



"Practical Problem-Solving Advice for Publishers"

Commercial Publishing vs. Self-Publishing: Advantages/Disadvantages

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Self-publishing has always been an option for aspiring authors. With limited opportunities to publish commercially and with the availability of inexpensive technology to assist in the process, self-publishing may seem like an attractive option.

However, self-publishing may not be as attractive as it first appears once you have an understanding of the complexities of the book publishing business. To help you decide if self-publishing is for you or if you should pursue a commercial publisher, here are advantages and disadvantages of both.

Nine Advantages and Six Disadvantages of Commercial Publishing

<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
Publisher bears all financial risk	You will probably need an agent as many publishers do not accept unagented manuscripts
Book production expertise: first class design; editing; subject matter expert reviews; content development	Author loses control of editing, design, etc.
Specialized marketing expertise	Longer production cycle-time
Expertise in fully exploiting all channels of domestic distribution	Turnover of editorial personnel; projects can fall through the cracks
Expertise in reaching international markets	Mergers and acquisitions in the industry may cause changes in personnel, publishing focus; cast of characters; your contract might even be cancelled
Handles all distribution functions: inventory, warehouse, fulfillment, and print reorders	Financial instability: some publishers struggle to earn profit during transition from print to digital
Handles all licensing and permission requests	Author's potential earnings limited by size of royalty; generally, 10 to 15 % of sales
Clout in marketplace with a recognized brand and a defined audience	
Market intelligence (you will learn about market potential when you shop the proposal)	

Six Advantages and Seven Disadvantages of Self-Publishing

<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
Author maintains control over processes	Stigma of self-published books may still exist
Shorter cycle-time, depending on what services author pays for	Managing details of publishing process time-consuming
If a sole proprietorship, author tax advantages using IRS schedule C	Steep and expensive learning curve for a one-time venture
Higher profit margin for self-publishers	Numerous missed marketing opportunities due to lack of expertise
If successful, all profits belong to author	Opportunity costs: other more profitable opportunities to use one's resources
Established publisher may buy rights to the book (rare, but possible)	Lack of licensing knowledge may lead to bad deals and lost income
	Author may infringe on another's copyright and/or trademark without expert vetting of publisher

About John B. McHugh

John B. "Jack" McHugh is a 40-year veteran of the publishing business. Jack has worked as an executive for Houghton Mifflin, Wadsworth, and Saint Mary's Press. Jack is also an experienced association publishing executive. For seven years, he was Publisher and Director of Programs at the American Society for Quality and for a two-year period, he served as the Interim Publisher at the Project Management Institute. Jack's specialties include association/nonprofit publishing, book publishing, executive recruiting, journal publishing, rights and permissions, organizational design, and startups. He serves as an advisor to the Friends of Kletzsch Park in Glendale, WI <http://goo.gl/6PhtU4>. Jack is the manager of two LinkedIn™ groups, Association and Nonprofit Publishing and The Self-Employment Forum.

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