

Independent Publishing – Controlling Your Destiny

By Denniger Bolton



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While a few of us put pen to paper solely for the pure pleasure of it, the vast majority want to see our works in print. We want to see and feel the book in our hands.

In October, 2006, I attended the Small Publishers Association of North America (SPAN) Marketing Conference and Trade Show held San Mateo, California. SPAN members are fiction and non-fiction book writers, who have banged their heads against the solid oak doors of traditional publishing and have staggered away saying: There has got to be a better way.

Wife: I want to make one thing perfectly clear.

Husband: What is that, dear?

Wife: The garage.

It's not a perfect solution, but there are good reasons to publish your own book.

1. Editorial control of content and title.
2. Money. Doing it yourself, you earn the profit by cutting out the middle men.
3. Time. Waiting to be picked up by a traditional publisher, and then enduring the additional one or two years to bring it to market, are considerably less.

There are however some disadvantages to independent publishing:

1. Possible loss of investment.
2. Less time to write (because you are doing publishing tasks).
3. Cannot get your car in the garage.

This may be a shock, but the author does the marketing. Rarely will a publisher take on this task. Unless you are a celebrity or bestseller like Stephen King. And even he is heavily invested in the publishing biz.

Printing the book is only half of it. The other half is getting your book to the reader, by personal or internet sales, National book chains, independent book sellers like Bookpeople, libraries and/or non-bookstore markets. Marketing was what the SPAN conference was about and the reason I attended.

Topics also covered: Web sites that customers come to and buy. Marketing plans. Podcasts. Newsletters. E-zines (on-line magazines). Target markets. Selling to Barnes & Nobel and Amazon. Using MySpace, You Tube and blogs (short for web log). Getting reviews. Wholesalers. Distributors.

At the accompanying trade show were book printers, including print on demand, Amazon, Google, ForeWord Magazine (book reviews for libraries), publishing and media assistance companies.

The attendees were an eclectic group from those with a seed of an idea but not yet writing, to publishers with multiple offerings: There was a woman with a \$40 book on operating a food concession, covering licenses and permits to recipes for corn dogs and funnel cakes. A publisher of novels working on a movie deal. A personal trainer publishing a giveaway book for his clients. A mother who researched a remedy for postnatal depression, deciding on her next step. A world traveling couple writing and photographing waterfalls, looking for feedback on integrated cover design.

There was solace for what I believed was an over the top investment in my new book cover, when I learned reason number one books are bought is the cover (and good reviews). It has to be well designed, well written, well edited. You are quality control and it is your money and reputation at risk. There is virtually no difference between the big guys and you, the independent publisher – once you have the isbn and Library of Congress numbers, someone like Baker & Taylor as wholesaler, a web site, a willingness to market, and expert help if you need it.

As a writer with persistence, I convinced a New York literary agency to read my manuscript, *Hippie Hollow – Murder on a Nude Beach*. My new agent shopped it around and got an offer. It was too little money for so much work, and would be at least a year more until printing. I decided to research self publishing through two good books on the subject, Dan Poynter's "*The Self-Publishing Manual – How to Write, Print and Sell Your Own Book*" and the Tom & Marilyn Ross book, "*The Complete Guide to Self Publishing – Everything you Need to Know to Write, Publish, Promote and Sell Your Own Book.*" The books lead me to SPAN and the Publishers Marketing Association, www.pma-online.org. I plan to attend their conference next year.

Hippie Hollow was being printed, but I needed to know about marketing, getting into Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and finding creative avenues for sales. That is exactly what I

found. Amazon was there and I picked its brain. I met a fellow who worked for a major publisher who was creating a consulting business. His quick advice, really cover Austin, the setting of the book, and for everywhere else there is Amazon.

It still took me a year to see the book in my hand. It costs a bit of money to start one's own publishing company, so I gathered together some investors. This way I earn more income than if I took the New York deal. Either way, I still have to do the marketing.

SPAN is an association partner of the Writers' League of Texas. Go to their information rich web site and see SPAN is a non-profit trade association, dedicated to advancing the interests and expertise of independent publishers and authors through educational opportunities and discounted services. Through our membership in the League, we are afforded a \$35 discount on SPAN membership,. Go to www.spannet.org for information.

Doing it yourself is not for every writer. It is a way though to have more control in getting that book out of your head and heart and into your hand.

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