

You *Can* Be Successful as a Self-Published Author

Tips on How You Can Self-Publish and Make It Work for You



by

Teresa D. Patterson

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Why I Did It

Along the long journey of writing and publishing my first book, I felt like a “nobody.” It often crossed my mind that no one would want to read what I’d written. I mean, I was a newbie in the industry. Why would they read my books when there were so many others written already by well-known, established authors?

I felt that readers would think, *Who is Teresa D. Patterson? When did she come on the scene? Why should I buy her book?* I was nervous, feeling that they wouldn’t like my writing style. It took me a long time before I even submitted any of my material to a publishing house.

I don’t have any horror stories about being rejected several times. I only submitted my manuscripts to publishing houses that accepted unsolicited material. I did research on query letters and how to write a synopsis. I called myself perfecting those two things and began the submission process. Once I submitted my material a few times and received no answer, I began to get impatient. The main reason is because I felt that I’d put writing on the back burner for too many years, and I was anxious to have my work out there—anxious to share it with the entire world.

My impatience led me to make a grave mistake. I signed a contract with Publish America for my debut novel, *It’s Your World, Black Girl!* I won’t tell you not to use this publishing company or any other vanity/subsidiary publishing company, for that matter. Ultimately, it’s your decision to make. However, I will tell you that I’ve regretted making the decision to sign a contract with this particular publisher. First, my book was priced so high that not many people would buy it. Let’s be real, who wants to spend \$19.95 on a book written by an unknown author? I couldn’t even get my family and friends to buy the book. Second, I could not afford to buy copies of my own books. The little discount they gave wasn’t even worth it.

Had I not been so impatient, I would have researched this company and decided not to use them. Now, I’m stuck in a seven year contract. I feel like I let a great book go to waste. Always, always, always research before you sign a contract with anyone. I also recommend that you have a contract lawyer go over the contract with you.

That leads me to the second mistake I made. I had *Project Queen* and *Uncrossing Her Legs* published by someone else, when in hindsight, I could have self-published both books myself.

One of the most frustrating things is being without books when your book is in demand. I cannot tell you how aggravating a feeling that is. To have people request your book/s from you, but you don’t have any copies—and you don’t know when your publisher is going to do the next print run. Playing phone tag, listening to the double-talk, and straight up bull just ran its toll on me. I made up my mind that I was going to do it on my own, no matter what it took.

Dealing with non-traditional publishing houses is what made me decide to form my own publishing company and self-publish future books. That's exactly what I did. In November of 2008, I formed Edit Again Publications. I self-published my first title, *Ex-boyfriend*, and released it on March 1, 2009. My next released titled was *In Need of a Joshua Man*, November 20, 2009. I released *Spin Cycle* March 2010. Lastly, I re-released *Project Queen* and *Uncrossing Her Legs* April 3, 2010.

To date, I have not regretted my decision to become an independent author/publisher. It has its highs and lows. Overall, I'm happy that I chose the route I did. There is nothing like having full control of my creations. I don't have to change the title, edit stuff out that I want to leave in. I can be creative with my covers. I can print as many copies as I feel I need. No more waiting around for copies of my books. And, I don't have to split the money with anyone else.

Now that you've read why I choose self-publishing, you might be convinced that you can do the same thing. You can be happy as a self-published author. Hopefully, I can share some information that may be useful to you. Now that you've written a book, you've done the easiest part.

Is Self-Publishing For You

Some people think that their book is the best book that has ever been written. I hear this all the time. That may be so, but if the book doesn't sell, what's the point of it being the best ever written? You'll just have a well-written book that's collecting dust. Then there are the ones who just *know* their book is the next best-seller. I've actually had aspiring authors contact me claiming this. How will your book be the next best-seller if no one knows who you are? It has to *sell* in order to be the next best-seller.

Here's my favorite: "*My book is going to make me rich.*" Think again. If anything, it can put you close to the poor house. Trust me when I tell you, I've eaten plenty of bologna sandwiches, Ramen noodles, and tuna fish trying to make this work for me.

There's nothing wrong about being confident about your product, but you also need to be realistic. If you're hoping to make a lot of money and quit your day job, that's an unrealistic goal. If you're doing it because you want to become an overnight success or a ghetto superstar, that's also unrealistic. It takes many years to even establish a name in this industry. I've been published since 2005 and I'm *just* getting a bit of a buzz.

Self-publishing isn't for everyone. As a matter of fact, it is definitely not for the ones who do not like taking risks. Many independent authors do not start off with a bunch of money. When you put money that you may not necessarily have into making your dream become a reality, you take a risk. You may or may not earn that money back or break even. You might even lose your money, depending on the market. Every book will not become a best-seller, earning you tons of money. Let that be something to ponder.

Your book may not make it to the bookshelves of popular stores like Borders and Barnes & Nobel. You might not get distribution. Be content if you find a few book vendors who you can sell your books to. This will generate income and get your book circulated in different areas.

You Have to Put In Work

If you decided that self-publishing is for you, figure out how you can make it work. You do not want to put money into something that is going to fail. Doing this is not easy. You have to do everything yourself. Be ready to serve as your own agent, publicist, marketing director, secretary, customer service rep—get the picture? To make the process a bit easier for you, here are some tips that may help:

- **Set up book signings**

Try local libraries where there is no upfront cost and you get to keep all of the money you make from your sales. Book signings are a good way to get your book and name out in the public, but they can also be a waste of time. At my first book signing, I sold a total of zero books. However, don't let me discourage you. Set up book signings and make the most of it. Some other places are local bookstores, clubs, community centers, etc. It's best if you contact these places in person with your book in your hand.

Once you arrange a book signing, let as many people as you can know about it. Tell family and friends. Have them tell their family members and friends. Do an email blast. This means, send a notification about your book signing to everyone in your email contacts. Even if they cannot attend, they can always purchase your book online to show support.

At the signings, don't just sit and look pretty. Get up from your table and mix and mingle with the customers. Remember, they are all potential book buyers. Also, try using a sales pitch. This one usually works well for me when I'm trying to convince a man to buy one of my books. *"Would you like to buy an inexpensive gift for your wife or girl-friend?"* If he stops to talk to you, you can pretty much reel him in. Oh, and be sure to mention the fact that you're a local author. Most people love to support someone locally, just because.

- **Network with other self-published authors**

I've found that many other self-published authors have information that they are willing to share. They may know someone that you don't know who can help spread the word about your book. All you have to do is ask.

I post other self-published authors book covers and a summary of their book on my website. I also post links to their websites where you can order their book. Every little bit helps.

Arrange to send other authors books or postcards so that they can pass them out for gifts, giveaways, etc. in their area and vice versa.

Other authors may be able to let you know about book festivals and other events in their area that you can attend. Therefore, it's important to network.

- **Hit the Streets**

I always keep a box of books in my trunk and some in the glove compartment. Always be ready to make a sale. Always be excited to tell people you run into about your books. Everyone is a potential customer. Everyone.

If you are serious about doing this, concentrate on how many books you're going to sale per day. Work on achieving that goal. The next week, increase the number of books you plan to sale. Continue to strive until you not only succeed, but excel.

I know hitting the streets may sound impossible. But, actually it isn't. At first, I was too shy to mention the fact that I'm an author to strangers. Then I read a book called *Guerilla Marketing for Writers : 100 Weapons to Help You Sell Your Work* by Jay Conrad Levinson, and I got over my shyness. As soon as I realized that the number one marketing tool was "me," I began to open my mouth. After all, "a closed mouth don't get fed", right?

- **E-books**

Electronic books are becoming increasingly popular. List your books on Amazon Kindle. Amazon charges a fee for this service, but selling e-books can be quite lucrative. If you're not interested in Amazon, try making your book available for purchase in PDF format on your own website. You can sign up with www.e-junkie.com for PDF hosting, paying as little as \$5 per month for this service.

- **Promote, Promote, Promote**

This is the most important thing. I cannot stress it enough. If no one knows about your book, no one can buy your book. Remember that.

Promote your book on-line. Some sites where you can promote are Facebook, MySpace, Goodreads.com, Shelfarie.com, Tagged.com, Authorsden.com, Linkedin.com, Blackplanet.com, Blackvoices.com, etc. Also, join book clubs and reading groups. Get involved and interact with people who love to read.

Create a website where you can post a picture of your book cover, synopsis, and the first three chapters. You can also add a PayPal button which allows readers to buy your book directly from your website.

Have postcards designed and send them to libraries, beauty and barbershops, book stores, etc.

Arrange radio interviews. Check out some of the shows on Blog Talk Radio, etc. and set up an interview.

Send a press release to your local newspaper/s.

Hit the street and pass out your flyers. Leave them everywhere you can think to leave them.

Get a car magnet with your book cover and ordering information on it. (www.vistaprint.com).

Get professional graphics painted on your vehicle with you book cover and ordering information on your rear window and two side windows.

Send complimentary copies to prisons, book reviewers, book clubs and bookstores.

Attend book festivals in your local area. If you're able to afford it, attend festivals such as the Harlem Book Fair, Book Expo America, Atlanta Black Book Expo, and there are a slew of others.

Advertise by word of mouth. Tell everyone you encounter about your book. Be bold.

Prepare to Be Happy, But Broke

You may run into some self-published authors who tell you that they make a bunch of money. Personally, I think they may be exaggerating. I wish I could tell you that I make enough from book sales to live comfortably, but I wouldn't want my nose to grow. However, I am very thankful for Amazon Kindle. Kindle sales for all of my books continue to rise.

Eventually, you will be able to make a bunch of money. It's all up to how much drive, motivation and determination you have. No matter how much you make, as long as you're happy, that's the most important thing.

Now, It's Your Turn

Somehow, I overcame fear-based thinking and did it. You've written your first book and have decided to self-publish it. You should be proud of yourself and happy about your achievements. Now, you are an author who can start working on establishing your name in the industry. Your first self-published book will give you the ability to establish writing credentials. Think about it, even the New York Times best-selling authors had to begin somewhere. If they can earn their credentials, so can you. Stop putting yourself down thinking that you cannot achieve what they did. You can. Now, get to it.