

WHY SELF-PUBLISH

Self-publishing is an option that was foreign to me when I first thought about becoming an author.

During my membership in the Yadah Yadah Ready to Read Book Club, we hosted a book signing for local authors, and we found that the majority of them were self-published. We didn't learn a whole lot about what that meant, but soon after, most of our book club members attended the *Pen to Paper Literary Symposium* in Dayton, Ohio. Some of the authors there were self-published, some had contracts with publishing houses, and some were operating in both arenas. I soon realized that if I was going to become an author, I had to decide which route to take.

When I actually decided to submit to my calling and write the book, Nawassa, who became my editor, told me it was time I talked to "Bea". Nawassa has a unique ability to get people to do what they are supposed to do.

Anyway, if you read my *Acknowledgements*, you know that "Bea" is now my mentor. I met her before Nawassa brought us together, though, because she was one of the self-published authors the book club hosted, and she went with us to the symposium in Ohio. She went on to teach me the majority of what I know about self-publishing, and now I am sharing it with you.

Why did I go into all that historical detail? I wanted to make the point that many people don't even recognize self-publishing as an option. While selling my books, many people have asked, "Who is your publisher?" When I tell them I am self-published, they express amazement and ask how I did it. When you look on the title page or binding of a book and see a publication name, do you consider that the publisher and author may be the same person?

Since I have become an author and learned so much about self-publishing, I have found that there are thousands of talented, self-published authors out there who are making their mark on the world.

Now, back to the title of this chapter: Why self-publish?

Self-publishing is an option, so consider it.

Whether or not you decide to self-publish should depend upon your publishing goals.

If you are mostly concerned with getting your work to the masses within no particular timeframe, and if you want a big publishing company name behind your work, self-publishing would be a less favorable option for you. You will need to operate within the following parameters if you decide to go through a publishing company:

- Realize that your manuscript may be turned down. Of course, it may not be, but there is a relatively high probability that it will be turned down at least the first time that you submit it. This does not mean that your work is not worthy of publication. Publishing houses receive thousands of manuscripts, so they cannot possibly publish all of them. They also may be looking for a particular type of work to meet their publishing goals, and your manuscript may not fit within the current criteria. In any case, you may have to try multiple publishing companies, and you may have to submit your manuscript multiple times to the same company. Be sure and follow the company's rules for manuscript submission.
- Hire an attorney to negotiate and interpret your contracts, or learn how to do it yourself. Unless you have a law degree or have complete confidence in your ability to interpret literary contracts and legal jargon, I would highly recommend hiring an attorney to do this for you. Each contract is unique in its own right, and you need to ensure that your best interests are represented. You need to understand what will be expected of you (e.g., write three novels within five years, submit drafts to the editor every three months, participate in 20 scheduled book signings a year, etc.). You also need to know what to expect from the publishing

company (e.g., five percent of the cover price of every book sold minus publicity and distribution expenses, etc.). It is absolutely imperative that you know any requirements for modifying, extending or terminating the contract. If you have an agent or attorney representing you on all these things, you certainly want it to be someone you trust.

- Unless the contract states otherwise, understand that editorial content is at the discretion of the publisher. In other words, the publisher may prefer a cover design that is not to your liking. A chapter may be removed, or you may find your character developing into someone you did not intend to produce. One of the great things about going through a publishing company is that you don't have to put up the money. One of the drawbacks is that you may relinquish a certain degree of control.

There are many successful authors out there whose works are published frequently through publishing companies. Who knows, maybe you could be the next Maya Angelou, Jackie Collins, Stephen King or Harold Robbins. Patience and an understanding of the industry are key.

If you want to guarantee publication of your book, maintain total control of nearly every aspect of your creative work, and publish it relatively soon after you write it, then self-publishing is your best option. You will need to operate within the following parameters if you decide to publish your own work:

- All of the expense and hard work is on you. You will set the time frame for completing your book, and unless you have a Nawassa in your corner to hold you accountable, you will need to rely on yourself to get the writing done. You will find an editor. You will cut, revise, edit and expand your work. You will research and find the best printer for your budget, approve the draft and binding, and pay for the

final result. You will market your book. You will schedule the book signings. You will create or hire someone to make the promotional materials. You, or someone you pay, will do it all. It is time-consuming work, but it is a labor of love. And nothing you will need to do is difficult. Thanks to computers and the internet, you can do most of the work yourself. You can even be your own distribution center.

- Although all the work and expenses are on you, all of the revenue is yours as well. You need to establish a publishing company if you want to be recognized throughout the industry as a publisher. You will have to keep good records for tax purposes, and you will need to understand state and federal laws for running a business. If you are planning to publish a book simply as a legacy for your family, such as memoirs for your children and grandchildren, establishing a publishing company is not necessary. You may not be able to claim any of your expenses on your taxes, however. Be sure to check with a tax advisor if this scenario applies to you.

Self-publishing takes time, energy and commitment. If you're ready, let's get started.