

The Four Paths To Publishing

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The ever-changing nature of the publishing industry has produced four clear paths for authors to achieve their publishing goals.

The past decade has brought about more upheaval in the publishing industry than the previous four hundred years combined. There weren't many ground-breaking innovations from the time Gutenberg invited the printing press through the introduction of the paperback (about eighty years ago). However, over the course of the last decade, the publishing world has undergone an indie revolution similar to what occurred in the film and music industries.

With the introduction of desktop publishing, print-on-demand technology, and the internet as a direct-to-consumer distribution channel, publishing became a service consumers could purchase instead of an industry solely dependent on middlemen (agents) and buyers (traditional publishers). In addition, the growth of e-books and digital readers has accelerated change, because physical stores are no longer the only way for authors to connect with readers.

While these changes have made now the best time in history to be an author, they have also made it one of the most confusing times to be an author.

Not that long ago, there was only one way to get published: find an agent; hope he or she would represent you; pray they sell your book proposal to a publisher; trust the publisher to get behind the book and believe in the project; and hope that readers would go to their local bookstore and buy your book. This description of traditional publishing (or what some now call legacy publishing) is still a viable path for authors today, but now there are three other distinct paths an author can pursue to get published: DIY, General Contractor, and Supported Self-Publishing. Each of these could be labeled as self-publishing, but each offers distinct advantages.

Let's look at each of these paths and compare their advantages and disadvantages.

1) DIY Publishing

DIY—which stands for Do It Yourself—is a self-publishing option in which an author uses an upload tool like Lulu to create a book and get it into distribution. Some of these solutions may be e-book only or have limited distribution, but if you follow through, you can get your book formatted and available for sale in at least one format and through at least one online retailer. Many of these options are promoted as “free” to publish, but there is a misperception that DIY means you don't have to spend any money. Sure, it's possible to publish at no cost, but it's not recommended. Even if you choose the DIY path, you should have your book edited, and you will likely have to spend something on marketing.

ADVANTAGE:
Usually the least amount of financial investment needed to publish a book in at least one format.

DISADVANTAGES:
Formats and distribution can be limited. Most options do not have any professional services available, so an author has to find the services needed to complete the project apart from the publishing solution.

2) General Contractor

The second option an author can pursue is the General Contractor publishing path. This requires hiring a number of independent service providers such as an editor, book designer, publicist, etc. and coordinating those activities. (See Sample List of Publishing Tasks.)

Typically, you will need to obtain separate quotes for the work, and it'll most likely require more of a financial investment than DIY. More importantly, if you decide to be your own general contractor, it will take significantly more time to manage the process and coordinate the activities.

You also have the option of hiring someone to be your general contractor. As this option emerged, a number of people began to promote themselves online as “publishing consultants.” These self-proclaimed consultants usually have some publishing experience but don't typically offer any services themselves.

Depending on which services you choose and which vendors you use, this option can require the largest financial investment of any of the publishing paths and can take the most amount of time to manage.

ADVANTAGE:
You select the individuals who work on every aspect of your book.

DISADVANTAGES:
Can require the most time and money, depending on the scope of the project.

SAMPLE LIST OF PUBLISHING TASKS

- Write book
 - Create title
 - ISBN
 - Copyright or protect
 - Edit
 - Cover design
- Interior design
 - E-book formatting
 - Illustrations
 - Cover copy
 - Distribution for print formats
- Distribution for digital formats
 - Print books
 - Ship books
 - Sell books
 - Track royalties
- Website
 - Social media
 - Publicity
 - Events
 - Video interview
 - Video trailer

These are just some of the tasks that are needed to get a book published and promoted, so you need to know how much work you want to do yourself versus having someone else do it.

3) Supported Self-Publishing

The third way you can get your book ready for sale is to work with a supported self-publishing company whose bundles of services help you get your book and cover designed in print and digital formats, in distribution, and available for sale. In addition, these companies typically offer a full menu of professional services for publishing, promoting, and selling your book. Most Author Solutions’ imprints, including AuthorHouse, iUniverse, and Xlibris, fall into this category. The biggest advantage to this publishing path is it’s a one-stop shop for everything you need to meet your publishing goal. Sure, it requires a financial investment, but because there’s a range of package offerings and price points, it’s apparent from the start what you’ll get and what it will cost. This transparency is not always possible with the General Contractor path, because you won’t know what you’ll need to spend until you get all your estimates.

Another advantage of the Supported Self-Publishing path is that there’s only one central place to call. Plus, with a place like Author Solutions, you have 24/7 customer service available. In addition, you have only one vendor relationship to manage no matter how many services you use. With the General Contractor path, you’ll likely have multiple vendors, which can take considerably more time to manage.

ADVANTAGE:
One-stop shop for everything you need to publish, promote, and distribute your book, and you have selection, service, and convenience.

DISADVANTAGES:
Can require the most time and money, depending on the scope of the project.

4) Traditional Publishing

The fourth path, Traditional (or legacy publishing), was the path discussed earlier. Historically, if you had a manuscript or book proposal, you needed to find an agent to represent you. Then, he or she would take the project to publishers with the intent to sell it and get an advance against future royalties. Unlike the first three paths, where you retain your rights to the content, you give your rights to traditional publishers, so you don’t have the same degree of control of your book as you do with the DIY, General Contractor, or Supported Self-Publishing paths. In addition, publishers can take a long time to evaluate, select, and actually publish a book, so you’ll need to be patient and resilient if this is the path you want to pursue.

If you do find a traditional publisher who wants your work, you’ll likely find they can improve upon it due to their experience. They may also have a sales force in place to push certain books to retailers, so you may find support from them that you won’t have if you self-publish. However, as a result of the changing publishing landscape, traditional publishers are now looking at self-published books as a source of content. In fact, if you watch the headlines, you’ll see publishers acquiring the rights to titles from all three of the self-publishing paths we’ve discussed.

ADVANTAGE:
You may get an advance, and the publisher will typically improve your manuscript using their editorial expertise. Plus, they may have a sales force to push you book.

DISADVANTAGES:
Fewer new titles and authors are being traditionally published, so the odds of getting “picked up” are reduced. It usually takes the longest time of any of the options to get to market.

A simple illustration to help you better understand your options

Now that you understand the four paths to publishing, here’s a simple way to think about them as you compare your options: Think about your publishing options the way you do meal options.

Your first option is to make a meal at home, which is typically your least-expensive option. However, you’re limited by your own ability, knowledge of the cooking process, and the availability of ingredients. Cooking at home is similar to DIY publishing.

Your second choice is to go to a food or salad bar at a grocery store. There, someone has prepared a variety of options for you, and you pay based on what you select. You don’t do the same amount of work you do at home. You’ll pay more, but you meet your needs. The General Contractor path is a lot like this option.

The third option is visit a full-service restaurant. Not only will you have food prepared, but you have a menu of packaged options to choose from. In addition, you’ll have people available to cook for you, serve you, and clean up after you’re finished. You’ll pay more for the restaurant salad than you will for the salad you make at home, but you’re not simply paying for the ingredients. You’re also paying for the preparation, service, and convenience. Supported self-publishing companies are like restaurants. Comparing the costs of these publishing paths is like comparing the cost of making a salad at home versus having it made in a restaurant. While each uses similar ingredients, they’re different experiences.

So how does traditional publishing fit into this illustration? It’s like going to a fine-dining restaurant and having someone pick up the tab for you. The only caveat is they’ll decide who eats at the restaurant and will have final say about what’s on your plate. That’s not necessarily bad, but it certainly doesn’t give you the control you have with the other three options.

| PUBLISHING PATH | LIKE |
|---------------------------|--|
| DIY | Making a meal at home |
| GENERAL CONTRACTOR | Going to a grocery store food or salad bar |
| SUPPORTED SELF-PUBLISHING | Going to a full-service restaurant |
| TRADITIONAL | Having someone order and pay for you at a restaurant |

Choosing a publishing path is like choosing how you want to eat a meal. There are trade-offs between convenience and cost to consider.

How do you know which path is best for you?

Now that you understand your options and have a handy analogy,
you need to make sure you're clear on four key items.

Goals and expectations:

If your measure of success is New York Times Best Seller and appearance on the Today show, then no matter what path you pursue, you'll likely be disappointed. Set realistic goals for what you would like to see happen with your book, and be realistic about what you might be able to achieve. There is no perfect system to predict which books will be breakout hits, so publish the best book you can, market it to a clearly defined audience, and stay committed to your work.

Skills and experience:

While there are options for you to do things by yourself, you should leave it to professionals if you don't have the skills or experience needed to format your book or earn publicity. Hire experts

or work with an author-services company so you publish the best book possible and give yourself the best opportunity for success.

Time commitment:

How much is your time worth? This is a key question when it comes to publishing, because getting your book into the market will take time. If you want to manage the process yourself, you can, but many people choose author-services companies because they provide the most convenient and easy way to get a book into the market.

Budget:

As with any purchasing decision, you should have a budget in mind when you are ready to publish.

The best time in history for authors and readers will only get better.

Not that long ago, few people could get published, but now everyone can get published if they pursue one of the four paths. If you look at the transformation that has taken place in the film and music industry, you'll see content creation in those industries has exploded, which has given consumers more choices than ever before. Most importantly, new careers have been launched, many of which might not have happened had there not been a revolution.

Publishing is in the middle of its own revolution, and while these paths don't guarantee success, they do give everyone the chance to be successful.



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Keith Ogorek • *President, Author Learning Center*

As an industry thought leader, Ogorek has helped drive a number of significant innovations in the self-publishing industry and is featured in the book, *Innovation--How Innovators Think, Act and Change Our World*. He also has authored three books, *A Clear View*, *Eli the Stable Boy* and *7 Secrets of Successful Self-Published Authors* and written a number of helpful white papers including the popular *4 Paths to Publishing* and *Three Phases of an Effective Book Marketing Campaign*. You will also find him speaking at leading industry events such as the Indie and Digital Author conference, Textbook and Academic Authoring Conference, The Singapore Writer's Festival, Havana Book Fair and the Florida Writers Conference. In addition, he is a regular webinar presenter for The *Author Learning Center*.