

I have a traditional publishing contract for three books with Berkley Prime Crime and I am self-publishing other novels. People always ask me about my experiences, and I see a lot of criticism of one route versus the other, so

I wrote this summary to help people compare the options.

Traditional Publishing

Advantages

- Your book will be copyedited and formatted for printing and for ebooks.
- The publisher will create cover art for your book.
- Your book will be assigned an ISBN and book information will be entered in the appropriate places (Bowker, etc.).
- The publisher may get cover quotes from well known authors for you.
- The publisher may send advance reading copies out for reviews.
- The publisher may enter your book in major contests.
- Bookstores may be willing to stock your books.
- More reviewers may be willing to review your books.
- You will not have to pay publishing or distribution costs.
- The publisher will keep records of sales and payments to you.
- The publisher may sell translation, audio, and other rights for you.
- Some publicity will be done for you (at least having your books in a catalog and on the shelves).
- You will automatically have more credibility as an author.

Disadvantages

- In the contract, the publisher will most likely try to secure all rights to all your work for an indefinite period, or at least try to prevent you from publishing other books in the same genre or using the same author name (Don't let them get away with it).
- Your advance is likely to be miniscule (\$1500-\$5000 is typical for a new author), and your books will need to earn that much money before you receive another cent.
- You will receive sales reports twice a year, typically six months after the end of the time period in which sales took place. (In June 2012, I will learn how many of my Berkley books were sold in December 2011.)
- Payment for everything will come when the publisher feels like sending it to you (*always* more than six months after you've earned it). If there's an agent involved, the agent may hold up your checks for even longer and will take 15%.
- Your book may not be published for years after you've delivered it.
- You will have no clue whether the publisher is cheating you or not.
- You will have little or no control over schedule, editorial process, cover art, book title, etc.
- The publisher may not attempt to sell foreign rights or any other subsidiary rights.
- The publisher may choose not to communicate with you or to fix any mistakes that may occur.
- At any time, the publisher may choose not to publicize (or even publish) your book.

Self-Published Ebooks

Advantages

- Your book can be published as soon as you finish writing and editing it.
- You have control over almost everything.
- You get a greater percentage of the book price so you need to sell many fewer books to earn the same amount of money.
Example: For an ebook priced at \$2.99 at Amazon Kindle store, you will get \$2.09 (70%); for a traditional mass market print book priced at \$7.99, you would typically receive \$.63 (8%) and 25% of the (sometimes 'net') ebook price. Yes, this is why you should care about ebooks!
- You will be paid by direct deposit in a reasonable time frame (usually 60-70 days after a month's end, so payments for May would be made in August).
- Your book belongs solely to you.

Disadvantages

- You must do everything yourself, or hire someone else to do it. This includes:
 - ✓ Copyediting, proofreading, and formatting your ebook
 - ✓ Securing an ISBN for print or premium distribution
 - ✓ Getting cover quotes and reviews
 - ✓ Creating cover art (yes, you need a great cover even for an ebook)
 - ✓ Uploading your book to all ebook stores and setting rules for distribution
 - ✓ Formatting for print, and arranging for printing and distribution
 - ✓ ALL promotion and advertising
 - ✓ Selling foreign, audio, and other rights
- Bookstores will most likely not carry your books unless you make them "returnable," and the bookstores that do agree to carry them may charge you a consignment fee.
- Major contests will not take your book (some, like the MWA Edgar contest, won't take it if it's *ever* been self-pubbed, even if it's purchased by a major publisher).
- Most well-known reviewers will not consider reviewing your book.
- Some traditional publishers will have nothing to do with you (although this is changing fast).
- Many people will still believe that self-publishing means your book wasn't good enough for 'real' publication.

If you Go the Traditional Route - How to Find Agents and Editors

The best way to locate appropriate agents and editors is to subscribe to www.PublishersMarketplace.com (\$20/month) and read the news of the deals that agents and editors announce there. Even without a subscription, you can look at the member list of agents and search by genre to find an active one in your category. Then double-check that agent's website to be sure that s/he is currently taking queries like yours. You can also see lists of editors and check their pages to see if they buy manuscripts like yours. Don't be afraid to send a query letter to an editor, either, after you've determined that editor is the one who buys manuscripts in your category. Most editors (or actually, their assistants) will read *letters*. Do not send samples unless you're invited to do so. If you get an offer from an editor, agents will leap at the chance to represent you.

If You Go the Indie Route - Basic Formatting Guide for Ebooks:

<http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/52> (FREE)

Also look on Kindle Direct Publishing and Pubit.com Websites, but if you format according to Smashwords, your ebook should work most places. The basic rules are: no line returns, no tabs, no using blank lines for spacing down, no fancy formatting (fonts, sizes, graphics, etc.), page breaks only in front pages and at chapter ends. A chapter is one long string of text. Remember that the reader can change the font size.

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* You can also upload to Google Ebooks, Apple I-Bookstore, Diesel, etc., but those can be a bit of a pain. For every place you upload (distribute) your own books, you must remember to opt out of that distribution channel on Smashwords.

The Apple Bookstore requires an ISBN. Smashwords will give you an ISBN if you allow them to be listed everywhere as your publisher; if you want to publish under your own publisher name and have the ISBN belong to you, you can purchase an ISBN from them or from Bowker.

When uploading an ebook to an ebook store:

- Read all the steps and the contract carefully. Each site has slightly different requirements, payment percentages, payout times, etc.
- Pay attention to the categories and tags/keywords you select for your book. Make sure these accurately reflect the book so people can find it.
- Make sure the description is intriguing and reflects any awards or honors you've won.
- Set the price carefully. At Amazon, you get 35% of a price below \$2.99; 70% of a price above that. But keep in mind that many readers will not try an unknown author for more than a couple dollars.
- There is currently great pressure to price at \$0.99-2.99. (Really)

Do your best to publicize your book:

- Have a great website with buy links prominently displayed. Easiest, free programs to build websites and blogs: <http://weebly.com> and <http://wordpress.com>
- Blog periodically if you have something useful to say and related to your books. Do not blog about your grandchildren, your food allergies, or your shoes unless you can somehow connect them to your books. My books include themes of outdoor adventure, animals, and investigation, so I blog about hiking, kayaking, snowshoeing, scuba diving, enjoying nature, the wonders of wildlife, occasional writing and editing tips, and things I've learned from being an investigator. My blog is on my website, at www.pamelabeason.com/blog.html

- Ask *everyone* to review your book on online sites.
- Learn to tweet. Set up an account on Twitter.com, but then use a free program like Tweetdeck or Hootsuite to tweet and keep track of all your followers' tweets. Use your author name on Twitter and tweet about things other than selling your book, but be sure to try #SampleSunday—posting a link to a free sample of your book on Sunday. Do not tweet about what you're fixing for dinner unless you're a chef. *Never* tweet something like “Buy my excellent mystery THE ONLY WITNESS.” Instead, you want something like “Can a signing gorilla help find a kidnapped baby? Read excerpt from THE ONLY WITNESS [link here](#) #mystery #suspense.” Make sure your links work before you post them (email yourself and test). See examples of Twitter and Tweetdeck at the end of this handout. Watch for useful #hashtags in the Twitter feed. Explore useful links. You'll find friends and good information on Twitter.
- Set up an author page on Goodreads.com. If you have print versions, consider doing a Goodreads Giveaway. (It's hidden under the little Explore tab toward the right of the screen.)
- Facebook, but don't ask me. I am Facebook-challenged.
- Tell everyone you know.
- Comment (using author name) and guest blog on sites with a lot of traffic.
- Pay attention to mentions of your ebook on the internet (set your Google alerts!), and keep publicizing your book at every opportunity.
- Carry author cards with you (business card or postcard size, or bookmarks) at all times.

THE KINDLE SELECT PROGRAM (AKA KINDLE LENDING LIBRARY)

Amazon currently allows authors to sign up their self-published ebooks in this program, which allows Amazon prime members to borrow these books for free. The rules: Books must be *exclusive* to Amazon for 90 days, authors are paid when someone “borrows” their books, and authors can do five days of giving each books away for free, which may get your book “noticed” and boost sales later. The catch: most “borrows” will be for the more expensive best sellers, you (obviously) don't get paid for the downloads on free days, and your book cannot be on sale anywhere else. Still, Kindle Select can be useful for promotion, but you are helping Amazon gain even more power in the marketplace.

Other Notes

Many authors are ready to tell you the secrets of their success (usually for a fee). Do not be led astray by comparing apples and oranges. Find a successful author in *your category* to learn from.

- ✓ If you are just starting out, you are *not* in the same category as an author who already has name recognition and has a backlist of books.
- ✓ If you are writing fiction, you are *not* in the same category as an author writing nonfiction.
- ✓ If you are writing mysteries, you are *not* in the same category as someone writing paranormal romances.

When considering ANY contract, watch out for the following “gotchas”:

- The term “net” (as in “net profit”) – this is usually not defined and could mean almost anything.
- Locking up your work indefinitely. Any contract should spell out the conditions under which you can exit or have the rights reverted to you.
- Locking in right of first refusal without a time deadline. It's bad enough to have to submit your next book to your publisher or agent before anyone else sees it, but if there's no deadline for them to say Yea or Nay, your career could be held up indefinitely.

- Taking ownership of your characters or your author name.
- And never, never let any publisher have your copyright!

A few good blogs for self-published authors:

On publishing today & self-publishing:

Kristine Kathryn Rusch is another hybrid author (traditional+indie) who tells it like it is: The Business Rusch: <http://kriswrites.com/business-rusch-table-of-contents/>

Joe Konrath's Newbie Guide to Publishing: <http://jakonrath.blogspot.com/>

Bob Mayer's Write It Forward blog: <http://writeitforward.wordpress.com/>

Aaron Shepard's blog & books, especially for POD: <http://www.newselfpublishing.com/>

One I just found with potentially useful info (even from South Africa): <http://www.authopublisher.com/>

Publicity & promotion issues:

Novel Publicity blog: <http://novelpublicity.com/>, then click the Blog tab and select the category from a dropdown list

Kristen Lamb's blog about social media for writers:

<http://warriorwriters.wordpress.com/author/warriorwriters/>

The Ten Awful Truths about Book Publishing

(copied from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bj-gallagher/book-publishing_b_1394159.html)

1. The number of books being published every year has exploded. Bowker reports that [over three million books were published in the U.S. in 2010](#). The number of new print titles issued by U.S. publishers has grown from 215,777 in 2002 to 316,480 in 2010. And in 2010 more than 2.7 million "non-traditional" titles were also published, including self-published books, reprints of public domain works, and other print-on-demand books. In addition, hundreds of thousands of English-language books are published each year outside the U.S.

2. Book industry sales are declining, despite the explosion of books published. Adult nonfiction print unit book sales peaked in 2007 and have declined each year since then, according to BookScan ([Publishers Weekly, January 2, 2012](#)). Similarly, bookstore sales peaked in 2007 and have fallen each year since then, according to the U.S. Census Bureau ([Publishers Weekly, February 14, 2012](#)).

3. Despite skyrocketing e-book sales, overall book sales are still shrinking. "Print Declines Outpace Digital Gains" was the [Publishers Weekly's headline of September 19, 2011](#). For the full year of 2011, a 17.1% decline in print sales outweighed a 117.3% increase in e-book sales, resulting in a 5.8% decline in combined print and e-book sales, according to the Association of American Publishers ([Publishers Weekly, March 5, 2012](#)). Similarly, combined print and e-book sales of adult trade books fell by 14 million units in 2010, according to the [August 9, 2011 BISG BookStats](#)<http://> report. The total book publishing pie is not growing, yet it is being divided among ever more digital and print products.

4. Average book sales are shockingly small, and falling fast. Combine the explosion of books published with the declining total sales and you get shrinking sales of each new title. According to BookScan -- which tracks most bookstore, online, and other retail sales of books (including Amazon.com) -- only 263 million books were sold in 2011 in the U.S. in all adult nonfiction categories combined ([Publishers Weekly, January 2, 2012](#)). The average U.S. nonfiction book is now selling less than 250 copies per year and less than 3,000 copies over its lifetime. And very few titles are big sellers. Only 62 of 1,000 business books released in 2009 sold more than 5,000 copies, according to an analysis by the Codex Group ([New York Times, March 31, 2010](#)).

- 5. A book has less than a 1% chance of being stocked in an average bookstore.** For every available bookstore shelf space, there are 100 to 1,000 or more titles competing for that shelf space. For example, the number of business titles stocked ranges from less than 100 (smaller bookstores) to approximately 1,500 (superstores). Yet there are 250,000-plus business books in print that are fighting for that limited shelf space.
- 6. It is getting harder and harder every year to sell books.** Many book categories have become entirely saturated, with a surplus of books on every topic. It is increasingly difficult to make any book stand out. Each book is competing with more than ten million other books available for sale, while other media are claiming more and more of people's time. Result: investing the same amount today to market a book as was invested a few years ago will yield a far smaller sales return today.
- 7. Most books today are selling only to the authors' and publishers' communities.** Everyone in the potential audiences for a book already knows of hundreds of interesting and useful books to read but has little time to read any. Therefore people are reading only books that their communities make important or even mandatory to read. There is no general audience for most nonfiction books, and chasing after such a mirage is usually far less effective than connecting with one's communities.
- 8. Most book marketing today is done by authors, not by publishers.** Publishers have managed to stay afloat in this worsening marketplace only by shifting more and more marketing responsibility to authors, to cut costs and prop up sales. In recognition of this reality, most book proposals from experienced authors now have an extensive (usually many pages) section on the authors' marketing platform and what the authors will do to publicize and market the books. Publishers still fulfill important roles in helping craft books to succeed and making books available in sales channels, but whether the books move in those channels depends primarily on the authors.
- 9. No other industry has so many new product introductions.** Every new book is a new product, needing to be acquired, developed, reworked, designed, produced, named, manufactured, packaged, priced, introduced, marketed, warehoused, and sold. Yet the average new book generates only \$100,000 to \$200,000 in sales, which needs to cover all of these expenses, leaving only small amounts available for each area of expense. This more than anything limits how much publishers can invest in any one new book and in its marketing campaign.
- 10. The book publishing world is in a never-ending state of turmoil.** The thin margins in the industry, high complexities of the business, intense competition, churning of new technologies, and rapid growth of other media lead to constant turmoil in bookselling and publishing (such as the bankruptcy of Borders and many other stores). Translation: *expect even more changes and challenges in coming months and years.*

The Ten Wonderful Truths About Book Publishing

(copied from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bj-gallagher/book-publishing_b_1394159.html)

- 1. There's money to be made in the book business.** [Book publishing revenues were \\$1,735.3 Billion in 2011.](#) Yes, it declined 2.5% from the previous year's \$1,779.9B, but it's still in the *Billions*. "That dough is going somewhere - some of it can go to you." ([author Dave Zaloski](#))
- 2. You get to work with the most interesting, fascinating, diverse people** you could ever imagine. ([publicist Leslie Rossman](#))
- 3. "Achieving publishing success is 5% writing a good book and 95% marketing."** If you like to get out there and hustle -- "eat, breathe, sleep, and live your book" -- this is a fun way to make a living. Yes, you *can* make a living at it! (authors Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen, [Chicken Soup for the Soul series](#))

4. Desktop publishing and book packagers have democratized book publishing. Anybody with a computer can write and self-publish a book. Access to the book market is no longer concentrated in the hands of big publishing houses. This is good news if you are passionate about the message you have to share with others. Mantra for the brave new world of book publishing: *Just do it.*

5. Books are not going to disappear. Books will always exist in one form or another -- digital, audio, interactive, and more -- though the days of bound pages of ink-on-paper may be numbered. We humans are story-telling creatures with a strong impulse to share our stories with one another, and with future generations. Books, in whatever format, play a vital role in conveying information, data, stories, ideas, and values across generations, cultures, and time.

6. Book publishing is a crap shoot -- a fun, exciting game of chance. There is always an element of luck involved. (It's a lot like Life that way.) Every roll of the dice is a new chance to win -- or lose. If you like excitement and challenge in your life, book publishing is a great game of chance. "But don't go to the table if you can't afford to lose." (author Cathy Conheim)

7. If you like to be creative, resourceful, and think outside the cliché-ridden box, then book publishing can be satisfying and rewarding. Go where the competition ISN'T. Bookstores may not be the best place to sell your book -- nor Amazon. The *Chicken Soup* authors achieved enormous success selling their books in restaurants, pet stores, women's catalogues, dentists' offices, gift shops, supermarkets, and many places other than bookstores. In two years, author Cathy Conheim has moved 35,000 of her [book about a three-legged cat](#) - none of those through bookstores!

8. If you're creative and entrepreneurial, you can build a cottage industry around your book -- with spin-offs like videos and feature length films or TV shows, coffee mugs and t-shirts, bookmarks and calendars, and an endless variety of merchandise. Sometimes you can make more money on the spin-offs than you do on the book!

9. You can use your book to leverage your business, build credibility with your clients, and create name recognition. Writing and publishing a book makes you an "expert" without having a Ph.D. or university affiliation. Even if you lose money on the book, it can still be worth it in terms of increasing your fees, building your client base, selling more of whatever your product is, and building a name for yourself in your chosen field.

10. You get to touch people's lives and make a difference in the world. Getting fan mail from readers touches your heart in a way that is almost indescribable. Getting phone calls, emails, or letters from people whose lives are better for having read your book -- that's the ultimate reward of publishing a book.

So, which list is true? "The Ten Awful Truths About Book Publishing" or "The Ten Wonderful Truths About Book Publishing"? They both are.

FINAL NOTE

Please support all authors, whether traditionally published or self-published. We are all "putting it out there" in a brutal business.

Please do not give your writing away for free unless it's a temporary promotion to increase sales later or to family or friends. Free books set an expectation of low prices among the reading public, reinforce the already prevalent idea that writers don't need to be paid well, and injure all authors who are trying to make a living from their craft.

To support authors, buy books, call bookstores and libraries and ask for their books, write reviews on online sites, and tell everyone about the books you like. Thank you!

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