

# DIY Self-Publishing: An Overview

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### Is Self-Publishing Right for You?

The Internet has made self-publishing a viable option for authors, enabling them to sell books across the world. Self-publishing is a lot of work, but it can be a rewarding endeavor. This booklet provides an overview of the entire process. If you decide that self-publishing is right for your manuscript, you'll know what you face, and you can consider which parts of the process, if any, you'd like to outsource.

There are many reasons to self-publish instead of pursuing a traditional publisher:

- You cannot find an agent or traditional publisher.
- You want to prove your book can be successful to then attract a traditional publisher.
- You don't want to sell the rights to your work.
- You want control over your book (e.g., its appearance, its contents, its price).
- You've heard that traditional publishing is not that great of a deal financially.

When deciding if self-publishing is right for you, consider your publishing goals. They might include

- having the thrill of a publisher accepting your work;
- becoming famous or mildly famous;
- going on the book tour you've always daydreamed about;
- making money;

- having your work in the form of a finished book;
- recording your knowledge; or
- sharing a story or information, perhaps to encourage others.

If your goals are leading you toward traditional publishing, make sure you have realistic expectations. Educate yourself about the current state of the publishing industry. Read recent articles online, and talk to traditionally published authors. Many authors love their publishers, while others tell stories of disappointing results: a publisher who changed the book against the author's wishes or let the book go out of print, for example. Even authors labeled as successful might tell you that their books rarely sell enough to pay off their advances or that the publisher spent little on editing or marketing their books.

Understand that a main goal of publishers is making a profit. This could translate into changes to make your book more marketable, which might compromise what you see as valuable in your work. If making money is not your main goal and you still want to publish traditionally, search for a publisher who shares your values.

If, however, your goals are leading you toward self-publishing, read on!

Throughout this booklet, I'll point out places where you might consider hiring an expert to perform a task. Even if you'd like to leave most of the steps in the process to the experts, it might be better to hire specialists—for example, a copy editor, a book designer, a distributor, a publicist—rather than hiring one company to do it all. Some all-in-one companies don't have great reputations, and when hiring specialists, you can personally vet each one by talking or e-mailing to get to know the person and by asking to see work. If you do decide to work with a company, search for online reviews to see what others say about their experiences with the company.

## Research the Market

It's good to know which books on the market are similar to yours. Knowing the competitive market will help you speak knowledgeably to potential retailers and customers when you're trying to sell your work. You'll be able to explain your book better by using comparisons and discussing why it is different than what's already out there. Research will help to clarify where your book fits in the current categories or will confirm that yours needs a new category. You might discover that a similar book exists, allowing you to alter yours to provide something new or meaningful. You might also get ideas based on what other books include or lack.

Research the market by reading books in your category or flipping through them in the library, at a bookstore, or online. You don't have to read every similar book, but try to get a sense of them; you might read the best sellers and flip through the others, for example. If possible, talk to a bookstore's buyer or owner about the category and how it sells. Look to turn weaknesses into strengths: If your category is saturated, that means it's popular; find a way to make your book complement all the others. If your category is on the way out, try to add something new to your book that might bring it back.

## Write the Book

There are many books and websites dedicated to helping writers write. They include everything from how to make time to write, to how to generate ideas, create believable characters, and self-edit your work. Read this information, but don't get so wrapped up in learning about writing that you never actually write. You become a writer when you spend time writing.

Writing the book includes many stages. You'll have a first draft and several revised drafts. Try to assume the reader's perspective, seeing the text as if for the first time, by spending time

away from it, printing it out to read on paper rather than on a computer (or vice versa), or reading it aloud. You might even print the text and then read the pages in random order to assess the writing without getting caught up in the familiar story.

Join a writing group to get feedback, or have friends act as beta readers for early drafts. Read about self-editing and apply the tips to the text. Many people have written about the willingness to cut scenes that you love if they are not best for the book. At some point, the book switches from being yours to being for your readers, and you must create the best book for them. You are not simply writing; you are crafting a book.

You may hire one or more professional editors to work with you throughout the process. Professional editors can provide these services:

- developmental editing, which is a detailed assessment of the manuscript with specific suggestions and recommendations about improving it;
- manuscript critique, which is an overall assessment of the manuscript, which is less expensive than a developmental edit;
- heavy copy editing or line editing, which is an edit that corrects errors, rewrites awkward or overlong sentences, and generally improves readability; or
- light copy editing, which is an edit that only corrects grammatical errors when readability does not need much improvement.

Note that a proofreader looks for errors in page proofs, that is, after the book is laid out. This service is not part of the initial writing process.

When an editor sees your manuscript, the editor might suggest the level of editing that's needed. Note that different editors sometimes use different terms, so be sure you are clear with your editor about the services to be performed.

Another task is securing permissions. This includes written permission to use any copyrighted material and any personal material that infringes on the privacy of another person. Permission issues can be tricky. For example, the laws regarding how much copyrighted material can be used without permission as “fair use” are vague. Or, permission may be needed to use a photo of artwork, even if the photo is yours, because the artwork itself may be copyrighted. There are books on the subject, and permissions editors can help. If you still want to navigate permissions yourself after reading about the subject, make a spreadsheet that includes every possible problem in your manuscript, and then solve each one. You might decide to leave out copyrighted material in one instance, but decide that another instance falls under fair use. You might rewrite a passage to protect the privacy of someone you can no longer contact (if changing the name is not enough), but write to another person to request his or her written permission.

If your book includes images, gather them and secure any needed permissions for their specific uses, such as for both print and digital formats. Do not, however, place them into your text or process them; these steps come later.

You might be tempted to start applying styles to the text in your word processing program, for example, making chapter titles large and bold. There are two reasons not to do this: The styles might not carry over to the program you’ll later use to lay out your pages, and you’ll therefore be wasting time. And the styles might not be appropriate for an e-book, which requires specific formatting. While you’re writing, just focus on the text and not on how it looks.

Likewise, if you plan to lay out the book pages yourself, you may be tempted to put the text into the layout program to play with fonts and arrangements before the text is finalized. This is fine, especially if you need to learn to use the layout program or get an approximate page count. But don’t try to maintain two current versions of the book, one in the word processor and one in

the page layout program. This will be a headache and probably lead to inconsistencies between the two versions. Finalize the text in the word processor before beginning the official page layout process. You'll need a final version in word processor format to use when creating an e-book.

Other written materials to consider are the copyright page, table of contents (TOC), acknowledgments, figure captions, footnotes, endnotes, bibliography, glossary, and index. Each item can add complications. For example, if you use the styles in your word processing program to automatically generate a TOC, the TOC might not copy properly into the page layout program. Instead, you'd have to learn to generate a TOC in the page layout program or insert one manually. An index adds value to a nonfiction book, but indexing is a special skill that may require hiring a professional indexer. Also, an index is not useful in an e-book (where page numbers change depending on the device used) unless the index links to the text, and adding links is time-consuming.

## Find a Printer (or Not)

Producing the actual book involves some major decisions. First, think about how many books you want to print and decide the format(s) of your book:

- printed (offset or digital)
- printed (print on demand, called POD)
- e-book

The format(s) will determine which companies you will work with and the next steps.

## Print Books

Offset printing is the traditional method used to print a large number of books. Digital printing is a newer method that is less expensive for small numbers of books. With either of these methods,

you'll hire a company to print and bind the books and also to ship them all to your chosen storage spot. Find good printer recommendations from other self-publishers. Make sure you find a real book printer, not a vanity publisher that will outsource the work and may try to sell you other services or a photocopy center that binds books with a spiral. Many printers will have an online form to fill out to receive a quote; even if you don't yet have all the specifications to fill out the form, such as the book size and page count or the type of paper you want, you can request initial quotes for a cost comparison.

Remember that price is not the only consideration. The following are some other questions to ask:

- Can I see book and paper samples? Note that each paper has a “pages per inch” (ppi) specification; use paper with a larger ppi to make your book thinner and save money. A book with images needs a paper thick enough that the images won't show through.
- Can I see samples of both offset and digital printing?
- What are your standard page sizes? These will be cheaper than custom sizes.
- Do you have a guide for creating and converting files? Which programs can I use? Note that some printers will need high-quality PDFs that cannot be created with a word processing program or a free PDF maker. This may seem inconvenient, but it will result in a better-looking book.
- What are your company's environmental practices? Do you offer recycled paper? Are the books printed at your facility or elsewhere?
- Do you work with self-publishers? Note that if this is your first book, you want to be able to ask questions and have someone overseeing your work who will notice errors, such as images that were incorrectly processed.



Print on demand (POD) means the printer will digitally print one or more copies of your book and ship them each time an order is placed. This could be a customer order for one book or your order for a small stash. With POD, you don't have to spend a large amount up front on printing or store a lot of books. The per-book price might be more, however.

A range of POD services are available. Some traditional printers now offer this service, with options such as these: (1) you take orders from customers, and then order the POD books; (2) you direct customers to the printer's ordering website; and (3) the printer sells your book through a retail partner. Some newer companies offer only POD; these companies will typically display your book in their online store. There are also bigger companies that are known as distributors but that actually arrange the POD printing as well; these are discussed in the Print Distribution section. Some authors have experienced issues with book quality when printing with a large company, so look for reviews. If a company is shipping books to customers or displaying books in an online store, they will probably charge a fee in addition to the printing cost.

## E-books

E-books are relatively new, and the rules for producing and selling them are constantly shifting. Multiple companies offer a range of services, and new companies appear regularly. The terminology can be confusing: publishers, platforms, software, templates... If you're interested in producing an e-book, read about the services currently offered on a reputable self-publishing blog to get an idea of which ones you might use. A DIY method is outlined here.

E-books come in multiple file formats. Currently, two formats enable an e-book to be read on all e-readers: MOBI (the format used by Amazon's Kindle) and EPUB (the format used by everyone else). In these formats, the book text flows from one page to the next, adjusting itself to fit the screen of the e-reader. The PDF is another electronic format, but it maintains a set content

on each page; on an e-reader, the reader might have to zoom in and scroll from side to side to see all the content in a PDF.

Producing an e-book only requires a word processing program, not a page layout program. You must style the word processing document a certain way before converting it to an e-book, however. This includes many tasks, such as using style headings, positioning images properly, and sometimes rethinking your text; for example, you cannot refer to “the figure on page 8” because page numbers are not set across e-readers. Once your word processing document is formatted, there are programs (free and otherwise) to convert the styled document into the different e-book formats.

If needed, you can hire someone to style your document properly and/or convert it.

A completely DIY e-book method comprises preparing your document, converting the file to an e-book format, and selling the e-book from your website. There are complications with this method, however: The buyer will probably expect access to the e-book immediately after buying it. If you direct buyers to a web page to download the e-book, you’ll need to consider the page’s security, and you’ll need to use a credit card processor, who will charge a fee for the transaction. You can avoid these complications by using a digital-products distributor to handle payments and distribution; you can link to or embed the e-book sales page (created by the digital-products distributor) on your website. The digital-products distributor will charge a fee, but it might include the credit card processing fee. Search online to find companies; an example is Gumroad.

You can also sell your e-book from other companies’ websites. Amazon’s Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) is a main example. Authors can easily upload a properly styled document, and KDP will convert it to MOBI and publish it on Amazon’s website at no cost to the author. Authors receive a royalty payment for each sale minus a fee. Authors can choose to turn on

digital rights management and enroll in a “select” program that might generate income, but prohibits sales from other sites. Find a current list of e-book retail sites and decide which ones you want to use; you might try to do all of them or pick the few major ones. Be sure to read all the details at each site.

Finally, you can hire a company to publish your e-book. Some charge a flat fee up front, while others work with you for free and keep a percentage of each e-book sold. A wide range of services exists. Some companies include file formatting, while others focus on distribution. Depending on the fees involved, you might use a company to post your e-book on all sales sites, or you might post some yourself (to increase your share of each sale) and have the company do others. As always, look for online reviews of these companies and read all the paperwork.

## Take Care of Miscellaneous Tasks

There are many tasks to take care of early in the process. Using a “publishing company” name on your book will make it look more professional. You may want to consider your publishing company as a new business. The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) has lots of advice on its website, including how to choose a business name. You’ll need to

- choose a good name that no one else is using;
- consider using a company logo created either by you or a professional designer;
- get a post office box if you don’t want to list your address online;
- register your website domain name, which you’ve already determined is available, and possibly build the website now;
- settle on a professional-looking e-mail address, possibly one that came with your website;
- consider opening a business bank account; and

- look into your state's business requirements, such as getting a license or a sales tax ID (which will enable you to avoid paying sales tax to the printer, since you'll be charging sales tax when you sell books), and filing your business's name.

There are several numbers to consider. There is debate about which ones are necessary, which you can read more about online.

- ISBN is the abbreviation for International Standard Book Number, a universal book identifier that is required by bookstores, although KDP does not require one. Each version of a book requires a different ISBN. There is only one place to buy an ISBN in the United States (<http://www.isbn.org>), and buying only one is expensive. Buying an ISBN from a reseller can be risky, however, because the ISBN will always be in the reseller's name. After you publish your book with the ISBN in it, you'll need to assign the ISBN to the book at the ISBN company's website.
- A barcode is needed to sell a book in bookstores. You can buy one from the ISBN company or elsewhere. Consider not including a price on the barcode to give yourself and bookstores more pricing flexibility. The barcode will come as an image file that you'll place on your book's cover.
- The Library of Congress catalog control number (LCCN) is used by libraries and is free, although you have to mail in a copy of your book after being assigned one. There are two types of LCCN; the Preassigned Control Number (PCN) is appropriate for self-published books.

Finally, start looking for testimonial quotes to use on the back cover of your book, as this can take time. While a testimonial from a famous person is great, any testimonial will make your back cover look the way readers expect it to when they're browsing and pick up your book.

Consider asking another author, an expert in the subject matter, a local celebrity, or someone with a credential you can use, such as “founder of” or “winner of.” Ask in person, if possible.

## Design the Book

Book design includes the design of both the cover and the interior pages. There are three ways to go about designing each: do it all yourself, do it yourself with a template, or hire a designer.

### Interior Design

If you’ve never designed a book, you might be surprised by how many steps are involved and how many decisions need to be made: picking the font of the text, positioning and processing images (perhaps adding a border or a drop shadow), inserting page numbers, using “running heads” to display the author name or book title in the header, using a drop cap letter at the start of each chapter, picking the font of the chapter titles, designing the title page, and more.

You’ll want to use a page layout program, and your printer may specify which ones are acceptable. An example is Adobe InDesign. These programs can be expensive and have a steep learning curve. You’ll want to use the program properly to create an organized file that easily allows you to make changes—for example, by using styles and having text flow automatically from one page to the next. If you are learning to use a program, practice with a small document before it is time to place your whole manuscript into the program; this way, you’ll make errors in the test file and have a cleaner file when it’s time to lay out your book.

You’ll also need to prepare any images: scanning photos or drawings or processing digital images. Your printer will have specifications to follow, such as the image size, resolution, and file format.

If you want to design the book yourself and need some help with starting the process, look at other books you like. Note the page size and how titles and images are treated. You may see things you never noticed before, such as how the first few words of each section are formatted in small caps or another style. A smartphone app can identify the font if it is not listed in the book. Different fonts take up different amounts of space, so the font can be used to control the page count of your book. Make sure to pick a font that's easy to read.

If this sounds like too much, you can use a book-design template. Templates are available online for free and for purchase. Purchased templates may include more features than free ones; you could try some free ones and see if you're happy with the results. You'll download a file that already includes a title page and sample chapters with the fonts and section breaks in place. You'll paste your material into this template. If you're working with a company, they might have templates to use.

A final option is to hire a book designer to create the design, either by using a template or creating a custom design.

To publish an e-book, you won't need to position text and images or to choose fonts. In a simple e-book, the styling you apply to your document simply indicates to the e-reader the function of the text, such as whether it's body text or a header. Images will flow with the text and should be positioned (in line, not floating or wrapped) where you want them to appear relative to the text. You can follow a guide to properly format your document for e-book publication. Software is now available to make e-books look more professional; so, as always with e-books, search online for the latest trends.

## Cover Design

The cover of your book will help (or hurt) sales and, therefore, must look professional. You should have some artistic ability if you plan to design it yourself. Look at other book covers to get ideas, not just for the image on the front, but also for how the spine is handled and the variety and positioning of elements on the back cover. You might include an enticing book synopsis, one or more testimonial quotes, the barcode, your publishing company logo, and your website. Once you have a design, get some feedback, preferably from friends with design experience.

You must own or have permission to use any images. These can include photos taken by you that do not include copyrighted work (such as artwork) in the photos, your own drawings, public domain images, and images for which you have purchased the rights. You must have written permission from a person to use a photo of him or her.

You'll need a PDF of the entire cover, including the back and spine. Imagine peeling the cover off of a book and spreading it flat to picture the layout you must create. Your printer may require that this layout be done in a certain page layout program, that the layout include a bleed (a border that will be cut off after printing), and that any colors used be in a certain color mode. Generally, printing in full color costs more than printing with one or two colors. You'll need to calculate the width of the spine by using the book's page count and the ppi value of the paper.

As with book interiors, there are cover templates and graphic designers who create covers.

To publish an e-book, you'll only need an image (like a JPEG) of the front cover. Some e-book publishing services include easy-to-use cover templates.

## Proofread and Publish

Once your book is designed and laid out, ready to print, is the time to hire a proofreader. You should fix any typos or make any last-minute changes in both the original word processing document and the final laid-out version.

Then you're ready to publish! You'll prepare files (probably PDFs) to send to your printer. Your printer will have specifications to use when exporting your files to create the final PDFs—for example, how to set image compression or what size bleed marks to use. They'll also instruct you on how to send the files electronically—for example, by uploading them on their website.

Once the printer has the files, they should be able to tell you if everything has been set up properly; you want a printer who will look for errors and not just print whatever you send. For example, the printer might indicate that one image on your cover is in RGB mode, not the CMYK mode required for printing. If you're unsure that you're doing everything right, ask the printer if you can send test files of the interior and the cover, early in the process. Include an image in each test file. If you've formatted the image incorrectly, you'll want to know before you format every image in the book.

For an e-book, the steps of publishing depend on the company or companies you're working with, as described previously. Some aspects of e-book publishing are straightforward. For example, if you want to publish your e-book with KDP, simply follow their guide to style your document and export it, and then upload the result at their website.

Other aspects are not as straightforward. For example, if you want to convert your word processing document to the MOBI and EPUB formats, you'll need a program to do so. Apple's Pages can export an EPUB, but limits the size of each chapter and removes all images once a



limit is reached. This requires you to organize your document with chapters to reduce the number of lost images.

Calibre is a free program that can convert all sorts of files, but it might be difficult for some people to use. If you don't want a company to publish your e-book, find suggestions for the latest or easiest conversion tools online. If needed, you can hire someone to convert your files—or to teach you how to convert them—leaving the rest of the process up to you.

## Set Up Your Office

Once your book is at the printer, you must prepare for its arrival. If you are not using print on demand, you'll need a place to store the physical books and a system for processing orders. If you haven't already created a website, you'll need to do that.

## Set Up a Website

You can build your own website (for free or not) or hire someone to do it. An overview of the options follows.

If you've never done it before, creating a website yourself is totally doable but can be confusing. For those who are not tech savvy, look for reviews of which website builders are easiest; many include templates that you simply fill with information and upload images into. The “dashboard” from which you build and edit the site may look confusing at first, but once you become more familiar with it, making changes to your site will be easy. Online, you should be able to find current how-to guides to popular website builders.

It's possible to create a website for free; numerous companies offer this service. You can search the Internet for “create free website” to get ideas and compare options. Either use a well-established platform (like WordPress) or read reviews and of the companies you might consider.

You may want to pay the annual fee to register a certain domain name, such as `yourauthorname.com` or `yourbooktitle.com`. You may be offered this option during the website creation process. Be sure that the domain name is registered in your name, so that you can take it with you if you move your website to a different Internet platform. Registering a domain name requires you to submit your personal information to a public registry, which can result in a lot of spam. Some website companies offer to act as a barricade, protecting your information by using their own, sometimes for a fee.

The next step up is to pay a company to host your website at your registered domain name. The host company will offer tech support, if needed. You'll install a "content management system" (like WordPress) using the host company's control panel; to then build the site, you'll log into the content management system. A host might offer perks like free e-mail addresses that use your domain name (such as `you@yourauthorname.com`) and a free "add-on domain," an additional domain name that you can use for a second website, while only paying for hosting once.

Some features may cost extra, like having a dedicated IP address so that no other websites are sharing your IP address; this can be important because other users might send spam, triggering spam guards to block your e-mails. Don't choose a host company based on price alone; research host companies and read reviews because migrating your website from one host to another is a big pain.

If you hire someone to build your website, but want to make subsequent changes yourself, make sure the web developer keeps things simple. For example, you don't want dozens of plugins added that will require updating, or custom code that might break when the website's software updates. While you want your site to look unique, you don't want it to use an obscure or

custom theme that won't be maintained, which also might stop functioning when the software updates. Have a plan for updating software; outdated software can make your site vulnerable to hacking. Make sure you have the information you need to log in to the site to make changes, including the site administrator's password; even if you don't plan to do any administrator tasks, you'll need this information if you hire someone different for help in the future.

### Choose a Credit Card Processor

If you want to sell as many books as possible, enable customers to pay with credit cards. This means using a credit card processor, which will charge a fee for each sale. Note that some credit card processors stipulate in the user agreement that you cannot add a surcharge to cover this fee. Make it easy for customers to buy your books; choose a processor that does not require customers to create an account to pay. Read the processor's rules about how it handles buyer complaints and seller's rights.

Once you've chosen a processor, you'll log into your account with them and adjust the settings, such as the countries from which you will accept payment. You'll provide the information needed to access money you make, such as by transferring it to your bank account. There will be tools to create website buttons: you'll input information about your book and shipping costs, and the processor will generate website code to paste into a web page, which creates a button that visitors can click to buy your book. Make sure that you will receive a notification when a sale is made so you can ship the book.

### Make an Order Fulfillment Plan

Plan the process you'll use to fulfill each order and keep records for tax time. You may want to create a spreadsheet or buy record-keeping software. Business may start slowly, but if orders pick up, you'll need a plan in place to manage them. Consider the following:

- Do you understand the best shipping options for your book? Media mail, which is designed for mailing books, is cheap and includes tracking; the package can only contain the book, however. If you offer priority options, the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) has many options that are not obvious at the post office counter. For example, there are flat-rate envelopes and different sizes of priority-mail boxes available for free as packaging, but they must be special ordered. International shipping has its own set of boxes and rates.
- Do you have padded envelopes, USPS envelopes and boxes, packing tape, and a black marker to prepare the package for shipping? You may want to buy these items in bulk to save money.
- When an order is placed, will the customer receive an automated thank you or an e-mail from you? Note that a personal e-mail might motivate a customer to reply, which might result in feedback on your book that you can ask to use as a testimonial on your website.
- What is your policy if a book doesn't arrive? Note that in the United States, tracking enables you to see that the book was delivered.
- Will you offer any discounts, such as student or bulk discounts?
- Do you need to charge sales tax? The rules vary by state.
- What is your policy for bookstores? Offering a discount of 40 percent and charging the bookstore for shipping seems to be standard. Bookstores will want you to send an invoice, which they will pay after receiving the books. Find out when payment is expected so you can follow up if you don't receive it.
- How will you keep track of orders, income, expenses, and receipts?
- Do you need to file any taxes, such as state sales tax, quarterly?

## Print Distribution

The distribution of print books is another area that is rapidly changing for self-publishers. The DIY method is to simply sell your book from your website. However, distribution through other channels can offer so much exposure that it is worth looking into them.

The distribution landscape is complicated by the many types of companies and services. There are online retailers, each of which has an online bookstore and might be willing to include your book in its catalog (thus distributing it), and there are distributors that don't offer retail sales but get your books into spaces that do. Some distributors serve as the suppliers to physical bookstores; note that having your book available from the distributor does not mean that any bookstores will order it. (The realities of selling in physical bookstores are described in the Marketing section.) Some distributors don't accept just anyone, making it hard for a self-published author to be accepted, and some won't work with POD books. Some distributors handle only POD books, acting as printer and distributor. There are also e-book distributors, which were referred to previously. An online search of "book distribution for self-publishers" will turn up articles listing the current major players.

As with e-books, you might decide to list your book as many places as possible, or you may decide to go with the biggest sites. You can always start with a few sales outlets and add more later. If your book has an audience in certain countries, find out which sales outlets are biggest in those countries. The rules and terms are different for each company, so be sure to read all agreements. You might place your book into retail outlets one-by-one, minimizing the fees you'll pay for distribution, or you might hire a company to place the book into multiple outlets for you.

A few major companies are described below.

The biggest distributor in the United States is currently Ingram. IngramSpark is a division that works with self-published authors and POD books. There is a guide to follow to upload your files; you'll need to have your own ISBN. IngramSpark prints and distributes your book, making it available in a range of places, and you appear as the publisher. (Remember: having your book available to bookstores does not mean they will carry it.)

IngramSpark's main competition is CreateSpace. Because CreateSpace has ties to Amazon, the company charges larger fees for distribution to non-Amazon channels, but might provide faster service for Amazon sales. There are also differences in how these companies charge for items like color printing and hardcover books, and many people consider CreateSpace simpler to use. Read online reviews that compare the two to choose which is right for your project; keep in mind that offerings and fees are continuously changing, and you might have to create accounts with the companies to get current information. Many consider the current best practice to use both platforms: CreateSpace to sell on Amazon and IngramSpark to sell elsewhere.

You don't have to use one of these companies, however. You can have books printed (whether a large print run or a small POD print run) and sell them through targeted retail outlets. Amazon is the biggest online retailer in the United States and offers several possibilities that self-publishers can access. Look for the most updated information on their website. Here are the programs they currently offer:

- Amazon Advantage is a program in which Amazon is the seller of your book. When they order your books, you pay to ship the books to their warehouse; then when a customer places an order, Amazon ships to that customer. If there is no demand, they will stop carrying your book. If you use this or any other program, carefully read the agreement details. For example, with Amazon Advantage, Amazon sets the book price. There are packaging requirements,

and they can add a handling fee if you don't meet them. There is an annual fee of \$99.00.

You receive 45 percent of the list price, not the 60 percent that is usual with bookstores.

- Fulfillment by Amazon is a program in which you are the seller of the book—which can be new or used. You don't have to be the author or publisher, but Amazon is shipping it for you from a warehouse, and it is eligible for Amazon's shipping and customer services, which may encourage customers to buy it. Amazon charges you fees for fulfillment based on the book's weight and monthly storage fees that are calculated on the number of books they have stored.
- Selling in the Amazon Marketplace allows you to sell books that you ship yourself. You create an account at “Seller Central” and list the books you have for sale and their prices. Amazon will set the shipping price. The professional account costs \$39.99 per month, plus there are additional selling fees for each book sold. The individual account has no monthly fee, but they charge \$0.99 per item sold, plus the additional selling fees. The fees can be complicated to calculate beforehand, but you can adjust the book price until your income is acceptable.
- Kindle Direct Publishing is for e-books, as described previously.

An online search of “online retailers for self-published books” will provide lists of online retailers to consider, in addition to Amazon.

## Marketing

You'll be solely responsible for marketing your book, unless you hire a publicist. There are many resources—books, blogs, other self-publishers—to use for ideas. Don't try to do too much or worry that you're “supposed to” have a blog or use Twitter; no one can do everything. Pick the marketing tactics that you can handle and that will get you in front of your target market. Keep trying; if one tactic produces no result, try a new one.

Ideally, you'll begin marketing early. Traditionally, there were steps to take like making a "sell sheet" to announce an upcoming book and securing reviews. Today, an early step would be building your fan base (for example, by blogging) so that when your book is published, there are people ready to buy it. Don't annoy people by trying to sell your book constantly, but do answer, "I'm a writer," when people ask what you do; then tell them about your book when they ask what you're working on. Have a card ready to hand out so they can preorder the book, get a notification when it's ready, or at least have your website if they want to follow up.

Once the book is out, there are myriad marketing tactics to try. Approaching bookstores to carry the book seems obvious, but bookstores have limited shelf space, and if your book is not part of their distribution system, they may not remember to reorder when it sells. Also, bookstores expect a refund for unsold books, which creates a financial risk. And, if you are using a POD distributor, the additional fees the distributor charges may further dissuade a bookstore from carrying your book. If you do pick a tactic like this, try it a little to see if it works: for example, send information to ten or twenty bookstores to see if any reply before you invest in a campaign to write to every bookstore in the country.

Think creatively. Maybe the local bookstore won't schedule a self-published author for an author reading. Is there somewhere else you could do one, such as an outdoor store for an adventure book, a health center for a wellness book, or a library where you can simply rent a room to host your own reading? Maybe the local fancy food store would sell your cookbook if the recipes use items it sells. Or perhaps there's a niche online retailer who'd carry it or a blogger who writes on your topic who'd review it. You could set up a table at a relevant festival.

If you're an introvert, networking can sound scary, but it doesn't have to be. These days you can participate in an online chat or forum to get your name out; you wouldn't want to try to sell



your book constantly, but as people get to know you, they'll find out about it. You might lure people to your website with some free material. Find ways to interact that you enjoy.

Trying to win an award for your book can be an enticing proposition and a good marketing tool. An online search of book awards open to self-published books will find many contests that are described as both legitimate and scams. You'll have to decide what you believe. For example, if the contest involves hundreds of winners who get golden seals for the fronts of their books, you may decide that it's not really a contest of book quality and not for you, or you may decide that the golden seal will help you sell books and that you want to try for it.

Factors to consider include the cost to enter a contest, the host (a for-profit company or a nonprofit organization?), the prizes (is the contest host actually spending money on them?) and if you find them beneficial, the number of categories and winners, and the judges (are they industry experts?). Entering a contest that requires you to sign away the rights to your book is definitely a bad idea. There is also online agreement that most contests don't provide much additional exposure; you'll still have to market your award to make it worthwhile. Note that contests are often for recently published books, so don't wait to look into them.

Recommendations from readers will help you continue to sell books. When you receive positive feedback, ask if you can quote the person on your website; you don't need to include the whole name, but could credit the quote to "John S. in New York" or "Mary S., location unknown." Reviews are extremely important at online retailers like Amazon. You might encourage friends who've read the book to review it, but be wary that Amazon has cracked down on "fake" reviews. Although their focus is on people who buy and sell positive reviews, you should be careful not to encourage anything that could get your account flagged. Amazon will

also indicate whether the reviewer is a verified buyer of the book (i.e., whether the buyer bought it at Amazon).

## Final Tasks

After your book arrives, there are a few final tasks to complete.

- Register the book's copyright with the U.S. Copyright Office. Although the book is automatically copyrighted as soon as it is written, registering the copyright can further protect your rights. There is a fee, and you'll have to send the office copies of your book.
- If you used a Library of Congress number, fulfill their requirement of books.
- If you used an ISBN, officially assign it to the book at the ISBN website. You'll need the date of publication, which is why you wait to do this step.
- Send complimentary, signed copies of the book to people who helped you with it.
- Consider how you will autograph books—with only your signature or with a catchy slogan?

Hopefully this booklet has given you an idea of what it takes to self-publish a book. You may decide to go for it, either by doing the entire process yourself or hiring others to do part or all of it. If so, explore additional resources to learn more. There are many books about self-publishing. There are also many websites dedicated to self-publishing and “independent authors,” and blog posts will provide current information on companies and services. Subscribe to blogs to stay up to date. To get started, three stellar examples at the moment are the following:

- The Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America sponsors the Writer Beware website and blog, which includes volumes of information about everything from fraudulent contests and vanity presses to emerging scams, as well as loads of self-publishing information.

<http://www.sfwaweb.org/other-resources/for-authors/writer-beware/>

- Jane Friedman’s website includes regularly updated information about the industry and free guides like *How to Publish an Ebook*. <https://janefriedman.com/>
- Joel Friedlander’s website offers a wealth of information about making books, including much information for self-publishers. <http://www.thebookdesigner.com>

As long as self-publishing remains popular, there will be companies offering various services to self-published authors. We can look forward to new innovations that will help authors reach more readers. But before you hire anyone, search the Internet to see if others recommend or warn against them. By taking the time to do some research, your self-publishing journey can be smooth and successful. Good luck!

## About the Author

Emily Buehler self-published her first book, *Bread Science*, in 2006. Back then, DIY tactics were necessary because many of the services offered today were not yet available. Emily recognized a need for a brief guidebook outlining the entire process. After finishing her second book, *Somewhere and Nowhere*, in 2017, Emily turned her notes on the process into this guide. She is currently exploring fiction writing.

In addition to being an author, Emily is an independent editor. She has a PhD in chemistry and began her editing career working on academic papers and research reports. Learn more at <http://emilyeditorial.com>.

Emily lives in Hillsborough, North Carolina, where you can spot her riding through town on her bicycle. When she’s not writing, editing, or teaching a class on bread-making, she likes to read and take walks. Read more about her on her website, <http://emilybuehler.com>.