

The Importance of Being a Hybrid Author in Today's Volatile Publishing Marketplace by Leigh Court

If you are a traditionally published author with a story idea that hasn't sold, or a writer who has yet to find a publishing home, self-publishing is a viable ... and smart ... option in today's volatile publishing marketplace.

Here are some key points about self-publishing:

- Series sell better than single titles, and series have inbred marketing. Readers tend to be voracious, and when they find an author they like, they'll buy everything you've written. If you can hook them with a series, you'll have a guaranteed readership. And here's an important point: readers DO NOT CARE if you're traditionally published or self-published, they just care that you've written a good book.
- But it must be a good, **grammatically-clean, and copy-edited book**. Self-published authors should have your book edited by an outside person, because nothing looks more "amateur" than misspellings, bad grammar and incorrect punctuation. Even if you're absolutely convinced you're an English maven, you as an author are so familiar with your story that you're likely to miss obvious errors. And if you're unsure that your fiction story WORKS ... with Goal, Motivation & Conflict and your basic 3-act or 6-stage plot structure ... you should consider a content editor as well.
- As a self-published author, you can get up to 16 or 18 royalty checks a month, if you count amazon and all its territories, e- and print editions of your book, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, iBooks, Google Play, etc. And don't forget audiobook royalties. You can work with companies like ACX—Audiobook Creation Exchange (an amazon platform) —which will let you pay the narrator of your book either a flat fee or pay him or her out of revenues received from the sale of your audiobooks. You can even get another check every month by signing up for amazon's affiliate program. I'm sure you all know how it works, but basically, if someone goes to your website, clicks on a link that takes them to amazon to buy your book, you get an additional 7% on top of the 35 or 70% royalty you're getting per book sale. Even if the person *doesn't* buy your book, but buys, say, a makeup mirror, you *still* get 7% of that sale because the buyer came to amazon from your website. Barnes & Noble has an affiliate program as well. You should sign up. That's passive income.
- For self-published authors, discoverability can be a big challenge. Some new self-publishing authors opt to put their books into the Kindle Unlimited program. (URL: <https://kdp.amazon.com/help?topicId=AA9BSAGNO1YJH>). Kindle Unlimited is a \$9.99 monthly book service that allows readers to "borrow" an unlimited number of books or audiobooks, and pays the authors royalties when a reader gets beyond a certain point in a book. That's considered a "sale." Kindle Unlimited has 1 million reader subscribers and 800,000 titles now available. And while it can be a way for a new author to be "discovered" by new readers, the downside is that you have to offer your book through amazon "exclusively" for the 90-days that it's part of the program. Some authors decide they'd rather not cut off all other potential revenue streams just to take a chance on Kindle Unlimited, but for other authors it can really work.

- Amazon recently introduced a program called Kindle Scout—([URL: https://kindlescout.amazon.com/about](https://kindlescout.amazon.com/about)). Kindle Scout allows an author to submit a never-before-published book to be part of a 30-day “campaign” during which time amazon readers get to see your cover & a blurb and “nominate” your book if they think it should get published. The more nominations your book receives the more likely it will be to get the attention of the Kindle Scout team. At the end of the 30-days, selected books are published by Kindle Press and receive 5-year renewable terms, a \$1,500 advance, a 50% eBook royalty rate, and featured Amazon marketing.
- Amazon also has its own publishing imprint called Montlake. If you’re a self-published author who sells well on amazon or does well in its KU program, you can expect to be contacted by Montlake about publishing through them.
- Getting a self-published book out there: I always recommend that self-published authors upload books directly to a distributor whenever possible, instead of going through an aggregator like Smashwords, that will take part of your royalty sales on top of what the publisher takes. Amazon and NOOK are fairly simple to upload to, but Apple iBooks can be a notoriously confusing. Luckily, I’ve learned that Apple has recently made things simpler, and here’s just a quick overview if you’ve tried uploading to Apple in the past and might want to try again:
 - You need a MAC in order to upload directly to iBook, and you can use Legend Maker to format your own books yourself, saving the cost of paying a formatter.
 - You can even use your iPad or iPadMini to upload your book, but you’ll need to download iTunes producer.
 - If you publish an iBook, you should consider establishing a DBA or an LLC, or else Apple will show your REAL NAME as the publisher, even if you use a pseudonym. That’s not the case with amazon or NOOK. Of course, if you write under your real name, that’s not a problem.
 - iBooks have 1 BILLION reading devices, which is #2 behind amazon, so it can be a real source of income.
 - Free books do extremely well on iBooks. Also free “first-in-series” books.
 - You might not be aware that Apple gives 250 review codes for free books, which you can send to reviewers. Reviews really do help sell books, so you should start sending out ARCs even before your book comes out.
 - A smart thing to do is to put books up for pre-order on iBooks as soon as you have a cover to help build up your ranking and sales.
 - That brings up the topic of marketing. Neither I nor any author can claim to know what works and what doesn’t, but here are a few things you should definitely do.
 - Website. Every author or potential author needs a website. And it’s important to find one that you are able to update yourself (for new book releases, blog entries, sales, etc.). Wordpress offers website design that is simple to do. Network Solutions also offers website building for

the tech-challenged (I say that because even I am able to maintain my NS site, and I'm a techno-idiot.)

- Social media is almost as important as a website, and you should post links to your social media right on your website home pages. Social media can be time consuming, but, at the very least, an author should have a presence on:
 - ✓ Facebook
 - ✓ Twitter
 - ✓ Goodreads
- Also consider:
 - ✓ Google Plus
 - ✓ Tribrr
- Get reviews. Reviews are essential to getting sales. Readers buy books based on what other people say about them. Research review sites in your particular genre, then submit your book for review.
- Blogging. Everyone should have a personal blog! It's a great way to gain followers and it works best if you post regularly. (Once a month or once a week, etc.) If you think blogging might take up too much time, try to find a multi-author blog, like I did with the Fierce Romance blog—example: <http://fierceromance.blogspot.com>. We have seven romance authors, and I blog once a month as Leigh Court and once a month as my alter-ego Jenna Ives. In three years, I haven't run out of topics yet!
- Newsletters. Newsletters are a terrific way to gain followers/readers. One secret to a popular newsletter is to give away things, like an Amazon gift card. Or offer “exclusive” content like an excerpt of a book or a personal story. Readers love to get to know their favorite authors even if they'll never meet you in person. You should put a sign-up form for your newsletter right on your website home page.
- Advertising. There are websites like The Fussy Librarian, E-reader News Today (ENT), FreeBooksy, Ebook Soda, or Book Goodies that advertise free or reduced-price books that can help boost your sales. These are relatively affordable (up to \$50). The *big* service is BookBub. BookBub is a free daily email that notifies readers about deep discounts on books. As an author, depending on the category you choose (ranging from mysteries to cookbooks to romance to bestsellers), the advertising rate rises with the amount of subscribers (readers) BookBub has for that particular category. BookBub is not cheap, but it can dramatically help your sales—<https://www.bookbub.com/partners/requirements>.
- Free books. If you have a series, considering putting the first book up for free or .99. Readers will be drawn to the low price, and potentially give your book a try even if you're an unknown author to them. Then, if they like the book, they'll buy the next in the series. It's a “loss leader” strategy that can be very effective.
- Metadata. Metadata is the keywords or descriptors of your book. It's how search engines help people find your book. For instance, as you go through the amazon Kindle Direct Publishing process, you are asked to list seven keywords to describe your book. (NOTE: these keywords can be phrases, not just single words, and even very long phrases. Take advantage of that!)

Another TIP: you can figure out which important words or phrases to use for your own book by typing them into the amazon search bar yourself, and seeing what comes up. If those books are like yours, definitely use those keywords.) And don't forget that you can constantly revise or tweak your keywords right from your amazon dashboard.

- Agents. If you are interested in pursuing the traditional publishing route and are looking for an agent, here are two good resources to check out www.agentquery.com or the website for professional agents, the Association of Author Representatives, at <http://aaronline.org>.
- Connect with other authors, either in critique groups, professional organizations, or online loops. You can learn a lot just by listening! I highly recommend Indie Romance Ink. There are more than 600 indie authors (and about-to-be indie authors) on that loop and you'll learn a TON of stuff about indie publishing, very little of it romance-related. If you want to subscribe just to check it out, send an email to indieromanceink-subscribe@yahogroups.com. When they send you the invitation to join, sign up for Digest mode, because it's a very active loop. Then just scan the topics in the email to see if there's information you can use.
- Write your next book. Once you gain a reader, you want to keep that reader, so get writing! That's the best marketing advice for any author, and it's the advice I'll leave you with.

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