

How to Self-Publish and Sell Your Novel: How I Did It

This is a guide to help the enterprising author begin their career, without the benefit of a contract, agent or traditional publishing house. Make no mistake, if you are fortunate enough to be sought after by a publisher who is willing to throw money at you for your scribbling your thoughts, by all means, take it. For the rest of us peasants, self-publishing is the only way we will ever see our work in print.

Fear not though, aspiring wordsmith. Success can be attained through some hard work and a little luck. By no means, do I feel my work has been a huge success, although at the time of this writing, I have sold more books in a year than I thought I ever would in my life. While that number may be miniscule in comparison to Koontz, King and Clancy, it is okay by me. With that said, let's begin.

Write your novel

When I began the writing process, I was so enthralled with the publishing process, my mind often wandered to thoughts of seeing my name on the shelves of Barnes and Noble and Borders book stores. Many times I found myself scouring the Internet for ways to get published and things I should be doing to sell myself and my work. But when it came down to it, I had no work to sell, just many pieces of unfinished manuscripts. While I became very educated on the process of how to become published and where to send my work, I became nothing but one of the thousands of other people out there who say "I want to write a book someday." I needed to stop focusing on how I was going to get my wicked awesome novel *published*, and start working on getting my wicked awesome novel *written*. Once I had the work done, I could worry about the other stuff. While this was difficult, it soon became my mindset and I eventually stayed off the Internet and stayed in Microsoft Word. Every time I had a new marketing idea or something I wanted to look into regarding publishing, I simply told myself, "market what?" or "publish what?" That kept me focused. Using this mindset, I have two self-published novels that I am somewhat proud of.

So after rambling on about this for much too long, here's the summary. Write. Write your story, your memoirs, whatever. Get a finished product ready then worry about the other stuff. Because the other stuff does not matter unless you have some work to pimp. Okay, enough preaching...for now.

Edit your novel

For me, this was the hardest part. Initially, I tried to do it myself. Bad idea. As I read the words, they came out of my head as if I were writing them. I skipped over misspellings, ramblings and other mistakes as if I were writing it for the second time. In most cases, my belief is that you need to have someone other than yourself edit and proofread. It's just a fact I've come to accept.

Here is my process: When I think I'm completely done with my novel, the writing is done and the story is all in place, I go back one last time and proofread it myself. Many times, I'll find mistakes or errors and fix them. Never have I found all of them. Why? Most likely for the reasons I have already listed. I have made the mistake in the past to rush to publishing, excited about the finished product, only to be embarrassed by errors, mistakes and misspellings. I'm sure work I have out there right now still contains many errors, but I learned a lesson: patience. A finished product that is mostly error free is much more enjoyable than becoming embarrassed over a less than stellar product.

Now, I know what you're saying: "I don't have anyone to proofread." While that may be true, it's a fact that it needs to be done. Get a friend, a relative or join an online authors site. Many authors will critique your work for free. And while some will give you honest feedback, beware those who nitpick for the sake of nitpicking. Take all criticism with a grain of salt. Your finished product will be better for it.

Publish

Okay, you're finished. You wrote your masterpiece, proofread it, and gave it to your best friend who loved it, except for that part about the guy who kills his best friend. He proofread it also and now it's ready to hit the shelves, so to speak. What now?

Now you decide on who you will allow to publish your work. Notice the use of the word, *allow*. Make no mistake that it is a privilege for a publisher to publish your work, and not the other way around although many will have you think otherwise. This is your hard work which most likely took many months and possibly years to complete. The company who publishes it should have your best interests in mind, and not the other way around. Choose carefully.

Now, as I mentioned earlier, I did TONS of research on the Internet before choosing a publisher. I eventually chose Createspace for many reasons.

Reason number one was price. They were able to publish my novel for virtually nothing, which was definitely in my price range. All I had to do was set up an account. Now, by virtually nothing, I mean there were small costs involved. One was ordering a proof once the book interior was uploaded and the cover was finalized and uploaded also. The cost was minimal, four bucks or so plus shipping which came to under ten dollars total. Luckily it looked good on the first try and the formatting was okay by me. So I hastily clicked the “Publish my book” button and off it went.

Createspace also happened to be running a special where they would upgrade me to their next tier of packages for free. This basically allowed me to sell my novel and receive a higher royalty on Amazon as well as on Createspace’s website.

Royalties was another reason I went with Createspace. All other companies I researched had higher cost and lower royalties by comparison.

Lastly was commercial outlets for my novel. While other charging companies had better or more outlets for my novel, none would allow me to sell it on Amazon for next to nothing. Some had deals with the larger book stores, but these deals came with a price tag attached which I was unwilling to pay. And who was to say if I got my book in a large bookstore that anyone would buy it? No one.

So I went with the cheapest, most cost effective solution for me. And so far it’s worked out.

While I’m not here to bash any other companies, I will give my recommendation after doing the research. I *would* recommend Createspace to another self-publishing author, for the reasons listed above. Lulu is also one I would recommend, just because it is similar to Createspace and allows an author full control of his or her work. Lastly, for self-publishing, I would recommend Booksurge, only because it offers very similar packages to that of Createspace.

While I do recommend you look at these options, do not shy away from the many other reputable self-publishing companies such as Xlibris, IUniverse, Dorrance and many others. I’m sure these companies are very trustworthy and provide useful services such as editing, marketing, cover design and have deals with wholesalers and distributors to allow your book onto the shelves of the large brick and mortar book stores. Look at them all. I am just offering my opinion from personal experience.

Marketing (selling) your book

So, you’ve written your masterpiece, carefully edited and proofread it. Selected a publisher and sent off your interior files as well as cover files. Now what?

Now it’s time to sell it. How? There are many ways, most of which cost a lot of money. But there are also many ways that cost nothing or very little and some that only cost some time a little hard work.

The first thing I suggest you do is create a website. Again, I know what you’re thinking. “I know nothing about making websites or even where to begin.” I’ll tell you where to begin. Go to www.google.com. Type in “free website” in the search and look at all the results you get. Personally, I use Freewebs, which is now just Webs, for my site. It is exactly what it says it is, FREE. Costs nothing for a basic site, using nominal bandwidth and nominal uploads and downloads for file space. The name of your site will have to be, *www.webs.com/yourname* or something like that, but who cares? It’s free. For a small fee, you can purchase a domain name and for around forty bucks a year, go to the first tier of premium services on Webs and get your own domain name like www.jjritonya.com or whatever you want to call your site. Just know you can spend as little, or as much as you want in this area. The resources are out there.

Okay, now you’re saying, “Sure, there are free sites out there, but who is going to design it to look cool and not cheap as if I did it myself?” Well, Webs has free templates you can use which are very

easy to set up and use. I also know that other sites offer the same service. You don't have to be a web designer to have a pretty cool site. Check out mine and see. It's easy.

As far as site content, I want to say just a few things. Make the site easy to navigate and simple. Don't overdo it. Don't make it difficult for a person to find your work and purchase it. It should be easy to buy your book. If it's hard, no one will bother.

Other things you can do to get the word out about your book include:

Join book club web sites, author websites and groups and other similar sites. Many have places to pimp your work. Post on forums with your website in your signature. Help others with answers to questions and give advice or ask others for advice. Forming relationships with others in your field is never a bad idea. In short, be *visible* in the author online community. There are many such as Authonomy, Goodreads and Permuted Press forums. Offer content, don't spam. You will be banned from the boards quicker than you can say "Buy my book!"

Locally, go to independently owned book stores and ask if they will carry your book. If they will, it will most likely be on consignment which means you give them some books and split the profits in some way. (I learned this the hard way. Going in cold to a locally owned bookstore, the owner asked, 'Would we offer your books on consignment?' I replied 'I'm not sure what that means.' She had to try not to smile and I left embarrassed.) No worries though. This is a learning process for me as well. Many locally owned stores, I have been told, love to support local authors. I think when they say, "local author" they mean "local *published* author." I do not believe they mean self-published. Anyway, it can't hurt to try, and all they can say is no, hopefully not very loudly.

Another trick is to get your book reviewed. There are many sites that will review your book for nothing more than the cost of your book and shipping. Some will actually let you send them an electronic copy, but not many. A few will ask you to pay them for a review. Enter into these agreements at your own risk. I'm sure there are some reputable companies that will review your work and post it on their site as well as email you an electronic copy of the review. Others may not live up to their end of the bargain. In all honesty, I sent my first book to four reviewers which I thought were reputable. Only one actually reviewed it and posted it on their site. The review was not bad, nor was it overflowing with praise, just a middle of the road, good effort, which was what I expected. But to be honest, I'm not sure I sold one book from it. I had a few hits from the link they put on their site and that was it. I've heard there is a saying that goes "Reviews sell books." This may be true, but for me it was forty bucks in shipping books pretty much down the drain. Maybe I didn't select the right reviewers to send it to. Maybe I was just unlucky. Who knows? I am still undecided if I will continue trying to get reviewed. Decide for yourself who to send it to. I sincerely hope you have better luck than I did.

Other outlets include EBay and Craigslist. Although I haven't had much luck with these, maybe you will. EBay is fairly cheap to sell stuff and Craigslist is free. Give it shot. If you followed in my footsteps and have your novel on Amazon, I would definitely suggest using the tools they provide. The author page is a very cool feature. You can list a bio, bibliography, post blog entries and more. It's a very nice page that displays much information pertinent to you, the author. Tagging your book is another great way to get it to show up in searches on Amazon. Horror, romance or adventure, tagging it will help people interested in your genre find your work.

Some other ways to gain notoriety would be to send your novel to a well known author and asking them to write a short review of your book. You could then post it on your website or in the front of your book. Offer free downloads of a chapter or two of your book. Just enough to hook them then hope they buy. Write short stories and send them to Ezines and websites in your genre. If you get published, your name and website will usually be mentioned and can attract new fans. There are also many Google groups and Amazon groups you can join that are targeted at writers or lovers of a certain genre. You can make many useful contacts and find information from these sites.

Let's not forget social networking on sites such as Facebook, Myspace and Twitter. These can be very valuable resources to build relationships with other authors, publishers and fans and get your name and title in front of more potential readers.

Lastly, I would suggest you add an author bio in the back of your book. Include other works by you, your web address, a small snippet about you and anything else you want your reader to know. Make it easy for them to buy your work again if they liked what they read the first time. You can also add a glowing review if you've had one.

Now I've covered all the ways to market your book without paying a dime. And most of these honestly work, to an extent. The only one I've seen that offers consistent results is a service I pay for. That service is Google Adwords. For those of you not familiar with this, I will give the quick description. Basically Google Adwords allows you to pick key words for your campaign and show your ad to people doing searches for those specific keywords on Google. These are the ads at the very top or along the right hand side of the page when you do a Google search. If you don't know what I'm talking about, go ahead and do a quick search and look. I'll wait.

Okay, so now you know what I'm talking about. Well, not only can you pick the search words, you can bid on how much you want to pay per click as well as how much you want to spend in a day or in a month on clicks. I will spare you the specifics on how this works exactly, but the more you bid, the higher and more often your ad will show up. And all of this guarantees absolutely nothing. You also need to have a catchy phrase or slogan to get people to click on your ad. But that's the key; you only pay when people click on your ad.

Personally, I have one ad that runs. I have my campaign set to only spend a buck a day and no more than thirty dollars a month. From the tracking I have done, I get about two to five clicks a day. That means people who actually click my link and are taken to my website. This has translated into ten to twenty "buys", in my estimation, of my novels per month. Not great, but not bad either. I am convinced that this is one of the most reliable ways to get interested buyers to your site. I'm sure there are other formulas, but this is what has worked for me.

Other Media

Besides paperback, there are many other emerging media to sell your novel, most of them being various electronic versions. I have researched most of them and have settled on offering my titles in only a few formats other than paperback.

Kindle is one of the most popular electronic devices for reading books. Amazon offers it free to anyone. Simply upload your interior in the format they suggest as well as a cover image and you're done. I don't sell many in this format when compared to paperbacks, but any sale is a good sale.

Palm had a few devices out at one point but seems to be falling to the way side, otherwise I would have offered my titles in this format also. If it ever appears to be making a comeback, I will certainly reconsider.

The only other format I make available is a PDF version of my books. It can be read on virtually any computer, which is the only other logical place a person would read, I believe. While the sales are minimal, even less than my Kindle sales, I will continue to offer it. It is free to set up an account on websites such as Tradebit and offer your title for half the cost of a paperback. It costs nothing to produce and is all profit. Hopefully this trend will take off and more people will begin reading on their laptop or desktop computer.

Beware

After all is said and done, **BE CAUTIOUS**. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Do your research before diving in. Do not pay an agent to read your work. I've had many established authors say this to me when I asked their advice. I hope you will follow it as I have. There are also a few publishing companies, who shall remain nameless (until I get a few drinks in me) who have treated me and most likely others, very poorly. As I said, be cautious. It's your masterpiece we're talking about.

Conclusion

I hope I have shed some light on the subject of self-publishing and taken some of the stigmatism and fear out of the process. It has been a long process for me, but I believe if I didn't do it myself it never

would have happened. People ask me all the time how I did it, and I usually start by saying, “This isn’t a paying gig. I wrote and published it on my own.” Most of the time they don’t care and just say how cool it is or how they have always wanted to write a book themselves. I do feel it is an accomplishment of sorts but not to the extent some people want to give me credit. It’s just something that I’ve always wanted to do, that I finally *did*. Just like anything else.

Thanks for reading and please feel free to contact me with questions or concerns. If I can help, I will.

Thanks,

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