

Doing It All Yourself – Self-Publishing

There's no question that going the self-publishing route demands a lot more work for you as the author. Be aware that the work continues well after you stamp "The End" on your manuscript.

That extra effort is well worth it when you consider that you don't have to split the profits with anyone else once you pay your initial bills. Even better, you won't have to wait endless months that can stream into years before you see your book in print. And you won't be subject to the demands of a publisher who may be willing to compromise quality for profit.

Now that you have the luxury of far more leisure time in your retirement, self-publishing your writing is a very wise choice.

No longer is a stigma attached to self-publishing, as it was in the murky days of the vanity press when authors were forced to accept thousands of books at high costs. Technology has ended that, and today you are able to print even very small quantities at reasonable prices.

Don't be concerned that you'll be totally alone, desperately hacking your way through new chores that are totally foreign to you as a publishing neophyte. Excellent books have been written on the subject to guide you. There are many consultants available as well. They can tackle specific projects for you or they can handle all of the preparatory work before printing.

Three outstanding books that you can easily find are *The Self-publishing Manual* by Dan Poynter, considered the guru of self-publishing; Peter Bowerman's excellent *The*

Well-Fed Self-Publisher; and Patricia Fry's informative *The Right Way to Write, Publish and Sell Your Book*. All three have been written by highly respected experts in the field of writing and publishing.

Designing Your Book

The writing and editing are done and your manuscript is ready for production. This is the time to obtain your copyright, ISBN, barcode and Library of Congress cataloguing, all of which we'll discuss later. One of your earliest decisions is to select the size of the book. Assuming you are planning a soft cover, 5.5 by 8.5 inches or 6 by 9 are the most popular and functional sizes.

The text, as it comes off the computer, is not suitable for a finished, professional-looking book. It must be formatted by a typesetter or book designer. Next you must locate a competent printer, digital if your anticipated press run is under 2,000; offset if it runs higher.

Make certain your designer and printer work closely together so that no glitches occur unexpectedly. Book designers and printers can be located through the Internet. Of course, it is preferable to obtain recommendations if you can.

The Cover Is Critical

Despite the old adage, most readers do tell a book by its cover...or at least, it is the cover that initially attracts them and makes them take the book down from the bookstore shelf. There are three parts to every cover with three distinct tasks: the front attracts, gives the name of the book and author and if available a one line commendation. The spine is the first thing a potential buyer sees when looking on the bookstore shelf. It

contains the name of the book, the author and the publisher. The back cover contains sales copy.

Both paid and free web sites exist to guide you through creation of a cover or even to give you standard templates and/or designs. Since so much depends on the eye appeal of your cover, I urge you to spend the money to hire a quality cover designer. Tests show that the average reader looks over the front cover for eight to ten seconds before turning to the back cover or returning the book to the shelf.

If you go to the Internet to find a cover designer, be sure to review samples of his/her work. Usually you can find a “portfolio” page with samples right on the web site. Always remember, these have been selected because the designer considers them his/her best work.

The Salesman on Your Back Cover

The back cover is made up of several important segments most of which are designed to sell the book. If the reader is attracted by the front cover, he/she turns to the back to get a better idea of what your book is all about. You have approximately 20 seconds to snare the looker at that point and turn him/her into a buyer. So your back cover must be attractive and appealing.

A brief summary of the book must peak the looker’s interest. Recommendations from worthy sources and favorable review excerpts, if you have them, appear here, along with a very brief bio of the author. The ISBN (International Standard Book Number) and a related barcode must appear at the bottom of the page for identification. Price can be placed here as well.

Applications for ISBNs should be made to R.R. Bowker (www.bowker.com), the official distributor. Barcodes are also available from this source. When you purchase your ISBNs from Bowker, you also receive a free listing in *Books in Print*, a key resource in the industry for those looking to find the thousands of books currently available.

Other Vital Tasks

Registration for the Congressional Library's "Cataloguing in Publication Program" should be made once your text is completed. This listing will go on the copyright page in the front of the book. Register at <http://cip.loc.gov/cip/>. It is almost impossible to place your book in a library without this registration. In addition, you can also register through the Donohue Group (www.dgiinc.com), a private company that services libraries throughout the nation.

Although your work is officially protected by copyright from the moment you write it, you cannot protect it in a litigation unless it has been formally registered with the federal government. Click on the word "Forms" in the web site www.copyright.gov to obtain application forms.

While these tasks may seem complicated, they really are very simple. You can hire a consultant to handle all this nitty-gritty, but I suggest tackling it yourself. It will only take a few hours to accomplish all of it.

Special Sections

In every book there are sections that are self contained and very distinct from the basic text. These too require your attention. Once again, you have the option of creating them yourself or hiring a professional to complete any of these chores. I usually prefer to develop the table of contents myself. I find it a relatively simple job. Since the titles of

the chapters have already been developed, it is just a matter of copying them on this page and in the case of a how-to highlighting the subjects covered in the chapter.

You can find self-help programs to build a TOC on the Internet. Just enter “Creating a Table of Contents.”

Developing a meaningful Appendix is only a bit more challenging. I usually use this section to offer qualified resources for the various activities I speak of in the main text. I find it quite easy as I write the text to click on an appendix file that I have created and enter each resource as I mention it in the text. I also then list the appropriate subject heading in the appendix, adding each new heading in the proper alphabetical order.

When I am completely finished with the text, I rework the appendix to ensure I have covered all subjects, and where I feel it is necessary, I add additional resources that meet my strict quality standards.

The third special section is a toughie. You can't develop an Index until your book formatter has completed his/her job. Don't make the mistake of using page numbers from your original computer text. They will change drastically in the final formatted version. For this task, I strongly recommend you find a professional who has created indexes for books that are similar to yours.

This is a time-consuming task and your time at this stage of book development can be far better spent on promotional efforts. Begin your search for indexers with the American Society of Indexers (www.asindexing.org). You will also find web sites of individual indexers listed on the Internet.

Selecting a quality printer is essential if your book is to look professional and be completed on time. It is helpful to choose a printer nearby, but not necessary. The printer of *The Writer Within You* was located almost a thousand miles from my office.

Nonetheless, having a printer close by that you can easily meet is a plus. You probably will want to be present at the final press run to be certain the book meets your expectations. Space doesn't allow a discussion of printing and printers in this article.