

## So You Want to Publish a Book?

SELF-PUBLISHING IS A GREAT NEW ZEALAND TRADITION with many titles published, especially in the genres of memoir, biography, family and community history. If you want to self-publish, you would do well to read up on the process before you begin, but here are a few thoughts on what makes self-publishing work.

Often, writers go the self-publishing route because they can't get a book taken on by a mainstream publisher. The general book-buying market in New Zealand is small and quirky, and bringing out a book requires a substantial financial outlay. Before you self-publish, think seriously about the fact that you are not being taken on by a mainstream publisher, or don't want to approach them, and remember that, once written, a book is a product like any other – a tin of baked beans, for example. Why should they buy your brand of baked beans rather than any other?

A first book by an unknown writer usually produces only minimal returns for a mainstream publisher. How are you going to achieve a different outcome for yourself, without their resources at your disposal? Perhaps this is when you decide to buy a copy each of *Self-Publishing: a Writer's Guide* and *Marketing Your Book* from the New Zealand Society of Authors.

### Definition of self-publishing:

Self-publishing is when the writer is also the publisher and distributor, taking responsibility for the entire publishing process, and paying all the costs of publication.

### Markets

Basically, consider whether your book has a specific or target or non-commercial market, or is for a niche market, or is intended as a promotional tool. Can this market be satisfied by a small print run, or by print-on-demand?

If you're writing *Going Freelance as a Personal Trainer*, for example, because that's how you earn your living, and you know all about it - then your specific readership is anyone who is or wants to be a personal trainer, so that's your target market.

If you're writing a family history, will there be anyone outside of your family or are they your target market – and a non-commercial market at that? This probably depends on how famous your family is!

If you're a local historian writing *The Story of the Brain Watkins House in Tauranga*, your main sales will probably be made to residents and tourists who visit this historical site, with a few additional sales to libraries and to people with a general interest in old buildings in New Zealand.

One important fact about your initial market is that it should be identifiable and easily reached. Think seriously about how you will do that, in terms of press releases and general promotion.

Many books are self-published because the person has a particular interest to share or story to tell, and believe passionately that the rest of the world only needs to know about it to send off an order immediately. Unfortunately, this is not so: often self-published books are excluded from reviewing, distribution or other than paid promotion.

You could end up with boxes of unsold books in your garage if you don't think seriously about how many copies you can realistically get rid of.

This determines your initial and subsequent print runs.

## The print run

The print run is how printers and publishers refer to the number of copies of a book that will be printed initially; and for subsequent restocking if the book does well.

Working out the print run for a self-published book by an unknown writer or local organization is a difficult thing to do. On the one hand, with a conventional printer, the unit price of the book goes down substantially the more copies that are printed.

On the other hand, if you print 2000 copies to bring the price down to a manageable level – because you're paying upfront, and because there will be an optimum price the customer is prepared to pay – and you only sell 50, you'll be out of pocket and out of space.

So be realistic about your expectations and your potential market. Arrive at a compromise decision, or use a print on demand service.

## Print-on-demand

Print-on-demand (or POD, as it is often referred to) is a rapidly-growing initiative whereby a set fee is charged for getting your book ready for publication, and a set unit cost arrived at. This unit cost remains the same whether you order 20 books or 2000. Often they will handle sales for you, too – it's worth enquiring exactly what you will get for your bucks.

Print-on-demand is useful, as you can order an initial and limited print run for a launch, or to take out and about with you to sell 'on the spot'. For example, I might take 10 copies of *Constructive Editing* and *At Your Service?* out with me whenever I do a writing workshop, and sell half of them.

Say you've written an anniversary book on *St. Peter's Church: The First Fifty Years*, for example. When the church committee is organizing its annual church fair, you'll make sure you've got 50 or so available to sell on the day.

Other forms of publication include creating your own PDF or e-book, and selling online or posting out once paid for. The latest versions of Word have a function that allows you to do this with a few key strokes. You can use a payment facility like PayPal – there are many available online – or set up an order form that details the bank account to pay into.

Ask purchasers to use their surname and the order number of the book they are buying as a reference when they make their payment. Once the money is in you allow them to download one copy of the PDF or e-book, or post out a copy of 'the real book'.

## The dummy

No, I don't mean you. After all, you're reading this, aren't you?

Before you ratify any order for a print run, make sure you get a dummy – a proof copy – of how your book will look when finished. It is for you to correct any errors at this stage; to proofread it; and to signal the go-ahead only when you are 100% satisfied that it is exactly as you wanted it to be.

## Genres

Basically, you can self-publish anything you like (subject to the laws of libel and pornography, etc.) Mainly the genres that best suit self-publishing are as listed below:

- Autobiography or personal memoir. *Your own story in full or part.*
- Biography or individual memoir. *Someone else's story in full or part.*
- Family history. *Again, in full or part.*
- Local history. *The story of a community, organization, building or site, society or service.*
- Anniversary. *For example, a centenary, or 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, or 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, etc.*
- Poetry. *Do be careful. Poetry offers particular problems of content, quality and format.*
- *Self-help.* This genre shows no signs of fading – if you're an expert, go for it.
- Health & well-being. *Again, expertise of the author is expected.*
- Medical. *And if you're not an expert, leave this to one who is, or co-write.*
- Religious, spiritual. *Individual perspectives can have value, or satisfy your desire to share.*
- Project-based. *e.g. how to use a telescope, build a doll's house, run a meeting, etc.*
- A secondary purpose. *e.g. to go with a product, explain a service, sell at workshops, etc.*

## Before you self-publish:

- Research the market – bookshops, libraries.
- Talk to booksellers – how do books like yours sell?
- Check for distributor to extend market – local, regional, national ... and international?
- Try & find agent or publisher to do the work for you.
- Get objective 2<sup>nd</sup> opinion i.e. from a manuscript assessor, editor or agent.
- Work to the highest standard of presentation.
- Ensure you're working from a final, print-ready copy.
- Ask the hard questions – can you & will you handle promotion, marketing & distribution?

## Statistics – a pause to ponder

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| New Zealand | 76 publishing houses, 2500 books p.a.     |
| Australia   | 221 publishing houses, 8500 books p.a.    |
| UK & USA    | 1000s of publishers, 200,000 + books p.a. |

There is a marketing limit on NZ exports going overseas.

There is no marketing limit on imports from Australia, UK & USA coming to New Zealand.

## Two important questions:

- Do you continue to believe your work is excellent when others do not?
- Do you continue to believe no one understands and appreciates your work but they will when it's published?

**Reconsider!** It takes cash and commitment to self-publish – and this kind of unreal thinking can leave you open to charges of 'vanity publishing' and makes you vulnerable to exploitation.

## Two further questions:

- Why do I want to publish this book? *Defines purpose.*
- Who is going to read it? *Defines readership.*

Unless you define purpose and readership, your book will fail.

## The advantages of self-publishing

- The technology now exists to do it better for less.
- You are doing it for yourself, and that is satisfying.
- You can create a publication for a special occasion or event.
- You are learning new skills you can use again or share with others.

**The best thing about self-publishing?** *Total control.*

**The worst thing about self-publishing?** *Total control.*

## The disadvantages of self-publishing

- Editing your ms. – we are not all good at self-editing.
- Technology – we are not all instant experts; some of us are technophobes.
- Small market size for many self-published titles.
- Amateur book design – know what a book is, and when to use experts.
- Cost & commitment. Both can be considerable.
- Stress, esp. when it comes to marketing & distribution.

## So why go it alone?

- Mainstream publishing has been rejected or delayed.
- It's a personal publication not intended to be commercial.
- It's for a specialised or niche market.
- You want to go for an 'alternative style', e.g. handprinted on handmade paper.
- If it's a potential best-seller, you get all the profits, not just royalties.

## Costs of preparing a print-ready ms.

(Cost can be hypothetical or actual.)

- Costs of researching it. *Time, energy and fees.*
- Writing it. *Time, energy and stationery.*
- Assessing it. *Being a Critic instead a Creator. Paying a ms. assessor.*
- Editing it. *We can be blind to our own errors. Paying an editor.*
- Adding illustrations. *Finding them. Paying for them. Paying an artist.*
- The cover design. *What sells books best. Paying a graphic designer.*
- Adding index &/or bibliography. *Know-how. Paying a professional.*
- Printing it. *Know-how. Paying a printer.*
- Binding it. *Know-how. Paying a bookbinder.*
- Promoting it. *Know-how and know-who. Paying a professional.*

- Distributing it. *Know-how and know-where. Paying a service agency.*
- Marketing it. *Know-how and know-who. Paying a professional.*
- Storing it. *Finding space or renting it.*
- Accounting for income & expenditure. *Beware the IRD. Paying a book-keeper or accountant.*

### Step by step by step

- Do a SWOT\* analysis. Paying someone to do something you can't can save you money in the long run.
- Get a quote, not an estimate.
- Stay within budget and be aware of hidden costs.
- Work out unit cost – that is your wholesale price.
- Work out the retail price. This allows profit margins for all: the writer, the bookseller, the distributor, etc.
- Consider costs carefully. Then consider them again. Bottom line, can you afford it?

### Argante's Law

*Expect to double the time you think it will take,  
and add 20% for unexpected costs.*

\* A SWOT analysis is where you consider carefully your strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats. It's a powerful tool, adapted from managerial techniques, to make you aware of what you can do, what you need to learn more about, and when you need an expert.



# **A STEP BY STEP FLOWCHART**

**RESEARCH CONTENT (body text, illustrations)**



**WRITE THE TEXT**



**ASSESS/EVALUATE CONTENT**



**EDIT/REWRITE & PROOF CONTENT**



**ADD ILLUSTRATIONS (photos, drawings, charts, diagrams, maps, etc.)**



**PREPARE A BRIEF FOR PRINTER QUOTE**



**GRAPHIC DESIGN ~ LAYOUT**



**GRAPHIC DESIGN - FRONT & BACK COVERS**



**CHECK & OK CONTENT & FORMAT**



**ASK PRINTER FOR DUMMY FROM PDF**



**CHECK & OK CONTENT & FORMAT**



**PROOFREAD & CORRECT IF NECESSARY**



**OK CONTENT & FORMAT**



**AUTHORISE PRINTING & BINDING**



**LAUNCH & PROMOTE**



**MARKET & DISTRIBUTE**



**ACCOUNT FOR EXPENDITURE & INCOME**