

**“An Introduction to Successful Self-publishing”**

**Notes from a talk by Debbie Young**

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*What exactly does it mean to self-publish these days? Would the indie route be a good fit for you and your books? Do you have the skills and the mind-set to make it work?*

*Find out with Debbie Young’s lightning tour of the seven stages of the self-publishing process: editorial, design, production, distribution, marketing, promotion and rights licensing. Debbie will also debunk myths and misconceptions and answer questions about any aspect of self-publishing.*

*Shortlisted for The Selfies Award 2020, given for the best independently-published fiction in the UK, Debbie will draw on her own experience and on case studies from members of the Alliance of Independent Authors, for whom she is UK Ambassador.*

*This talk is suitable for anyone at any stage of their author career, from those still writing their first book to experienced authors with multiple titles, whether published traditionally or independently.*

**JUST JUDGED SAW’S BARBARA HAMMOND PRIZE FOR BEST SELF-PUBLISHED BOOK**

- Many Scottish authors already successfully self-publishing
- Some great role models within SAW such as Wendy H Jones – also Barry Hutchison aka JD Kirk, Chris Longmuir, & Linda Gillard
- Rising stars apparent in the books I’ve just read
- Always room for more and always more to learn
- Whatever stage you’re at, I hope this talk will help you, whether as a beginner’s guide or as a refresher course

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SELF-PUBLISH?**

- Misnomer: suggests DIY/IKEA Flatpack
- Real meaning: you are your own publisher – no agent, no trade publishing contract
- Nor is it vanity publishing, where you submit your ms to a printer and uncritically they print a large quantity of copies in a one-off deal for you to take away and sell on your own (or fill your spare bedroom with!)
- Self-publishing covers many formats: ebook, paperback, hardback, audio – not just ebooks
- An author-publisher is like an actor-manager
- Not new concept: Twain, Dickens, Woolf, Potter
- You take responsibility for all component parts of publishing process:
  - Writing
  - Editing
  - Design
  - Production
  - Distribution
  - Marketing
  - Promotion
  - Rights sales (We’ll talk about these more shortly)

**UNLIKE TRADE PUBLISHING, SELF-PUBLISHING IS AUTHOR-CENTRIC & THE BUCK STOPS WITH THE AUTHOR!**

## **C21<sup>ST</sup> TECHNOLOGIES ENABLE NEW-STYLE SELF-PUBLISHING – not at all like vanity publishing**

(The opposite of Virginia Woolf with her printing press in her kitchen!)

How can we publish our books worldwide in all the different formats without leaving our homes? (just as well in lockdown – and why indie publishers have been able to continue their business pretty much undisturbed by the pandemic, unlike big publishers who had to postpone lots of their new publications)

- Internet retailing > global market reach
- Rise of dedicated ereader, then free ereader app accessible on phones & tablets> new/bigger market for books
- New subscription models making reading more affordable & accessible
- POD for affordable production & distribution without need for bulk orders, inventory & P&P

### **WHAT DOES SUCCESSFUL SELF-PUBLISHING LOOK LIKE?**

You define your own terms and be your own judge – what would you need to achieve to consider yourself successful?

- Money?
- Readership?
- Reviews?
- Legacy?
- Bookshop presence?
- Rights sales?
- Bestseller ranks?
- Awards

Any one of these or any combination is valid

Professor Alison Baverstock of Kingston University's Publishing MA programme:

*“A print run of one can make the right self-publishing project a success”*

### **BUSINESS MODELS FOR SUCCESSFUL SELF-PUBLISHING**

If you decide to treat your self-publishing as a business, trying to reach as many readers as you can, rather than as a hobby for your own private pleasure, there are different business models available to you.

Orna Ross, founder & director of the Alliance of Independent Authors, talks about the Three Hats Model: maker/manager/entrepreneur

- Books only, single outlet, fast release
- Books wide and in all formats & rights (wide means all platforms: Amazon, Apple, Kobo etc)
- Books + event speaking/writing for journals, guest blogs etc
- Books + courses
- Books + self-publishing services
- Books + membership club extras
- Books + patronage (Patreon)
- Books + affiliate marketing
- - or any combination of the above!

I'm the third of those – I have my books wide in all formats – print, ebook & audio – and also enjoy journalism (I write for Ingram Spark and for Mslexia) & public speaking. But writing my books is my first love and my priority, rather a purely financial goal.

## **7 COMPONENT STAGES OF SELF-PUBLISHING**

- After writing: must be best it can be – it's your product
- 1. Editorial: structural, line, proofreading
- 2. Design: interior, cover
- 3. Production: ebook/pbook/abook
- 4. Distribution: choose online & physical platforms
- 5. Marketing: author platform & long-term strategy
- 6. Promotion: short-term boosts
- 7. Rights: making most of assets globally

### **HOW DO YOU MASTER ALL OF THESE THINGS? BUILD A TEAM!**

- Like big publishing houses, assemble team of experts in specialisms to ensure professional standards  
OR farm out whole project to a full-services agency to manage for you

### **HOW TO CHOOSE (AND KEEP) YOUR TEAM**

- Avoid sharks
- Don't assume cost = quality
- Network with other authors for recommendations & references
- Build long-term relationships
- Google "complaints" and company name!
- Check quality via ALLi's Directory of Services
- Treasure them and build long-term relationships/partnerships

### **COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID**

- Publishing too soon/not editing enough, assuming readers will forgive errors
- Spending so much time editing you never publish
- Using the wrong partners eg your mum to edit, an artist for your cover
- Not taking time to learn the skills you'll need
- Pricing your book out of the market
- ONTO MARKETING - Not taking control of your online presence via a website
- Trying to do too much marketing: pick one or two things you enjoy
- Assuming if your first book isn't a success, you've failed: marketing gets easier with every additional book you publish
- Targeting writers, not readers
- Assuming the reader thinks like you do eg not publishing ebooks because you don't read them
- Assuming that if you go the traditional route, you don't have to do any marketing or publicity

## **KEEP UP WITH INDUSTRY CHANGES**

- But always with the author at heart
- Owe it to self to keep up to date
- Early adopters do best
- Supportive, generous community
- Innovative, assertive, rule-bending
- New services, platforms, markets
- ALLi as fast-track to expertise
- 21 benefits including forum, discounts & deals, & moral support

## **pWHY SELF-PUBLISH WHEN IT INVOLVES SO MUCH RESPONSIBILITY?**

- Creative control: your choice, not bound by an agent's or publisher's constraints (title, cover, genre, pricing etc)
- Speed of process – no agents or acquisitions editors or trade publishers' marketing committees to please! (but don't rush – treat the publish button with the respect of the nuclear red button and only press when absolutely sure!)
- Longevity – never out of print and no deadline to make your book a commercial success
- Financial control: % royalty - <70p/£1, instead of 5p/£1
- Technology makes it easy, accessible, and low start-up cost for a business
- Thanks to self-publishing in its modern form, there has never been a better time to be an author
- By which I mean to turn your manuscripts into books and to get them in front of readers

**Whatever your self-publishing ambition, whichever business model you choose, I wish you the best of luck!**

**Keep learning, keep up with industry change, and stay motivated** by joining the Alliance of Independent Authors, a specialist non-profit organisation for self-publishing authors, offering global 24/7 online support and numerous of benefits such as discounts, deals and free guidebooks for authors – most members more than cover the annual membership costs with the savings they make.

**Good luck, and keep going! It's worth it!**

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

**Join ALLi – the Alliance of Independent Authors is your self-publishing ALLi!**

[www.allianceindependentauthors.org/?affid=885](http://www.allianceindependentauthors.org/?affid=885) (Disclosure: affiliate link)

**Visit Debbie Young's website: [www.authordebbieyoung.com](http://www.authordebbieyoung.com) (free ebook when you join my mailing list!)**

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