A brief guide to self-publishing

Step 1: planning

DIY self-publishing

If you're going to manage your publishing project yourself, you'll usually require:

- an editor
- a proofreader
- a designer: for your cover and your interior layout
- a printer: obviously!
- a bookshop and ebook distributor
- an ebook converter (or your designer might be able to help with this).

Keep in mind that it's best to find people or companies with experience working on books.

Self-publishing companies

The other option, rather than finding the members of your self-publishing team yourself, is using a self-publishing company to help you. This means that, rather than having to locate and manage five or six people to help on your book, you'll have (usually) just one person coordinating the whole project for you. You'll still be involved in all the decisions, but the job of managing all of these service providers will be taken off your hands.

If you select this option, as with choosing any service, shop around until you find a self-publishing company you feel you can work with. Ask them to send samples of books they have worked on recently.

At the planning stage you'll also need to consider:

- the schedule for your book
- the budget for your book.

PUBLISH
CENTRAL

Step 2: Editing

It's a good idea to talk to at least two or three editors or self-publishing providers about your book before selecting somebody, and even meet with them if you can.

A good editor will be very involved with both you and your book, and will be just as enthusiastic about it as you are. Far from just 'correcting' your work, an editor will improve it in many ways small and large, while working with you to ensure you are producing the book that you want. Your editor will fix up spelling mistakes, inconsistencies, incorrect grammar and other errors, but a good editor will do much more than this. A good editor will:

- suggest additions where more information is required
- suggest deletions where you've included something unnecessary or repeated something
- alert you to any possible copyright concerns
- discuss with you changes that will improve your writing.

Because you're self-publishing, you have the final say in what goes in your book, but you would be well advised to take the advice of your editor in most instances. If your editor has made a change that you don't agree with, raise it with him or her and discuss it. You'll usually find you can come to an agreeable solution and, if not, it's up to you to decide what to do.

It's important that your book's text is as final as possible by the end of the editing stage, as making significant changes to it after this point will be costly in both time and money.

Step 3: Design

Designers have websites with portfolios on them, so these are a great place to start looking for a designer if you're handling the publishing process yourself. Look around a number of sites and browse through a number of portfolios. Once you've found, say, three portfolios you like, get in touch with the designers and have a chat. Another way to find a good designer is to find a book cover you like – the name of the designer will be inside the book.

If you're using a self-publishing company to help you with your book, cover design will usually be part of the package. You should ask for samples of their previous books when comparing self-publishing companies, so you can check out the kinds of covers they do.

When you brief your designer or service provider, include the following:

- a number of book covers that reflect how you'd like your cover to look and feel
- a description of who the target market is
- a list of any preferences you have for images, colours and fonts
- the practical details, such as the title, author name and size (format) of the book.

Your designer or self-publishing provider will usually send you four or five different design ideas to look at and discuss. The designer will ask you which idea is your preference, and then you can discuss that cover and make any required changes. You'll usually go through three or four rounds (or even more) of changing and refining.

You will go through a similar process with the interior design of your book. Once the interior design has been finalised to your satisfaction, your book will be laid out (or 'typeset'), ready for proofreading.

Step 4: Proofreading and indexing

Proofreading is the final quality-control step in the production of your book. One or two minor errors in your book aren't the end of the world, but if you don't have it proofread there will probably be more than that.

Even the best editors won't pick up every single problem and error in your book, so proofreading is important. And by the end of the editing process, you're the last person who will find any mistakes. You may have spent three to six months writing it, and another month or two – or three – on the editing, layout and cover. By this point you (and your editor) will be so close to your book that some of the pages could be upside down and you might not notice. You need fresh eyes.

An index is a useful tool to help readers find what they want in your book. An index goes at the very back of your book, and lists all the major topics in your book in considerable detail.

Your editor may also be able to do your index, and this can be a good option. They're more familiar with the book, and so may be able to produce a more nuanced and effective index. This is because creating an index is much more involved than simply listing every instance of a word or subject that appears in the book. An indexer will carefully assess the major topics in your book and only index those topics, and mentions of that topic, that are of benefit to the reader. If a topic is only mentioned in passing on a certain page, it won't be included in the index.

Not all books include an index. You can discuss with your editor whether you think your book needs one.

An index is optional for an ebook because ebooks are searchable, so it's actually not too hard for readers to find what they're looking for.

Step 5: Printing

If you're project managing your book yourself, knowing the different printing options available to you is helpful.

Ask printers or self-publishing companies you are considering to send you a sample copy of a book they have recently printed – make sure it's a book, not a brochure, poster or anything else. Any quality company will do this without hesitation. If the company is reluctant to do so, they've made your decision easy: don't use them.

To obtain a quote for printing, you'll need to provide the following information:

- how many copies you want printed
- the size of your book (known in publishing as the 'trim size')
- the length of your book (called the 'page extent')
- whether it has any colour inside
- where you need copies delivered
- how you will be supplying files – usually this is PDF files
- what type of binding you want
- what type of lamination you want
- what type of paper you want for the book interior and cover (known as the 'stock').

Don't hesitate to use a printer or your self-publishing professional as a source of advice. Any good printer or self-publishing provider will spend some time with you answering any questions.

If you're using a self-publishing company, you won't be as involved in the details of the print management.

Step 6: The ebook

The most common ebook format is EPUB, and you'll also need a MOBI file for Amazon. 'EPUB' – not surprisingly – stands for 'electronic publication'. Most ebook conversion services will supply you with an EPUB file and a MOBI file as part of their standard service.

Like websites, ebooks have to be readable on a variety of different screens, such as mobile phones, tablets and laptops. For this reason, ebook text is what is known as 'reflowable'. This means that the 'page size' adjusts to whatever size a device's screen is and the text 'reflows' to fit this. Unfortunately, the need for reflowable text means that ebook formatting can be rather limited, so you need to be prepared for the fact that your ebook may not look quite as good as your print version.

If you're going to do it yourself, you can set up accounts on each individual ebook store you wish to sell on and upload your files yourself. Setting up the accounts can be a bit fiddly, but isn't difficult. You provide the information you'd expect, such as price, an author bio and ISBN, and then upload your files.

Keep in mind one major drawback of doing it all yourself is that for some US-based sites you will need a US tax ID to receive your payments.

The other DIY option is to use what's known as an 'ebook aggregator'. This is where you upload to just one site and they upload your book to a large range of ebook stores – for a fee, of course.

If you are using a self-publishing company, the ebook conversion and upload will most likely be included in your package.

Step 7: Distribution

You may consider trying to get your book into bookstores. This can be tough as a self-published author. Understandably, bookshops are often reluctant to deal with individual self-publishers who have only published one book and are managing the distribution themselves.

There are two methods of distribution: DIY and using a distributor. The DIY route involves contacting bookshops yourself (or advertising to them) and asking them to stock your book, then supplying the books ordered, invoicing for them and taking any returns. A number of excellent book distributors are available in Australia, both small and large, and this may be the better option. The distributor will take the whole thing off your hands, dealing with bookshops, invoicing and sending out books. The cost of using a distributor is usually around 60 to 70 per cent of the RRP, but most of this actually goes to the bookshop.

Some self-publishing providers offer bookshop distribution, some don't. If you use one that doesn't, this is something you will have to arrange yourself.

Ebooks are a great leveller for small publishers; you can easily distribute your book worldwide, just like a larger publisher.

You can also distribute your book through your business, and on sites such as Amazon and Booktopia.

Other things self-publishers should consider:

- Copyright issues
- Creation of illustrations, photos or diagrams
- Testimonials
- A foreword
- A bookmark
- Back cover blurb
- Cataloguing and lodgement with the National Library
- ISBNs
- Barcodes
- Author photo
- Marketing and publicity
- Print on demand
- Audiobook
- Pricing

Need to chat to somebody about self-publishing?
Call Michael Hanrahan on **+61 3 9888 5949**,
or go to our website for heaps of useful info.