

Self-publishing: pros and cons

A possible solution to the loss of creative control that comes with signing over your precious work is self-publishing. Effectively, you take your manuscript to a press that prints the book the way you want. Beware the difference between a vanity and subsidy presses, and self-publishers. Self-publishers will be up-front about the cost of printing your book and will offer help with editing and design. With a vanity press, you may not be able to recover any of your costs and, as a worst-case scenario, may not even receive the books you ordered to be printed! For an excellent guide to self-publishing, see the Canadian Author's Association's guide to publishers (<http://www.canauthors.org/links/publish.html>).

Once you have the printed books, now what? You have to be prepared to distribute them. If you were only looking to produce a few copies to give to your friends and family, then self-publishing is your best bet. If you want to reach a wide

audience, you may get frustrated quickly. Many self-published authors hand sell their books to book stores. Be prepared to spend as much effort promoting your book as you did writing it. The standard cut for any bookseller in Canada is 40% of the total cost of the book. And do not expect to receive any money until your book sells. You will be the one responsible for tracking your sales and collecting your profits. The business of selling books is like any other. You have to work very hard to get your book into a store.

Another factor to consider is competition. Self-published books do not look or feel like professionally published titles. These flashy books will be sitting on the shelf next to your book. Without media attention, a self-published book will be unlikely to fly off the shelves. In fact, booksellers will be reluctant to take on a self-published book without knowing that it has received some form of publicity. Local news and radio may give you some attention, but only if your book will appeal to their audience.

"If I had to give young writers advice, I would say don't listen to writers talking about writing or themselves."
~ Lillian Hellman

Self-publishing is not for the faint of heart. The advantages include a huge amount of creative control. If you are self-motivated and business-minded, you may also be lured by the ability to market your book your way. Also, after your initial cost of printing, all of the profits will be shared by you and the bookstore.