How to create a publishing plan

"Begin with the end in mind" is one of Stephen Covey's seminal *7 Habits*. Too many first time self-publishers start their projects with little more than a hope or a dream. Success (in self-publishing, or anything else) begins with a realistic vision of the desired outcome, and a viable plan for achieving it.

The Self-Publishing Roadmap provided with Beacon #1 outlines a general plan for the typical self-publishing project, including the management tasks, authoring tasks, design tasks, production tasks, and marketing tasks involved. It's a great starting point, but it's only a part of the planning process. To create a Publishing Plan that's truly viable and effective for your book, it's important to complete seven key actions steps:

- **Outline your publishing objectives** - What is your reason for self-publishing? What outcome do you want to realize from the endeavor? Perhaps you have multiple books in the works and want to launch a profitable publishing business. Maybe writing and publishing books is more of a part-time hobby. Or it could be that you are self-publishing your first book as a "trial balloon" to see how it goes before you commit more time and money to the effort. It's even possible that you have been unable to interest traditional publishers, and are hoping that a record of strong sales for a self-published title will change that. Whatever the reason, it's important to set specific, measurable, and realistic goals. What kind of book do you want to be holding in your hands on the day it is released? What qualities or characteristics of the book will make you feel proud to be the author and publisher? What outcomes do you want see one month after the book is released? Six months after? One year? Three years? The more clearly you outline exactly what it is you want to happen, the more likely you'll be to create a plan to produce that result – or to discover that the goal you have set is unrealistic (given the time, money, and resources you are willing to commit). In this case, you can adjust your expectations and set a goal that you can achieve, rather than setting yourself up for disappointment and failure.

- **Assess your time and budget constraints** - How much time and money do you have to invest in self-publishing your book? Remember, publishing involves management tasks, writing tasks, design tasks, production tasks, and marketing tasks. Anything you handle personally will take time, and anything you can't or don't handle personally will cost money. The more ambitious your goals are (with regard to your book's quality, and with regard to your sales objectives) the more time and money you will need to invest in order to realize those goals. Because time and money are limited (even for major publishers), it's important to identify from the outset exactly how much time you have available to publish your book, and how much you're willing to spend to complete each group of publishing tasks. Knowing your time and budget constraints will help you make more effective decisions at each stage.

- **Determine what tools and resources you have available** - Do you have a computer, word processing software, image manipulation program, embeddable fonts, and the other publishing tools and resources (printer, paper, a flash drive for back-ups, etc.) that you might need to complete your publishing project? Will anything need to be purchased or upgraded? Would it be less costly and yield better results to have certain services performed for you rather than buying the software yourself and learning to use it? What you have on-hand already – and what you need to acquire – obviously affects your budget and schedule, and should be considered in your planning. You also want to examine any preferences or prejudices you have regarding the tools of the trade. For example, if you're a Mac person, or a person who refuses to use anything but free/open source software, then you essentially take Microsoft's products and solutions off the table for your project (which will affect how you proceed through certain steps).

- **Evaluate your knowledge and skills** - How much do you already know about the action steps required to publish your book? How skilled are you at using the tools and resources required? If you're publishing your book for fun (to share with friends and family), this may not be important. However, if you are publishing with a profit motive (and especially if you intend to publish more books in the future), it's essential that you honestly and accurately evaluate where you stand to determine what you need to learn and master, and what you'll want to entrust to a service provider like Lighthouse24 (so you can budget the time and money for the options you choose).

- **Identify your current Support Team members** - *Who loves ya, baby?* Through each stage of your publishing project, you can benefit enormously from having a strong Support Team. In the planning stage, they might provide encouragement and "moral support." In the authoring and design phases, they might serve as proofreaders. They will also be the first "fans" and promoters of the book, who help spread the word initially (in the music business, this would be called a "street team"). Of course, your Support Team should not be limited to just your family, friends, and fans. Other authors, as well as book design and publishing professionals can become part of your team and help fill gaps you discover in the skills or resources required. To plan your project, you want to determine on whom you can rely on during certain stages and action steps, and you want to identify any "voids" (areas where you'd like to have more support than you do right now) – then look for opportunities to build a supportive team.

- **Create your Publishing Plan** - This is simply a matter of writing down what needs to be done (each task or action item), when it needs to be done, and how much time and money you've allocated to get it done by then. If other success factors are important (such as producing a professional quality product), list those criteria, as well. Also, consider that factors relating to how effectively you integrate your publishing endeavor with the other people and responsibilities in your life (for example, will you really have as much productive time on your computer as you've estimated that you'll need?). Finally, assess the risks associated with each task you write down. Risk management is as easy as asking yourself, *"What could go wrong during a given step, and what would the worst possible consequences of that be?"* If you can live with those consequences, then no problem. However, if the situation would create unacceptable risks for you (personal, financial, legal, etc.), or if you're not sure what could go wrong, then you know ahead of time where you'll need additional information, help, or resources – or at least a "Plan B" contingency.

- **Review the Plan regularly (and modify it as needed)** - Some things are unpredictable, and (naturally) some things will change as you proceed through your book project. This fact causes a few self-publishing authors to forgo the planning steps, and just "wing it." This nearly always results in a book that costs more than it should (in time, money, or both) to produce, isn't as good as it could be, and doesn't sell. *Plan the work, then work the plan* – but when a particular aspect of the plan you've made just won't work, review the previous steps and modify the plan to fit the new circumstances.

These seven steps cannot guarantee your self-publishing success (nothing can), but they will start you in the right direction to achieve a positive and profitable outcome.