

YOUR PUBLISHING ROUTES EXPLAINED



PUBLISHING ROUTES: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING

About

Traditional publishing refers to established publishing houses that acquire books by buying their rights. The most well-known publishers are known as 'the big five' and include Penguin Random House, Hachette, Macmillan, HarperCollins and Simon & Schuster. They each have a number of imprints within them that specialise in different book genres.

How it works

If you secure a contract with a traditional publisher, they will take ownership of the entire publishing process, from manuscript assessment through to sales and distribution. As traditional publishers provide the financial backing, they will take complete control over how your book is edited, how it looks, what price it sells for and what discounts are offered, so that it performs well in the market and they will be able to make back their investment on your book and make a profit.

Financial reward

You will most likely receive an advance payment for the rights to your work on signature of your agreement, followed by 5–15 per cent of royalties earned from book sales once your book has been published. Your royalty percentage depends on factors such as book format (hardback vs paperback) and whether you are taking a share on the price the book retails at, or the price after a trade discount has been applied. You will not begin to receive royalty payments until your initial advance has been offset by the sales income, so it's not uncommon for the first royalty payment to be much lower than anticipated.

Routes in

Traditional publishers acquire book rights from literary agents they have pre-established relationships with. The most typical route to becoming traditionally published is to submit your finished manuscript to agents specialising in your genre. Agents will often have strict application procedures that you must follow. If an agent chooses to represent you, they will pitch your book to publishers, taking their own sales cut if the rights to your book are bought by a publishing house.

SMALL PRESSES

About

Small presses have fewer books on their lists and are often a more accessible way to get published than the traditional route. They tend to specialise in particular genres, such as children's, business, fiction, academic, etc. Notable small presses include: Jacaranda, Eye Books, History Press, Muswell Press, Myrmidon, Saraband, Amberley, Orenda and Elliott & Thompson.

How it works

Small presses usually have an excellent (but smaller) pool of specialist freelancers who they work with directly to produce your book to the highest standard. They will take ownership of the entire publishing process, and often will allow you more creative control than a traditional publisher. But be mindful of the fact that they may not have such robust budgets and channels for distributing, marketing and promoting your book.

Financial reward

Small presses structure their costs and royalties similarly to traditional publishers; however, they are usually more flexible when it comes to contractual rights, especially if they are taking on less risk with your book. For example, you could find that you are offered a higher royalty fee than the traditional 5–15 per cent, yet it's likely in this case you will be offered a much smaller advance, or no advance at all.

Routes in

Small presses work directly with literary agents in the same way that traditional publishers do. Furthermore, many will be receptive to receiving unsolicited submissions, and in some cases welcome them. If you are planning to bypass an agent and approach small presses directly about your book, make sure you research those that are most applicable to your book genre.

SELF-PUBLISHING

About

Self-publishing is an alternative route to getting your book published and one that is growing continuously in popularity thanks to platforms like Amazon. If you choose to self-publish, you fund the publishing process yourself, sourcing the right specialists to carry out key services, and retain the creative control and rights to your work. Famous self-published/indie authors include Jane Friedman, Mark Dawson and Joanna Penn.

How it works

You make decisions on all aspects of the publishing process, from who you hire to what price the book retails at. If you complete the bulk of the work yourself it can be very cheap, but then you do risk sacrificing the quality of your book. If you employ freelancers to complete specific tasks such as copy-editing, proofreading and cover design, be sure to check the quality of their previous work beforehand, as you can't guarantee you are getting value for money. Costs can increase with marketing and publicity activity you choose to run, and you will need to decide on what works best for generating the most sales.

Financial reward

Many self-published authors choose to publish their book via Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing or IngramSpark. This generates significantly higher royalties than traditional publishing, typically 70 per cent rather than the standard 5–15 per cent.

Routes in

The great thing about self-publishing is that you don't need buy-in from an agent or publisher to proceed and you can get started right away, but you will need to find the time to oversee the process. Make sure you do your research, plan ahead for things like marketing, and bring in the right people where necessary.

HYBRID PUBLISHING/ AGENCIES

About

Hybrid publishers and publishing agencies work by helping you to publish your book in return for a payment to cover the cost of services involved. By using a hybrid, you are able to benefit from their industry knowledge to navigate you through the process, and similarly retain creative control of your work. As they are being paid for their services, it's an extremely accessible route and you can ensure a level of quality. Rethink Press is a notable example.

How it works

Whilst you will still be taking your own book to market, hybrid publishers have a trusted network of outsourced specialists, and involve you in the decision-making process along the way. You will have your hand held through what can be a complicated process, and you will benefit from support in areas that are not always possible when self-publishing, such as making your book discoverable to retailers. Whilst hybrids can support you in publishing a great book, they may not have access to the distribution channels of traditional houses or small presses for taking it to market and sometimes over-promise on what they can deliver.

Financial reward

Hybrid publishers come in all shapes and sizes and have varying business models. Some may take a royalty and others may not. They will also vary in the size and scope of their marketing and publicity packages. If they are taking a royalty, they may be more invested in selling copies of your book, but usually this is a responsibility that will fall to you. Whilst this is a more expensive route than self-publishing on your own, you will guarantee a level of quality that can justify a higher retail selling price.

Routes in

In the same way as self-publishing, this route does not require buy-in from either an agent or a publisher, but you will need to have the funds in order to pay for the services, the costs of which can range in the thousands.

PUBLISHING ROUTES: PROS & CONS

TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING	SMALL PRESSES	SELF-PUBLISHING	HYBRID/AGENCIES
<p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional publishers have large distribution channels and marketing and publicity resources. They have the leverage to get your book into stock-holding retail outlets and are well placed to secure PR coverage and reviews. Having the logo of a notable publisher on your spine provides a book with standing and authority. 	<p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is potential for you to receive a higher royalty. With a smaller team and a curated network of freelancers, you may find small presses are more accessible and offer more creative control. 	<p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have creative control over the production, appearance and timeline of your publication. If you have skills in digital marketing and a large network of potential readers, you have the potential to make more money than via the traditional publishing route. 	<p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have access to the same publishing freelancers employed by the big five, meaning your book will often be produced to the same standard. You have more creative control over your book than if you were to publish traditionally.
<p>Cons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The publisher owns all the rights to your work, so you will have very little control over how it looks, is sold, and any opportunities to sell the rights if it does well. Given royalties are much lower, the financial reward depends on how well the book sells, and it can be a while before you see a good return. 	<p>Cons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> With smaller budgets and margins, small presses may not be able to market and distribute your book to the same standard as the big five. With a less recognisable logo on the spine of their book, small authors may feel the risk is too high to relinquish their rights to a smaller, financially more vulnerable press. 	<p>Cons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Without paying for specialist support with editorial, design and marketing, your book may appear unprofessional and contain errors. Without distribution and marketing support, your book may not be discoverable online or in bookshops. 	<p>Cons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have to front the production costs, which could be high depending on the services you require. Unless you pay for additional services in marketing, you are in charge of getting your book into the hands of readers after it has been made available physically and digitally.
<p>What to look out for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many writers believe that as soon as they sell their book to a traditional publisher, it is guaranteed to become a bestseller. In reality, very few books are allocated a large marketing budget, and many don't receive one at all! 	<p>What to look out for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selling the rights to your book to a small press, especially one that is not particularly well-known, may not offer the same rewards and garner the same coverage as working with one of the big five. 	<p>What to look out for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many competitions (and some readers!) do not grant self-published books the respect they often deserve. It may be hard to sell your book without the support of a notable publisher or reputable organisation. 	<p>What to look out for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not all hybrid publishers are legitimate and it's vital that you check your sources before spending significant amounts of money. Look out for 'vanity publishers' who ask for the rights to your book and charge for their services. Take a look at The Society of Authors or The Alliance of Independent Authors for more information on this.

ABOUT WHITEFOX

We are whitefox, a publishing services agency made up of industry experts to help writers self-publish beautiful books and take them to market. We don't discriminate between publishing projects, using our access to amazing freelancer talent to work on both publisher and self-published projects. It's never been easier to publish your book.