decided to publish with them, great! They just have to print the book, not make sure there are no grammatical errors. With a vanity press publisher, you may or may not lose the rights to your work, depending upon the particular contract. Vanity publishers pretend to be publishers but do not really undertake the regular activities of traditional publishers.

# Vanity Presses

## PROS

- + You probably will not face rejection letters as the work is almost always accepted.
- + Quality standards are more flexible than with mainstream publishers.
- + This is a much faster route to publication than traditional publishing.

## CONS

- No quality standards enforced on the content or materials used, so the final product may be a disappointment.
- Since you, not readers, make up the customers, marketing and distribution are limited or nonexistent.
- It can be expensive and the costs may be hidden or misrepresented.
- Vanity presses may falsely claim that they will share production costs with you.
- You must pay numerous fees to set up, print, register an ISBN, create a cover, register copyrights, insert images, etc. You receive a percentage of the sales, but the publisher keeps a portion of the profit from your investment.
- A vanity press has no incentive to sell books because you are their customer.

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

### *Subsidy Presses*

Like vanity presses, subsidy presses are fee-based publishers. The terms subsidy press and vanity press are essentially interchangeable, although some subsidy presses may promote themselves as more respectable than a vanity press. Fee-based publishers may market themselves as sharing the publishing costs with you. Yet the fees you pay to a publisher instead cover costs plus a profit for those services.

The Pros and Cons are the same as vanity presses.

### *Print / Publish on Demand (POD)*

Print on demand (POD) with digital-publishing technology allows you to print copies of your book only when an order has been received, including single books at a time. This results in reduced printing costs for small or single runs. It also minimizes your storage and handling costs and prevents waste from unsold books.

Companies providing POD services may also offer you a number of other services including formatting, proofreading, editing, design, order fulfillment, royalty payments and distribution into online bookstores. Some examples of companies used by other writers include Createspace, Lightning Source and Lulu.

# Print/Publish On Demand

## PROS

- + If your work is already in demand, you can use POD to get your work into bookstores.
- + If you want to publish your book in print, you do not have to order large quantities and then store them.
- + You retain control over your publication and rights.
- + POD offers an efficient path to publication.
- + You can revise/update the content.
- + Your royalties are greater than with traditional publishers.
- + POD is more cost effective than traditional or vanity publishing.
- + You can have greater control over the production and distribution process.

## CONS

- Choices for POD services are limited to the packages of available options, as opposed to greater customization available through true self-publishing.
- You may generate less income compared to true self-publishing because the POD provider receives fees for the services and only returns a portion of sales revenues through royalties.
- Most POD providers own the ISBN and keep some electronic publishing rights.

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

### *Electronic Self-Publishing*

Some statistics may give you a useful introduction to electronic self-publishing. According to BookStats 2012, e-books ranked for the first time as the top format for the Adult Fiction category. In addition, e-books' net sales revenue more than doubled in 2011 compared to 2010. This is expected to continue rising over the next 5+ years.

A Pew research study of the number of adults using e-book readers shows an increase from 16 percent in 2011 to 23 percent in 2012, while the number of readers of printed books decreased from 72 percent to 67 percent. The number of people who own either a tablet or an e-reader increased significantly from 18 percent in 2011 to 33 percent in 2012. The overall number of book readers remained about the same. This shows that more and more readers are switching to purchasing e-books over printed books.

Several options exist if you want to self-publish electronically. First, you can publish directly to an e-reading device such as Amazon's Kindle, Barnes and Noble's Nook, Apple's iPad or Kobo. Second, you can utilize e-publishing service and distribution companies like Smashwords and PressBooks allows you to create e-books in various formats. Many POD companies also offer electronic publishing services.

You will probably find that entering the self-publishing fray by publishing only electronic versions at first makes starting simpler. After all, you can get a sense of readership, reviews, price points, cover art interest and other aspects of your book

## Andrew Verb

before ever going to print. Print versions can be produced later, after you gain knowledge and experience in the market. Producing an e-book is less complicated than print, especially regarding formatting and cover design. You can price e-books at dramatically lower points than print books, making them easier to sell.

# Digital Self-Publishing

## PROS

- + Your costs are minimal to self-publish electronically. For example, publishing with Smashwords and Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing is free.
- + You can set the price of an e-book very low or even free to generate sales and interest.
- + Producing an e-book is simple, including formatting and the cover.
- + A self-published e-book takes up the same amount of digital shelf space as a traditionally published book's e-version. This levels the playing field somewhat.

## CONS

- Getting noticed through the competition can be hard. There are nearly two million Kindle e-books for sale on Amazon.



### III. The Final Professional Touch

---

*“More and more frustrated writers will choose to self-publish. Not only is it easier than getting accepted by a traditional royalty publisher, but it’s much faster and if the book is successful, it’s much more profitable. The catch though, is that most self-published books are poorly written and won’t be successful.”*

*- Nick Harrison Senior Editor, Harvest House Publishers*

---

To successfully self-publish, you must fulfill these five requirements.

- Write a high-quality book.
- Create a captivating cover.
- Add a compelling description.
- Set a reasonable price.
- Develop and follow a marketing plan.

When authors sign publishing contracts, their manuscripts start a journey toward being turned into books that meet professional-level standards. To be successful, you need to take the same steps to achieve a high quality final product. You must consider whether these tasks are best handled alone or with outside help.

According to the Taleist 2012 Self-Publishing Survey, writers who story edited, copy edited, proofread and designed

their own cover made only 38 percent of average earnings. Those who got more outside help made more revenue. Getting assistance with these services can add substantial value. Numerous online providers can affordably provide quality services.

## **Tools Available Online**

### *Editing*

Editing marks the first task needed to improve a manuscript – and this is one of the most important tasks! The editing process revises content for better flow, readability, and precision of language. An editor asks whether the structure and organization need improvement, if transitions need clarifying and if the tone sounds right. If you're a writer that tends to use shifting verb tenses, or that uses dangling participles, or writes a lot of run-on sentences, it won't matter how great the actual story is if your reader is hung-up by these distracting mistakes. All it takes is some funky grammar or a large chunk of the book that's too long and irrelevant, and suddenly the respect level and professionalism of your book is impacted. Want to play with the big boys and be the next John Grisham or Nora Roberts? Make sure that a great editor is your number one priority.

After editing comes proofreading, where the manuscript receives a more detailed and refined review. A proofreader looks for grammatical errors, mechanical mistakes like incorrect spelling and punctuation, and poor sentence structure. This is right up there with editing as far as importance goes.

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

Want to see your reputation as an author go down the drain? Publish a book with a bunch of spelling mistakes. Avid readers catch everything, and if you have a habit of mixing up “they’re” and “their,” trust me, they will notice. Those kinds of mistakes are simply not found in large, traditional publishing house books, and they shouldn’t be in yours either. Do you know when to use “further” vs. “farther?” If not, get a proofreader. Do you rely solely on spellcheck within Word? If so, get a proofreader. It’s that important! An author’s eyes will catch a lot, but sometimes your own familiarity with your words can blind an author to these types of minor errors. A fresh set of eyes who are directed to focus on just those aspects can make a big difference in the overall quality of your book.

Although self-published books do not have the same negative connotations now as in the past, readers may still treat them with suspicion due to their reputation for amateurish writing, riddled with errors. You should hire editors and proofreaders to elevate your work because publishing an unedited, unproofed book truly does hurt your chance at success. Shrewd writers take the time and expense to make their writing absolutely solid. By doing the same, you will better your chance to receive positive reviews and establish a good reputation, which generates sales. Many authors make the mistake of believing that they can edit/proof their own work. Yet in almost every instance, small errors get missed and perceptive readers pick up on them. The last thing a writer wants is to have their work viewed as amateur or unprofessional due to lingering grammar or spelling errors. Also, there is no worse “hiccup” to a reader’s experience than to come across a glaring mistake while deep in the flow of a book.

Even more damaging is a major error in the first few pages. Some readers are quick to not even finish a book with errors that appear early in the text.

Another reason to perfect the content is that potential customers may read sample pages of your book either online or in print to determine whether or not to purchase it. Poor quality writing will immediately lead to rejection. Though your writing should be consistent throughout the book, the beginning segment really needs to reel in the reader's interest so that they will want to keep reading beyond the sample.

There are many industry associations, such as the [Independent Book Publishers Association](#), which provide resource listings to find both editors and proofreaders. The listed options have different costs and levels of service. Some companies offer evaluations, which report on strengths and weaknesses in the manuscript and may suggest further editing.

Hiring a recommended freelance proofreader or editor may provide you with more personalized service. With someone else closely examining your work, editing can feel like a pretty personal process. Working well with that individual can make your experience more pleasant and beneficial. Also, hiring a freelancer can give you more control over choosing a contractor with direct understanding of your book's genre, which can lead to better results. If you only have a small budget to work with, check out editors on online freelance sites like Elance. Try to choose a contractor with high approval ratings, great reviews and a solid portfolio.

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

If you have a larger budget, you may opt to hire a more premier level editor. Some freelance editors currently work for major publishers or have worked for them in the past. Using a highly skilled, veteran, professional editor should ensure that you receive excellent, honest feedback and customized service.

### *E-book Formatting Services*

E-book formatting has two components, namely getting the text to display correctly on the device and converting word processing files into e-book files. This section considers display formatting first, then file conversion.

When e-book formatting goes badly, spacing can be off, portions may appear bold or italicized, paragraphs may be incorrectly split, and text may show behind pictures, among other problems. Something as small as a missed break between paragraphs can cause confusion for the reader. Formatting issues reflect badly on your book and interrupt your reader. Creating a quality product requires that you get the formatting right. You want to generate a balanced layout, use proper fonts, allow for reading flow, and create an attractive look.

# Andrew Verb



Your ability to do this step without help may depend upon the complexity of the original format. For example, bullet points, graphics, illustrations, tables, or block quotes can add additional code that makes formatting e-books more complicated. For assistance, the Smashwords Style Guide is a free resource available through their website that contains formatting information for e-books. KDP has a Simplified Formatting Guide online also.

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

In order to create an e-book, word processing files must be converted into e-book files. Let's start by getting a better understanding of five e-book file types.



EPUB, the industry standard e-book file format, is widely supported across all platforms. Most e-readers support .epub files. This does not include the Amazon Kindle, for now. As an open standard, EPUB is free and publicly available. The International Digital Publishing Forum (IDPF) maintains the standard. EPUB displays reflowable content, which means the presentation adjusts to the device.



Now owned by Amazon, the Mobipocket e-book format is also an open standard and runs across platforms. E-book files in this format use .prc or .mobi extensions. MOBI formats are suited for smaller screens but do not work as well on tablets. The format supports indexing and can handle complex content. It also displays reflowable content.



Amazon developed the proprietary AZW format for the Kindle eBook reader. Although based on MOBI, it contains some enhanced features and changes and allows for the use of Digital Rights Management (DRM) to restrict purchases to only that customer's e-reader devices.



Adobe's Portable Document Format (PDF) has been around for some years and many people use it. It has many features and supports fixed width layout. However, the PDF format is not generally reflowable, which leads to formatting problems on e-readers. Note that converting PDF files to EPUB can be difficult and therefore costly.



Apple developed a proprietary e-book format called iBook, which is created with iBooks Author. Be aware that Apple restricted the sale of e-books with iBook files to the Apple iBookstore. However, you can distribute your iBook files for free elsewhere and you may repurpose that content into other e-book formats.

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

How you choose to self-publish may affect the file formatting decisions. Depending upon what service or method you use, certain file types will or will not be accepted. For example, Smashwords uses only .doc files. Amazon's KDP can accept a wide variety of formats including Word, HTML, EPUB, PDF, plain and rich text. Createspace takes PDF, .doc, .docx or .rtf files. eBook Prep takes either previously printed books or .doc files.



Other file conversion options include using tools available online, either at no cost or for a fee. Examples include Mobipocket, which has free software to create e-books from a variety of file types. Jutoh runs across all platforms and converts to all popular e-book formats. BookGlutton can convert HTML files into ePUBs. Calibre provides free open source software for converting files to use between e-readers and to create e-books. In addition, their software allows books in other formats to be converted into MOBI files for use on a Kindle.

Getting e-book formatting just right can be an exercise in frustration. As word processing software converts the document into a book ready format, things can go amiss. Also, some software is only compatible with PC (rather than PC and Mac). You may choose to avoid these difficulties by utilizing e-book formatting companies or freelance formatting contractors. Another option is to pay for formatting services through self-publishing companies. Hiring out these services can spare your time and sanity! If you've got a lot on your plate, simply hire this part out. It's totally okay.

You will want to think ahead about some formatting goals. It's not the sexiest part of self-publishing, but it's an important one. First and foremost, the e-book should not have major, obvious formatting errors. Also, EPUB files need to pass ePubchecker, which allows Apple's iBookstore and other vendors to accept your e-book.

Beyond that, some self-publishing services have a reputation for creating flat looking, bland, featureless e-books. A boring looking e-book will not stand out among the millions. Getting noticed requires a higher-level product. Some desired features include having each chapter on a new page, a digital table of contents that allows readers to jump directly to each chapter and a consistent look across all e-reader devices. Even more in-depth formatting can include images within the text (maybe as chapter headers!), footnotes and endnotes.

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

Hyperlinked Contents	Non-hyperlinked Contents
<h3>Table of Contents</h3> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li><a href="#">1. Introduction</a></li><li><a href="#">2. The Captain and Lawrence</a></li><li><a href="#">3. Saved by the Tail of a Cat</a></li><li><a href="#">4. Catfish on a Bush</a></li><li><a href="#">5. Gator Hunt on the Suwannee</a></li><li><a href="#">6. Mullet Fishing With Bobby</a></li><li><a href="#">7. Catawba Worms</a></li><li><a href="#">8. Lake Okeechobee Cat Fishing</a></li><li><a href="#">9. The Fish Don't Have a Chance</a></li><li><a href="#">10. My Wooden Boat That Melted</a></li><li><a href="#">11. Some Things Never Change</a></li></ol>  <p><i>Clickable</i></p>	<h3>The Big Mouth Bass Fishing Secrets &amp; Recipes</h3> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Introduction</li><li>2. The Captain and Lawrence</li><li>3. Saved by the Tail of a Cat</li><li>4. Catfish on a Bush</li><li>5. Gator Hunt on the Suwannee</li><li>6. Mullet Fishing With Bobby</li><li>7. Catawba Worms</li><li>8. Lake Okeechobee Cat Fishing</li><li>9. The Fish Don't Have a Chance</li><li>10. My Wooden Boat That Melted</li><li>11. Fishing With Mitzi</li><li>12. Fishing With L.A.</li><li>13. A Quarter Ton of Indigestion</li></ol>  <p><i>Not-Clickable</i></p>

If you really want to project quality, you may strive toward a unique and beautiful look, with attractive elements and a highly customized appearance. Illustrations receive special treatment and details add distinction. Don't forget cover art! But, more on that in a bit.

When publishing specifically for the iPad or the Kindle Fire, you may discover new ways to create highly interactive, bright and colorful e-books. The ability to embed video, photos,

interactive objects, graphic drawings and animations adds enormous possibility. Some books are better suited to this display, but as devices evolve and tablets continue to outsell simple e-readers, these features may become more prevalent.

### *Obtaining an ISBN*

The International Standard Book Number (ISBN) is a unique book identifier assigned to a book title for tracking, ordering, and discoverability purposes. When ISBNs are assigned, corresponding book information is obtained and catalogued in a global book database, which is utilized by retailers, wholesalers and libraries.

ISBN identification is based on a global standard and is administered by an international organization. Every developed country has a local ISBN Agency who is responsible for ISBN assignment and title data. In the United States, Bowker is the official US ISBN Agency. Print and digital versions of the same book must have different ISBNs. Even the hard cover and mass market versions of the same book need different ISBNs.

There are some companies designated as Authorized Agents by the US ISBN Agency to assist self-publishers with ISBN assignment. Authorized Agents such as Publisher Services and Lulu work directly Bowker to enable legitimate ISBN assignment and convey accurate title information to the Global Books in Print database. The internet is full of misinformation about ISBN assignment policy and there are some

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

unauthorized online services promoting ISBN services. So beware!

### *Reviewing Services*

Reviews have been proven to be one of the best ways to boost sales. They are so important in the publishing world that we are going to discuss them in a few places. This section addresses paid book reviews. Other ways for you to obtain reviews are considered in the Self-Marketing Section below. A more detailed examination of reviews appears in the last section, “The Importance of the Review.”

A standard book review offers readers a brief description, critique and evaluation. Reviews help readers decide whether or not they want to purchase and read your book.

With the ever-growing number of self-published books, you need a way to establish your work as high quality and worth reading. It is in your interest to help establish a filter to assist readers in finding worthwhile choices from the flood of available books. You will need reliable, fair-minded reviews to institute that filter.

The subject of paid book reviews became controversial recently due to press coverage about authors purchasing positive reviews. In fact, the bestselling author mentioned earlier, John Locke, took that approach when getting started. Within several months, his sales had skyrocketed. In addition, some authors have used false online accounts to create

positive reviews for their own work as well as disparaging reviews of their competitors' work.

And despite the recent controversy, you can still purchase positive book reviews in single or bulk quantities from a number of providers. However, guaranteed positive reviews are obviously considered the poorest quality reviews as they lack honesty and integrity. These types of reviews generally stick out amongst genuine reviews (and will garner comments that point to that fact). Most of these "reviews" are not even based on your book at all, and the book isn't even read. Instead of critiques, these reviews generally just offer general descriptions and positive attributes. Buyers are becoming more savvy to these industry tricks, and are easily put off by them.

In light of this recent controversy, some or many writers (it's impossible to know the percentage) strongly disapprove of using any type of paid review service. These writers believe that using free means to produce book reviews offers the only method to generate authentic, unbiased reviews. They argue that payment inherently taints the transaction and produces bias. Writers, readers and industry members continue to debate the soundness of that argument. Publications devoted to presenting reviews receive free books in exchange for the reviews. Traditional publishing houses pay for advertisements, so even these professional reviews constitute being a paid review. Self-published authors can pay for reviews in these types of publications, like *Kirkus Reviews* or *Publishers Weekly*. But self-published books are only accepted during certain times of year, and the reviews are not guaranteed to be

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

published within the magazine – despite the rather hefty fee paid. There are other review services that have smaller fees but indefinite turnaround times.

You can find some paid review services at an affordable cost with reasonable turnaround times in this recently developing market. [YourFirstReview.com](http://YourFirstReview.com) is one such service that promises both an unbiased review and their unique seven-point report card that can help improve your writing. Using these reviews as a basis to revise your work is an additional benefit.

Paid book reviews have pros and cons. An argument in favor of paid reviews is that reviewers must return the reviews within a specific deadline, while volunteer reviewers operate on their own time frame. Also, with most paid review services, you know for certain a review will come, instead of being subjected to the vagaries and whims of potential volunteer reviewers. Reviewers are inundated and some free review providers just cannot take on any more. This results in you having fewer available unpaid review options and longer wait times. When you spend your time procuring book reviews, you have less time and energy to actually write. The downsides of paid reviews include having to cover an additional expense for just one piece, and the expense varies. Remember to research your options!

## Design Services

### *Interior Design Options*

E-book readers can customize their experience using their electronic reading devices, including changing fonts, sizes and colors. Making that process work correctly and look right takes place during e-book formatting. Therefore, interior e-book design considerations mainly come into focus during the formatting stage.

Interior design issues play an important role when developing your book in print, however. Trim size, margins, page size, font size, correct justification, graphic elements, text placement, and page number placement are just some of the design decisions you will make.

You expend significant time and energy creating your work. In the end, having an attractive, perhaps even a beautiful book to show for it will give you pleasure and satisfaction. Not only that, but what reader would be drawn to a low quality piece when so many books look sharp and attractive? Competing in the marketplace demands a high-caliber end product.

Interior book design involves a large number of small but important decisions. At a minimum, you want to avoid creating an obviously self-published book. In his book *Ape: How To Publish A Book*, Guy Kawasaki offers a number of ways to avoid this problem. He suggests utilizing *The Chicago Manual of Style* as a reference to get the front matter right. If you want to establish your own publishing company, choose a stylish

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

name and then Google it to verify its uniqueness. Limit blurbs to avoid self-aggrandizing.

A few other markers of poor quality interior design include incorrect justification or hyphenation, blank right sided pages, the wrong size book, tiny margins, lack of running heads or running heads on blank pages, orphans & widows, and the list goes on and on. Better quality design results in a more tasteful look with ample blank space and attractive fonts. You can use interior design to truly elevate your work. High-quality interior design can increase your reader's engagement with a book. Choosing the right typeface can add credibility to the piece. These seemingly minuscule details can join forces to fabricate a memorable and marketable volume.

*Example*

Sufficient margin size

It doesn't really take a degree in psychology to make a few educated guesses about the food relationships that were going on in each of those examples.

Are you happy with the items you put in your grocery cart these days, or do you feel like maybe they're not giving you the

*The belly rules the mind.*

—Spanish Proverb

Graphic elements

nourishment you need? Are you eating the foods that love you back? You'll find out as we walk through this program.

When I learned to deal with life's challenges, changes, and choices in a more mature way—less emotional and more solution-oriented—I realized that a healthy relationship with food could be

Justified text

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

### *Cover Design Options*

When designing a cover, strive for creating a charismatic look that gives readers a quick high-impact sense of the contents. You want to use the cover to draw in readers and generate sales. The Taleist 2012 Self-Publishing Survey results show the importance of a professional looking book cover. Self-publishers who had outside help with their cover design received 18 percent more than the average earnings than those without help. You don't want to leave it totally up to someone else, though. Remember the earlier story about Barry Eisler? Have fun with it, and recognize that it's a very good thing that you're in charge of the cover design.

When designing covers, you want to reflect something of the book's era, its subject, or somehow suggest the feeling of its contents. Try to distill the book's contents into an evocative visual image. The goals for print book covers differ a bit from e-book covers. For print, the cover should make the reader want to hold it, study it, touch it and buy it. For an e-book, you want to optimize the cover for an online thumbnail image while keeping the image clear enough to view the title and author. The image also needs to be clear when it is full-size on their reading device. Create a spark in a potential reader that gets them to click on the book, and then click through to a purchase.

With cover design, make it simple but not one-dimensional, use restraint, and avoid overdesigning. Also, strive for eye-catching, elegant, or unexpected images. Err on the side of minimalism rather than overwrought, complicated jumbles.

You have lots of options when it comes to book cover design. First, for photos, iStockphoto sells affordable photos and illustrations. If you have Adobe Photoshop skills, you can design outstanding covers using that software. Adobe's InDesign software offers you even more advanced features. BookCoverPro software allows you the choice to design covers on your own or use their custom cover design service.

For outside help, KillerCovers offers e-book and print cover design, particularly for non-fiction. Self-publishing service providers like Lulu and Createspace also offer cover design services. Some companies sell ready-to-go covers that can be customized. Freelance cover designers may provide a high amount of customization plus more personalized service.

Poorly designed covers are unattractive, bland, dull, and may even turn away readers. Using generic or overused stock photos, centered text, and incorrect proportions all may contribute to a cover's fast and painful death. Instead, make an engaging cover that draws the customer's attention and stimulates interest in the book. The right cover design reflects the message and essence of the content. With strong graphic elements, you can pique a reader's curiosity. Cover design can bring a book to another level and play a part in the creation of a beautiful object. You can forge greater connections with readers by designing covers with exquisite taste and customized detail work. Of course you never want to plagiarize, but if you need some inspiration, take your fingers on a walk through Amazon, focusing on your genre so that your inner muse can explode with ideas of your own.

### **Assessing Services**

#### *Rubric*

The rubric on the following page summarizes the four main types of services that you may choose to use when publishing your book, namely editing, formatting, reviewing and design. Each service has varying levels of quality. Included in the quality considerations are cost, levels of sophistication, and the provider's qualifications.

**Criteria | Level of Achievement**

	<b>Lowest Quality</b>	<b>Average Quality</b>	<b>Best Quality</b>
<b>Editing</b>	Generic customer service, lack of individual attention, unknown qualifications and interests of editor	More individualized service, may be more expensive but the editors' qualifications and interests are known	Highly personal customer service, most expensive, editors with long-term experience with traditional publishers
<b>Formatting</b>	Display errors, fails to pass ePubcheck, bland, featureless appearance	Consistent across devices, book's information appears in metadata, e-book cover appears in device with the title, attractive appearance with some details	High amount of customization, unique and creative look, beautiful appearance, rich details
<b>Reviewing</b>	Guaranteed positive, reviewer does not read book, description based rather than critical emphasis	Unbiased and independent, affordable, reasonable turnaround times, information helps with improving content	Highly qualified and professional level staff with industry experience, most expensive, slow turnaround
<b>Interior Design</b>	Distracting fonts, incorrectly sized book, poorly sized illustrations, improper spacing, mistakes in page numbering	Stylish typeface, ample blank spaces, best content order, correct content, suitable amount of details	Enhances the quality of your writing, enriches the reader's experience, adds credibility with typefaces
<b>Cover</b>	Centered text, stock photos, limited options, no revisions, boring	Message and spirit of contents reflected in the cover design, engaging cover, strong graphic elements	Special graphics, customized detail work

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

Deciding which services to purchase and at what quality level depends upon the nature of your book, your goals, resources, and time frame. You may bring additional skills to your projects besides writing, which can impact these choices also. This is an individualized process that must suit your own needs. However, knowing the range of possibilities can help focus your project.

### *Research the Options*

You must apply logic and research when deciding upon services. Spending exorbitant sums of money on self-publishing is certainly possible but not necessarily the best choice. You need to think ahead about the marketability of your book. Also, are you willing and able to establish and carry out a marketing plan? Answers to these questions will help you dictate the quantity, quality and type of services to purchase. Choosing reasonable quality outside assistance at affordable prices can provide you with the right balance of generating sales while maximizing profit.

Research the options before committing. Choices may appear straightforward due to effective marketing by service providers. However, realities may lurk underneath that can cost you in terms of time, money, and legal rights. Invest effort into understanding and appreciating potential problems.

### *Writing and Reading Communities*

Go online and be social! You can benefit greatly from the wealth of information and support available online through writing communities. Experienced and knowledgeable authors,

self-publishers and industry insiders offer countless ways to avoid self-publishing pitfalls, improve writing quality, build an audience and make sales. You can find blogs by author, writing genre, gender, and geographic location, among others.

You may want specific suggestions to improve your writing. This type of support can be found on reciprocal critique sites. For example, Critters Workshop offers free in-depth critiques provided by fellow writers, including an option for critiques of full-length novels. Writers exchange critiquing services through the website. Review Fuse is another writing critique site that has an automated peer matching process for giving and receiving constructive criticism. WritersCafe and Critique Circle provide two more options if you need feedback.

You also want to create your own digital presence due to the changing ways readers find new books. According to the Codex Group's quarterly survey, readers are discovering new books more through online media such as social networks and author's websites and less by visiting physical bookstores. Online booksellers, like Amazon, surprisingly remain a relatively small presence overall in terms of where readers discover books.

As an online social media example, readers looking for books often use Goodreads, recently acquired by Amazon, which is a website community dedicated to sharing information about books. Users can post their own reviews, ratings and reading lists while viewing others' recommendations. The site generates recommendations based on user ratings. Readers can also join online groups, contact authors and find detailed

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

book information. From your perspective, the site provides a great way to connect with readers, create a fan base and expand your digital presence. You can create a simple profile on the site but you can also join the Goodreads Author Program, which allows you to customize your profile page and better promote your books. Another similar resource is Shelfari, also owned by Amazon.

LibraryThing has a much smaller user base than Goodreads and emphasizes cataloging and social networking. Readers can connect with each other over their catalogs, reviews, ratings and forums. You can become an official LibraryThing Author, which allows you to list your publications and share your own reading lists, thus increasing your online presence. Amazon has an ownership stake in the company also, which resulted from their 2008 purchase of Abebooks, LibraryThing's first minority partner.

A relatively new site, Zola Books, hopes to connect writers and readers independently of Amazon's influence. They want to build a community where writers, book lovers, bloggers, magazines, book clubs and booksellers can gather. Readers' purchases can support certain independent bookstores. The site is currently undergoing transition but may soon receive more attention due to Amazon's purchase of the previously independent Goodreads.

Andrew Verb

## IV. Self-Marketing

---

### *The Importance of the Product*

The importance of making a quality product increases as the number of available books increases. You need ways to differentiate yourself from the competition and to demonstrate your book's value. Also, promoting your self-published book will be much easier and more enjoyable with a quality, marketable product. People want to use their time wisely and invest in worthwhile activities. Writers who develop their books thoughtfully and methodically give readers the opportunity to do that.

### **Define your Audience and Get the Ball Rolling!**

As a self-publisher, take these steps:

- Carefully prepare your manuscript to contain the best content, including excellent story construction.
- Present it free of grammar, spelling, typing and formatting mistakes.
- Package it in an attractive way with an engaging, professional looking cover that conveys a message about the content.
- Add smart looking details.
- Write a book description that enthralls readers and creates desire.

Time to be a sales person! You need to define your audience in order to concentrate marketing efforts, set the best price and maximize sales. First consider demographics such as age, gender, income and ethnic or religious background. This helps you to better understand where to find your readers, and how to gauge their potential disposable income and likely social media use. Next, examine psychographics, which are personal attitudes, interests and lifestyles. This helps you to know your customers' habits and how to effectively reach them.

Use that basic information to form a more nuanced understanding including what they like to do, where they go, and how they get the news. Find ways to capture their attention by visiting relevant venues, events, and conventions. Garner press coverage in the publications they favor.

Write a specific marketing plan and work relentlessly to execute it, adapting it as necessary to refocus on the most effective elements. Check out some marketing books from your local library for tips! This process should begin even before the writing commences. The marketing plan should involve at least five avenues to maximize potential sales. You want to broaden out into every available distribution system to gain exposure and limit losses from problems in any one area.

You can begin marketing from the very start by creating a cover when you just begin to write and post it to social-media sites. This can build familiarity and anticipation from your potential audience. Some authors even post outlines of their books to crowd source story ideas and generate buzz. Some

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

set up countdowns to release dates. Set up some social media. Invite friends to your newly-created fan Facebook page, or Twitter account. Spend some time searching what other genre-related message boards or groups are out there, especially if they encourage self-promotion.

Don't forget about the title! Create a distinctive title that your readers can easily find on Amazon and Google searches. Avoid using a title that allows the book to get lost in a maze of search results. While Neal Stephenson has a tremendous genre following, one of his recent books, *REAMDE*, had a tough time in bookstores and libraries. Few knew how to pronounce it, and many often misspelled it. Again, spend some time on Amazon once you have a few titles in mind. Do some searches to see if there are other books with the same title. Be conscious of what complications might arise from a particular title. For example, if you're publishing a women's romance novel and are thinking of calling it "The Summer Garden," be aware that a search for this could frustrate readers who end up with countless pages of how to grow vegetables, flowers and herbs.

You can show your capabilities by entering (and winning) writing contests. Author Jennifer Bresnick successfully completed the NaNoWriMo contest in 2009. She also won the grand prize in the Shelf Unbound Magazine writing competition. With two self-published books, she now appears as a Featured Author on Createspace.

## Unpaid/Volunteer Reviews

Another way for you to prove the worthiness of your work is through reviews. Paid reviews provide you with a viable and effective means to gain feedback, but not the only way. To enhance marketing, you may choose to pursue as many reviews as possible. In this case, consider soliciting unpaid, volunteer reviews.

Before launching into cultivating free reviews, though, think about the objective. You want to receive thoughtful, informed, quality reviews with integrity that go beyond simple descriptions and spoilers. Perhaps the ultimate goal is to find reviewers who care about your book – either inherently or through incentives.

People who innately care include those who truly love books, live to read, and enjoy spending time writing reviews. Finding these folks may be accomplished most easily through online reading and writing communities. On the other hand, finding reviewers who care because of inducements happens too. For example, paid reviewers want to produce a quality review in order to get paid or keep their jobs. Book bloggers want to incite more traffic to their sites. Fellow authors need reviews for their own books. Reporters need fresh, interesting stories. Receiving quality reviews, written with care and integrity, can be accomplished when that is the aim.

The most obvious way for you to find reviewers who care is to ask your family members and friends, but this probably isn't the best strategy. After all, wouldn't Mom give you a big hug

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

and smooch and tell you it's the most wonderful book in the world? This is probably not the objective review that you're looking for. In 2012, Amazon deleted large numbers of book reviews. It appears that they purged some legitimate reviews along with some reviews by authors' family members and friends. It seems that Amazon looked for connections between reviewers and authors, and removed reviews from those with apparently deeper connections. Also, those close to you may not actually read your book before reviewing it, which can be obvious to readers.

To obtain free reviews, you should start by professionally presenting yourself and your book. Most reviewers are inundated so you need to showcase yourself and your work as worthwhile. Carefully identify the blogs and sites that may offer reviews of your book's genre and respect their policies. You can also target more well-known authors and editors in the genre with the hope of getting lucky. Avoid sending books to a reviewer who does not take your category as it wastes everyone's time or could even generate poor reviews. Recognize that some sites do not review self-published books. Create a template for sending book review requests that clearly and courteously requests a review. Prepare to provide complimentary copies.

One suggestion is to post requests in the Goodreads or Library Thing groups to find reviewers in exchange for a free copy of your book. Reviewers may be willing to cross post to Amazon or other blogs. You can offer your books for free on Amazon and request reviews. Reader Views provides a limited number of free reviews. Their reviewers choose which books

to review, so it is hard to predict whether yours will get chosen. Other places to try are Midwest Book Review, Kindle Obsessed (not taking submissions right now) and The Kindle Book Review (over half of the reviewers do not currently accept books).

The Indie Book Blog Database specializes in self-published books. Research other sites to find book-loving bloggers who are willing to review books on their sites for free.

Recognizing that these bloggers are also probably dodging tall TBR (To Be Read) stacks, savvy writers want to give these book bloggers extra encouragement. Before requesting a review, network with them by following and commenting on their posts, or by re-Tweeting one of their reviews. Having a connection first can make a large difference when making a request later.

You may follow an influential blogger who does not review books but could provide access to your target market. In this case, ask to write a guest blog post, run an excerpt or organize a book giveaway through the site.

You may need to become a reviewer yourself. Reviewing other books in the same genre creates networking opportunities among your peers. Post the review on Amazon and send the author a copy. Note, however, that Amazon may delete author-to-author peer reviews.

Getting a review or even a mention in a local or national paper seems nearly impossible, but it is worth researching

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

which papers still review books and their submission criteria. Trying to connect with local publications or smaller publications in other regions that may have interest in the subject can succeed. Also, early on, network with reporters who cover the relevant subject area by commenting on their articles. This can result in some press coverage at release time.

You can generate reviews by searching Amazon's Top Customer Reviewers page to find reviewers appropriate for your market. The top reviewers receive this ranking through some combination of the quantity and helpfulness of their reviews. Therefore, these reviewers know how to swiftly produce high quality, effective reviews and their reviews carry weight.

Searching through the list of top reviewers may take some time, as many will review products but not books. Also, not all reviewers' profiles contain contact information. Make sure to check that the book's genre matches the reviewers' preferences, contact the reviewer and offer to send them a copy for review. While the top reviewers are influential, less frequent reviewers may still provide solid reviews. Also, you will need to contact numerous potential reviewers to actually receive enough. Thus, there is no harm in moving further down the list to reach an adequate number of candidates.

Amazon has one other review program worth mentioning, Vine Voice. This program invites certain customers to write reviews for new or pre-release products. Program members receive program invitations based on their reviewer rank. The easiest way for you to access this group is to look for similar

books to yours and then search through the reviews to find ones marked as coming from the Amazon Vine Program. Make sure to target reviewers with the Vine Voice badge, but not a top reviewer badge, if you have already contacted the top reviewers.

If you have the budget, another great way to get the word out there about your book and solicit reviews is to host a booth at a book conference. Book Expo America (BEA) is held every summer in New York City, and readers, booksellers, reviewers, librarians and every other imaginable bibliophile attends. It can be pricey to host a conference booth, but it may be worth it. There are similar shows in London and in Frankfurt. Also, American Library Association (ALA) holds two conferences each year – one in winter and one in summer. These are heavily attended by librarians, most of whom love to read and sit on various review and award committees. Hosting a booth at ALA may be more cost-effective, especially since the location changes from year-to-year. Contacting your local library can also pave the way to more readers and reviews, too.

You may wonder where to start after reading all of the above options. Reviewing data from the Taleist 2012 Self-Publishing Survey may offer some guidance. According to the survey, submitting books to the top reviewers on Amazon was the best single method to get the most reviews and sales revenue. Submitting to the mainstream press was also highly effective. Yet combining the two methods resulted in double the average number of reviews and revenue. The overall best tactic in terms of reviews and revenue was to combine a

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

number of methods: giving away review copies, submitting to book review blogs and the mainstream press, seeking Amazon's top reviewers and asking your readers through email lists or other direct contact methods.

Overall, the positives associated with unpaid reviews are that your financial cost is low, usually the cost of the review copy and postage for print books, and you can receive them in quantity. On the downside, generating unpaid reviews takes lots of your time, energy and dedication.

### **Price Promotions and Giveaways**

You want to create buzz, make lots of sales and get good reviews. Some ways to do that include using price promotions and book giveaways. First, let's explore price promotions using Amazon. The degree to which Amazon recommends books depends upon units sold, not royalties generated. The more units sold, the more it becomes recommended. The fewer units sold, the more it fades away. A higher price results in fewer sales but greater royalties. Due to Amazon's system, you want to maximize your unit sales and therefore you should price lower. Cheaper books sell more units and thereby receive higher rankings. Higher sales can yield placement on bestseller lists and recommended pages, resulting in greater discoverability and further sales – a virtuous cycle. Yet your royalties from 99-cent books add up pretty slowly.

Price pulsing offers a technique to try to maximize both unit sales and royalties. It involves dropping the price down to 99 cents temporarily to gain unit sales, then returning to the retail

price at the right moment to capture higher royalties. The price drop creates greater unit sales, which gets your book placed on the lists for greater exposure. The exposure leads to new customers who pay the higher price. The decay curve (downward trending sales) sets in and eventually sales drop off again. You can repeat the technique and cycle through but the effect fades over time. Highlight the lower price as a limited time promotional price to maintain your vestige of worth and inspire action.

Along with pricing promotions, you can participate in give-away programs to generate reviews and attention. Library-Thing (LT) offers member giveaways where you provide free copies and LT chooses winners for them. You usually request reviews, explain the available formats and suggest where you would like reviews posted. Reviews are encouraged but not required.

Goodreads' popular giveaway program has given away over 200,000 books. Many hundreds of people enter to win each book. Note that e-books are not allowed in their giveaway program.

Smashwords uses a unique coupon discount program. The Smashwords Coupon Generator allows you to create custom coupon codes. You determine the amount of the discount (including free) and expiration date. These unlimited coupons can be given to readers, reviewers or contest participants and you can tell whether the coupons get redeemed.

### **User-Reviews Drive Your Sales**

The Taleist 2012 Self-Publishing Survey shows a correlation between reviews and sales. To quote directly, “Having a higher number of reviews explains about half the increase in sales for successful books.” How do reviews drive your sales? Positive reviews in online bookstores offer social proof that your book is worthwhile, thus encouraging undecided readers. Put another way, the number of reviews indicates your book’s popularity. The more, the better.

Customer reviews and ratings impact the rankings and recommendations created by online book retailers. Using proprietary computer algorithms, computer systems combine sales data and customers’ ratings to determine to what extent your book should be promoted. In addition, positive reviews encourage sales, which improves your book’s ranking, in turn increasing its visibility and then additional sales.

### **Accurate Reviews Stand Out**

Book reviews that offer only brief descriptions or plot details do not help readers acquire real knowledge about your book. Customers want to know if a book is worth their time. Readers quickly recognize accurate and fair reviews and put more weight on them. Harsh reviews will hurt your feelings, but resist the urge to respond to them. First-time authors (and sometimes even longtime authors) will comment on reviews. If you want to directly connect with your readers, keep those interactions positive and concise. Don’t respond to a negative review, even if you think it doesn’t sound defensive, it will not

reflect well on you. Thank them for taking the time to read your book, and nothing more. A mature response like that will gain you more respect from those reviewers who do read the harsh review and will make the reviewer look less credible.

## **Compare and Contrast Review Services**

Several well-established book review sites can offer you paid review services, such as Kirkus Indie and PW (*Publisher's Weekly*) Select. The Kirkus Indie review is a straightforward process in which you pay a set fee for an unbiased, professional review. Their standard service (\$425) takes seven to nine weeks while their express service (\$575) takes four to six weeks.

On the other hand, with PW Select's program you pay a set amount (\$149) to have an announcement of your book listed in PW Select. In addition, some of these books will receive reviews from Publishers Weekly, about 25 percent of the total submitted. Reviewers are professional experts or book industry members.

BlueInk Review only reviews self-published books and costs a bit less than Kirkus. A Standard Review (\$395) takes seven to nine weeks and a Fast Track Review (\$495) takes four to five weeks. Their reviewers are professional writers and critics, editors or those with professional level subject matter expertise. All reviews receive professional editing.

## The Rise of Self-Publishing

Createspace offers objective paid reviews by professional book critics through its service, ForeWord Clarion Reviews. A Standard Review (\$399) takes eight weeks and an Expedited Review (\$549) takes four weeks.

[YourFirstReview.com](http://YourFirstReview.com) provides an unbiased 300-word review with a quick turnaround of about a week (\$149). Reviews and critiques are provided by seasoned book reviewers and this service is specifically targeted towards self-publishers.



## VI. Summary

---

Without a doubt, this is a truly exciting time for you to self-publish your book. The resources available to you are growing enormously. Self-publishing, especially electronically, is becoming extraordinarily easy. The ways to garner attention through social media and online connections are rising all the time.

You need to choose the best method to publish that suits your particular goals. However, know that electronic publishing provides the simplest and most effective way for a novice to start.

Deciding upon what services to purchase and which providers to use depends in part on your skills. Knowing the critical importance of editing and proofreading to create quality content, the necessity of correct formatting, the significance of generating honest and reliable reviews, and the power of an engaging cover and interior design should help give you direction. Professional assistance in these areas can greatly contribute to your book's sales. Overall, producing a quality product is the critical factor in self-publishing success.

Beyond having a quality product, you will also need to be a dedicated marketer. It is up to you to target your market, obtain reader reviews, and develop pricing and promotion strategies. Since customer reviews can make or break your book, putting time and effort into them is a critical element of

your book's marketing plan. A marketing plan can be as simple as spending time each day promoting your book on social media, or as complex as scheduling out a book tour with library visits, book store signings, industry trade show attendance and more.

You will need to be fully committed to your project, have patience, set realistic goals and maintain your self-confidence. In this way, you can absolutely achieve self-publishing success. Now get out there and get started!