



# THE 10 BIGGEST MISTAKES SELF-PUBLISHED AUTHORS MAKE

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I'm a self-published author. The first book I published (2004) was actually a re-print of my father's (Jim Spillman) 1981 classic *The Great Treasure Hunt*. The following year I self-published my first (authored) book, *Breaking the Treasure Code: The Hunt for Israel's Oil*. I self-published these books, because I needed to make them available to the public quickly and self-publishing seemed to be the fastest, cheapest way to do it.

I had been an entrepreneur for several years by the time I published my first book and my career was always in sales and marketing. It didn't take much research into the state of the publishing business in 2004 to know that I didn't have a chance in getting these books out in a timely fashion if I relied on the traditional publishing industry. So I jumped in, learned quick, made plenty of mistakes and got those two books out and into the marketplace.

Let me tell you, I didn't know much about writing a book, and knew nothing about publishing, printing, marketing and selling books! If I had known anything, I might have walked away, overwhelmed with the whole process. Successfully self-publishing can, at times, seem hopeless. But I stuck to it, learned a lot about publishing, even more about marketing and selling, and, through lots of practice, sharpened my writing skills.

Did I survive the self-publishing process? Well, those first two books, by God's grace, have been among our most successful – selling around 300,000 copies between them (my father's outsold mine pretty handily – but mine did just fine)! After those two books were published

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an acquaintance asked if I'd consider publishing his. I was completely naïve and had absolutely no business publishing anyone else's book, so I said, "Sure!"

Today, between our two company imprints, *True Potential* and *Milestones International*, we have 135 titles by more than 60 authors and we're closing in on one-million books sold. Now that's not much in the 'big publishing' picture, but it does prove that it is possible to self-publish and to be commercially successful.

Even so, there are countless, landmines, booby-traps, dead-ends and just plain mistakes a self-published author can make. This little book captures ten of the most common, most detrimental mistakes you can make as a self-published author and, hopefully, how to avoid them.

Here we go!

# 1. EDIT YOUR OWN BOOK!

## **Spelling and Grammar – *ouch!***

Do you think editing is just a matter of running ‘spell-check’ on your word processing software? Think again. Do you think that you are your own best editor or that hiring a professional editor is too expensive or an unnecessary expense? Think again.

Editing your book isn’t just about correcting spelling mistakes. Even if it were, your word processor’s spell-check program won’t pick up the difference between *two*, *to* and *too*, or *there*, *their* and *they’re*. Spell-check programs won’t tell you when and when not to use possessives or when you’ve mixed pronouns. Here’s proof:

*“Author’s shouldn’t do they’re own editing; their just two close to there own work.”*

The sentence above contains seven obvious grammatical errors that my Word™ software failed to catch when I ran its ‘Spelling and Grammar’ tool. Were you able to catch all seven mistakes? If not, hire an editor to review your manuscript before allowing the world to read your book.

The grammatically correct sentence should read:

*“Authors shouldn’t do their editing; they’re just too close to their work.”*

I attended a professional conference recently; the attendees were very successful small business owners (\$1 million - \$30 million in annual revenue) who paid a significant registration fee to learn from cutting-edge industry leaders. In one session I listened to a supposed expert in self-publishing rant that the comments he had received from his readers about the misspellings and grammatical errors in his books

were ‘petty’. He said that worrying about spelling and grammar was secondary; readers should be paying attention the valuable information he expounded instead of ‘minor’ mistakes. That statement and a few other ‘minor mistakes’ in his ‘expert’ self-publishing advice, in my eyes, greatly discredited all the otherwise valuable advice he may have given during his talk. Judging an author’s content by its mistakes may be ‘throwing the baby out with the bathwater,’ but that is precisely what many readers will do when they see spelling and grammatical mistakes in your work. They’ll throw out your great content with your mistakes. Don’t let that happen. Hire a professional editor.

**\* Note:** In some cases (not many) you may prefer to use what your editor may consider a grammatical error (like a reflexive pronoun) to communicate your message more effectively or prevent restricting its flow. If you’re allowing a grammatical error on purpose, you’d better be ready to explain it to your editor and you’d better be sure it works.

### **Context – *Do your readers know what you’re talking about?***

Another reason to hire a professional editor, even more important than catching spelling and grammatical errors, is to be sure an outside audience understands the context of your message.

What this means is that you, as the creator of your work, have a very intimate connection with it. You *understand* the context of your message. You may be making assumptions about the subject matter that, in your eyes, need no back-story or introduction. An outside reader, without an intimate connection to the subject matter, may have no background knowledge of information you take for granted. When you read your own work, your message looks perfectly clear and obvious (to you). When someone new to the subject or without your particular context reads your work, will they be able to understand your message?

For example: Your book, *Be a Winner with Social Media* tells your readers: “*Make sure your Social tags include your main url and cross-check them against popular keywords.*” You understand this sentence perfectly because you already know what ‘Social tags’, ‘url’s’ and ‘keywords’ are and how they work – after all, you wrote the book! But your readers, those who could most benefit from your book, have absolutely no idea what the sentence means unless you have already introduced them to the individual concepts.

An outside editor is an outside pair of eyes, with an outside perspective; she will warn you when you're speaking in your own language rather than the language of your audience.

You want readers to read, learn and benefit from the message contained in your book. In order to do that, your message must be presented without hurdles the reader must leap in order to understand your message. Spelling mistakes, grammatical mistakes, internal language and unfamiliar terminology are all hurdles that block the path your reader is trying to follow. Allow an editor to help you take away those hurdles and pave a smooth path for your reader to follow.





## 2. DESIGN YOUR OWN COVER!

You've heard the old saying; "*You can't judge a book by its cover*"? Unfortunately that's exactly what happens; your book will be judged by its cover. In the span of a few seconds a potential reader, reviewer or professional book buyer will decide whether or not to pick up your book to look inside – based on it's cover.

### **Your Title – '*a rose by any other name ...*'**

One of the most common, most obvious mistakes made by self-published authors is putting a title on their book that means the world to them ... but not a thing to anyone else. As we discussed in the last chapter, because you are the author of your book, you're closer than anyone else in the world to it. The title you've chosen for it might be very meaningful to you and completely meaningless to the rest of the world.

The problem is, of course, that your book's potential readers probably don't know the context of your work and may not understand the depth of your topic. *Choose your book's title for your readers, not for you.*

One of our very popular authors wrote a book based on his many years of clinical work with drug addicts and other codependent patients. The book's suggested title was, *Escape the Grip of Codependency.* After all, that was exactly the result of years of counseling - helping clients 'escape the grip of codependency.' But that title came from the author's context of his work, not from the context of the thousands of potential readers his book could help. In most cases the audience he was trying to reach weren't aware that their lives were 'in the grip' anything, and they didn't know the definition of 'codependency'. All

they knew was that their situation was a mess and they needed some way to take control of their lives. We decided, for the intended audience, to title the book, *Take Control of Your Life*. That was a title readers understood!

The title of your book, like everything else on the cover, is there for one reason – to sell books. Unless you're too weird or too rich, you won't be buying your book, your readers will; the title is for them.

### **Your Cover Art – ‘baby pictures ... ugh!’**

I love baby pictures! Well ... let me qualify that. I love baby pictures of *my* babies. For those of us who have had babies and/or grandbabies, what's the first thing we do with our new baby pictures after we've ooh'd and awe'd over them? We show them to anyone and everyone in our path – friends, neighbors, family, total strangers, everyone. We're so enraptured by the sight of our baby we just know that everyone in the living world will be too. The truth is, although others may give us a polite “awe!” or “that's cute,” they're not really too interested. It's not their baby.

It can be the same way for the ‘perfect’ artwork you've chosen for your book. You may love it like your own baby. After all, your book and its cover, like your own children, are extremely personal to you – you've worked hard giving birth to them. The reality, though, is that the reading world is a cold hard place; they'll never care as much about your book and its cover as you do. The cover art for your book, like its title, is there for just one reason – to sell books. The art you choose for your book's cover is there for your potential reader; to make him or her stop and engage.

### **The Back Cover – ‘you've hooked ‘em, now reel ‘em in!’**

One of the first things I learned in the publishing business was this: “Your front cover's job is to get browsers to pick up the book and read the back cover. The job of the back cover is to get them to read the first page.” Your book's cover is a sales tool, plain and simple. Your back cover has two main functions (besides a few others we will discuss later).

The first function of the back cover is to show the reader how he or she will benefit from what's inside your book. Some call this part the

‘synopsis’, we call it a ‘blurb’; you want your reader to call it, ‘the reason I bought this book.’ When creating copy (the blurb) focus on benefits (what this book will do for the reader) instead of feature (content included in the book).

Features may include:

- 100 heart healthy recipes
- 8 workout plans
- 10 ways to say no to chocolate

Benefits may include:

- Lose weight and eat great
- Live with more energy than ever
- Eat the food you love

Do you see the difference? Features are *causes* – what you have to do to get the benefit. Benefits are *effects* – the results you experience when you engage the features. Believe me, people will buy your book for the *benefits*, not the *features*. Focus on the benefits readers will receive book more than the features inside the book.

### **Bio – ‘oh, my-o’**

If I haven’t said this enough already, let me say it again – your book and its cover, to be effective, is all about the reader – not about you. Your bio is on the back cover for one reason – you know already – to help sell the book. Your bio tells potential readers why they should be taking advice from you. If your book is about eradicating crabgrass and you’ve won the *National Beautiful Yard Contest* five years in a row, that’s important. Readers need to know that. Unless your book is about scouting or baking, the fact that you were an Eagle Scout or won the County Fair brownie contest might not be a relevant bio element for *this* book.

It’s okay to mention in your bio that you, your life-mate, six children and Great Dane live on a farm in Vermont (if it’s true), that kind of information can make you human and more accessible to your readers (just don’t give your street address). But remember, the main purpose of your bio is to qualify you as an authority in your book’s subject matter.

## **Are You a Graphic Artist? – *now is a lousy time to start learning***

I've run a publishing company for nine years; we've published over one hundred different titles for more than sixty authors. I've trained myself to be proficient in all of the design software used in our business; I know what makes a good book cover and what doesn't. I've designed some of our book covers, I don't anymore. Want to know why? I'm not a graphic artist. I may know more about designing book covers than most graphics artists, but I'm not a graphic artist. I can paint a house, but I can't paint a sunset.

All of the major book cover elements we've discussed will fail to serve their highest purpose if they're not presented properly and professionally on the pallet that is your book's cover. The number one visual indicator of a 'self-published' book for professionals (publishers, distributors, retailers, critics, radio and TV hosts, etc.) as well as sophisticated readers is the cover. The response to a book cover that cries out "amateur!" is immediate and detrimental (remember, a book is judged by its cover). Plain and simple – those people and entities most familiar with the book world, who could help the sales, distribution, publicity and reviews of your book will think twice before they commit time, resources and reputation on a book with an 'amateur' cover.

It's possible to design your own book cover, but unless you're a graphic artist I'd recommend getting a professional. Your book will wear that jacket all of its life, and you want its life to be long and successful.

## **3. Layout Your Own Interior! – *'how words look can be as important as what they say'***

Pagination (typeset in the old days) is how the interior of your book is laid out. Most new authors don't even know pagination is a word, let alone how it plays a profound part in the reader's experience. I do not recommend you paginate your own book; you don't have the proper software (\*hint: Word™ *is not* the proper software) and even if you follow all of the advice below, there are probably twice as many pitfalls I'm forgetting to tell you about here. However, here are the most obvious pagination mistakes, along with some tips to make the inside of your book as attractive as its cover.

## Fonts – ‘*and the winner is ...*’

The winner for most often-abused interior pagination rule is the use of sans-serif fonts in the body of a book’s text. Sans-serif fonts are those without the ‘feet’ on the font strokes. ‘T’ is a serif font: ‘T’ is a sans-serif font. See the little ‘feet’ at the end of the serif font stroke? ‘Sans’ is French for ‘without’. ‘Serif’ isn’t French for ‘feet’; it’s just French for ‘serif.’ Don’t ask me any more French, that’s all I’ve got. The point is this: use serif fonts in your body text; save the sans-serif fonts for your chapter heads, if you choose, just not in the body text.

The common thinking for why this rule exists is that the little ‘feet’ in a serif font help the reader’s eye travel naturally from character to character and word to word, in order to help bring a cohesion to the text. Think of them as tiny threads that tie words and ideas together.

Since the advent of digital (computer) text, the sans-serif font has become more popular for text blocks (body text) because it was easier to read on computer display screens since the old display screen technology ‘twittered’ the serifs, making the text harder to read. Screen technology has evolved; serifs don’t ‘twitter’ anymore, but sans-serif is still the digital font of choice for websites – just don’t use it in the body text of your book unless you want to look like an amateur.

P. S. ‘Times New Roman’ is the old fuddy-duddy serif font; ‘Arial’ is the most established sans-serif font. A self-appointed style critic told me once that using ‘Times New Roman’ was ‘amateur’ because the font was out of date ... *whatever*. My current personal favorite serif font is ‘Adobe Garamond Pro.’

## White Space – ‘*give us a break*’

Have you ever opened a book only to get ‘fire-hosed’ with text? I mean the pages are so crowded with text, usually *small* text, and so devoid of any white space that you think, “I’ll never get through this.” That’s a lack of white space.

The reader’s eyes need a little break now and then. They need to know when one idea stops and another one starts. And not all readers are voracious word gluttons; most of them want a little island of white occasionally where they know they can stop and rest if they get tired.

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I try to be sure the pagination of our books allows for generous (but not too wide) margins, a break of at least 0.0625” between paragraphs and a break of 0.125” at the end of a sub-head (those mini-chapters within chapters, like white space, give the reader a visual break at the head of this section), as well as some space between the header (chapter heads) and footer (page numbers). I usually leave the top two inches blank on the first page of a chapter.

While we’re on the subject of white space, it’s an established custom to start chapters and sections on the right hand page. If the previous chapter stops on a right hand page and you’ve got to leave a blank page on the left before starting the next chapter, so be it. (\*note: very occasionally I’ll break this rule, but not often and for good reason – like I’m feeling particularly cheap that day, or it screws up the signatures. \*\*note: I’m not going to tell you what signatures are today).

### **Pull-outs**

Add a little class to your book with pullouts. Pull-outs are short quotes or ‘sound-bites’ from your book’s text that communicate an important points. They’re ‘pulled out’ from the text body and set in their own little invisible box. Pull-outs are usually set in different font and bigger font size than the body text, and they’re formatted to encroach on the body text flow (the body text ‘flows’ around the pull-outs).

### **Page Headers and Footers**

Here are some easy rules to follow regarding page headers and footers:

- Don’t include headers or footers on title pages, copyright page, or transition (blank pages).
- Don’t include a header on the first page of a chapter or section.
- Page numbering usually begins with the very first page, but it doesn’t actually appear on the page until you start getting into the text. Every text page (preface, introduction, foreword) before the main body of the book (first page of first chapter) should be in lower case Roman numerals (i, ii, iii, iv, etc.).
- The first page of the first chapter begins with Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.). Some paginators prefer to begin the first page of the first chapter with the actual page number, counting from

the first page of the book forward (if there are ten pages before the reader gets to page one, chapter one, then page one, one chapter one is numbered ‘11’). Some prefer just to number page one, chapter one as ‘1’. Your call.

- The main body pages (not the first page of a chapter) should have headers telling the reader what they’re reading (in case they forget?). The left page header should be the title of your book. The right page header should be the title of the current chapter.
- Headers and page numbers (bottom) are a good opportunity to try that sans-serif font you’ve been dying to bust out. Try to make the headers and footers at least one font size smaller than the text font – they’re not here to attract attention, just information.
- Center justify your headers and footers.





## 4. DON'T BOTHER WITH AN ISBN OR LCCN!

### **First of all, what is an ISBN and a LCCN?**

ISBN is short for “International Standard Book Number.” Without getting too technical, it’s a thirteen digit number assigned to your book; it’s how book buyers and book sellers identify your book as unique among the millions of books on the market.

LCCN is short for “Library of Congress Control Number.” Without sounding too antiquated, in the United States, we have a Federal Institution responsible for tracking and cataloging the books published in this country. The LCCN is the unique Library of Congress (and your local library’s – yes those still exist) catalog number for your book.

Remember that expensive professional business conference I mentioned in chapter one? Remember the self-publishing ‘expert’ who claimed that spelling and punctuation errors were ‘petty’ mistakes? He also told his audience not to worry with putting an ISBN on their books; my guess would be that he would find LCCN’s even less useful.

### ***So Why Bother?***

You can publish your book without an ISBN or LCCN. You can fish without a fishing license ... but it does severely limit *where* you fish. If you’re planning to sell your printed (as opposed to e-book) book anywhere other than out of the trunk of your car, you’ll need an ISBN. No distributor or retailer (including Amazon) will offer your book for sale without an ISBN. Amazon will offer your e-book for sale if it doesn’t have an ISBN, but they’ll assign their own ASIN (Amazon Standard Identification Number) to your e-book. Good luck trying to

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get Apple's iTunes store or any other e-retailer to accept Amazon's ID number for your e-book.

LCCN's are used by libraries for cataloging and ordering. A library cannot/will not order your book without a LCCN.

If you're serious enough about your book to write it and publish it, be serious enough to register it properly. It allows the rest of the world to find (and buy) your book.

### ***Another reason ...***

If you think your book's title and your name as its author makes your book one in one-hundred million, think again. Books of the same title as yours have probably already been published; if not, they're likely to (how many great book titles can there be?). Publishing a book that has the same title as an existing book (unless you're specifically trying to target the existing book) isn't illegal at all; it happens all the time. And if you think your name, as an author is unique in the universe, do a Google search for your name; you may be surprised.

**Bottom line** – if you're serious about selling your book, get an ISBN *and* a LCCN.

## 5. DON'T WORRY ABOUT HOW PEOPLE WILL ACTUALLY READ YOUR BOOK!

It doesn't really matter what format your book comes in, does it? I mean, as long as people can get the information, that's all that's important, right? Wrong! How people read your book will determine how well it sells.

Think it's cheaper and easier to just publish your book on Kindle Direct as an e-book? Well ... you're right; it is pretty easy. But what is your goal? Is your goal to find the fastest, easiest way to make your written work available to a limited amount of your potential audience on a limited format? Or is it your goal to make your written work available to your widest possible audience in a wide range of formats? Think about in what format your audience wants to read your book, not about what the easiest, cheapest single format in which you can get by.

### *Printed book vs. e-book*

Don't believe every publishing prophet that claims printed books are going the way of the horse and buggy. Printed books are not obsolete, and probably won't be for a long time. Printed books still outsell e-books. That may not be true forever, but it's true now.

Printed books still have a sense of seriousness (for lack of a better term) that e-books don't enjoy. The fact that your work is considered (at least by someone) worthwhile enough to put into printed form still says something to the world. Public speakers will often publish a printed book just to establish themselves as an expert on a given subject and increase their demand on the speaking circuit. I've never once seen a speaker's book table at a public event selling e-books.

About one quarter of the reading population in America now owns a computer tablet; about 19% own a e-reader device. I own both. I buy e-books for both – probably more than you do. I buy more printed books than e-books. Depending on where I am or the mood I'm in, I read on all formats - printed books, e-books via my iPad, e-books via my Kindle reader, even on my iPhone. Many readers probably do the same. Most readers, at this point in time, read printed books. Most e-book readers are using an Amazon Kindle device or an iPad; some use one of the other many brands of tablet or e-reader devices on the market. **My point is:**

1. Print isn't dead or even terribly sick – if you're serious, your book should be in print.
2. The answer to the Print vs. E-book question isn't *either/or*; it's *and*. If you're serious, your book should be available to your potential audience in the formats in which they read books – printed and e-book.

### **Epub vs. Mobi**

Depending on the reading device, e-book files must be published in specific software formats. Amazon (Kindle) and Apple (iTunes) the two giants of the e-book distribution world each have proprietary formats; and they update or come up with new proprietary formats on occasion. You can keep up with the proprietary formats if you've got the time and inclination and publish to each platform in their own proprietary software formats, or you can use the two standard universally accepted (currently) formats – e-pub and mobi. E-pub is a standardized format that works on iPads, Barnes & Noble's Nook e-reader and a plethora of other e-readers. Mobi is a standardized format that translates (since Amazon bought the software's creator) to Amazon Kindle products. In our company we develop the e-pub file first and then use Calibre software (free) to automatically translate e-pub to mobi.

**Bottom line-** If you want to make your e-book available to the widest possible audience, you'll need to distribute it in the formats that work on their readers. If you're serious about your book, make it available to your readers in the way they want to read it.

### *One last thing ... PDF's*

Opinions vary about calling a PDF (Adobe's 'Portable Document Format') an e-book. In my opinion (which may not be totally fair), a PDF is more like a digital 'photocopy'. It is possible to read a PDF on most tablets or e-readers ... but it doesn't contain the same 'born-in' indexing/location features as an e-book in e-pub and mobi formats. There's nothing wrong with sharing your ideas in a PDF and calling it an e-book (the e-book you're reading is PDF format because I'm giving it away and it's easier than explaining how to manually download and install an e-pub or mobi version on your reading device), just let readers know ahead of time what format they're getting.



## 6. ASSUME THAT THE WORLD WILL BEAT A PATH TO YOUR DOOR!

You've written your book, had it professionally edited, a graphic artist has created the perfect cover and you've laid out the interior beautifully. You've created a first class book! Wow! Congratulations!

At this point, many new authors think their work is pretty much behind them; now we just let the orders roll in!

### *Time to wake up and smell the coffee.*

Other than mom, sis and your pastor, who else knows about your book? Here's a tough question: Who else cares? Thanks to Amazon there are 14 million reading choices just a mouse click away.

1. How will potential readers find your book?
2. If they did find it, why would they buy it, as opposed to one of the 14 million others?

To me, these are the two most important questions in the book business; everything else is just details.

### *Promotion*

As its author, you are your book's single most important, most responsible advocate. Not your publisher, not the distributor, not the local bookstore, not Amazon, not the 'market' – you. You are responsible for the commercial success (assuming that's your goal) of your book. And your book will only be a commercial success if your potential audience knows about and is willing to purchase a copy. *And*, you're the one who is supposed to tell them. Why you? It's your message to the world; not your publisher's, not the distributors or local bookstore's,

not Amazon's and certainly not the market's.

If you still wonder why the responsibility of your book's success is on your head and not on the heads of everyone else on the list, let me break down everyone's jobs for you:

1. **Publishers:** A publisher's job (in my opinion) is discern whether or not the author's message is appropriate for and wanted by the market, and then to create a product from the author's raw material (the manuscript) that is both aesthetically pleasing and effectively communicated in all the formats most accessible to the market. And to maintain relationships and infrastructure (distributors, retailers, thought leaders, information, etc.) necessary for the authors work to move easily through the/ to the market.
2. **Distributors:** Book distributors exist to transfer books from the publisher to the retailer. They warehouse books from many different publishers and fill orders to many different bookstores. Distributors receive books, warehouse books and ship books, but they don't buy or sell (at least to readers) books. Their business is storing and moving books; they really don't care if it's your book they're moving and storing or anyone else's.
3. **Bookstores:** Brick and mortar bookstores (the kind you can actually walk into) have a big problem – they exist. Let me explain the two factors of 'existence' that makes it a problem:
  - a. Because bookstores exist (take up physical space) they're limited to how many books they can inventory (100,000 titles would be considered a superstore). Taking Amazon's 14 million titles as an example of the total books available (including yours) I can promise you now, your self-published book has as much chance of being stocked in bookstores as my dog has of winning the lottery.
  - b. Because bookstores exist, they must exist *somewhere*. That means, even if your book, by some miraculous turn of events, wound up in a bookstore's inventory, the potential audience for your book would be limited to just those who walked into that particular store, in that particular town.



Bookstores, because they exist in time and space, limit their inventory to only those books *they know from experience* will sell in their community or those books the publisher is *paying them to stock* in hopes that the local customer base may buy them. It's not a bookstore's job to sell your book; it's their job to sell the books their customers want. It's your job to make sure your book is wanted.

4. **Amazon:** Amazon is the world's largest book retailer ... and the world's largest book distributor ... and (wants to be) the world's largest publisher. Their job is to cut out all middlemen and sell everything directly to everyone. The good news is that Amazon will keep your book in inventory, along with 14 million others. Think of Amazon as the world's largest haystack and your book as a very small needle.
5. **You – the author:** Your job is to *sell* your book to the world – not 'sell' like make each individual cash-for-copy transaction (although that's okay too). What I mean is that you're ultimately responsible for sharing your message with the world; one reader or a thousand readers at a time. You are the steward, the advocate, the primary representative of the message contained in your book. *You* are responsible for *selling* your book to your audience. It's your book, your audience, your message; everyone else - the publisher, the distribution system, retail stores, even Amazon – are just there to help facilitate *selling* your book to your audience.

*How* you sell your book to your audience would take another book or two. The important thing to remember is this: There are several players involved in successfully reaching your audience with your book, all or most of them are helpful or even necessary in some way, but you alone are ultimately responsible for reaching your audience with your message, and that, in my opinion, is success.



## 7. I DON'T NEED DISTRIBUTION, I'VE GOT AMAZON!

Okay, I just said that 'you alone are responsible for your success.' I get that. I started in this business as an *author*. Now I'm a publisher: I know better than most, the limits of 'distribution.' First, let's define exactly what distribution is: let's say, for the sake of our discussion here, 'distribution' is every avenue for reaching the buying public outside of Amazon and direct sales (off of your website or out of your trunk). And Amazon, in case you don't know, is 'distribution'; except they do everything themselves so we don't think of it that way.

**Here's a fact:** Amazon has 27% of the book market. That's impressive! Do not ignore Amazon! So why worry about the more traditional forms of 'distribution' (like to bookstores)?

**Here's another fact:** Unless you personally control the other 73% of the book market, someone else is selling books. Do not ignore distribution! Sure, they're a pain in the rear, and yeah maybe they're getting a little obsolete, but someone else is selling the other 73%!

When I was young in the publishing business I learned an important lesson: "*Be everywhere!*" It doesn't matter if one avenue to my reading audience is more efficient than another. It doesn't matter if I can make more money selling direct than through distributors. It doesn't matter if Amazon is the biggest, most hassle-free distributor/retailer in the universe. It doesn't matter that most distribution channels are a royal pain in the posterior. Once I've got my direct to reader and Amazon sales channels set up, I *need* distribution. Sorry, it's a fact ... if you want to sell more books.

***Here's another fact that may cause even more pain:*** Self-published authors do not have access to the 'distribution system.' Distributors do not carry 'self-published' books ... sorry. There are too many self-published books in the world and, as we discussed earlier, distributors are in the business of moving books to retailers, and retailers only stock books that they know have already been 'sold' to readers. Their business plan doesn't include your book. But there is, as the computer industry says, a 'workaround.' In the book business the 'workaround' for distribution is called a 'subsidy-publisher.'

Nowadays, just about every 'real' publisher has a subsidy division. Here's a short history. There is a cost involved in publishing books. Traditional ('real') publishers could only publish books they knew would sell enough copies to cover publishing cost and make a profit – they're in business, remember. There are *a lot* more authors than *profitable* authors. Before the idea of subsidy publishing came up, unproven authors were simply just *rejected* by 'real' publishers. Well, the 'real' publishers were rejecting a lot more authors than they were accepting. Authors could always go to a 'vanity press' but that had an 'icky' sound and an even 'ickier' reputation.

'Real' publishers realized that they were losing a lot of business just because, the authors and book submissions they were getting, but rejecting, weren't 'guaranteed.' They figured out that, if the authors were willing to pay the publishing cost of their own books, their risk would go way down, and, a happy coincidence emerged – publishers could make money by charging authors to publish their books! Subsidy publishing was born!

I don't want to get into the weeds with this (it's the subject of a whole 'nother' book) but the bottom line is this: publishers may be worth their cost just for access into the distribution system.

## 8. PUBLISHERS ARE ALL CROOKS! I CAN REPRESENT MYSELF!

Which brings up my next point: yes, it can seem that publishers are all crooks. Publishers are in business, and the point of business is to make a profit. And, concerning your book, your publisher is interested in making a profit. That's just the way it is. But maybe, as the creator, advocate and steward of your book, you're responsible for choosing a publisher who isn't a crook. They're out there.

Remember what the publisher's job is supposed to be – creating a book from your manuscript that is both aesthetically pleasing and communicates your message effectively to your audience. And, to enter your book into the publisher's distribution, marketing and information infrastructure. In a nutshell, your publisher's job is to create a quality book and make sure potential readers can find it and find out about it in the marketplace. Your publisher is your book's builder and your representative in the trade.

### ***Why do I need a book builder?***

Remember what the first five chapters of this book were about?

- Editing
- Book Covers
- Interior Layout
- ISBN, LCCN
- Format

My advice was to find a professional editor for your manuscript, a professional graphic artist for your cover, a professional layout designer for your interior, purchase an ISBN (don't forget to get a barcode for

the back cover), register for a LCCN with the Library of Congress, and get your book printed in the proper trim size and format as well as built into an e-book in both e-pub and mobi formats.

As a self-publisher, this is the point where you've got to decide if you're going to be an author or a publisher or both. I can tell you from experience, doing both prevents you from doing either perfectly. There is a learning curve involved in properly publishing a book, just like there's a learning curve in building a house. You can publish your own book and it's possible to build your own house; and it's true, you can save the money you'd have to pay a publisher or a building contractor to do the job for you. But you'll spend that money and your own time doing their jobs yourself. A publisher has the experience, tools and relationships, acquired over years and at considerable expense, to publish books, just as a building contractor has in his professional field. This is their business. And, the fact is, a publisher can publish his hundredth book (yours) and contractor can build his twentieth house much better (and maybe cheaper) than you can publish your first book or build your first house.

## 9. I'M A STAR! MY FANS WILL COME TO ME!

Now that you've finished writing your book, now that it's published, your job as an author is over, right? Now it's time for you to sit back and enjoy the success your book will have among the masses and the celebrity of being an author. Now that your book is available to the world, readers will line up to buy it.

...Sorry. That's not how it goes. Your book may be very good. Its message may inspire, comfort, help, motivate or otherwise improve the lives of whoever reads it. But they've got to read it, and to read it they've got to know about it, and to know about it someone needs to get their attention long enough to tell them about it. That someone is you.

Remember earlier I mentioned that Amazon currently has 14 million different books for sale? Out of that 14 million, how and why is any reader going to choose yours? They won't. They won't know or care about your book unless someone they know, like and trust shares it with them. That someone starts with you.

### Advertising

The days of mass advertising actually working are over. Today the market (what and why people buy) is driven by *word of mouth*, not *flood of noise* (my apologies to early morning TV car dealers). To be fair, according to recent surveys, mass advertising does still work ... sort of. Radio, TV and Print (magazines and newspapers), according to Nielsen's April 2012 "Trust in Advertising Global Report"<sup>1</sup>, are about

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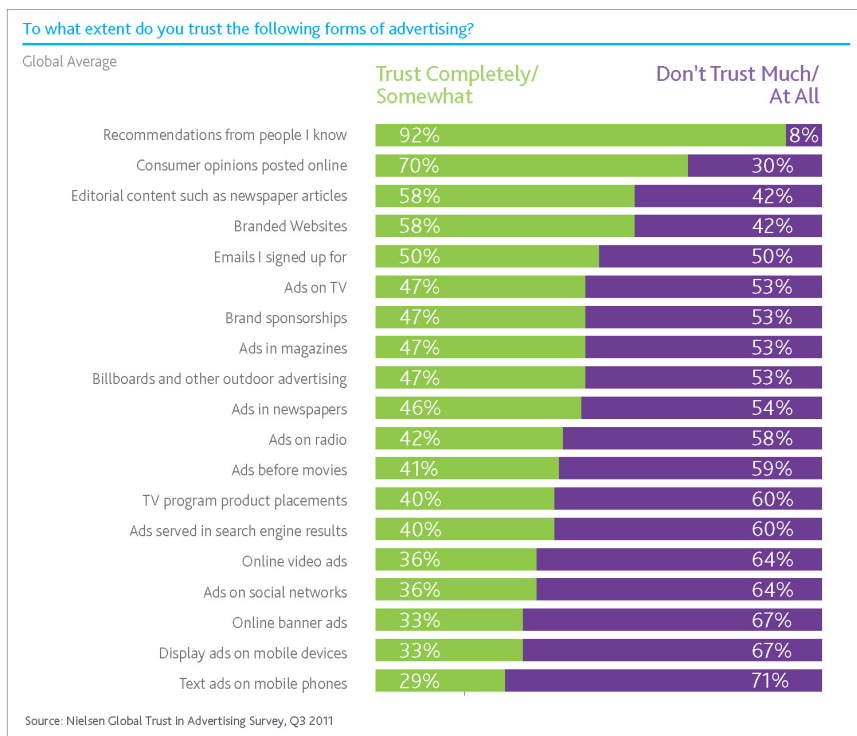
1 <http://www.fi.nielsen.com/site/documents/NielsenTrustinAdvertisingGlobalReportApril2012.pdf>

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42% to 47% effective. Other than the fact that this kind of advertising works less than half the time, it presents a few other problems as an option for self-published authors:

- ***It's expensive!*** (magazine and newspaper print ads run in the thousands of dollars – per ad)
- ***It's impossible to measure results*** (how do you really know who saw your ad and if it caused them to buy your book)
- ***It's a shotgun approach*** (those who might be the most interested in your book might only be a minority of those the print ad actually reaches)

What about advertising on the Internet? It's cheap compared to other kinds of traditional advertising, I can measure results and I can target my audience better. So Internet advertising is the way to go right? Not so fast. Mass advertising is still mass advertising, whether you're doing it on radio, TV, print, or the Internet. As a matter of fact, the most popular Internet mass advertising schemes are the least trusted by consumers!





## Engagement

My bottom line on advertising your book: save your money, or rather, invest your money and time more wisely. Why doesn't advertising work anymore? Because technology has allowed the consumer an almost infinite amount of choices. Twenty years ago, 'Mega-Bookstore' would proudly brag about their potential inventory of 100,000 titles (the mom & pop stores, carrying only around 10,000 titles were being put out of business by these bookstore behemoths). Today, as we've mentioned, Amazon carries 14 million titles. By the end of 2012, more than 634 million websites found their homes on the Internet. Consumers (readers) really do have a nearly infinite amount of choices.

Add to this the fact that we're bombarded every waking minute from every possible angle via every imaginable device with advertising – someone trying to get our attention, to convince us, to sell us every moment. Last year, *Consumer Reports* let us know that the average American is exposed to 247 advertisements per day. I think the number, including web based input, is much higher. The fact is, we're numb to advertising being pushed at us. We tend to know what we want and how to search it out on the Internet. And, as far as those things we don't know we want yet, we tend to filter out input from everyone except those we know, like and trust – our friends, friends of friends and 'experts' we consider knowledgeable and trustworthy.

Which bring up another amazing product to emerge from our on-line technology explosion: a relationship between consumers (buyers) and providers (sellers); it's called engagement. Even though technology has opened up the world of engagement a million times greater than ever before, it's actually a very old practice.

So how do you engage your potential audience? You talk to them; you engage them in conversation. This is the oldest, most successful commerce strategy in man's history; he's been doing this in every marketplace in every town and village, on every continent for thousands of years. It may have been a pound of butter or a bolt of wool or a slab of bacon back then; today, for the sake of our conversation, it's your book. You tell someone about your book, you share a sample, you answer their questions, you share your heart and your reasons for writing the book – you engage your potential reader. Do you know what this

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process does for potential readers? It allows them to know, like and trust you. And then they *want* to buy and read your book.

After you've won a reader (and a fan), do you know what that reader is most likely to do? Share your book (really her reading experience) with her friends. Of course her friends already know like and trust her, so they're likely to take her advice and get one of your books for themselves. When they have that same positive reading experience with your book, they'll share it with their friends. And so on.

You've just engaged and won your reading audience! But it would have never happened, would have never built the momentum necessary to propel your book into the marketplace if you hadn't engage those first core readers.

Writing and publishing your book was a lot of work, but the work (and sales) doesn't really begin until you begin engaging readers and helping them engage others.

## 10. I'M AN AUTHOR! MY STUDENT DAYS ARE OVER!

I imagine you put a lot of research into writing your book. I know I did. I spent more time reading than I did writing. At almost every turn in my writing I had to stop, research the topic, find a fact or confirm source before I could get back to the task of writing. When I had written the last line my first book and finally hit the 'Save' button, I was relieved that all my research had paid off and happily filed my notes in a box and closed the lid. I had made myself an expert in my field; it was time for me to do the teaching and my audience to do the learning. My 'student' days were over ... or so I thought.

### **Education**

My 'student' days were just beginning! In addition to keeping up to date on my book's topic and adding to my own knowledge (an expert only stays an expert by learning more) I had to begin learning about how to sell my book, who my audience was, where they gathered, what their interests were, how to reach them. I discovered that my student days had just begun. More than 99% of what I've learned about publishing and book marketing came *after* I finished my first book.

If you're about to finish your book, or if it is already published, now's the time to start learning in earnest about being a successful author. There's a lot more to being a successful author than good writing skills. Some very successful authors are actually horrendous writers! But they're very good at laying out their ideas, good at finding and employing excellent editors (even ghost writers!) and *very* good at selling to their reading audience. My point is that your education as a successful author doesn't end when your book is finished – it's just beginning!

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If you're not already familiar with blogging or Social Media, this is a prime place to begin continuing your education. There is a free library of great beginning blogging and Social Media how-to videos at [www.truepotentialmedia.com/blog](http://www.truepotentialmedia.com/blog). Remember that engaging with your readers and potential readers is really the smartest way to build your audience and sell more books. Internet technology and free blogging and Social media platforms are the easiest, most effective way a self-published author can build her audience.

I listen to popular marketing, sales and publishing podcasts almost every morning. Podcasts are audio (or video) programs delivered via the web to your listening (or viewing) device, like your smart phone or MP3 player. If you're not familiar with podcasts or what topics are available via free podcasts visit <http://www.apple.com/itunes/podcasts/>. There you can register for a free iTunes account, search for, discover, browse and download podcasts on almost any topic – all for free! As a publisher and marketer, my favorites include Dave Ramsey's "*Entreleadership*," Michael Hyatt's "*This is Your Life*," and Pat Flynn's "*Smart Passive Income*" podcasts.

Of course, books – printed, digital and audiobooks - are the foundation of my continued life-long education. Your education as a successful self-published author just begins when you've finished your book, and it continues until the last book is sold.

## BONUS TIP!!

### THE 11<sup>TH</sup> MISTAKE!

You've read through this e-book. Congratulations! As a prize, here's a bonus tip for you:

This mistake I didn't list in *Ten Biggest Mistakes Self-Published Authors Make*, but it's a biggie. It's one of those 'just shoot me now' mistakes and it happens more than you might think. It's a mistake so heinous that if you make it, you may want to consider just giving up altogether and learning a trade – like welding.

**Never, never, never, never, never do this!!**

That little section in the front of your book where you or someone more famous than you gives a short introduction to the book is called a **Foreword** (a 'word' be-'fore' the book's main content)

**– not a Forward!!**

## ONE LAST WORD

Writing a book is quite an accomplishment. Anyone who has achieved it should be proud; it takes a tremendous amount of effort and commitment. I congratulate you! You are in rare company – the company of authors!

Publishing your book can seem an even more daunting task. But don't worry; it can be done and has been done many times. Take your time, do your homework, and most of all, gather around you strong allies and friends.

If you think a publisher that views itself as an ally, facilitator and a friend to its authors would help make your book more successful, we'd love to talk with you. Remember; anyone can print books and ship them to you – if you're looking for a publishing partner, find one that believes in helping you reach the world with your book!

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