

Hi everybody, thanks for being here. I'm really excited to have been invited to the inaugural Wyong Writers' Festival.

We don't have much time so I'm going to jump right into it. I'll give you the abridged version of the short version of my bio, and then we'll get into the interesting stuff. And there will (hopefully) be time for questions at the end. I'm also available after this talk to answer any questions, and I'll be posting a copy of this talk on our website at [publishcentral.com.au/wyong](http://publishcentral.com.au/wyong)

So, me in a nutshell ...

My father was a writer. When I was younger, two of my biggest interests were writing and design. When I was 16 I did work experience at William Heinemann Australia, and I completed a writing and editing degree at Deakin University. I was managing editor at one of Australia's largest publishers, and 15 years ago I turned down a job offer from Penguin to start Michael Hanrahan Publishing Services, which is now Publish Central, one of Australia's leading self-publishing business. I spend all day, every day talking about, reading and working on books.

Now onto the good stuff...

Let me tell you about a phone call I receive a few times a week.

The phone rings, and of course I stop what I'm doing and answer it, as long as the cat isn't sitting on my lap or the dog isn't in the way and I can actually get to the phone. After cheerful greetings, the person on the other end tells me they've written a book. They launch into an explanation of who they are and what their book is about, usually becoming quite enthusiastic. This lasts for about 5 minutes. At the end of the explanation, they pause and take a deep breath ... and then they ask:

*'What do I do now?'*

I've heard this question **so many times**, and it's what I'm **going to answer for you today**. This might be where you are right now; **excited about the prospect** of getting your book out there but a little unsure of **how to go about it**.

Again, because time is short, I'm going to give you a quick overview of all the steps involved in self-publishing a book, and then we're going to go into more detail on step 1, planning.

Over the years at Publish Central we've refined our process into a seven-step self-publishing system that's logical and easy to follow. Whether you're managing the process yourself or using a self-publishing company, you too can follow these steps:

- 1 **Planning:** this step looks at working out a schedule and planning your budget, and who you need to help you with your book.
- 2 **Editing:** How many times do you think I've heard an author say: 'My book was better *before* it was edited?' If you guessed absolutely never, well done. I've been doing this for over 20 years and that has *never* happened. 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 you want.
- 3 **Cover and interior design:** creating a book that looks good, and is inviting and easy to read, is very important.

- 4 **Proofreading.** This is the final step in the editing of your book. It's the final check for errors by a person who has *not previously read the book*. This provides a fresh set of eyes, which is essential because at this point you, your editor and your designer will have been working on the book for many weeks – or months – and will therefore be less likely to spot any problems.
- 5 **Printing:** While you don't have to become an expert, it's very helpful to know a little about the printing process to ensure you get the best result.
- 6 **The ebook, print on demand and audiobook:** you can do these yourself, or you can get experts to help.
- 7 **Distribution:** This is of course getting your book out into the world so people can read it.

I'm going to focus now on STEP 1: PLANNING.

An important part of part of planning is developing an understanding of the publishing process. People usually call me looking for help with self-publishing, but I find giving them a bit of an overview of how the publishing industry works helps them understand the self-publishing process.

These days, different publishing permutations and combinations are appearing all the time. The industry has changed rapidly in recent years and the lines between the different publishing models are now sometimes a little (or a lot) blurred. I regularly speak to authors and publishers who have bent and twisted the book model to suit their needs, often successfully but sometimes not.

Still, you can publish a book in three basic ways – all other methods are based on these.

**The first is traditional publishing**, which is the form of publishing most people are familiar with. In traditional publishing an established publishing company such as Penguin finds a book they think they can make profitable. The book has to be high quality and marketable, and the publisher must be satisfied that they can work well with the author. They then negotiate a contract with the author and, if a contract is agreed upon, take on production of the book. The publishing company is responsible for paying all the costs and managing the publication of the book, and shares the profits with the author in the form of a royalty payment, usually around 10 per cent of the recommended retail price.

The key advantages of this approach for authors are they don't have to pay anything to have their book published, and they get expert editing, design, printing, marketing and distribution. In exchange for this, the author gives much of the decision-making over to the publisher and shares the profits.

**Self-publishing** is where the author also takes on the role of the publisher, *usually* with the assistance of an editor or a self-publishing company. The greatest single advantage of self-publishing – and the reason many authors choose this route – is that it *guarantees* your book gets out there. The biggest hurdle to traditional publishing is simply that many, many more manuscripts are written than books are published every year. As such, many good books are regularly knocked back by publishers because the resources simply aren't available to publish them all. If you have the time, money, energy and enthusiasm, with self-publishing you can avoid this significant drawback of traditional publishing. You're not dependent on finding somebody else to support your book to get it out into the world.

With self-publishing, the responsibility for the book lies completely with the publisher (who is also the author). You have the final say on every decision, and many authors self-publish precisely to have this control. (It's important to note that you have this control

because *you* are paying the bills; traditional publishers have the control because *they* are paying the bills.)

By working with a skilled self-publishing professional or team, you can still get the expert assistance you need *and* make all the decisions yourself. From a decision-making point of view this can be the best of both worlds; hire a good person or company to help you and you get expert advice but still get to make the decisions.

But there's no such thing as a free lunch; with all the decision-making power comes all the financial risk of the project. Although this can be managed with good advice, as with any business project it's never eliminated. Realising that as a self-publisher you're taking on all of the business risk of the book is very important. This is the definition of what a publisher does, whether it's you or Penguin. You may have an editor, or designer, or self-publishing company help you produce your book, and they will support and advise you as best they can. But, ultimately, the success or otherwise of the book rests entirely with you.

**Partnership publishing** (sometimes called hybrid publishing) is an area where inexperienced authors can get caught out. It's a hybrid model, somewhere between traditional publishing and self-publishing. Nothing is inherently wrong with the partnership publishing method, and it can produce excellent results, but it does open up unwary authors to being ripped off. The 'partnership' is formed by the publisher signing up the author to what is much like a traditional publishing contract, but also asking the author to contribute to the costs of the book or to commit to buying a large number of books from the publisher, or both.

Like anything in business, if the terms of the agreement are reasonable and the risks and returns for the publisher and author are equitable, partnership publishing is fine, and can be very successful. Where authors can run into trouble with this model is if they're unaware of where the risks and rewards lie.

**You're at a session about self-publishing** so I'm going to take the small leap and guess that this is an option you are seriously considering. The preceding brief overview of the other options has hopefully helped you understand a bit more about where self-publishing fits into the publishing landscape, which I think is very important.

Once you've decided on the publishing model you are going to use, you need to think about **three key areas** before your project can commence:

1. Who is going to help you put your book together?
2. What is your schedule for your book?
3. What is your *budget* for your book?

You'll need a number of people to help you put your book together. First I'm going to address the individuals you can hire if you're going to manage the publishing process yourself (being your own project manager), and then I'm going to look at using a self-publishing company to help you out. These companies can take care of all your needs in one stop, providing all the services you need and managing the project for you.

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

- An editor and proofreader: keep in mind that you need an editor *and* a proofreader. Your editor cannot proofread your book because the role of the proofreader is to

check for mistakes, and your editor won't usually pick up any mistakes they may have made themselves.

- Designer: for your cover and your interior layout.
- Printer.
- Ebook person.
- Print on demand person.
- Audiobook person.
- You may also need help with distribution.

With a bit of time and effort you can track these people down. You might be able to get some recommendations from friends, family or colleagues, and these individuals or companies will all have websites or be in databases. Keep in mind that it's best to find people or companies with experience working on books. For example, I've seen things go very wrong when designers who *haven't* worked on books before have tried to do an interior layout. And printers that don't regularly print books can produce sub-par results. So when you're assessing a potential service provider, ask them about *books* they have worked on and to see some sample copies if possible.

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 managing all of the service providers will be taken off your hands.

These days you can choose between quite a few such companies. Some offer a complete range of services, including ebooks, audiobooks and distribution; some can help you write your book as well; some specialise in certain areas of publishing. It's helpful to know what services you need before you start looking, but if you don't, ring up the companies you're considering and ask them. It's part of their role to advise you on what services you need to produce a good book.

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. Tell them what your book is about and what you plan to do with it, and then ask them for their advice. Most such companies will be happy to spend some time with you to explain how they can help.

If a company *isn't* willing to have a chat and give you some information, it's probably not the sort of company you want to be working with anyway. We give free, no-obligation, 30-minute phone consultations to potential clients. Often we end up working with these people, but sometimes we don't and that's fine too. If I've given somebody some information that will help them with their book, I'm happy.

**So, should you project manage the process of publishing your book yourself or find a self-publishing company to help you?** Both approaches have advantages and disadvantages, and I've seen great books and not-so-great books produced both ways.

If you're well organised, prepared to put in the time and effort, and are enthusiastic about

doing something new, you can successfully manage your project yourself. Project management is an important part of the publication of your book. It involves:

- arranging and monitoring the schedule
- creating and overseeing a plan for everything that needs to be done for your book to be published
- finding and liaising with service providers, such as designers, editors, proofreaders, and printers
- making sure things are done in the right order
- getting quotes and paying the bills.

I've certainly seen some great books produced this way, and the authors have found it challenging but manageable and exciting.

An **advantage** of managing your project yourself is that you can shop around and find the lowest cost designer, editor, printer and so on. The **trade-off**, as with most things, is that in *possibly* saving a few dollars you'll have to put in a lot more effort yourself, both in finding people to help you and then in managing the project. Coordinating everything takes a lot of time, and it can be difficult to make sure everything happens on time and in the right order, especially for your first book.

The other option is to find a **self-publishing company** that not only provides the services you need but also manages the whole process for you – a 'one-stop shop'. This has a number of advantages:

- you only have to deal with one service provider throughout the publication of your book
- you have somebody to guide you at every step of the way, explain what you need to do and what your options are
- the process often runs more smoothly because the self-publishing company has systems in place to manage and coordinate the different stages of the process
- you won't have to worry about the more mundane tasks of publishing your book, such as purchasing an ISBN and barcode.

Most such companies will help authors with developing their manuscript, through editing, layout and printing, proofreading, to ebook formatting, and some offer bookshop distribution as well. Many won't help you **write** your book but will help you refine it once it's written.

If you take up a full package, a full-service company might also actually provide a lower cost option overall when compared to doing it yourself, because managing the whole process introduces efficiencies that can save you money (and time). For example, editing a book can also include some preliminary work on the formatting. At Publish Central, if we edit the book and are also providing the layout, we can prepare the book for our formatting systems during the edit. If the person editing your book doesn't know the systems and requirements of the person doing the design and layout, this can introduce some inefficiencies, with the designer at times having to undo and then re-do some of the preliminary formatting work done by the editor.

Many **technical issues** need to be managed in producing a book, so having everything done in one place can be advantageous. So you may actually find little or no cost advantages in shopping around for individual services.

Think of it like managing a renovation on your house. You can find the architect, the electrician, the plumber, the carpenter and all the other people you need yourself, or you can find a building company that will take care of the whole thing for you.

You will also need to work out a **schedule** for your book. Often the best way to do this is to work out when you need books by and then work backwards.

Here are some general guidelines for how long you can expect each step to take, based on a 35,000-word book that doesn't require a heavy edit or a complicated layout:

- *Editing*: three to five weeks.
- *Internal design and layout*: two to four weeks.
- *Cover design*: two to four weeks (alongside edit and layout).
- *Proofreading*: one to two weeks.
- *Printing*:
  - Black-only interior printed in Australia: two to four weeks.
  - Full-colour interior printed offshore: two to three months.
- *Ebook, print on demand and audiobook formatting and uploading*: two to four weeks.

So, in total, expect your book to take three to four months to go from Word file to you having printed books in your hands.

Keep in mind the following when considering these timelines:

- All steps are done sequentially except for the cover, which is a standalone process and is usually done in parallel with editing and interior layout, so the cover doesn't usually require extra time that you have to factor in.
- The timelines will vary according to the individual book. For a book of 35,000 words being printed in Australia, expect the whole process to arrive at the printed book to take about three months (or maybe a little bit more). If your book is, say, 100,000 words, expect about four months for the printed book.
- You have to be heavily involved every step of the way – the preceding suggested timelines are dependent on you being readily available during the publishing process and you keeping things moving. Often with self-publishing the biggest hold-up is from the self-publisher, because they're trying to fit production of the book in around their job and other commitments.
- These timelines are for guidance only. Every editor, designer, proofreader, self-publishing company and so on will have their own processes and schedules. Make sure you discuss this with them when you're investigating suppliers to ensure they can meet your required deadlines. If you need your book turned around quickly, you may be able to negotiate an express service for an extra fee.

**And here's a very important tip for you:** if your book launch is on 15 April, don't work

out a schedule that gets books delivered to you on 14 April. There are two reasons for this:

- **If any delays occur, you'll have a launch without a book!** It happens! Things can *and do* get held up. Maybe you thought you could get permission to use an extract from another book, but when it was turned down you had to do some rewriting. Maybe the printer discovered a problem with your files. And then there's the unavoidable speed bumps in life: maybe your editor gets sick and needs to take a week off, or you do.

For this reason, I always like to build at least two weeks extra into a schedule between books being printed and the launch. Once when I was working at John Wiley & Sons, due to an extremely tight schedule I once picked books up from the printer at about 6 pm and drove directly to the launch – which was at 7 pm. This is not advisable.

- The second reason is that if you're distributing your book through bookshops, you need to allow time for stock to filter out to stores. Any publicity you get for your launch will be largely wasted if no books are available for people to purchase. It takes a few weeks for stock to be sent out and placed on shelves, so keep this in mind.

I have *never* worked with an author who held their printed book in their hands at the end of the project and said, 'You know what, I really wish I *hadn't* done this.' And usually it's the exact opposite – first-time self-publishers are almost jumping up and down with excitement when their book arrives from the printer. On that day I feel like their new best friend. Writing and self-publishing a book is a great personal achievement and something to be very proud of. Many a bottle of champagne has been drunk when books first arrive. (I *love* that day.)

Yes, time, effort, discipline and financial investment are involved, but every author I work with thoroughly enjoys the process. Yes, all of them. In publishing a book you learn a lot about a whole new industry. You get to meet and work with interesting, creative people. And at the end of it you have a book you can be proud of. I've been involved with many hundreds of books in my life, and I've enjoyed every single one. And I still get excited at the start of a new project and a buzz when the books arrive from the printer. I know you'll love it too.

Thanks for listening.