

jcannonbooks

Because everybody
needs an editor . . .

and a newsletter



It's starting to click



People attending the San Diego Writers Festival stroll around the booths at Coronado High School. I don't remember high school looking like this. Must be the palm trees.

WARNING: *The following contains depictions of social media and networks. Tech-averse authors who hope to publish novels or nonfiction but are unfamiliar with the marketplace may experience nausea, sleeplessness, and uncontrolled freaking out.*

When we became accomplices in the Digitization of Everything, we provoked such tumult in the publishing industry that it responded with secret weapons.

I don't mean algorithms and AI, scary as they are. Not talking about print on demand, but that's a factor. The weapons are unpaid marketing strategists, and the job overwhelms many of them because they are the authors themselves.

Understanding the world of modern publishing requires familiarity with its main options. And then you have to understand that no matter which or how many options you try, your work's chief promoter and marketer will always be you.

Any author with just a vague idea of the author's role in marketing needed only to attend the recent [San Diego Writers Festival](#) at Coronado High School to have it explained. Yeah, too late now, but here's guidance from a few of the three dozen panels and presentations. You probably know these things. You probably ignored them.

Publishing options break down into three main categories. Some folks divide the market further, but they're not writing this newsletter, are they?

Traditional publishers occupy the industry's lofty throne, a place built long ago on a slick-sided mountain of mostly unanswered query letters. They are giant, New York City-based businesses, often called houses. If you have written something and intend to ask Hachette, Penguin Random House, or other members of the Big Five to consider it for publication, you will first have to persuade a literary agent to represent you, a crucial and nearly impossible task. Then your manuscript needs to be among the few selected for publication, which many sources say amounts to 1 or 2 percent of submissions. The chosen authors don't pay for the services a traditional publisher provides, and first-timers might receive an advance of a few thousand dollars, which they keep even if the book flops. If sales generate more than the advance, authors get a cut of that revenue. In most cases, the publisher maintains control of the publishing rights.

[Cornelia Feye](#), moderator of a session at the writers festival titled "Getting Published: Deciding Between Self, Indie, and Hybrid," agreed that the traditional publishing method is the most prestigious. But . . .

"It's painful and often not very productive," she told at least 80 people packed into a science lab that was among the rooms the free festival used.

[Shiloh Rasmussen](#), author and panelist, expressed a central truth about the traditional publishing method. If your manuscript is accepted, it may not come out looking the way you imagined.

"They'll cut a lot of your stuff out," she said.

That's the bargain: Trade control for prestige and reach. Of course, anything you submit to a traditional publisher must be the best you can make it. No continuity problems. No secondary characters who disappear without warning. No incomprehensible plot lines. And for the love of all things written, no grammar or syntax errors. But even if you accomplish all that and are offered a contract, a traditional house will unleash its editor hounds upon your work. The result will be an improvement, but don't be surprised by requests for rewrites.

If an author survives that pummeling, a process that can take months or a year, the big publisher will want the author to contribute to sales through a self-devised campaign to spread the word about the book. It is the same campaign you outlined for the publisher months earlier while groveling for notice.

"The traditional publishers do not do marketing anymore," Cornelia said. Well, maybe if your name is Stephen King.

My depiction of the Big Five process is not disrespectful. It is a tip for authors who have modern expectations. A new shirt, a toothbrush, or a refrigerator can be delivered to your doorstep with astonishing speed. We don't want to be told something is unavailable. We want fulfillment, and we want it now. Is it any wonder why independent, hybrid, and self-publishers were spawned?

Hybrid publishers usually require a conventional pitch from authors, but some hybrids are more discerning than others. Caveat scriptor. Reliable ones usually offer an array of services that an author can pay for, including editing, cover design, and perhaps marketing guidance.

The options can be expensive. Real expensive. Even so, for some authors, control is more important than cost.

[Patrick Holcomb](#), another of the "Getting Published" panelists, tried the traditional route for his book, *Where the Seams Meet*.

He described the most frustrating response he received in his hunt for a traditional publisher: "You were so close."

He didn't want to hear about close, so he turned to [Acorn Publishing](#), a hybrid.

"I wanted to get the book out in 2024. I wanted to maintain control, and I wanted to run with it," he told the festival attendees.

But about that money. Holly Kammier, Acorn's co-founder and acquisitions editor, told those attending a session later in the day called "The Ins and Outs and Ups and Downs of Publishing" that hybrid publishing via Acorn will likely

cost a writer \$11,000. That includes editing, proofing, cover, blurbs, support, and marketing guidance.

Did self-publishing at [KDP](#) just start to look attractive? Or is it almost closing time in the Tavern of Publishing Dreams? Amazon's KDP lets you misspell every other word, devise nonsensical plots, produce a cover while blindfolded, and entertain the notion that someone will buy that mess. Your income will depend on how much you charge above KDP's printing and delivery cost and whether it's an ebook or a paperback. That could range from nothing to 70 percent of what's left after KDP takes its cut.

And if you want someone to buy the book, it's better to make it readable.

[Anne Moose](#), author, editor, and panelist for the "Getting Published" session, won a permanent place in my heart when she pointed out a critical professional service authors can find without much trouble.

"I would say that most people should probably have an editor," she said, and may her name be praised.

Some editors do much more than basic copy editing, and they have a variety of names for those things: line editing, book editing, and developmental editing. You can find some—ahem—who not only fix the words but provide a full report of the gaps, problems, confusion, writing gaffes, and other obstacles likely to cause readers to hurl your book at something or just hurl. The [San Diego Professional Editors Network](#) is a good place to start looking for help.

By the way, the free ISBN that KDP provides only works on a KDP book, not for anything offered at an independent bookstore. And your book will be one of more than a million that KDP publishes annually.

Of course, KDP is not the only self-publishing option. It is respectable, as are others, but some in the game are soulless predators.

Are you not daunted? You can't be—the work is about to begin. You've finished the writing, which is a simple matter of bloodletting. Now you must market.

"You're going to have to learn how to do your own PR," is how Shiloh Rasmussen put it.

Got your own website to pitch that book? No? Build one now. Panelists in a session on marketing tips suggested that groundwork should begin as much as twelve months before estimated publication.

They suggested authors consider working these routes into their marketing map: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok (assuming it slips out of congressional crosshairs), X nee Twitter, BookBub, and Goodreads. Consider book giveaway promotions, work your email list of friends, talk to book clubs, see if you can finagle your way onto a podcast that has some reach, and familiarize yourself with bookstagrammers who focus on your genre. Ask well-known, connected people for blurbs. Humility has no place in this mission.

“You don’t have to do it all, but you have to do it well,” said [Jeniffer Thompson](#), who moderated the marketing tips session. She is an author and co-founder of Monkey C Media, which aims to help authors get known.

And sure, mistakes will happen. But persevere.

Panelist [Jennifer Coburn](#), a San Diego author who has engineered successful marketing efforts for her historical fiction and other works, revealed one of her early misses: She said she once paid someone \$800 for a service that amounted to putting quotes from one of her books on Twitter.

Overwhelmed yet?

Don’t be. [Linda Moore](#), San Diego author and panelist, reduced marketing to its unmistakable core:

“Word of mouth is best and free.”

So start talking.

Kind regards
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April 2024



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