

## Step-by-Step Guide to Self-Publishing Without utilizing Print On Demand (POD) companies

**Reasons for not using POD:** *My Dog The Meat Eater* was originally published through the Print On Demand company, Booksurge. Although I was relatively happy with the end product, there were many drawbacks. Deadlines were missed, there were a number of mistakes with the formatting of the book, and the covers were low quality (i.e. not laminated). Costs were inflated for initial setup and corrections, and, the company's customer service was less than stellar. They stopped replying to most of my questions once they had my money. All of these may seem like little problems, but they all take time and/or money to deal with and correct. Additionally, the company's marketing promises weren't all they were cracked up to be. For example, they promised to send out review copies to any newspaper source that requested them. No newspapers I was in contact with ever received these copies.

While there are difficulties inherent in the process of writing and publishing your book, it doesn't need to be any harder than it already is, and the people you pay to help shouldn't add to the frustration.

My experience led my father and me to research and pursue other modes of self-publishing. He was interested in helping my grandfather self-publish. One of the most important factors for me was that I wanted to have more control over the entire process. We investigated other, more hands-on approaches to the whole process, from formatting to marketing.

While I can say that I am, without a doubt, more satisfied with the new process, there are still many frustrating hurdles to overcome. The most important difference between my POD experience and the current process is that I'm in control of every aspect of it. If something goes wrong, it's usually my fault, and I'm the one who has to fix it (with the help of my dad, who knows much more about computers and formatting than I). I like being accountable for every failure and success. I have a more vested interest in my book than Booksurge did. I work harder at it and I get things done quicker and more correctly. For me, this is a better position to be in. The same may not be true for you. If you are computer illiterate and have no friends to help you with this aspect of the process, POD is probably the better alternative for you. Consider and research both options carefully before making your choice.

That being said, the book I've ended up with as a result of the author-controlled, non-POD method is higher quality and cheaper to produce.

Now on to the guide. . .

### **You've finished the book and researched your options (POD, traditional publishing, etc.) . . .**

**Get an ISBN** (International Standard Book Number) for the book: [www.isbn.org](http://www.isbn.org)

#### **Costs:**

- \$19.95 for the Publisher registration fee
- \$225 for the Processing Fee (for 10 ISBN numbers so you can use them for your next few books as well)
- \$25 for the bar code (You can get a bar code for free at [www.cgpp.com/bookland/isbn.html](http://www.cgpp.com/bookland/isbn.html). However, keep in mind that free bar codes from this site are not guaranteed; a very small percentage don't work when scanned in bookstores.)

[NOTE: Some printers will provide bar codes free of charge, check first.]

If for some reason you can't get through the next step, formatting, and you decide you want to use POD after all, you can still use this ISBN.

### **Format the book**

Printers must have the file in PDF form. You can use the free PDF creation program at [www.cutepdf.com](http://www.cutepdf.com) to do this. It takes a little fooling around with to get it to look right. For example, make sure that you select the proper page size, that you download fonts, and that you select the proper dpi for resolution. You will have to create two files--one for the text and another for the cover. This will take a lot of your time unless you really know what you're doing. It took me many hours to get the new cover for *My Dog The Meat Eater* just the way I wanted it. I didn't know what I was doing going into it, so it was basically a process of my trying different things until I liked what I saw. I *can* tell you that you should save the file as a new one every time you make major changes. This way if you screw up you can always go back. I learned this the hard way. These files will be huge, but you can delete all but the final product once you've gotten the final proofs back from the printer.

### **Get quotes from printers and decide which one to use**

The best we've discovered are at the following websites:

[www.kingprinting.com](http://www.kingprinting.com)

[www.craneduplicating.com](http://www.craneduplicating.com)

[www.countrypressinc.com](http://www.countrypressinc.com) (this is the one we use)

You can print a 125-page novel for between \$3 and \$4 per book if you order one hundred (this depends somewhat on the company, cover design, and size specifics). This is very reasonable and generally much cheaper than most POD companies. And, if you live close to one of the printers you can cut down on shipping and handling costs by picking the books up yourself. I'm not listing POD prices here because they change frequently and they're easy to research.

### **Register the book with the copyright office**

[www.copyright.gov/register/literary.html](http://www.copyright.gov/register/literary.html)

This will cost you thirty dollars plus two copies of the book. Technically, you don't need to copyright the book (it's copyrighted the moment you write it; just put *copyright © 2005 Your Name* on it), but it helps to prove you wrote the book, should anyone try to steal it from you. You can also send the book to yourself through the mail. This way it is automatically date stamped and sealed. Just don't open the envelope. You could use it to prove that you wrote the book at a specific time. This method is good to do with the various drafts, since you won't want to register every draft.

**Sell the book** through Amazon.com and/or BarnesandNoble.com and through your own website if you choose. You should research the prices on these options. Many people I talk to feel the Amazon deal is a ripoff, but Amazon is the largest bookstore in the world and if you can drum up some publicity for the book, there is the possibility that you will do very well.

[www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) (go to the Amazon Advantage section)

[www.barnesandnoble.com](http://www.barnesandnoble.com) (I don't use this yet)

(At some point, I hope to put together a guide for creating websites or at least finding resources and/or services that can assist self-publishers)

### **Begin Marketing** (use your imagination)

Here are some links that might help:

#### ***Libraries in MA***

[www.mlin.org/libraries/networks/index.php](http://www.mlin.org/libraries/networks/index.php)

I use this link for contacting various libraries and requesting small readings and discussions for my book.

### ***Bookstores in MA***

[www.newpages.com/bookstores/index.htm](http://www.newpages.com/bookstores/index.htm)

So far I haven't had much luck with this. But hopefully, with the press, recognition, and validation I'll gain from the success of bigger venues like the Boston Public Library, bookstores will start to take me more seriously. We'll see what happens when I publish my second novel.

### ***AM radio stations in MA***

[www.fcc.gov/mb/audio/amq.html](http://www.fcc.gov/mb/audio/amq.html)

These stations can be very helpful with promoting book events, at no cost. Send your press releases to News Producer.

### ***Newspapers in MA***

<http://www.usnpl.com/manews.html>

Send press releases to News Assignment Editor.

### ***Vista Print (for ordering postcards online)***

[www.vistaprint.com](http://www.vistaprint.com)

This company provides cheap and easy printing services for postcards, business cards, flyers, and other promotional items you might need at some point.

If you're from another state or you're looking for another site to help with marketing, just search for the topic at <http://www.google.com/>  
There might also be links on the sites I've provided.

### **Other Advice**

- **Go to lots of book readings**—both for famous and unknown (especially self-published) writers. Take note of the strategies they use and how they carry themselves. Although well known writers don't have to try as hard, you can still pick up a lot useful information and inspiration. I've recently attended readings by Howard Zinn, Noam Chomsky, X.J. Kennedy, and a number of names you've probably never heard.
- **Read independently published books.** Many of them are bad, but a few are good (this is pretty much true of big publishers anyway). And besides, you can learn a lot from bad books. I've read a number of them in the last few months. You can find them at library readings (some libraries even have special sections for local self-published books) or by searching POD websites.

- **Read books on writing and marketing.** And read books that are similar to the one you're trying to write. In the past few months I read the writing memoirs of Stephen King and Ray Bradbury. I also read a book called *How to Publicize Your Book*, which was very helpful. I re-read Strunk and White, for grammar (I'm still not very good at it). I read *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, *Into The Wild*, and *On the Road*, as well as many other books to help with the writing of my second book, *Do It For The Money*. I read a book on Stephen King called *Man and Artist*, just to get an outsider's opinion of a talented, extraordinarily well-known author who I don't care for very much. Joseph Heller's *A Portrait Of The Artist As An Old Man* was also very interesting. Mark Twain's autobiography is a great writer bio to read. I'm sure there are many others as well.
- **Join a writer's group.** I'm in one. We drink a lot.
- **Read the book sections in local and major newspapers.**
- **Go to book discussions.**
- **Take classes if you have the time, money, and inclination.** I recently took a poetry class to impress a girl I like, and it has been surprisingly helpful to my writing. I never read much poetry before taking the class.

Good Luck!

*God gives the nuts, but he does not crack them.*

~German Proverb