

At rare times I wondered why I chose to self-publish a book instead of coasting lazily through my retirement or possibly selecting a different approach where the publisher assumes responsibility for all these chores. But every time I felt overwhelmed, I reminded myself that I was totally in control of every aspect of my book from the initial writing through printing and on to its arrival on bookstores' shelves. Recognizing that energized my entrepreneurial spirit and satisfied my craving for a sense of accomplishment in whatever I do.

Even First Time Authors Can Harvest The Rewards of Self-Publishing Their Book

By Charles Jacobs

No one ever told you it was an easy job. But the rewards in income and in self esteem far outweigh any negatives.

Self-publishing is fraught with myriad chores that steal time away from writing and promoting. The nitty gritty of pre-publication seems to grow, not diminish, with every challenge you overcome. For a first-timer it can be a bit daunting. I know. I've been there, yet I recommend it highly to any author and to my peers who are beginning to write in their retirement. All it takes to be successful is a willingness to spend the time learning and implementing this process.

You're in Business

You're now a publisher, not just a writer. The process may begin with your writing, but it goes on to pre-pub preparations, printing, distributing, marketing and promoting...they are all your responsibility. While you may not perform each of those tasks, you still control how they are done because the people you hire are responsible directly to you.

Before we look at the challenges you'll face, I urge you to read some of the outstanding literature available on self-publishing. Start with Dan Poynter's classic *Self-Publishing Manual*. Add Peter Bowerman's *Well-Fed Self-Publisher* and Patricia Fry's *The Right Way to Write, Publish and Sell Your Book*. Perhaps you'll be inspired by John Kremer's *Self-Publishing Hall of Fame*. Use that knowledge to create a solid business plan and timeline for action, and you'll find the challenges can be overcome with relative ease.

Easy But Time Consuming

Well before you go to press, you must tackle a host of small, but essential, tasks. Securing your book's ISBN, obtaining barcodes, copyrighting and cataloguing it with the Library of Congress. All of these are easy, but they do take time and effort.

The aesthetics of your book are critical considerations. It must have a dramatic, magnetic cover to make it stand out from competitors on the book shelf. Each portion has its own special function: the spine motivates the customer to reach for the book because that is what he/she first sees. It then becomes the job of the front cover to convince the customer the book is worth skimming, and that has to happen in about two seconds. The average

person then turns to the back cover for information about the book and the author and any impressive endorsements.

Next in the decision-making process is a strong, well-designed table of contents that allows the potential buyer to gain a true sense of what the book is about. Lastly, he/she will flip through some pages to get a feel for your writing. At that point, the design and formatting of the text, done tastefully, will probably send the looker to the cash register to close the sale.

Although going to press is the last stage in the production cycle, you better find time to interview printers and make your choice early on. You'll need to know the specs required to print your book so your cover and text designers can meet the printer's needs.

Gaining Awareness

It is critical that you try and capture as many reviews and endorsements as you possibly can. They are the most effective selling tools. That means preparing Advance Review Copies (ARCs) to send to key reviewers, particularly those who in essence review for the trade like *Publisher's Weekly*, *Foreword*, *Library Journal*, *Kirkus* and other highly respected publications. The best of those endorsements will go on the back cover when you actually print the book. The others will be placed on the inside pages near the front, along with excerpts from early reviews.

While all of this is going on, you, the publisher (and the promoter), must juggle the other elements of your promotional plan. You need a web site, and that requires some careful thought to make it effective. It also demands a good deal of writing as you keep adding fresh content to your site. But you should be doing these things regardless of the publishing method you use.

You must start writing articles to send to other web sites as well as both print and digital publications. And you have to reach out to establish links from other web sites to bring readers to your own.

The Nuts and Bolts

As though all of that isn't enough to make your head swim and keep you tossing and turning throughout the night, it's time to develop a program of distribution for your book. You require a distributor to promote and sell your book to the marketplace and a wholesaler to be available to fill bulk orders swiftly.

It's time to decide on fulfillment. Will you accept orders on your web site? If you do, you must have a shopping cart and a merchant program to accept payments of cash and credit cards. And you must have provision to package and ship books that are ordered. You might prefer to avoid all of that by contracting with your distributor to do the packing and shipping. Or, if you feel overburdened, you may want the distributor, if able, to accept individual phone orders in your name and process them. All of those decisions impact both your own schedule and the bottom line of the company. Remember, you're now in a business and the bottom line is a major consideration.

On first reading, this may sound overwhelming. Not to worry. It is a great deal of work, but it produces not only satisfaction but far more dollars for that bottom line we talked about. Remember, the entire profit from every sale is yours to keep. The publisher you share it with is YOU. Self-publishing done properly can be a lucrative business. Today, more and more authors have begun to realize this, and are following this path. Once you dig in and see how rewarding it can be, you'll be delighted that you decided to join them.