

Self Publishing: design for success

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<http://greatstorybook.com/self-publishing-design-for-success/>

This entry is part 1 of 3 in the series [Self Publishing nuts and bolts](#)

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When we read about self publishing authors who are able to make a handsome living for themselves – [or even become multi-millionaires](#), it's easy to let the mind fantasize about achieving that kind of personal wealth.

But those writers didn't just "get super lucky." They worked hard to write a story and design it and then worked hard to [promote it right](#) - to get it selling so much that publishers sought them out to make a deal.

You can make a living as a successful self published author, but you need to buckle-down and approach it like a professional.

If you do this right, you can earn a livable income by crafting your writing career. It doesn't stop with writing a story. That's where it starts.

I am very often emailed with requests for book reviews. Sometimes I will do it; sometimes I just cannot do it because I'm too swamped.

What often hits me about the books that are self published is that many of them should have been refined before being brought to the market. Unfortunately, if I'm getting the already-published ebook or book, what I'm asked to do is critique it, not edit or consult on it.

Do not make this mistake. When you look at and read your own work, you must ask yourself, "Would I spend money on this?" Would I love it?

Ask Yourself: Would I recommend it – or am I just going to cross my fingers and hope there are enough people in the world who would buy it and not leave a negative comment online?

Customer Reviews are a real threat to authors - make no mistake. It doesn't matter how you are published; if you're out on the market, customers can kill your potential success. How does this translate? Make sure your story rocks.

This is where we come to the pros & cons of self publishing: You do it all.

It is entirely in your hands. For some people, this can be a nightmare. For those who like to delve into a new kind of project, to experiment and learn – this is a fun design challenge.

Even if you hire out certain aspects of the project (such as illustrations or book block design - or even a marketing package), these things are still your responsibility. You pay the bills because you are the one who is planning and delegating these tasks.

Here are the aspects of your book - a marketable product - that you need to consider very seriously after your story is complete. (If your book needs to be illustrated, go here for [details on how to plot your panels](#) .)

1. Book Cover Design.

You can and absolutely do judge a book by its cover. Don't think for a moment that it could ever be otherwise. This is perhaps one of the most important points in your marketing of the book. If the cover looks bad, people will tend to think that the story itself must be of the same or lesser quality.

Do not sell yourself short by slapping a crummy cover together.

2. Spine Design.

Don't forget that the spine (edge) of the cover is also something you will need to design, and the space you have to work with will change with your number of pages (the more pages, the thicker the spine).

Printers provide their own spine-width calculating tool, one that includes the variances of their paper options. This is vital information, so do not make the mistake of using a generic spine-width calculator. Always use the one provided by the printer you have chosen to use.

If your hardback and paperback editions are being printed by different printers, you will need to calculate the spine width twice, because the binding option affects that width, and also because the printers will most likely use different types of paper (also known as weights of paper) for those different qualities of binding options.

When using POD Publishing Companies, they very often provide not just a calculator, but a program that calculates the proper spine width for you. It makes this step super easy.

The spine should absolutely have this information:

- **The title of your story** (so long as the spine is thick enough), and
- **the author name.**

That's it. If another person is the illustrator, their name most usually doesn't go on the spine unless they are more famous than the author.

The spine should be easy to read and the look of it should reflect the design of the front cover. Don't go crazy with font options. The most important thing about the spine is that it be clean and readable.

3. Back Cover Design.

This only applies if your book is in print. Ebooks don't have back covers, but the information included on a back cover needs to be somewhere on your profile page for that book – on every online platform where it is sold.

The back cover can be a tricky thing, because **you must have testimonials here**. Get people to review your book. Take part of that as testimonial (the best part) and put it on the back cover.

What this means (and why it is tricky) is that you'll first need a copy of the book (probably an ebook unless the reviewer demands a hardcopy) for the reviewer and then another one, slightly altered, for the public market.

These printed copies of the book that are *not meant for the public* but meant specifically for book reviewers is known by many names. This can be called a Reviewer's Copy, an Advance Copy, an Advance Reading Copy, or a Galley Proof. In the past, galley proofs were meant for editor's eyes only. This function has changed over the years and a galley proof (sometimes just called "galley") and advance reader's copy are now the same thing.

Some reviewers will not accept that and want to base their review on the final product.

Just ask them again, and make it clear that you're hoping to use part of their review for testimonial on the back cover. Offer to send a signed copy of the book once it is completed. This may or may not work, but it doesn't hurt to ask.

If the reviewer is unkind, don't bother. They won't write a nice review anyway. Know whom it is you want to work with in the future, who should be reading your next books. Introduce yourself to writers who like to blog and review books. Establish a relationship there and don't be afraid to guest blog.

4. Book Block Design.

The book block is the inside of your book. It will *most likely* include these things:

- **The Frontispiece:** this is an optional, illustrated page that faces the title page, a sort of introduction to the actual story, acting much in the way the opening credits of a movie prepare us and get us in the mood for the story about to be told.

- **The Title Page:** The page that presents the book's formal title and the author's name and illustrator's name. It isn't optional.
- **The Copyright Page:** This provides the specific information about the publisher, the creators of the book, the copyright owner and date, and distribution permissions. Also includes what edition the book is, where it was printed (or produced, if it is an ebook), and cataloguing details (such as the ISBN). This is absolutely necessary.
- **The Table of Contents:** This is a list of everything in the book. For the typical illustrated storybook, this isn't necessary. However, if your book is also an ebook, it may be a good idea to create a clickable Table of Contents for that edition.
- **The Story:** go figure. Ahem. It's necessary.

Here are optional items to include in your book block:

- **After-Reading Questions:** We often see these added to special editions of novels that are popular amongst reading groups. We can do this too for kids and illustrated books. For parents who want to make sure their child is developing good reading comprehension skills, this can be a real gift. For teachers, this makes your book something they can use in class.
- **After-Reading Projects:** This doesn't have to be extravagant, but a crafts project included at the end of the story is a brilliant way to attract the attention of teachers and librarians. This can be as simple as a coloring page in the back of the book.
- **Dedication:** In many illustrated storybooks, the author and illustrator both make a short dedication. It can go in the beginning or the end for kid's books – for novels it is always towards the beginning, before the Table of Contents. In some illustrated books, the Dedication is on the Copyright Page.
- **Acknowledgments:** This is rare, especially in illustrated stories, but it has and can be done. It's especially nice to see in projects that are publicly funded or funded by a special grant.

There are other optional sections too – but not for an illustrated storybook. We just don't see a List of Tables or an Introduction in this type of book. (If you do decide to do that, or find an example somewhere, let me know. I'd really like to see how that works.)

Dealing with the Printer.

If your book is an electronic one, page count is an irrelevant question. You can have as many pages as you want, no restrictions.

If your book is printed on paper, restrictions apply because of the way physical books are made. Your page count always increases by four (a larger sheet of paper is folded in half and then sewn in or glued into the binding - making for two pages front-&-back, for a count of four pages of content).

After a page count of 32 (the typical page count for an illustrated storybook), you jump up to 36 pages.

What you need to keep in mind here is that more pages means increased cost for you and ultimately your readers. If they are full color pages, that price punch can hurt your sales.

You need to weigh whether the added pages are worth the added cost or not. This also means that you might well need to consider consolidating panels onto fewer pages. To get a better idea of what I mean, [read about plotting your panels](#).

If you (like me) are bent on adding special pages to the book (such as After Reading Questions), but you don't want to add too many pages to the printed edition, you can launch a website and include those special freebies as downloadable files.

To let readers who have bought your book know this is an option, add a single line to either the beginning or the end of your story (perhaps in large print on the copyright page, for example), inviting them to visit your site and download your special activities.

For an illustrated storybook, choose how you want to format each page of the book. With necessities like the title page and copyright page, this can potentially leave you with fewer pages for actual story than you might imagine. For the nitty gritty details on how to approach this, **[sign up for my newsletter](#)**.

Consider Design the 1st Bit.

The design of your book is **the first piece of marketing**. There's much more to it than that. Whether you self-publish or win a traditional publisher over, you are the one who drives the promotion of your book. Not sure what I mean by that? Get more details on the [pros, cons and common misconceptions of Traditional Publishing](#).

Don't ever base your decisions on the get-it-done-right-yesterday thinking. This can put you in a panic and push you into making decisions that hurt the success of your project.

Make your decisions with care. If it leads to a production delay – that's ok. You are the owner of this project. Own it.

Keep creating, no matter what.

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