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GETTING PUBLISHED: GO IT ALONE OR GO TRADITIONAL?

You've spent years perfecting your book and you're dying to share it with others, but you've reached a fork in the road.

These days, you don't necessarily have to wait to get published – the opportunity is there for you to Do It Yourself and join the tribe of indie authors.

But is that necessarily the best option for you and your circumstances?

The aim of this eBook is to summarise both options so that you can be better informed to decide which path to take. You could even end up doing both – many do.

For each option, I will offer some pros and cons followed by a list of quick-fire steps to take.

Due to there being more you need to prepare and arrange yourself, the section for self-publishing is longer and has more detail.

The information is aimed mainly at authors looking to self-publish in the UK, however, most of the steps are the same wherever you are. If you are outside the UK, two of the main differences will be to do with copyright law and ISBN numbers.

I will provide links to resources for each type of publishing route so that you can find more in-depth information with which to bulk up your knowledge arsenal as you go along.



GO IT ALONE



Pros of Self-Publishing

- **Personal development** – the experience can be rewarding and will give you valuable skills and knowledge for future endeavours.
- **Experience** – if you have first self-published, it can help you to be accepted by a literary agent if you decide to go down the traditional publishing route for your next book.
- **Marketing opportunities** – if you write nonfiction, you are likely to be already involved with your target audience. This means you'll know people who will happily share the word about your upcoming book.
- You may be well-known in your field at the offset – perhaps you have submitted pieces to magazines, guest blogs, columns, forums or professional circles.
- **Support network** – there is a supportive community of indie authors out there, with plenty of help, advice and networking opportunities. You will also find plenty of editors and other professionals dedicated to helping indie authors thrive.
- **Social media** – you'll have the opportunity to build trust and a connection with your followers, which will encourage a desire to invest in your projects. If you feel this eats up too much of your time, you can learn to use a social media scheduler or work with an assistant.

- Social media is a great way to connect with many people at a low cost.
- **Control** – you will have full control over the process (for example, marketing, design and which professionals you'd like to work with, if any).
- **Less risk** – self-publishing allows you to 'print on demand'. This means there's less risk, and no wasted resources such as materials or money – the books are simply printed as they are ordered, and this can be done very quickly these days.
- There is no struggle to pitch to a literary agent and face frustrating rejections.

Cons of Self-Publishing

- **Potential overwhelm** – you, the author, will need to do all the work yourself or contract professionals to do it for you – everything from editing, interior and cover design, proofreading, illustrations, photography, marketing and publicity, accounting, indexing, manufacturing, fulfilling orders, shipping, sales, etc.
- **Business savvy** – self-publishing should be seen as running a business; all the relevant activities and responsibilities involved in being self-employed as an author and publisher will be down to you.
- **You're accountable** – having to wear many different hats can become overwhelming if all you want to do is to focus on writing.
- **Research and learning** – you will need to be committed in order to make the best of your self-publishing journey.
- **Costs** -- these can be daunting – although there are various levels of expense, it can become a large investment with no guarantee to make a return.
- **No mainstream exposure** – if you decide you'd like your book to be available in major bookshops or libraries, this may not be an option if you self-publish.

Quick-Fire Self-Publishing Guide

Any bold text signifies something in the resources list that will have a link to a helpful blog post or online article so you can find out more – or you can just click the bold text to be taken straight to the resource as you go along.

Initial Preparations

- Start off by asking yourself what your goal is as a result of self-publishing – what is your definition of it being a success? Do you want to sell x amount of copies? Do you just want to see your book in print? Do you want to see your book being recommended by certain organisations? Your production and marketing plan (and your budget) will depend on how you answer these questions.

- See self-publishing as setting up and running a business; you will need a way of [keeping a log of all your business expenses](#) – a simple Excel spreadsheet will suffice.
- [Costs](#) – decide how much you are willing to do yourself as opposed to what you want to outsource; decide this first and begin to save up in advance. It is a good idea to see these initial expenses as an investment in your business and future. See my resources list for some helpful blogs that break down the potential costs and the various tiers of expense you could be looking at.
- Have a [marketing plan](#) in place.
- [Prepare your manuscript.](#)
- Get an [ISBN](#) – if you're publishing an eBook only, you don't necessarily need one, but for print books, you definitely need one. Remember that you will need a new one each time there is a new edition, an edition in another language or if you want to publish a hardback version, so you may be better off getting the package of 10 to start with, rather than a single one; it will be more cost-effective in the long run and gives you flexibility and control. See the resources list for links to where to buy these in the UK and the USA.
- [Copyright](#) – keep up to date with the latest laws and [the very minimum you need to include on your copyright page](#). There are some handy links for both the UK and the USA in the resources.

Nurture an Online Presence

- Start talking about your book well before it's launched; share information on social media and build up anticipation for the impending release.
- Develop an online presence by posting and getting involved in relevant forums, on social media or on your own blog.
- Blogging – a great way to maintain your online presence and put content out there.
 - Don't forget that online copy differs in various ways in order to make it easier to read content on-screen – to improve readability, it's better to keep paragraphs short. Many people read blogs on a coffee break or when they have a moment to spare while they are waiting for dinner to cook, for example, so you might want a mix of longer and shorter posts.
 - When writing a post, start by asking yourself how you want the reader to feel, what you want them to know, and what you want them to do as a result of reading it – structure the content of your post around the answers to those questions.
 - Where does your target audience mostly hang out? Share your posts in these places. If someone has put some time and effort into reading and providing feedback on one of your posts, it's always good to return the favour if you can.

- Research [how often and when to post on each social media platform](#) to avoid overwhelming followers – there are some great tips and cheat sheets on Pinterest; a lot of them are aimed at lifestyle bloggers, but the insight still applies. The best thing to do is to be yourself. Relentless self-promotion is an ideal way to lose followers or get yourself "muted". Show an interest in others, be supportive, and find your tribe. Most importantly, ignore anyone trying to be inflammatory on purpose – it's not worth the time and effort it takes to respond.
- Mix up the posts – they shouldn't always be about sales or asking followers what they can do for you. Post about your life behind the scenes, let followers get to know you, share photos and useful or interesting things that your target audience might be interested in. Let them know where you can be found if you're going to an event. Engage with them, reply to comments if you can, and be interactive.
- Be consistent if you are blogging; followers come to expect a post regularly – it doesn't matter if it's weekly, fortnightly or monthly as long as it's consistent. If not, you risk followers giving up on your blog. Nina the Writer (who was also kind enough to answer some questions about her own self-publishing experience below) offers some great advice about blogging on her own [website](#).
- Your website should be like your storefront – focus on copy that will engage the reader and give them a good insight into what to expect from you as a writer.
- Choose a domain name and web host (I personally recommend [Bluehost](#)) – with [Wordpress](#) you can host your blog on your website, or if a blog is all you need, you can choose a [free platform](#). Your own website gives you more control and there are some inexpensive options that will provide everything you need. Wordpress is known to be very good for SEO ([Search Engine Optimisation](#)) and offers many free customisable themes so it still looks professional. If you want to cut costs, setting up and maintaining your blog on a platform like Wordpress is something you can do easily yourself if you have more time than money to spare. Once you've learned the skills, that knowledge will help you again and again.

Outsourcing Professionals

- If you hire professionals, the cost will inevitably increase. Do you have anyone you could do a skill swap with? Maybe you could write some website copy for them in return for a photo or two.
- Will you require the skills of an illustrator or photographer to provide additional material?

- **Book cover design** – will you do this yourself, have a friend do it, or will you outsource a professional? If you don't already know how to do this, there are many **tutorials** that can be found online, but you need to be prepared to spend time on and practice this to produce a cover that really does your book justice. Many self-publishing platforms allow you to design the cover as part of their process.
- Editing
 - Do you want to work with an editor? There are a number of good reasons to do this, but it is entirely up to you. Perhaps you could ask some friends to look over your manuscript with a fresh pair of eyes. It's not advisable to edit your own work; your eyes may only see what your brain is telling them they should see, rather than what is actually there. After I post a blog, I always notice something later that I didn't notice at the time of editing, even when I felt that I was editing ruthlessly. If you are self-publishing, you want to present yourself in the best possible light. Errors and inconsistencies can slip through when we edit for ourselves, and these can cause the reader to have a difficult experience. You want them to digest and react to the material you have worked so hard on and make it as smooth a ride as possible for them, rather than full of distracting bumps.
 - You can choose **how in-depth you want your editor to go** (line editing, full copy-edit, proofreading etc.). Do your **research to find the editor** that best fits your style, niche, and budget. The relationship between you and your editor should be a collaboration.

Ready to Launch

- Choose your platform – I talk a lot about **Amazon's platforms** but there are others available, such as **lulu.com**.
 - Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing offers a **step by step guide on how to prepare your manuscript** – you can save it as a PDF or get a proof copy for you to assess before you make it available to the public. It provides templates for various sizes which you can download to Word, paste in your manuscript and view the layout. Video tutorials are also included.
 - Amazon's KDP will also help you to **design the interior of your book** and you can decide which pages to include or exclude.

What Next?

- Continue to implement your marketing plan once you have published – this could include interaction on social media and maintaining your online presence or in-person networking.

- Look for [reviewers](#) who can provide some vital feedback – use the #amreading tag on Twitter to look for beta readers, or you could ask friends, family and peers to leave you a review.
- As time goes on, your presence will build. The best thing about social media activity is that followers could become interested in any future projects you decide to share as they get to know you.

Self-Publishing Resources

- [Simple record keeping](#)
- [Costs explained](#)
- Various levels of self-publishing and their [costs](#)
- [Ways to market your book](#)
- Getting started with [marketing your book](#)
- [Preparing your manuscript](#)
- ISBN – [UK](#) / [USA](#)
- [Copyright](#) explained – [UK](#) / [USA](#)
- [Wordpress](#)
- Blogging [tips](#)
- Social media scheduler – [Buffer](#) and [Hootsuite](#) (Hootsuite offers many [tutorials and free lessons](#).)
- Domain name and [web hosting](#)
- [Blogging platforms](#) explained
- Book cover and interior [design](#)
- [Editing](#) explained
- Finding a [compatible editor](#)
- Platforms – Amazon's CreateSpace is closed to new accounts and they plan to merge with [Kindle Direct Publishing](#)
- Finding [reviewers](#)
- eBook only resources – this [post](#) demonstrates the advantages of eBooks and circumstances where you might consider a printed version instead.



Short interview with self-published author, [Nina Jervis](#)

Nina: I'm happy to answer the questions as best I can, though I should declare that I had help! A friend of mine had self-published a novel a few years ago and now he's in the process of setting up his own publishing company, so he used me as a 'test' customer in exchange for a testimonial. I don't know whether I would actually have gone through the process at all otherwise; it costs at least £2k to self-publish properly.

Is there anything you wish you had known before taking the self-publishing route?

I wish I'd known some clear steps to follow – it's a bit of a minefield, and you realise that writing the book is only the beginning. There are so many companies out there willing to do everything for you, but you don't know if you can trust them – particularly when they start gushing about you and your book without knowing you, or having read the book!

What was the biggest challenge?

The biggest challenge was getting the cover designed; it was really hard trying to describe what I wanted to a designer. The first one I used got it totally wrong, designing 'Sex and the City'-style covers when I had emphasised that I didn't want it to look like chick-lit. Eventually, I just asked a graphic designer friend to do the cover for me. Choosing fonts was quite hard too – there's more to it than you think!

What did you find hardest to find information about when you were researching the process?

Finding the best place to begin was hard; there's a lot of really disparate information online and it felt very technical and overwhelming. I'm an author, not a designer or a technical typesetter.

You can find Nina's self-published book, 'Procrastinations', on [Amazon](#). Nina's unique outlook and wry sense of humour shine through as she shares her observations of daily life with us.



GO TRADITIONAL



Pros of Traditional Publishing

- **Less responsibility and cost** – the publisher will be responsible for attempting to distribute your book as widely as they can.
- They will be responsible for, and the costs involved in, hiring professionals such as editors, designers, etc.
- **Mainstream exposure** – your publisher may be able to place your book into thousands of bookstores around the country, reaching a wider audience.
- They can create public relations opportunities with major media.
- They will be helping to market you and your book so if you ensure you are also doing this yourself, there will be double the exposure. The benefits of creating an online presence and getting to know your potential or current readers still apply, even if you decide to take the traditional publishing route.
- **Credibility** – you may feel as though you are taken more seriously if you work with a publisher, and you may have the opportunity to network with a wider range of people.

Cons of Traditional Publishing

- **Fewer rights** – you will have to give up the reproduction rights to the book and may also have to hand over electronic, first subsidiary, foreign translation and other rights to the publisher.
- **Less control** – you may not have control over the development of your manuscript or how your book looks when finished.
- **Marketing** – the publisher will decide how to market the book, but they will rely heavily on you, your network and your efforts as part of their marketing plan.
- You are often expected to be active in the marketing of your book so may have to contend with public speaking, which you may find challenging.
- **Rejection** – if your sales are not consistently good, the publisher may decide your book no longer warrants any marketing and put it out of print.
- The demand for publishing outweighs the supply of big or small publishing houses so your chances of getting published may be slim.
- You have to put a lot of time and effort into finding a literary agent and experience many rejections – you may not be given any feedback on why it was rejected and end up at a loss as to how to improve your chances for the next time. It's a long and arduous process which can be disheartening.



OWLY'S HELPFUL HOOT

"You could consider cooperative publishing if you are a nonfiction author with a specific niche. Smaller publishers in your field could be a good fit for you, which allows you to concentrate on writing and selling your book. You pay a publication fee, the cost of printing or any upfront expenses and, as a result, you become an equity partner. For example, 50% of profit rather than x% of the retail price goes to you. This removes the risk for the publisher and gives you the potential of a publishing house but is more of a business venture/investment for you."

Quick-Fire Traditional Publishing Guide

- **Prepare your manuscript** – complete with references and bibliography, etc.
- **Build up an online presence** – let people know about the upcoming book, gauge interest, inform your peers, etc. If you have built a solid foundation, it will mean you have more potential for readers and sales if your book is published.
- Blogging and submitting feature articles to various other publications (print or web) are great ways to build up trust, interest and an online following. Don't sweep traditional in-person networking under the rug either, just get yourself out there – you never know who you might meet.
- **Find a literary agent** – they will be responsible for selling your work to a publisher. If you're not accepted or offered a deal, don't give up.
- **Editing and refining** – if you are offered a deal, the publisher will arrange editors, etc. and they will handle the physical production of the book.
- **Continue implementing your marketing plan and maintain your online presence once you have been published.** If you have the budget for it, you may want to hire someone to help with your admin from time to time – especially if you are in the process of writing another book.

Traditional Publishing Resources

- [Preparing a manuscript](#)
- Finding a [literary agent](#)
- A fantastic post detailing [how mainstream publishers produce books](#) by Louise Harnby



Whichever route you decide to take, there is a huge amount of support and information available at your fingertips to guide you along the way.

Good luck!

Ally