

The Writer As Publisher

This little story has a moral: if you want something done properly, get a woman to do it. Or: If you want something done properly, do it yourself. I was asked by the Thunderbolt man if I wanted to be part of a worker's collaborative where writers were doing it themselves—the publishing and distribution, that is. The word 'work' panicked me a bit, but he then said it a different way, asking if I wanted to be multi-skilled, by becoming more than just a text provider—the jargon for the diminished role of the writer in our modern throw-away, crap-in-your-nest society. I didn't know what to say, really. It sounded like I'd have to do a lot more trade learning. Sound arguments were put to me why a writer is a 24-carat idiot if he's waiting to be fed by the business suits in the publishing business. Consider the logic, as it was explained to me. If you were to ask what the best way to keep the price of food down, you'd have to say 'to buy it off the bloke who grows it.' And you'd be right. However, until we can transmit food through phone wires, we'll have to keep on going down to the food store. But with books, 93% of what we pay goes to people who had nothing to do with the growing of the product. They're all in the business being middlemen when the product CAN be sent through a phone line direct to the customer. That, and that alone, is driving the demise of the traditional book business. It's getting down to a one-on-one between writer and reader, as it should have been, had we lived in a near-perfect world.

But there are many reasons a writer ought to think about getting himself into print directly without all the hangers-on—especially the untalented people who make their living out of judging your talent. And self-publishing is rapidly shedding the 'bad reputation' tradi-

tional publishers put on it and any other form of competition. One of the many good reasons concerns money, or income from his creation. It's no less convincing than the others usually of more interest to an artist. If he's sitting on the fence not sure of which way to jump, he might consider the money question on its own. This is the argument: Have you considered that a baby being born today will be buying and reading your ebook? Oh yeah they will, because ebooks never go out of print. Unlike print books. Let's assume you can get a publishing house to give you a contract, you'll probably only see one (1) print run done of your book. And that print run will take 18 months or more to be on book shelves. And once it goes out of print, your book will be made into an ebook because publishing contracts now have that stipulation. If it is made into an ebook by the publishing company, you won't be receiving the same royalty as the author who self publishes. Why? Because instead of Amazon sending you the 70% royalty for ebooks sold in the U.S. the U.K. and Germany, they'll be sending it to your book publisher. That's why mid-list authors are jumping ship and publishing their books. They've done the math. Don't believe? Then consider this:

Author A is a mid-list Author with XYZ Publishing House (names have been changed to protect the guilty). Author B on the other hand, is a non-conformist. She self-publishes on her own site and puts her books in Amazon's Kindle bookstore. XYZ publishes Author A's book and prints 25,000 copies (their normal run for her genre). The paperback book sells for \$6.95. For this scenario, Author A will get 7% of the gross. So $25,000 \times 6.95 = \$173,750$ $\times .07 = \$12,162.50$. The book was not reprinted as more than 2,000 books were sent back to the publisher so the royalty Author A actually received was reduced by \$973.

Now Author B publishes her book on the Kindle so there is no print run. But she does sell the same number of books as Author A in the first year because her book is being sold world wide instead of in local book stores. Because Amazon pays a royalty of 70% for buyers in the United States and other Countries 35% royalty, Author B's royalty will be measured at an average of 52.5% royalty. To be even more fair, Author B sells her book for \$4.95 on Amazon. So $25,000 \times 4.95 = \$123,750$ $\times .525 = \$64,968.75$.

Money isn't the only difference between the two authors. Author A is locked into a contract and since her publishing company won't reprint, the only money she'll receive is 7% to 15% of the 70% her publishing company makes selling it as an ebook on Amazon. Which means Author A is dead in the water. She's locked into a contract and it will be years before she can get her book back to self-publish. While Author B will be selling her ebooks year after year. In one or two years, it's entirely possible, your name could be right up there with Stephen King but without the added baggage of a go nowhere contract. Really makes you rethink your attitude of being "print" published. Isn't it better to have a huge fan base of readers continually buying your ebooks instead of seeing your "print" books sitting on the discount table at Big-W?

(courtesy Judith Tramayne: www.agoodread.com)