How to Choose the Right Publishing Pathway for You



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Introduction

When you're thinking of writing a book – and especially if you've already produced a first or further manuscript drafts – no doubt you'll be considering how to publish.

This mini-guide looks at the different options, outlines the basics of what's involved and how they work, so you can begin to choose the right pathway for you.

The different types of publishing

Fundamentally, there are two options:

- Traditional publishing – via an established house
- Self-publishing – where you publish as author either under your own name or imprint, via a hybrid publisher or packager.

Traditional publishing

This is querying (pitching) a house for a book deal.

For non-fiction, it involves preparing a solid book proposal and sample chapters in advance. You don't need to write the entire book first before pitching. In fact, sometimes it's better not to, because the publisher will assess your samples and can help to guide your writing and content in the right direction for their list and maximum audience traction.

Traditional publishers operate via author contract, which offers royalties as a percentage of income from sales and any associated rights such as translation and film.

Publishers finance and project manage the entire production process for authors, from commissioning and editing through to print and marketing. They expect authors to be active in promoting the book.

Securing a book deal is prestigious – and hard-won. It gives you kudos and real presence in your sector. It can also be a slog, taking time and effort to query publishers to find one that's interested in taking on your book.

If you are offered a deal, do be aware that you'll still need to consider it carefully. It's always recommended you seek legal advice over the contract, to check the financials and terms and what they will deliver for you.

Self-publishing

Taking the self-publishing route means you retain complete creative control of your book.

As the author, you also have to cover all of the cost and handle the different editing and production stages. It can be challenging if you don't have the publishing knowledge to do this – but not impossible. You can outsource services if you'd prefer not to get involved with, or don't feel fully confident to take on, the technical side of things.

Let's look at the options.

The types of self-publishing

There are several different ways to get your book out:

- Do-it-yourself
- Hybrid publishing
- Packagers
- Vanity presses

Do-it-yourself

As mentioned previously, here you manage the entire project (or can engage a project manager to do this for you), finance and commission all the necessary services.

Your book may need some (if not all) of the following editing stages, and all of the post-editing tasks:

- manuscript assessment
- development editing
- copy and/or line-editing
- design/typesetting, including ebook upload
- proofreading
- indexing (optional)
- blurb and promotional copywriting
- cover design
- ISBN, barcode and legal book deposit
- online sales platform selection
- distribution
- marketing and PR.

(My mini-guide, *The Different Types of Editing*, outlines the editing stages to help you work out the best ones for you.)

If you're planning to commission services, find them where possible via reputable sources such as national professional societies or organisations in your country.

When researching suppliers, look for a solid track record, good, up-to-date training, experience and a relevant portfolio in your sector and subject area.

You'll be relying on your suppliers to deliver for you so you can progress with peace of mind. It's important to be able to trust the team you've gathered to do that.

Be sure to deal with people who really know what they doing, and understand where you're coming from.

Budget is, of course, a factor for self-publishers, which is understandable. However, when it comes to commissioning services, it's advisable not to be tempted by really cheap ones, as it can mean unqualified or low-standard suppliers.

Shoddy work isn't an option when publishing – readers notice it, and respond with negative reception and bad reviews. They do spot typos, inconsistencies and poor editing and production, and definitely tell others about it!

It can cause time, stress, hassle and extra cost to rectify.

It's a fact that self-publishing requires at least some investment. If you want a product that represents you well in the world – and especially if your book will be showcasing you and/or your service as professional – it's relevant to consider and factor this into your plans.

Hybrid publishers

Hybrids offer a contracted book deal – this provides editing, production, distribution and marketing and PR.

In this pathway, you as author pay either part or fully to publish: you're still funding the book. A hybrid publisher will have a commissioning department and deal in books they think will sell.

They might have an associated book coaching or writing guidance programme to help you, if you're expert in your field but perhaps feeling less confident about writing.

The financial difference is that contracting with a hybrid means higher royalties than a traditional publisher. You've invested, so you get a better return.

Their deal requirements aren't so strict, but they should still adhere to quality. (For more, see the IBPA.)

Packagers

Packagers don't offer book deals – they provide production and marketing services, including design, ebook, print and promotion and distribution. This is especially useful if you only want to commission some services. You can cherry-pick from the ones you need, or engage them to provide everything.

Some packagers provide editing, but often the author commissions that separately, then hands over the edited files for the packager to progress through production.

Vanity presses

This type of 'publisher' comes with a serious health warning: both for you as an author, and your bank balance.
Unfortunately, vanity presses exist in the publishing landscape, and they're a blight on the industry.

The key to spotting a vanity press is that they'll accept unsolicited scripts regardless of quality, promise

guaranteed audience traction, and price their services extortionately. They make their profits from authors rather than book sales, often leaving them high and dry.

If you decide to go with a self-publishing service such as a hybrid or packager, it's important to research carefully. It's worth being aware that in some cases, what may appear to be a hybrid is a wolf in sheep's clothing: it's actually a vanity press.

If a self-publishing service seems far too good to be true, it probably is. Please don't be ripped off!

How to find reputable publishing services

The first thing is to look at their website.

- Is it professional?
- Exactly what services do they offer?
- Who are the company personnel – do they identify themselves, what are their publishing sector specialisms, expertise and background?
- Are they transparent about their offer and deals?
- Are there any manuscript or pitch submission guidelines?

Then, check online to see the books they've published.

Look at the reviews and download samples, so you can see the type and quality of their products.

Another good way to scope out a self-publishing service is to contact the authors who've already used them, and ask them direct about their experience.

Good 'watchdog' facilities also exist online that you can check for a service's authenticity:

Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi)
Writer Beware

If you've found this booklet useful, are thinking of publishing and would like more information or advice, I offer a call to soundboard your book idea, identify your needs and look at possible pathways with you.

Contact me:



lisa@lisacordaro.com

Connect with me:



www.linkedin.com/in/lisacordaroedit/