

## Notes on Self-Publishing

From Chris Eirschele

First, what does self-published mean to you? Terminology can confuse the topic.

Are you using a system like Amazon Digital or Amazon CreateSpace or Smashwords? Are you using a print on demand service, which is also considered self publishing in some respects/in some circles? Will it be an ebook or in print?

Some people think that if it is an ebook, it is self published. Wrong. But I think, unless you have a particular publisher behind it, the mis-perception is there.

Here are links of my books to use as examples. Recently a writer-friend [posted a review of my Kid-Gardener's Planting Book](#). In it, there are links to Amazon and to Smashwords. Though I did not self publish this book, Victoria Nicks (Decoded Plants) did use the tools a self publisher could. This book was published through Amazon CreateSpace, put on Kindle ebook, but also put into print, both in color and in black and white. It was also published in Smashwords, a tool many self-publishers use. That form of ebook can be used by readers, not of a Kindle nature.

My first ebook, [Garden Truths From My Family Stories](#) was only published using Amazon Digital Services. Made only for a Kindle for all practical purposes. I did this book all myself. I took one piece of advice, I put a lot of effort into creating a rock'in good book cover. I must have been successful in that, because I got a lot of compliments about it. I hired Victoria Nicks (before I worked for her) to help. The photos were mine, but she input a lot of creative juice into the idea.

I lack computer tech. prowess. I am very bad with it. So, using even the so-called "simple" Amazon system was difficult for me. I did have some back up peeps who stood by to answer questions, but it was hard non-the-less. (Stressful would not be exaggerating the situation.)

For instance, Smashwords is respected for the audience it reaches. But I was unwilling to tackle, posting it with that system.

Editing is sooooo very important. And I do not mean by a friend, even a writer-friend. Though, beta readers are useful. Even though my second book went through many editing processes, (first as articles, then together in a book) I have come to believe that for my fiction book, I want more. People editing that are cold-hearted.

So in self-publishing, 1.) Know what you mean. Know what you want. 2.) Put a lot

of effort and \$\$ into the book's cover. And the back cover with short reviews, if it is being printed. (Having seen both your books you must know this already.) 3.) Editing by a coldly objective source, which might have to be paid for. 4.) Have tools in place to promote your book over the long haul. (I like what you did with your blog, blending it all into a website where your books are found, too. I learned about this idea at bookcamp-though my situation is slightly different. I want to blend my nonfiction with fiction, gardening being the connecting link in my brand.)

Here is another [team of self publishers, pen name is MJ Williams](#). I know Peggy Williams from Suite days, and we have stayed connected. (She lives in Wisconsin.) Her fiction books are on Kindle and in print, (I know because I wrote a review on the first one for a Suite section back in the day.)

## **8 Things I've Learned From Self-Publishing**

**From Diane Laney Fitzpatrick**

Since I went through the self-publishing process the first time, in 2013, I've had probably a dozen people ask me to share my experience and some do's and don'ts. Unfortunately, I didn't save what I wrote and had to rewrite it all every time someone else asked me.

So looking back, I can kind of summarize it in eight main points.

### **1. It's not for losers anymore.**

I wrote *Home Sweet Homes* in its first incarnation in 2008. I ruled out self-publishing because I thought it was just a vanity press run amok and I had no interest in being a self-published author. I spent a year putting together queries for 40+ publishers and 30+ agents. It went nowhere, so I set the book down for four years. And in that four years a funny thing happened with self-publishing. It cleaned up its act, it became easier to put out a quality book on your own, and readers were hard pressed to see the difference.

So I went into it full-force with the idea that it was really my only option. Some writers will tell you they "chose" to self publish because of the freedom, the independence, the higher royalties, the blah-blah-blah. Not me. I self-published because I couldn't get my book out any other way. And I decided a) I wanted to see my book in print and b) it would be a fun project to see how the process worked.

In the past three years, self-publishing has evolved even more. It's still looked down on by some accomplished writers, and the market is flooded with books that aren't top-notch, but it's not the ugly step-sister it once was.

### **2. Research your publisher carefully.**

There are at least 57 varieties of self-publishing companies out there, all with their own level of support and division of responsibility between you and them. If you find a publisher that sounds great and their rep talks them up and their website is smashing, go one step further and Google the company's name and the

word “problems.” You’ll find every disgruntled author and learn more than you’ll ever want to know about what could go wrong. Not that you won’t end up going with them in the end, but you have to know what exactly you’re dealing with.

I self-published both my books through CreateSpace. It has pros and cons.

Pros include:

- Author sets her own price and can change it at will.
- You get lots of perks on Amazon.
- Their fees are competitively priced.
- You get lots of support both in choosing the publishing package you want and throughout the process. CreateSpace has improved over the past few years. I talked by phone to my team quite often. The automated stuff has been reduced.

Cons include:

- No hardbacks, only paperback and e-books.
- I’ve seen slicker, more professional covers on books published elsewhere.
- CreateSpace is an Amazon company and bookstores won’t carry your book if they see it’s published by Amazon aka Satan himself.

Which brings me to #3:

### **3. Create your own imprint.**

If you do end up publishing with CreateSpace, you can use them to publish, but create your own little publishing company, your imprint, call it whatever you want, and the book will show it’s published by that, not CreateSpace. In fact, CreateSpace will show up nowhere on the book information, so you’re effectively hiding your Amazon ties. This is legit, done all the time, and is not seen as being dishonest.

### **4. Don’t be dishonest.**

I have a writer friend who tells everyone his book was published by Such and Such Press, which he describes as a “small publisher in Oakland.” Yeah, it’s small alright. And it’s in his living room in his apartment in Oakland. He created his own imprint but took it one step further and pretends like he got a legitimate publishing contract. And it gets better: He gives people the business card of his

agent, who is a made-up person with a fake name, a fake agency name and an email address. He answers emails under this fake agent's name. He told me someone gave him the advice that if he wanted to be taken seriously as an author, he had to come across as a serious author with some cred.

Don't do this. Please. Or I'll have to not be your friend anymore. ;) The biggest problem with that strategy is that you have effectively capped your success. If you ever want to be "discovered" and make it *really* big with a *real* contract and a *real* agent, it's going to come out that your early claims were BS. And that's going to be the extent of your success. The day a hot shot publisher calls Tim's agent and realizes he doesn't exist and that Such and Such Press isn't a publishing company at all, but simply an imprint, he'll see him for what he is, a blowhard, and that will be the end of that.

The advice he got to make himself appear more important than he actually is was just plain wrong.

## **5. Avoid scams and be careful because they're very well disguised.**

Morgan James is one company I would warn you away from. I almost fell prey to them, because they were so complimentary to me, stroked my ego and convinced me that my book was going to sell like hotcakes if I would just sign here . . .

They are in Manhattan, so they are right in claiming to be a "New York publisher." They offer all kinds of cool perks like they'll have voice talent record an audio-book of your book. Royalties are good, they put you on a speakers bureau where you can charge for speaking engagements, it's all very promising. Until the red flags start popping up.

First they told me I'd have to remove all swear words from my manuscript because X% of their titles are Christian. (Oookaay, but what does that have to do with me and my not Christian book?) Then they told me they couldn't give me any numbers on what I could expect from bookstore sales. Then they told me my only financial obligation would be to buy X number of my own books. And it was a ridiculously high number. I pictured my basement filled to the rafters with every copy of my book in existence.

I think Morgan James is in a new category of publishers that are self-publishers in disguise. They don't take your money up front, but they get it somehow, so that the risk is all on you and not on them.

## **6. Spend 99 percent of your money on great editing.**

A well edited book can make it undistinguishable from a mainstream published book. Get recommendations from professional author groups or look in the acknowledgements in the back of a book that you love, see if the editor is mentioned and look him or her up and see if they do freelance editing.

I would recommend three rounds of editing: For content and proofreading.

I used Angie Kiesling from [Editorial Attic](#). She has teams of freelance editors and she'll assign your book to the editors she thinks will do the best job in your genre, and then she steps in and does additional rounds of editing herself.

## **7. Learn social media marketing and branding.**

Even the big authors don't get their publishers to do their marketing for them anymore. Building your brand and putting effort into social media marketing is really the only way to sell books now. And as a self-published author you're on equal footing with the big dogs, except they have more money to spend to have experts help them do it. I learned a ton about brand, my platform, and marketing from the San Francisco Writers Conference, which I would invite all of you to – you can stay at my house! It's in February every year. I've been there twice and skipped this year because I was seeing a lot of repeats. The best thing about it is you get to pick the brains of some high-powered experts for free.

It's an exciting world, but even if you figure out what you *should* do, finding the time to actually do it is another story.

## **8. Let's see ... what else?**

Self-publishing isn't for everyone. But if you can't get a real publishing house to take on your book, give it a try. Self-publishing doesn't mean your book can't ever get picked up and republished elsewhere. When you self-publish you own the rights to your book. There are fine-print limits, but for the most part, you're not limiting your book's future by self publishing. In fact, "they" say that if you can show impressive results from a self-published book, a publisher is more likely to take on your second book. Because you're a known entity.