



13 THINGS

BEGINNERS NEED TO KNOW

about self-publishing

1

DO YOUR RESEARCH FIRST

People have been self-publishing long enough now to have an idea about what works and what doesn't work, so there's a lot of information out there to be had. This also means that there's a lot of information to sift through. You'll need some basic knowledge though, so don't skip research, thinking it's all too hard. Those with the knowledge and the plan tend to get the best results. These three people are big names in self-publishing: Nick Stephenson, Mark Dawson, Joanna Penn. Start by looking them up. If you can afford their courses, do them. If not, just buy their books or read their blogs.

2

GET AWESOME GRAPHICS

'Don't judge a book by its cover,' they say. Rubbish. I do, you do, we all do. Your cover and associated graphics must be as professional and genre-appropriate as possible. A dodgy, unprofessional cover will tell readers not to bother. This is where you should spend money, if you have it. If you don't have any, or only a little bit, try [fiverr.com](https://www.fiverr.com) or head to [canva.com](https://www.canva.com) for some inexpensive DIY tools and research, research, research what makes a good book cover in your particular genre. It's also good to have some other useful graphics in a style or branding that matches your cover, for things like your website, newsletters or value-adding downloads.

3

GET AWESOME PAGE FORMATTING

Getting book pages to look right is almost as important as the cover. There are hidden tricks in page design, and if you don't know them, you can look like an amateur, especially if your book is going to print. If you must do it yourself, choose a template like those from www.bookdesigntemplates.com and follow their instructions. Otherwise, pay a designer to do it for you. Again, this is where it's worth spending money.

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4

GET A GOOD EDITOR

Your cover can be great, your page layout can be amazing, your sales funnel can be fine-tuned, but if your writing is no good, your story isn't structured well, and your characters are one-dimensional, people will be disappointed. If your work is riddled with typos and grammatical errors, they'll hate you. It's likely that they will close your book and never open it again. Good editing and proof-reading is absolutely essential, and worth paying for.

5

STEER CLEAR OF VANITY PUBLISHERS

There are a thousand so-called 'vanity publishers' out there who will take your money and leave you with a sub-standard book that won't sell, and that you have no control over going forward. If a publisher is asking you to help pay the costs of publishing your book, run the other way. If they promise editing and publicity, it probably won't be as good a job as you can do or have done under your own steam. Don't get excited about someone who wants to 'publish' your book if you've never heard of them: it's likely they aren't in it to further *your* career.

6

HAVE REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS

Self publishing can be hard, and discouraging. I only say that to warn you against high expectations that can easily be dashed. It's unlikely that your book is going to sell thousands of copies in its first year. But don't give up. If you do your research, work on your writing, use a great designer, and follow some of the tried-and-true systems that have worked for others, there's no reason why you can't do well.

7

CREATE A MAILING LIST AND A SALES FUNNEL

Collecting the email addresses of fans and readers is the best way to keep in touch with them. If you plan to write more books, your 'list' is key to making more sales in the future. Direct email sales are known to be more effective than advertising and hoping. There are many, many programs and apps you can use to set up a 'signup' page. Some are free, some are costly. You'll need to see what works for you. As people sign up, they'll need to be welcomed by email, with information about you and your books. You'll need an online presence of some kind, whether that's a website or social media page. Using an automated emailing system is going to save you valuable time and getting the content of emails right is super important. Again, do your research. There is a lot of information out there about 'sales funnels' and 'reader magnets'.



8 THE TECHNICAL STUFF ISN'T THAT HARD: HOW TO UPLOAD YOUR BOOK TO AMAZON

Open an account with Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP), and upload your files and blurb to the KDP dashboard. It's reasonably straightforward and user friendly. KDP will convert your Word file into a .mobi file for you as part of the process. You get to set a price for your book, and tick the box to enrol it in KU or not. E-books can be published exclusively to Amazon and enrolled in its 'Kindle Unlimited' (KU) program. This is a subscription program where Amazon readers pay a set fee per month and are able to pick up as many 'Unlimited' books as they like. Authors enrolled in KU are paid based on 'page reads' rather than receiving a percentage of the book price. This has some advantages; for one, you may get more readers. The disadvantages are that readers on other platforms (Kobo, iBooks, Nook) are not able to access it. Also, you are not able to sell the ebook yourself. Is it better to stay exclusive (in KU) or 'go wide' (on all the channels)? The choice is up to you.

9 HOW TO PUBLISH YOUR E-BOOK TO OTHER CHANNELS

You could spend time figuring out all the ins and outs of uploading to all the ebook platforms, or you could use an 'aggregator' which will do it for you. Draft 2 Digital is a platform that will do it for you, as is Smashwords. You'll need to visit both and decide which looks easier for you.

10 HOW TO PUBLISH AS A PAPERBACK

Using a 'Print On Demand' (POD) service is standard these days. In the old days, authors did a print run of thousands of books, but POD allows you to buy only as many books as you need at one time. Three popular POD services are CreateSpace (associated with Amazon), Ingram Spark, and Lulu. CreateSpace is good quality, and printing costs are cheap, but if you're publishing out of the US, postage is expensive. With Lulu, like CreateSpace, it costs nothing to set up the book, but in the past, I have not been impressed with their bindings, which have fallen apart quickly. I recommend Ingram Spark for quality, however, the uploading of cover files can be tricky, and there is a setup fee per title. Again, the choice is yours. Decide which POD service you'll use and open an account with them. Choose a size and binding type for your book. Upload your files. When you've set up the title, always order a proof copy to check for errors.

11 UNDERSTAND BOOK PRICING

RRP stands for Recommended Retail Price. The RRP of your paperback book needs to be at least 50-60 percent more than your printing and postage costs. If you are ever hoping to get your paperback into a bricks-and-mortar bookstore, the owner will expect to purchase your book at their standard book seller discount of approximately 45-50 percent, thus allowing them to pay their costs, and make a small profit. If you're only ever going to sell your book to family and friends, and don't want to worry about bookstores, set your price at whatever you think people will pay versus what you hope or want to make per copy. E-book prices vary wildly, depending on the genre and the length of book. Take some time to look at similar titles and set your price accordingly. Once again, a lot has been written about pricing, and it is worth doing some research.

12 ISBN NUMBERS

If you're publishing e-books, you don't need an official ISBN number. Amazon and the aggregators (D2D and Smashwords) will provide a number for you. Print publishing needs an ISBN, however. Some Print On Demand services will supply them, but others may not. You can purchase your own ISBNs online.

13 THE ANSWERS ARE OUT THERE

Anytime you're tempted to give up because you don't know what to do or you don't know how things work, take a deep breath. The answer is out there, I promise you. If you're asking a question like, 'How do I sell my books?' you may not find a simple one-sentence solution that will work like magic, but if you're prepared to look, and read, and think, you will find answers that will work for you. There are Facebook groups about self-publishing you can join, forums you can read, and courses you can do.

If you need some hints as to direction, I'm happy to answer your emails and point you towards good resources to help you in your self-publishing journey. And of course, when you need editing, get in touch.

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