

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 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 books?* 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’ve regretted that decision, but I learned from my mistakes. 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 as I feel I need.

No more waiting around for copies of my books. That's important for an impatient person. Don't let me forget—I don't have to split the money with anyone else. Sweet.

Now that you've read my zany tale of why I choose self-publishing, you might be convinced that you can do the same thing. 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.*" Um. 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 have written by candlelight on more than one occasion.

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 for in this industry. I've been published since 2005 and I think 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 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.

Your book may not make it to the bookshelves of popular stores like Borders and Barnes & Nobel. Be content to 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. It 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?

- **Set up book signings**

Try local libraries where there is not 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 places are local bookstores, clubs, community centers, etc.

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.

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

- **Hit the Streets**

I always keep a box of books in my trunk and three 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 plan to do this full-time, 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.

- **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 site.

You can sign up with www.e-junkie.com for PDF hosting, paying as little as \$5 per month for this service.

www.amazon.com

www.smashwords.com

- **E-mail blast/Press Release**

Send an email about your book to all of your e-mail contacts at once. Be sure that you've gotten their consent beforehand because you don't want to be accused of SPAMMING them. A good way to do this is to have them subscribe to your author's website.

Write a professional press release about your book and submit it to your local newspaper.

- **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.

Join book clubs and reading groups.

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). (Just be sure to take them off at night if you live in the hood. People will steal them. Why? I don't know.)

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

I've sent 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/s. Be bold.

Be Ready to Be Happy, But Broke

You may run into some self-published authors who tell you that they make a bunch of money. This may be true, but 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, particularly *Project Queen*, continue to rise. It's just a matter of time before the money stops trickling in and begins to flow in.

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 has given 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.

Helpful Websites

- **Advertise**

You can advertise on these sites for a fee. Some advertising may be free.

Cush City – www.cushcity.com

The Urban Book Source – www.ubs.com

Urban Reviews – www.urban-reviews.com

Raw Sistaz – www.rawsistaz.com

Joey Pinkney – www.joeypinkney.com

- **Book Reviews**

These sites offer free book reviews or book reviews at a low cost

African American on the Move Book Club- www.aambookclub.com

Apex Reviews – www.apexreviews.com

ARC Book Club – www.arcbookclubinc.com

Joey Pinkney – www.joeypinkney.com

Raw Sistaz – www.rawsistaz.com

Readers in Motion Book Club – www.readersinmotionbookclub.ning.com

Urban Book Source – www.urbanbooksource.com

Urban Reviews – www.urban-reviews.com

- **E-mail blasts/Press Releases**

AALBC – www.aalbc.0063om

Urban Roundup – <http://urbanroundupeblast.com>

Black PR.com – <http://blackpr.com>

Page Turner.net – www.pageturner.net

Cushcity – www.cushcity.com