

A few simple “basics” of book publishing

Almost anyone can fly an airplane . . . or publish a book – yet none of us were born with the skills to do either. You are no doubt anxious to get your self-publishing project off the ground, but before you jump in the pilot seat and grab the controls, it may be a good idea to learn the basics of what it will take to make your book “fly.”

Publishing a book involves five groups of closely related tasks – and there are certain activities within each of the groups that must be performed. That’s true whether the book is being published by an industry giant like Random House or a first time do-it-yourselfer. Certain things *have* to be done.

- **Management tasks** - As the name implies, these are the tasks that relate to managing a successful and profitable publishing endeavor. Far too many self-publishing authors don’t consider the issues associated with these activities until they’re already working with a subsidy press or print-on-demand service – at which point they realize that some of the decisions they made (or that were made for them) were not in their best interest. *Management tasks include developing a publishing plan and coordinating the completion of the other publishing tasks.*
- **Authoring tasks** - Obviously, if the goal is to publish a book, then writing and editing the original manuscript are among the key activities that must be completed. When a major publisher buys the rights to a manuscript, they normally spend anywhere from six months to two years editing the work, deciding on the book’s title, writing the bibliographic description and back cover copy, and proofreading each of these pieces thoroughly. With do-it-yourself publishers, however, once the manuscript is done, impatience often takes over – and the other critical tasks are done hastily and carelessly. *When self-publishing, there’s more to authoring a book than just writing the manuscript.*
- **Design tasks** - Book design includes all the activities necessary to incorporate the manuscript content (and any related artwork) into a style, format, and organization that complies with reader expectations, industry standards, and the requirements and specifications of the book’s printer/manufacturer. Self-publishing authors (especially first timers) are typically unfamiliar with the design tasks required to produce print-ready files for a book. As a result, they (1) pay too much for design “packages” from POD services, (2) hire low-cost freelancers who are not qualified for the job, or (3) attempt to design the book themselves without learning any of the fundamental rules of commercial book design. *Consequently, a lot of **good** manuscripts become **bad** books at the design stage.*
- **Production tasks** - As you might expect, the production tasks include everything directly related to printing and manufacturing the book. When an author self-publishes, most of these tasks are performed by a commercial print service. However the author is always responsible for reviewing and approving each step. For example, when the print-ready interior and cover PDF files (prepared in the design stage) are submitted to the printer/press and approved for production, the press manufactures a proof copy (a “sample” of the book that looks the same as the final book will look when it is published). Upon receipt of the proof, it is the author’s job to carefully examine it, make corrections to the interior layout or cover files as needed, and then repeat the PDF preparation and submission process until everything is right. Once the author is satisfied, he/she approves the final proof for publication and release. *The new book is then ready to be printed (either in quantity or on demand) and fed into selected sales channels.*
- **Marketing tasks** - Promoting and selling the book is also a publisher’s responsibility. Many self-publishing authors take a “build it and they will come” approach to the marketing tasks – they assume that merely having a book listed on Amazon.com, or sitting on the shelf in a local bookstore, will produce sales. That’s rarely the case. Even the phenomenal Harry Potter series began with a book that was actively promoted for 17 months before its initial U.S. release, and then for another 26 months before it finally topped the New York Times bestselling list of fiction. *Ideally, the publisher should begin to formulate a marketing strategy as soon as the book is conceived (yes, before the manuscript is even completed!).*

Don’t be concerned if you see some unfamiliar terms in the orientation above – subsequent beacons will be posted to guide you through many of the details. The [CreateSpace COMMUNITY](#) is another great source for information about the simple basics of self-publishing. Finally, here’s a SELF-PUBLISHING ROADMAP that provides a visual plan and approach for completing the key steps outlined above.

A SELF-PUBLISHING ROADMAP

The flow diagram below shows the major tasks associated with self-publishing a typical print-on-demand paperback book. Of course, the steps may vary depending on the characteristics of the book, the degree to which professional services are used to augment do-it-yourself skills, and the addition of sales channels or printing options beyond those offered by an on-demand printer such as CreateSpace.

