

KNOW YOUR PUBLISHING OPTIONS

YOUR GUIDE TO SELECTING THE BEST PUBLISHING PATH FOR YOU!

davis creative
PUBLISHING PARTNERS

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PUBLIC ACCESS

Write, publish, and distribute work in a public or semi-public forum, directly for readers.

- *Publication is self-directed and timeline is established by the author*
- *Emphasis is on feedback and growth; sales or income is rare*

Benefits

- Allows writers to develop an audience for their work early on, even while learning how to write.
- Popular writers at community sites may go on to traditional book deals.

Options

- E-newsletters: A great way to start sharing your information and knowledge for writers who have a list of followers. Also a great way to develop a list. Popular vendors include Constant Contact, MailChimp, Hubspot, among many others.
- Social media and blogs: Both new and established authors alike use blogs and/or social media accounts to share work and establish a readership. Reuse content from your e-newsletters. Examples: LinkedIn, Facebook (groups especially), Instagram (Instapoets), Tumblr, YouTube.
- Serialization: Readers consume content in chunks or installments and offer feedback that may help writers revise. Establishes a fan base, or a direct connection to readers. Serialization may be used as a marketing tool for completed works. Examples: Wattpad, Tapas, LeanPub.
- Patronage: Similar to a serialization model, except patrons pay a recurring amount to have access to your content. Popular platforms include Patreon and Substack.
- Fan fiction: Similar to serialization, only the work is based on other authors' books and characters. For this reason, it can be difficult to monetize fan fiction since it may constitute copyright infringement. Examples: Fanfiction.net, Archive Of Our Own, Wattpad.

DIY

The author manages the publishing process, hiring services as-needed to edit, design, publish, and distribute. The author oversees all artistic and business decisions.

Ebooks

Retailers offer online access to authors (Amazon KDP, Nook Press, Apple Books, Kobo), or authors use ebook distributors (Smashwords, Draft2Digital, StreetLib).

Paperbacks

Print-on-demand (POD) makes it affordable to sell and distribute print books via online retail (Amazon KDP, IngramSpark). With print-ready PDF files, it costs little or nothing to start.

Print Quantities

Never purchase large quantities of printed books. Only buy what you know you can sell. If authors are confident about sales (conference, convention, pre-order), they may decide to hire a printer, invest in a print run, manage inventory, fulfillment, shipping, etc.

Sales

- Author sets the price of the book; retailers/distributors pay based on that price. Amazon/DKP and IngramSpark will have a minimum allowable sales price.
- Most ebook retailers pay approx. 70% of retail for ebook sales if pricing within their proscribed window (for Amazon, this is $2.99–$9.99). Ebook royalties drop as low as 35% if pricing is outside the norm.
- Amazon/KDP pays 60% of list price for print sales, after deducting the cost to print.

Author Beware

- Authors may not invest enough money or time to produce a quality book or market it.
- Authors may not have the experience to know what quality help looks like or what it takes to produce a quality book.
- It is difficult to get mainstream reviews, media attention or sales through conventional channels (bookstores, libraries). Some brick-and-mortar retailers will not order if your book is only available on Amazon/KDP.
- Do not plan your retirement around the sales of your book.

AUTHOR-ASSISTED

Also known as Book Shepherds, Mentors, Consultants, or Concierge Publishers, this option is for authors who want to look traditionally published without the hassle of finding an agent, and want to avoid self-publishing pitfalls. Most often used by a authors writing non-fiction and self-help. High-profile authors are assisted in establishing themselves as an Independent Publisher, allowing the author to:

- minimize your investment
- maximize your return on royalties
- retain 100% of royalties
- maintain ownership of your copyright
- access global distribution

Services

- Fee-based; author owns everything created
- Provides multi-faceted expertise in publishing, branding, target-audience identification, design, messaging, pricing and distribution
- Employs veteran marketing professionals who are experienced and knowledgeable in book writing, book design, branding, publishing, and the marketing of small-business services
- Accesses expert resources for social media, websites, public relations, digital marketing, etc.
- Offers packages and programs for maximizing

Experience

- Often run by experienced publishing professionals
- Exhibits a depth of knowledge of the publishing process and top industry standards; answers those questions you are not even aware to be asking
- Creates client relationships built upon the mentor/student model of trust, patience and willingness to share expertise
- Freely shares process details, establishes goals, and manages time-lines to meet your deadlines

Your completed book will . . .

- Rival those produced by the top 5 traditional publishers
- Reflect professional best-practice industry recommendations
- Be customized to meet your specific author platform, to better position yourself in your market

INDY & HYBRID

Companies that require authors to pay to publish or raise funds to do so (typically thousands of dollars). Hybrid publishers have the same business model as assisted services; the author pays to publish. Examples of hybrid publishers: SheWrites, InkShares

Benefits

Get a published book without having to figure out the service landscape or find professionals to help. Ideal for authors with more money than time, but not a sustainable business model for career authors. Some companies are run by former traditional publishing professionals and offer high-quality results (with the potential for bookstore placement, but it's rare).

How it Works

- Authors fund book publication in exchange for assistance; cost varies.
- Hybrids pay royalties (divided between you and them); other services may pay royalties or up to 100 percent of net sales. Authors receive a better cut than a traditional publishing contract, but will make less than DIY self-pub.
- Regardless of promises made, books will rarely be stocked in physical retail outlets.
- Each service has its own distinctive costs and business model; secure a clear contract with all fees explained. Such services stay in business because of author-paid fees, not book sales.
- The selling is up to the author. Some offer paid marketing packages, assist with the book launch, or offer paid promotional opportunities. They can get books distributed, but it's rare that books are pitched to retailers.

Author Beware

- Some services call themselves "hybrid" because it sounds fashionable and savvy.
- Avoid companies that take advantage of author inexperience and use high-pressure sales tactics
- Printing companies are not publishers

SMALL PRESSES

This category is the hardest to define because the term "small press" means different things to different people. For the purposes of this chart, it's used to describe publishers that avoid advances and print runs. They take on less financial risk than a traditional publisher.

Benefits

- They work with all types of authors.
- Rarely requires an agent. See the submission guidelines of each press.

How it Works

- Author receives no advance or possibly a token advance (less than $500). Royalty rates may look the same as a traditional publisher or be more favorable since the publisher has less financial risk upfront.
- They rely on sales and discovery through Amazon and possibly through their own direct-to-consumer or niche efforts, as well as the author's marketing effort
- Possibly a more personalized and collaborative relationship with the publisher. With well-established small presses: editorial, design, and marketing support that equals that of a larger house.

Author Beware

- Diversity of players and changing landscape means contracts vary widely.
- Don't expect brick-and-mortar bookstore distribution if the press relies on print-on-demand printing and distribution, unless they distribute through IngramSpark.
- Printing companies are not publishers

OTHER TRADITIONAL

Not part of the Big Five, but work in a similar manner (same business model). Examples of larger houses: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Scholastic, Work-man, Sourcebooks, Wiley & Sons, W.W. Norton, Kensington, Chronicle, Tyndale, many university presses (Cambridge, Univ of Chicago Press). Smaller houses: Graywolf, Forest Avenue Press, Belt Publishing.

Benefits

- Identical to Big Five advantages.
- Sometimes acquisitions may be ideals driven or mission focused.

How it Works

- Doesn't always require an agent; see submission guidelines.
- Novelists should have a finished manuscript. Nonfiction authors should have a book proposal.
- They work with mainstream authors, as well as those with a more niche or special-interest appeal; celebrity-status or brand-name authors; writers of commercial/genre fiction; nonfiction authors of all types.
- Authors are paid the same as with the Big Five. Author receives an advance against royalties.
- Distribution: The largest houses work the same as the Big Five, but smaller houses often use a distributor to sell to the trade. Ask your agent or editor if you're unsure. Nearly every book will have a print run.

Author Beware

Smaller houses offer smaller advances (and possibly a more flexible contract).

BIG FIVE TRADITIONAL

Penguin Random House, HarperCollins, Hachette, Simon & Schuster, Macmillan (each has dozens of imprints). Might soon become the Big Four.

Benefits

- Publisher (or agent) pursues all possible subsidiary rights and licensing deals.
- Physical bookstore distribution nearly assured, in addition to other retail opportunities (big-box, specialty).
- Best chance of media coverage and reviews.

How it Works

- Almost always requires an agent. Novelists should have a finished manuscript. Nonfiction authors should have a book proposal.
- They work with authors who write works with mainstream appeal, deserving of nationwide print retail distribution in bookstores and other outlets; celebrity-status or brand-name authors; writers of genre fiction, women's fiction, YA fiction, and other commercial fiction; nonfiction authors with a significant platform (visibility to a readership).
- Big Five publishers take on all financial risk and pay the author upfront (an advance); royalties are paid if the advance earns out. Authors don't pay to publish but may need to invest in marketing and promotion.
- An in-house sales team meets with major retailers and wholesalers. Most books are sold months in advance and shipped to stores for a specific release date.
- Nearly every book has a print run; print-on-demand is used when stock runs low or sales dwindle.

Author Beware

The majority of advances do not earn out. Publisher holds publishing rights for all major formats for at least 5+ years.

- Authors don't control title or cover design.
- Authors are often unhappy with marketing support or surprised at lack of support.

NOTE: This content is an expanded version of a Publishing Path chart originally created by Jane Friedman, https://www.janefriedman.com/key-book-publishing-path/

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