

SPECIAL REPORT - The Top Ten Self-Publishing Myths

Myth #10: The only authors who self-publish are those whose writing is not good enough to be published by a traditional publisher.

Truth: This was probably never true because the first publishers were in direct competition with rich men who could afford to self-publish. These publishers actually created the concept of the vanity press, and rode that horse to huge profits. Today, however, things have changed. Rumor in the book industry has it that no large publishers are offering contracts to new authors unless that author has a following of at least 25,000 and a large online presence. For most major publishers, this is unofficial policy. Book sales in the 10,000 to 20,000 range used to be enough to make the midlist, but these days, a book with these sales would be considered a failure by large houses. The midlist author of the past is today's self-published author.

Myth #9: Readers do not like to read self-published books.

Truth: Readers do not want to read *bad* books, no matter how they were produced. Although publishers and other writers might be biased against self-published books, readers just want to know that they're going to get their money's worth. Huge self-publishing successes like *The Celestine Prophecy*, and *The One Minute Manager* prove that readers are interested in the content, not who published the book. The issue is trust. That's why it's so important for self-published authors to make sure they get the best book possible out there. If it's well written and well marketed, readers will buy it.

Myth #8: People who read can tell when a book is self-published because the standards of production are lower.

Truth: While publishing professionals might be able to tell the difference, regular readers will not notice minor differences in binding or laminating, and as long as your book looks more or less the same as similar books and the text is easy to read, most buyers won't know (or care) about the size of the margins or the gutters.

Myth #7: Self-publishing is expensive because you have to order a lot of books up front and pay for publishing services.

Truth: A book is a product that you are trying to sell, and it has to be comparable in quality to the competition: other books that others are trying to sell. If you know how to format your own book and design your own book cover using software like Photoshop you can probably do a lot of the setup yourself. You will still need to obtain an ISBN, an EAN, a Library of Congress number, and a barcode, and you will also want distribution, and possibly editing. If you can afford it, these services are available through publishing companies. Some publishers do require their authors to order minimum print runs, which can cost thousands, or even tens of thousands, of dollars. However, POD (print on demand) publishers don't require authors to order *any* books. And in some cases, a number of books are included with the publishing package.

Myth #6: No one reviews self-published books.

Truth: In fact, self-published books *do* get reviews. Some even get reviewed in major magazines and newspapers. However, these are the exception, not the rule. Most POD books get reviewed on radio, in local media, in regional magazines, and on the internet.

Myth #5: Self-publishing is expensive because you have to pay large setup fees.

Truth: Some publishing companies include the actual publishing of the book in the setup fees. If the setup fee includes formatting, the essential administrative numbers (ISBN, EAN, LOC#, and barcode), a custom cover, and distribution then you aren't really paying for setup, you're paying for publishing services. Watch out for those companies who tell you a small setup fee that doesn't include any real services.

Myth #4: It's hard for self-published authors to succeed because they have to do all their own promotion.

Truth: Here's a quote from a Senior Editor at Harper Collins: "I won't even look at a book unless the author is prepared to do a book tour and book signings..." If that's not work, I don't know what is. All authors are required to do

promotion on their books. No one, except celebrity authors, gets their books out into the marketplace without working for it. No large publisher will take on a new writer who isn't about to do the promotion, the book tours, and the media interviews.

Myth #3: Self-published authors are at a disadvantage because they're unknown and there's no quality control system in place on published books.

Truth: Self-published authors are usually unknown; there's not much that can be done about that. However, there are a few self-publishing companies who do insist on quality in editorial as well as production values. Such publishers don't take every book that comes in "over the transom," and because they have standards, it's easier for potential readers to trust the books they sell.

Myth #2: Most self-published authors can't get their books into large chain brick-and-mortar bookstores like Barnes and Noble and Borders, and you have to have books on these shelves to be successful.

Truth: Once, chain bookstores were the only place to buy books, but that's no longer true. According to a recent poll, only 32% primarily shop for books in chain bookstores. 43% of respondents buy their books online and 9% buy most of their books from small, independent bookstores. 16% bought elsewhere--in drug stores, specialty shops, supermarkets, warehouse clubs, and airports. Plainly, since 68% of buyers buy elsewhere, chain bookstores are no longer the be-all and end-all of bookselling.

Myth #1: Self-publishing is okay for some, but I want writing to be my career.

Truth: The length of the mainstream author's career is under the control of his or her publisher, and future prospects are only as good as the sales of the last book. If your book doesn't earn back its advance, or sells only modestly beyond the advance, the publisher will not want to publish your next book.

Only 1-2% of all books published become bestsellers. Take a look in any bookstore at the books that are *not* selling in huge numbers. Take a look at the remainder tables. It may be rare for a self-published book to become a bestseller, but for that matter, it's rare for *any* book to become a bestseller. Most books make their money in the long tail of sales, which brings in as much income as the bestseller, the difference being that this money comes in over time rather than all at once. Those writers who persevere no matter what, who continue to write and to publish, who continue to add books to their product line and promote them, can succeed.

A self-published author's career isn't over until the author decides to stop publishing. The self-published author's career makes it or doesn't based on the author's work and the author's willingness to keep writing, publishing, and promoting. It's not up to anyone else to decide if you'll be an author; and it's not up to anyone else to decide when you'll quit.