

Self-Publishing Services Best Practices

ANY PAY-TO-PUBLISH REQUIREMENT MUST BE CLEARLY DISCLOSED.

Many hybrid or other author-participatory publishing companies do not clearly state that the author must pay to have their book published. Many of these companies make the author believe that they are a “traditional” publisher, when in fact, they are only a variation on a self-publishing service.

- Authors in these participatory arrangements must be given full control over the editing, design, and marketing of their book. Many companies limit the input by the author, compounding the problems for the author.

AUTHOR MUST HAVE FINAL APPROVAL ON ALL EDITING, DESIGN, AND MARKETING OF THEIR BOOK.

Any services which an author pays for must be provided with full and final approval by the author. If the service provider does not obtain the approval of the author before proceeding, then the author is not self-publishing.

ALL FEES AND COSTS SHOULD BE CLEARLY STATED ON WEBSITE.

Most companies provide clear price lists on their websites for most of their services. Unfortunately, there are some companies that do not follow this practice. Beware of companies that:

- Claim that they will publish your book for free. If they are advertising heavily on the Internet that they will publish your book for free, there is most likely a “catch” to their offer. In most cases, it involves the purchase by the author of a large number of books at an inflated cost. Some of these companies provide good services, but many do a very poor job of producing your book.
- Require you to talk to a sales representative to get pricing. This may result in a hard sales pitch in which you feel pressured to sign up quickly. Get the pricing in writing and take your time reviewing it.
- Up sell to more expensive package. You should only purchase the services that you need for your specific book. Many companies offer cheap packages, but up sell to more expensive packages that include unneeded, inappropriate, and overpriced marketing services. You should have a marketing plan BEFORE you publish your book.

THE CUSTOMER SERVICE STAFF SHOULD HAVE PUBLISHING KNOWLEDGE AND TRAINING.

Look at the history of the people you will be dealing with on your book project. Do they have any more knowledge about the publishing business than you do? Maybe someone in the company knows a little bit about publishing, but often the person giving you advice has no more knowledge or training than you do. Just because someone has self-published their own book, they aren't an expert. Some of the large companies have published over 100,000 titles. When they make big claims about their success stories, you can rest assured that the author did all of the work and would have had a winner no matter who they used.

AN EDITORIAL EVALUATION SHOULD BE AVAILABLE, OFFERED UP FRONT, AND BE UNBIASED AND PROFESSIONAL.

We recommend that an author get an editorial evaluation of their manuscript before starting the publishing process. Don't publish a book that isn't well edited. Get a professional opinion on your book. Most self-publishing companies offer an editorial evaluation as part of a package, but you are already committed at that point. Don't confuse this with the content evaluation that the company will do to look for use of copyrighted material, pornographic, highly violent, or otherwise objectionable or illegal material. That content evaluation is for their protection, not yours.

EDITORIAL SERVICES SHOULD BE APPROPRIATE TO THE MANUSCRIPT AND BE PERFORMED IN THE U.S. BY PROFESSIONAL EDITORS.

After the editorial evaluation has identified the need for editing, the right kind of editing should be done. If you don't understand the differences between developmental editing, content editing, and copy editing, you aren't alone. Use our Resources page to help understand what you need and how much it should really cost.

COVER DESIGN SHOULD BE PROFESSIONAL, ATTRACTIVE, AND IN STYLE APPROPRIATE FOR THE BOOK AND ITS GENRE.

Covers don't sell a book, but they tell a lot about the quality of the content. They are the single most important marketing collateral for the book and must be well executed. A poorly executed cover will turn off a potential buyer and a great cover will make a book stand-out from its peers on a web page or book shelf.

INTERIOR DESIGN SHOULD BE PROFESSIONAL AND EXECUTED ACCORDING TO INDUSTRY STANDARDS.

There are well established standards for the layout of the elements of a book and the design of the content. These standards make the book easy to read and don't distract the reader. Failing to follow these standards will mark a book as amateurish and detract from its perceived value to the potential buyer.

ALL FINAL FILES FOR THE BOOK (COVER DESIGN FILE AND INTERIOR LAYOUT FILE) SHOULD BE THE PROPERTY OF THE AUTHOR WHO HAS PAID FOR THE WORK TO BE PERFORMED.

An author who is using a self-publishing service has paid for the creation of the cover and the layout of the text. The final files for the cover and text should belong to the author, without the need to pay additional fees or request them within limited time frames.

THE ISBN FOR THE BOOK SHOULD BELONG TO THE AUTHOR.

The ISBN is the identifier that retailers, distributors, and libraries use to buy and track books. It is contained in the bar code on the back of the book and is on the copyright page. The ISBN is owned by the publisher of the book and is not transferable. If an author is self-publishing a book, they are the publisher and they should own the ISBN. If the publishing service owns the ISBN, the author cannot control the meta data attached to the ISBN, the ISBN will have to change when the author is no longer using that service, and all sales information will be lost for the book.

THE AUTHOR SHOULD BE ABLE TO BUY BOOKS AT MANUFACTURING COST.

Self-publishing services should sell authors copies of their own books at the actual cost of manufacturing with only an appropriate and separately stated handling fee. The self-publishing service is usually using either Lightning Source or CreateSpace to print the books and should allow the author to buy the books directly from those sources. The self-published author is usually going to sell more books directly than they will through retail channels. Self-publishing services which sell books to the author at a “discount from list price” are making a significant profit from the author on those books.

THE AUTHOR SHOULD BE ABLE TO SET THE LIST PRICE FOR THEIR BOOK.

Many self-publishing services set the list price for the author’s book. When combined with the predatory method of selling books to the author at a discount off list price and offering lower than industry standard discounts to retailers, this results in lower sales of the books at retail and higher profits to the self-publishing services company. The author should be given adequate information on the costs of manufacturing, distribution, and other expenses as well as industry pricing feedback to allow them to set an appropriate list price for their book.

MARKETING SERVICES SHOULD BE SEPARATE FROM THE PUBLISHING SERVICES AGREEMENT.

Unnecessary or inappropriate marketing services are sold in publishing bundles or packages to authors. Authors need to have a marketing plan in place prior to publication of their book. Many critical marketing steps must occur prior to publication to be effective. By separating out the marketing services, the author can better evaluate the cost and alternatives for those services.

PUBLISHING SERVICES AGREEMENTS SHOULD BE TERMINABLE BY THE AUTHOR ON VERY SHORT NOTICE.

Due to the nature of the current publishing industry, a self-published book that is available as an eBook and a POD book can change distributors in a matter of a few days. Only when there are printed copies of a book in warehouses is there a need for extended termination provisions in a publishing contract.

Please go to our website for the latest and most up-to-date reviews and Best Practices.

www.CenterforBookPublishing.com/best-practices-for-self-publishing-services