

From Author to Publisher

By Mary Ellen Bates, Bates Information Services



Mary Ellen Bates

Over the past 18 years, I have had six books published by three different publishers. When I decided that I had another book inside me, I considered pitching it to my publishing contacts, including John Bryans at Information Today, who shepherded four of my books into print. After serious thought, I decided to self-publish *The Reluctant Entrepreneur: Making a Living Doing What You Love* through Amazon.com's print and e-book services. While it usually takes a publisher nine months or a year from receipt of a manuscript to shipment of a book, my turnaround time was just four months—a significant factor with a book that covers social media and other rapidly changing fields.

This choice isn't for everyone. It was appealing to me as an established author and speaker because I already had a number of avenues for promoting and selling my book. I have developed strong writing skills, so I knew that my manuscript would not need extensive editing. A good friend of mine had already handled the production of several other books, and we established a barter relationship through which she could provide me with the editorial and organizational support I needed. Along with Guy Kawasaki's remarkably useful book, *APE: Author, Publisher, Entrepreneur—How to Publish a Book*, I felt that I had the resources I needed to self-publish.

I chose to produce both soft-cover and e-book versions, on the assumption that the relatively small additional work required to modify the format would make the book appealing to as large an audience as possible. (So far, I have sold an equal number of print and e-books.) While getting the print version formatted to my satisfaction took longer than I had anticipated,

the process was relatively painless. Amazon's CreateSpace platform makes it easy to preview and print draft copies, and I can purchase author copies of the book for under \$4 each—significantly less than what traditional publishers charge authors for copies of their books.

Even though I decided to self-publish, I wrote up a book proposal outlining the scope of the book and of each chapter, spelling out my marketing plan, and committing to a completion date nine months out. In my experience, a clear proposal with accountability and metrics is an essential tool in ensuring that a self-published book gets from idea to publication.

As with all my books, getting the last 10 percent written was the most difficult part of the process. As before, my spouse sent me to a hotel with the admonition that I not check out until the manuscript was done. As always, this approach was successful; I returned home three days later with the manuscript completed and ready for my editor.

Having had the experience of working with traditional publishers, I had a fairly good idea of what would be required in self-publishing a book. Following are the most significant trade-offs I encountered during the process of taking *The Reluctant Entrepreneur* from concept to publication.

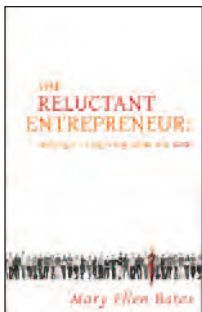
Editorial support. Publishers provide an editor, copyeditor, and (usually) an indexer. I bartered for editorial services, and paid for copyediting of the final manuscript. I chose not to include an index to the book, relying instead on a detailed table of contents (and, of course, the full-text search functionality of e-books). The coaching and writing support I received from

my editor was instrumental in getting the book done, and I doubt I could have afforded to pay for all the hours my editor spent keeping me on track. If you are not in a position to pay or barter for time with an editorial coach, consider finding a writing buddy to keep you focused and on track. Be sure that you also have someone who is skilled at editing and polishing book manuscripts; this is not an area in which you want to economize.

Design support. Publishers usually design the book cover and internal format without input from the author. I bartered with a local graphic designer for the book cover and logo for Niwot Press (the name of my self-publishing identity), and my editor and I worked together to develop the book's internal layout. As with traditional publishers, I chose the title and subtitle myself, with plenty of input from my editor and from colleagues.

Administrative support. Publishers handle the administrative work involved in getting an ISBN and Library of Congress control number (or equivalent) for the book, assigning a cover price, and generating the barcode. Fortunately, these are fairly straightforward tasks, and both Amazon.com and Kawasaki's book spell out the steps involved.

Advance against royalties. Most publishers pay authors an advance of several thousand dollars against the royalties they will earn from the sale of their book. As a self-published author, I have to invest in the expenses of preparing a manuscript for publication. The trade-off is that I earn more money from each book sale, particularly when I sell books directly. Since the success of the book is dependent on the quality of the writing and appearance of the book, it



is important to budget for high-quality editorial and design services.

Sales support. Publishers handle distribution and sales of both print and e-books; I sell copies of my books through my own web site as well. As a self-publisher, I use Amazon

as my primary distribution channel, and I keep an inventory of about 100 copies of my book to sell at book signings and speaking engagements. Since my book is more likely to be purchased by individuals than libraries or institutions, my focus has been on reaching out to groups that comprise solo practitioners and entrepreneurs providing professional services.

Marketing support. Publishers provide what most authors consider to be a minimal level of marketing for their book. After all, while I am just one author among many to a publisher, this book is top priority to me. All authors must become comfortable marketing their books; self-published authors are simply more aware of that fact. I developed a six-month

marketing plan for my latest book, using many of the techniques mentioned in Kawasaki's book, *APE*. I can use the social media profiles I already have, and I have created a separate blog and web site specifically for the book (www.reluctant-entrepreneur.com). I am participating in the local author consignment programs offered by two large independent book stores in the Denver, Colorado, area, one of which includes a book signing and promotion as well as prominent placement near the front of the store for three months.

Reflecting on the process for getting this latest book to market and comparing it to my experiences with traditional publishers, I am happy with the trade-offs required for self-publishing. I found it tremendously satisfying to be involved in all aspects of the design of the book, and I enjoyed having complete control over the editorial process. And while I miss that royalty check, I believe that I will ultimately earn more through self-publishing. This may not be the route for first-time authors, but I encourage more experienced writers to consider self-publishing for their next book.

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Mary Ellen's books include:

The Reluctant Entrepreneur: Making a Living Doing What You Love (2014, Niwot Press)

Building & Running a Successful Research Business: A Guide For the Independent Information Professional (1st edition, 2003, Information Today; 2nd edition, 2010, Information Today)

Super Searchers Cover The World: The Online Secrets of International Business Researchers (2001, Information Today)

Researching Online For Dummies (2nd edition, 2000, IDG)

Mining For Gold on the Internet (2000, McGraw-Hill)

Super Searchers Do Business: The Online Secrets of Top Business Researchers (1999, Information Today)

Online Deskbook: Online Magazine's Essential Desk Reference For Online and Internet Searchers (1996, Information Today)

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