

Successful Self Publishing

Unit 1: Making Decisions

There are many reasons for self-publishing your book, and they usually relate to your head, your heart or your wallet.

In order to make your self-publishing venture a success, you need to be very clear about why you are doing it, and what will be required. Your reasons will influence every decision you make, both large and small.

Sherryl Clark

Sherryl has 27 commercially published books, a dozen self-published books and over 100 books she has helped others to produce.



*Her expert experience covers small press books to major publishers such as Penguin. Her Successful Self-Publishing, (Hale & Iremonger, 1997) is a bible in self-publishing circles.
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Which of the following best describes you?

- A lasting record of your achievement (this might be a family history or twenty years of your poetry writing)
- Your first step towards being published commercially (you are entering a competitive arena – do you understand the publishing industry?)
- You have something to say (a political commentary perhaps – have you studied the libel laws?)
- You have specialised knowledge that you believe you can sell (are you good at selling? Do you understand the marketplace?)
- Publishing with/for others (do you have the terms in writing? Who owns the copyright?)

The pros and cons of self-publishing:

- You are in total control of the cover, design and contents – you are also totally to blame!
- You have to come up with the money to pay for it all – but you get to keep all of the profits (and if you're sensible, you certainly won't make a loss)
- If you want to sell nationally, you will have to wrestle with distributors and bookshops and they will take a large portion of your cover price
- There are lots of small 'marketplaces' where you can sell your book successfully and commercial publishers can't (it can be an advantage to be small)
- It provides the opportunity to experiment, to create and publish outside the mainstream, to offer something new and different to the world.

Is it a feasible project?

It is a simple matter these days to produce a great-looking book for a reasonable cost. This is due to advances in technology – you no longer need to pay a typesetter, or incur large base costs for printing plates that force you into huge print runs.

You are able to do a small print run and, when you have sold all your copies, you immediately have the money to print more.

The things that will save you money include doing your own typesetting and page design (you need good computer skills and equipment), using a printer who will print text on a Docutech rather than an offset press (which means you can do very small print runs), and doing your own cover design (this is one thing you should pay an experienced person for if you aren't sure – a poor cover will probably kill your book).

Problems occur when:

- You want to include photos or illustrations in colour
- When you are using materials or text for which you need permission
- When your fantasy of being a best-selling novelist overtakes the reality of fiction publishing and marketing.

What if you don't want to sell your book?

You are in the best possible position for a self-publisher! You can produce a small print run, to the best of your financial capacity and book-making ability, and happily give it away to friends, family and whoever is interested. You can even make your books by hand – how special is that?

Warning. You may well find that so many people want it, you could end up in a position where you will *have* to sell it!

ACTION ACTIVITY

Answer the following questions – take time to think about them clearly and be completely honest about this process because, if you aren't, it will lead you to make poor production decisions.

1. What kind of book is it?

Describe it in one compelling sentence, e.g. it's the story of my grandmother's life in a Siberian prison camp and how she survived to invent icecream. This will be your primary selling tool when people start asking. That's when you get their name and address for the launch and pre-orders.

2. Who will buy it? Where will you sell it?

This is crucial – you should make up a list of all *serious* potential buyers that you can access yourself. Do not include bookshops unless you plan an extensive marketing campaign and are prepared to risk substantial money. Also ask yourself if you are honestly capable of selling – to friends *and* strangers.

3. Have you got a great title?

An important selling tool.

4. How many will you print?

This depends on the answer to Question 2. Take this number, add 20%, do not pass Go yet.

5. How will you produce your book?

This answer depends mostly on your responses to the first four questions, and your computer skills. You also want your book to compete in your chosen marketplace and look as good as possible, so now answer Question 6.

6. How much money do you have to spend on your book?

There are many ways to save money through alternate printing methods. Later we will look at some of these in more detail.

When you have confidently answered all these questions, you are on your way to publishing your book!