

Traditional Publishers: the pros and cons

by Chazda Albright -

<http://greatstorybook.com/traditional-publisher-pros-cons/>

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Mark Twain, Beatrix Potter, D. H. Lawrence, Gertrude Stein, e. e. cummings, Virginia Woolf, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Edgar Allan Poe, Amanda Hocking (paranormal YA novels), David Mamet, L. Ron Hubbard, Irma Rombauer (The Joy of Cooking), Jack Canfield and Mark Hensen (Chicken Soup for the Soul), Stephen King, John Grisham, and John Clancy. **What all these writers have in common is that they all are self-published.**

Some made their fame and fortune - and their legacy - through self-publishing. Some decided to move over to self-publishing after many years of success as a traditionally published author. These certainly aren't all of the enormously successful self-published authors, but some whose names you're sure to recognize.

There is no reason to believe that you cannot successfully publish your own work. However, there is also no reason to believe that a traditional publisher wouldn't publish your work if given half a chance. So how do you decide?

After the recent article on [How to Self-Publish](#), a lot of people have been asking whether I think they should choose publishing with a publisher or doing it themselves. Each person is different, and so is each book, so there is no easy or fast answer to be had.

What I can do is tell you the pros and cons of these two options – so that in the end you are well-equipped to make an informed decision before moving forward.

Now I must warn you: this doesn't mean nothing will go south. Mistakes can be made and sometimes we have to learn the hard way. But I can tell you [what to look out for](#) and what to think about – so that the potential for financial harm is minimized.

Financial harm? You bet. It can hit you no matter which route you choose to take. So let's take a look at the upside and downside of Traditional Publishing - and some of the most common misunderstandings, too.

The Pros of Traditional Publishing

1. Status. Perhaps the most obvious PRO to getting published rather than self-publishing is the status of that achievement. Even though best-selling novelists are stepping away from their contract renewals in favor of publishing their own work, there is still the stigma of not being recognized formerly by other professionals.

The thing to remember here is that status isn't given. That's sort of a myth. We very often don't purchase the best books. When you look at the book market, there is your proof. The books that are selling the best are indeed sometimes really fantastic, but a lot of successful writers are “just lucky.” That luck is mostly about numbers and marketing, so when you get right down to it, status really isn't something that's given. It's taken – by wit, by smart number crunching, by savvy presentation and relentless marketing.

2. Payments. Another great thing about getting published is the upfront payment and then the royalties that come later. I like getting paid and not needing to worry overly much about sales. It's a real luxury. When you self-publish, you only get paid for what you sell. The alternative is to [self-publish via book production](#). That's a whole different business structure for you as a book creator and it does mean you get paid upfront. In fact, before the first edition goes into print if you do it right. [For details, go here.](#)

3. Editor for free. It's also really great to have an editor on your side - if you get a good one, and most of them are good. In some publishing houses (not all), an editor will be assigned to your book before the book block is designed. That's a really nice ally to have on your side and it comes with the publishing deal.

Misconceptions about Traditional Publishers

1. Publicizing. Most people think that working with a publishing house will mean that they also publicize your work. Unless you are a big name, that isn't true - and honestly, even the best-selling authors still pay for their own book trailers, websites, and magazine spreads. The publisher doesn't do much of that, if at all.

What the publishers will do is promote your upcoming book on their websites, submit your work to appropriate writing competitions for awards (which means you don't have to bother with it), and list your book(s) with literary magazines and catalogues – the stuff librarians and book retailers read.

2. Cost. Another misconception is that getting published is cheaper than publishing your own work. Not necessarily true. If you spend three years submitting a manuscript to various agents and publishers, that translates to lost time and money. More publishers are now accepting online submissions, but most still want a paper pile delivered snail mail with a SASE (Self Addressed Stamped Envelope).

If you live (as I do) outside the U.S. but want to submit to an American Publisher, this can be outrageously expensive (\$150 per manuscript submission x 3 submissions per year = \$450 loss per manuscript). I stopped sending submissions through the post when I realized how much it was costing me per year. If the publisher doesn't accept email submissions, I pass.

For me, this was a positive business decision to make, not a negative one.

3. Financial benefit. It's also often thought that getting published is more lucrative than self-publishing. While this is true for most writers who are self-published, it isn't true enough to really be a valid statement anymore. Too many self-published writers are able to make a decent living by publishing their own work. Some of those writers are millionaires – a handful, but enough for the publishing pros to take notice.

According to a [Writer's Digest and Digital Book World survey in 2014](#), 1.8% of self-published authors make six figures or more per year. For traditionally published authors, the number isn't much better: 8.8% - still less than 10%. However, those who do BOTH: 13.2%.

Does that mean everyone else is starving? No. But it probably means they can't yet quit their day job.

Writers who just self-publish typically earn between \$0.00-\$5,000 a year from their writing.

Writers who are traditionally published earn between \$5,000-\$9,900 a year.

Writers who do both, or are hybrid writers, do even better: \$15,000-\$20,000 a year.

According to two separate reports from Mark Coker ([Founder of SmashWords.com](#)) and Hugh Howey ([self-published millionaire](#)), self-published authors have a clear advantage in the ebook market, and that advantage is increasing. If you check Hugh Howey's [Author Earnings stats](#) (which is in large part derived from Amazon.com sales) you'll see that of the Best-selling ebooks sold on Amazon, 39% are comprised of self-published titles (that includes Amazon titles, indie and single-author publishers). That beats out the large publishing houses by 23%.

The thing to remember here is that if you approach writing as a type of business (rather than a hobby or purely artistic endeavor), then you will be able to make a much larger profit margin - regardless of how you get your work on the market.

The Cons of Traditional Publishing

1. Get with the e-thing. The most annoying thing about traditional publishers is that they have no clue about the new market. If you want your book to be available in hardback, paperback, audio book and ebook, your publisher can and may do that, but they will place far too high a price on the ebook and there will be no bonuses provided with hardbacks. No incentives.

This is the primary reason driving most successful novelists into self-publishing. They can actually make a lot more money taking their business into their own hands because they fully understand the mechanics of how it works and they also understand their readers and what they are willing to pay for a given product.

2. Pricing products. I know that for myself, I would never pay full price for an ebook (read: the same price as a paperback or more) when I can simply invest a couple more dollars and get the hardback instead. But I also know that if a writer is new to me, or I'm not sure whether I'd really like their new book series, I will not get the hardback. I'll instead wait until copies hit the dollar-bin (if the ebook isn't available or is too expensive). When it comes to fun reads like bodice-rippers and cozies, most of the new releases are only available in paperback and ebook. Those two products should not be the same price.

3. Not your bag. When you work with a traditional publisher, none of these decisions are in your control: design, copy, available editions, pricing. Even if you are a master designer, the publisher will not allow you to create your own book cover or book block. Forget it. Someone else on staff takes care of design. The same thing applies to the copy (the type of material you read on the back cover of a book). Even if you are a master at writing promotional material, you will not be the one who scripts it for your own book.

This is even true of writer/illustrators. If you have written a story and created illustrations to go with it, you may or may not see your artwork accompanying your story. This is ultimately up to the publisher. If they feel your story would sell better with someone else's artwork, then they will pay you for the story and hire someone else to redo the illustrations.

This also applies if you as the writer hired an artist to create illustrations for your story. If the publisher doesn't feel the work you hired-out is the best, then that's it. While you as the copyright owner can certainly bargain various points with the publisher, it is very difficult to sway them in this regard because

it is their investment on the line.

For some, not having to worry about all these finer details is a bonus. They don't want to bother with all those tasks. But a lot of writers are visual thinkers (and/or control freaks) and so these specific tangibles are very important. If that's the case for you, then you might prefer self-publishing. Just don't decide to lean on the self-publishing option because you're afraid to deal with professionals. They are not your enemy. In fact, they want you to be a successful writer... especially if you're contracted with them.

The Bottom Line

If you want complete control over the look and feel of your book, then you must publish (or produce) it yourself. However, do remain in contact (and continue to make new contacts) with various publishing professionals. Don't be averse to working with them. In fact, it can be a lot of fun when getting to work with someone you genuinely like and trust.

That's a wonderful and positive experience I would recommend to anyone.

It's just a very different process and ultimately, a different writing experience. So what does that mean? There are a lot of pros and cons to self-publishing too, and I will go over those with a fine-toothed comb. Then self-promoting and basic marketing, because this is something you need to know if you want your book to be successful. Look here for more over the next few weeks – or sign up for my newsletter and I'll send it to you directly.

What do you think? Are you on the fence about doing it yourself? Do publishers frighten you? Comment below, let me know. If you have any questions, leave a comment or send me an email. I'll be the one who reads it.

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