

# Becoming a Published Author Can Be Dangerous To Your Wealth



By Dick Kuiper

By now, almost every business person is aware of the wonderful world of print-on-demand in the world of book publishing. Companies like CreateSpace and Kindle have revolutionized the publishing industry. Unlike the status quo of a decade or so ago, becoming a published author is now relatively simple and inexpensive.

That's the good news. The bad news is that the book market has been flooded by so-called authors churning out volumes of near-worthless content. Unfortunately, it has always been a struggle for even good authors to get their books accepted to the point of being deemed a success. The inundation of junk books has greatly exacerbated the situation.

## **Before the New Book Publishing Renaissance**

Back in the day, aspiring authors had two basic routes to take: 1) try to get a publisher to pick up their book, thereby avoiding the cost of self-publishing and purchasing a substantial book launch inventory, or 2) self-publish and invest in enough inventory to get the printing cost down to a reasonable number.

Both choices were fraught with serious problems. Going the publisher route presented two difficult challenges: 1) convincing a publisher to agree to publish your book was too often an

exercise in futility, and 2) if the publisher agrees, the author loses control and even has to purchase copies of his or her own book from the publisher.

With the other option of embarking on the self-publishing journey, the author maintains control but must fork over a serious chunk of change to put the book on the market.

## **Now Comes the Distribution Hurdle**

In the pre-Amazon era, the book market arena itself was not for the faint of heart. The Ingram Book Company has been the quintessential “owner” of the book distribution marketplace for several decades. If you wanted to get your book distributed, Ingram was pretty much the only game in town.

If you or your publisher wanted to get your book on the market, you realistically had to go through Ingram. It was not terribly difficult to get Ingram to carry your book because the company had nothing to lose. But not so for publishers and self-published authors. Books were basically “provided” to book stores on quasi-consignment, with the stores having the right to return books that were not selling well.



While authors did receive the proceeds of book sales to the stores up front, minus a very hefty commission, many had to return the money when and if the books came back as unsold – which was very common. Ouch!

## **It Gets Worse – All Marketing Is the Responsibility of the Author**

The wishful thinking of “write it and they will come” is pure poppycock. Except in very rare circumstances, neither publishers nor book stores do any marketing of the books they carry. That’s up to the author and it’s a herculean task.

If you think book printing is spendy, try funding a book marketing campaign. The printing investment is child’s play in comparison.

## **Enter the Amazon.com and Print-on-Demand Revolution**

As I mentioned at the start, things have changed dramatically. Nowadays, anyone with a personal computer can become an author in record time – perhaps not a passable author, but an author nevertheless.

Even hard-copy printing and traditional sales & distribution channels are non-essential options, which greatly reduces the market entry cost.

In years past, it was not unusual for an author to labor arduously over a book for a year before it was ready for publication. Today, that is a rare exception.

With the current accelerated pace of life, reading has become sort of a lost art, replaced by electronic entertainment, video games, social media and the like. While 300-page novels are still marketable, non-fiction books greater than 150 pages don't stand much of a chance of turning a profit – far less than 1/20<sup>th</sup> of 1%.

Not to disparage millennials, but the new generation has turned to sources of information other than book reading. It has nothing to do with laziness or lack of caring, it's just that books have fallen out of favor when compared to other choices of how one spends their time.

You don't have to take my opinion on this. A study was done on the length of non-fiction books that have made the New York Times best seller list for the past 6-7 years. In 2011, the average length of such books was 476 pages. By 2017, it was down to 273 pages and dropping quickly. And that's just the best sellers. The overall average is quite a bit lower, especially in the ebook arena.

## **Here Come the Scam Artists**

The not-so-brave new world of inexpensive, fast-paced book publishing has spawned a new breed of 'quick-buck' opportunists. This was not unexpected since almost every breakthrough engenders a swarm of ill-intentioned entrepreneurs lining up to exploit the new trend.

It's been a well-known fact for decades that being a published author provides a significant boost to any business person's credibility and reputation. Having a published book in your business portfolio is one of the best marketing advantages a person can have.

Now that publishing your own book is a low-cost, quick-turnaround activity, we have been seeing an avalanche of "publishing experts" descending on the business world, chomping at the bit to get their piece of the action.

Many of these "star maker gurus" have little or nothing in the way of credentials as publicists, authors or publishers. Many are mere charlatans making unrealistic promises to



unsuspecting business people. Don't get me wrong, there are many true experts working in this area. But just like the confusion caused by the flood of sub-standard books on the market, it's often difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff. So, caveat emptor as the saying goes.

## The Instant Best Seller, The Mother of all Scams

If you think the "I can make you a published author in record time" ploy sounds too good to be true, how about this next claim to potential fame?

More and more paid commercials are showing up on the Internet where the advertiser states they will guarantee to make your book a best seller...usually regardless of the quality of the content. Wow! Does that sound tempting or what?

Well, don't be shocked but it can and does happen.

Not long ago, a marketing expert named Brent Underwood set out to prove it could be done and it was surprisingly easy. He produced a book called *Putting My Foot Down*, which almost immediately became a #1 best seller on Amazon. Mr. Underwood did it as a spoof because the book had only a photo of his foot and all the pages of the book were blank!

Amazon quickly banned the book and plugged the huge loophole.

However, there are still several "Slick Willies" out there on the Internet who guarantee to make your book a best seller for a fee – ranging from around \$1,500 to \$4,000. And...guess what? It works because Amazon is unable to close all the little loopholes that make it possible.



But...there is a catch, and it works to the detriment of the named author of such best sellers. There are many complaints on the Internet of people who have fallen into this clever trap. I say "trap" with some caution because there is nothing illegal with exploiting the loophole that is still used. While it's certainly unethical, in the eyes of the law, it's just a playful ruse.

The essence of the complaints is that although the poor authors can truthfully claim their book reached best seller status, most made no money on book sales. Not only that but the authors found the best seller status they achieved did them no good unless they were willing to launch an expensive marketing campaign based solely on that status recognition. So, back to square one with a few thousand dollars less in their bank account.

## Now For the “Not Really a Book” Book

So, now you’re onto the best seller scam and have given up on that.

But you still want to take advantage of one of those advertised offers to make you a published author even if you’re a sub-standard writer.

As I mentioned above, many people advertising to help you have little or no experience in book writing or publishing. That being the case, you may be just as qualified as they are in making it happen.

The biggest mistake made in these “slam dunk” programs is that the book that comes out of the process can hardly be called a viable book at all. In many cases, they are merely “me too” copies of content you can find for free on the Internet. So why pay someone for that?

Publishing a “me too” book is sometimes worse than not having a book at all. It damages your reputation when it gets out that you wrote a worthless book. That being the case, the chances of getting acceptance of a follow-on book are slim to none. If you hope to land consulting or speaking engagements because you are a published author of one of these books of little or no value...well, good luck! Odds are it won’t happen because your first book left a bad taste in people’s mouths.

I’ve seen such “fake authors” touting their books with grandiose promotional activities and phony testimonials. Meanwhile, their books are little more than glorified pamphlets with trivial content people have seen many times before. Again, this does more harm than good. And paying someone else to help you produce such a book is adding insult to injury.



If you are contemplating paying someone to help you produce a book, you MUST do your due diligence. Demand to see samples of books they have written themselves. If the sample is of marginal quality or if it’s just another “me too” copy of readily available information, steer clear.

If they have written a viable book, it should be on Amazon.com. If it’s not, something may be fishy. If it is, Amazon should provide you a taste of the writing with its “See Inside” feature that allows you to view the first 10% or so of the book without purchasing it. Read it carefully because it’s a precursor of your own book.

## **No Such Thing as a Free Lunch**

In closing, I remind you to be extremely cautious when you encounter offers to help you publish a book. The old adage “You Can’t Judge a Book by Its Cover” is not only true about books, its true about “consultants” offering to help you get published as well.

Publishing a sub-standard book can do serious harm to your career and the damage it can do may haunt you for years to come.

### ***About the Author***

A ghostwriter and freelance writer by trade, Dick Kuiper has been writing on a wide variety of non-fiction subjects for years. Two books he wrote recently under his own name are *Success Is Yours For The Taking* and *Gig Economy: The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*. In addition to his writing activities, Dick is an internationally known speaker and seminar presenter. Samples of his writing can be seen at [www.ghostwriterhelp.com](http://www.ghostwriterhelp.com).

