

## **Whether Seniors or Younger, Most Beginners Find the Publishing World Befuddling**

You were too busy with school or work to fulfill your dream of writing. But once you finished your schooling or retired from your former career, you struggled for months to hone your new book to a level of perfection that would please even the pickiest literary agent or publisher. But when you proudly offered your masterpiece to the market, you struck out. Some first time authors have broken the barrier and found a publisher, but you haven't been that fortunate, and you don't know why.

It's very simple. Publishing just ain't what it used to be. Not too long ago the industry was composed of editors and publishers devoted to the preservation of quality literature. People who would take risks to introduce new talents and new ideas. Sadly, those lofty principles have fallen victim to the new standard – the bottom line.

Proud publishers, respected throughout the literary world, have lost their identity and their commitment as they have been swallowed up by huge publishing conglomerates. Today, major publishing houses seldom take risks. They place their money behind sure bets, books about or by show biz celebrities, political figures or other notables, often bypassing highly talented new writers.

### **The Traditional Route**

Publishing traditionally requires a three-way partnership between author, literary agent and publisher. The number of layers involved makes this a slow and ponderous process that can take as long as two years before you see your book in print. In addition, many feel it is as difficult to find an agent as it is to land a publisher, perhaps harder.

The national book tours, elegant publication parties and other promotional efforts that were once the hallmark of traditional publishing are now offered only to top level star-studded authors. All the rest of us are expected to finance our own promotional efforts out of the meager royalties (usually 5% on net sales), adding strongly to the trend away from traditional publishing.

Nonetheless, this is by far the most prestigious method of publishing your book. It makes challenges like obtaining reviews and gaining access to bookstores and book club rolls far easier. If you are willing to wait patiently for your book to come off the press and if prestige is important enough to you to sacrifice control of your book during production, then traditional publishing is the road you should follow.

### **There Are Alternatives**

Fortunately, a growing number of dedicated smaller publishers have become alternatives to the majors, and are maintaining impressive standards. Just a year ago, the Book Industry Study Group, the prestigious monitor of industry trends, described these independent small publishers as "sizable and growing with surging numbers."

In addition, dramatic advances in printing technology over the last decade have spawned

a brand new industry, Publishing on Demand (POD). These advances have also made possible cost effective printing for short press runs, and that has opened the door to easy, relatively inexpensive self-publishing. Beginning writers are no longer at the mercy of costly vanity presses that required them to accept large press runs of books that then remained unsold in moldy basements and garages.

This fledgling POD industry has finally overcome the stigma that surrounded it in its earliest days when the rest of the publishing world demeaned it and reviewers refused to consider books it produced. With their books beginning to capture awards and reach best seller levels, they have gained substantial respect, and represent a very effective way for newcomers to break in.

If you decide to go this route, study the fine print of your POD contract before signing. Be aware that POD houses promise you total control over your book throughout the publishing process. However, that is not completely true. In the vast majority of cases, the ISBN (International Standard Book Number) belongs to the POD house, not the author, and the entity that owns the ISBN controls all financial aspects of the book. Decisions on key factors like pricing and profit are made by the house, not by you.

### **Making Life Easy**

Nonetheless, POD offers real benefits to the wannabe author who has never experienced the complexities of publishing a book. The house assumes all the responsibilities of production and basic distribution. In addition to the ISBN and bar codes, the house will obtain a copyright and catalog your book with the Library of Congress.

It will produce an attractive cover for the book and format the interior text to equal the quality of books produced by traditional publishers. Once all of the nitty gritty of pre-publication is completed, the house will arrange for printing and list the book with a major distributor.

However, don't rely on your POD publisher to promote your book. That's your job. Stay away from the alleged promotional programs offered for an additional price by POD publishers. They basically add up to nothing more than a release that is essentially ineffective distributed to the press.

There are a number of sources to turn to for guidance on the POD experience. Begin by following a case study done by Morris Rosenthal of Foner books ([www.fonerbooks.com/pod.htm](http://www.fonerbooks.com/pod.htm)) or turn to Moira Allen's excellent newsletter ([www.writing-world.com/publish/podtruth.shtml](http://www.writing-world.com/publish/podtruth.shtml)). With a little effort you will be able to find more sources.

### **Self-Publishing**

More and more authors now choose to follow the self-publishing route. The advances in technology have made doing it yourself a great deal easier and faster than following the traditional route. Excellent books have been published to guide you through the experience. I strongly recommend Dan Poynter's classic *Self-Publishing Manual* and

Patricia Fry's *The Right Way to Write, Publish and Sell Your Book*.

While one can argue that the prestige of publication by one of the majors is inducement enough, a simple dollars and cents (perhaps better yet dollars and sense) analysis demonstrates how much more beneficial it is to collect all the profit from self-publishing than to receive a minuscule 5% royalty from a traditional house with little or no help on promotional expenses.

Today's fledgling authors have these four options as they seek to publish their first book: major or independent traditional house, POD or self-publishing. Of course, there are pros and cons when you analyze each of them, so it is important that you understand the process and whether it is suitable for your needs.

If prestige is what you seek and you are willing to sacrifice speed in production and minuscule returns, the traditional route is yours to take. If speed is a factor because your book is timely or if you are an unsure beginner, POD may be the answer. If pride of self accomplishment and/or higher profits intrigue you, then perhaps your best choice is self-publishing.