

You Can Publish A Book

An inside look at what it takes from a first-time author | By Connie Fairbanks



How many times have you said to yourself, “I should really write a book about that?” Whether it’s knitting, knives or ghiordes knots, you know you should put all that knowledge down on paper, and hey, possibly make some money too. But where do you go from here?

First, make sure you have a thick enough skin for this. Be ready for people to try and convince you that you need to get yourself an agent and then a publisher. Be prepared for people to tell you that you could spend years writing the book only to be confronted by the competition from other budding authors. Get ready for the onslaught of negatives from book sellers, returns, publishers and dog-eat-dog distributors who’ll do nothing to help you promote the book and be prepared for the typical small margins that the publishing industry employs.

Once you brace yourself for doubt, criticism, rejection and lots of hard work, if you still have confidence in yourself and in your book, decide if you should take your outline and plan to a publisher or self-publish the book. My decision to self-publish was based on the fact that I was a first-time author and knew that finding an agent could take years. After evaluating the publishing process of agents and the diminishing market for new writers, I decided that if I was ever going to produce a book, I’d have to do it myself. And you *can* do it yourself, but there are a few things to know:

Write what you know. Every school of writing tells you to write about what you know. Because I grew up in a small town in Kansas, I learned to cook at an early age from my mom, aunts and even the 4-H. Every summer, my three sisters and I would prepare for the 4-H County Fair by making our buttermilk biscuits and golden glow cake to win that coveted purple ribbon. Make sure whatever you chose to write about you have a basis of expertise. If you write about what you know, you’ll find the words and ideas just tumbling out. Perhaps you want to write a mystery novel and your family included a reporter who covered the crime beat. Or, you might be thinking of a romantic book with a heroine who lives in a cottage by the sea that replicates your family’s summer vacations. Whatever you’ve experienced in your lifetime is a front to draw upon for a successful book. Always keep a notebook handy for ideas.

Consider costs and competition. Self-publishing means you’ll put up the money for the book yourself (obviously) and because I was writing a cookbook rather than a novel, my costs would be higher. I had to factor in recipe testing, photography and design. My book, in addition to being interesting, had to be visually appealing. That brings up another important factor. Know the competition. In my case, a walk through a local book store confirmed that there were hundreds of cookbooks out there. How would mine be different?

Next, assemble a ‘to-print’ team.

You’ll need a good editor, a production manager or designer, and a Web designer. You’ll also need a trademark attorney and an attorney/CPA to form an S-corporation, to channel expenses and limit liability to yourself. Finally, you’ll need a printer. In choosing a team, the best advice is to interview as many candidates as possible—these are people you’ll be depending upon and spending a good deal of time with. Discuss this with your graphic designer who may be willing to manage the printing for you.

Be the team leader. During the publishing process, you’ll learn to do many things yourself to save time and money. In my case, I learned to style food and take high quality photos with a digital camera. Remember, you’re the team leader—in addition to being the author, you need to be a problem solver, banker, and above all, a cheerleader.

Sell it! The next issue to address will be how to market your book. Remember, you don’t have a mega-publisher with a company of experts to propel your book to the best seller list. Self-published books are the wave of the future because publishers have been doing less and less to promote new and first-time authors. Marketing tools will include publicity, Web site and promotions to create a buzz around your book. Think of yourself as your best advocate and salesperson. Carry the book with you. Hire a publicist (find one by asking other successful entrepreneurs or authors who they used) to arrange for TV interviews, book signings, reviews and personal appearances. Capitalize on all your contacts and, just as you did when finding your first job out of college, use all your resources to open doors.

Lastly, have fun. Utilize those skills that you learned from your past business life. And, once you’ve published the book, you’ll have a track record and may want to work with a publisher the second time around. Self publishing your first book may prove to be just a stepping stone to a bigger and better literary venture. ■

*Connie Fairbanks has written her first book, a cookbook, *Scratch That Seasonal Menus and Perfect Pairings* (\$35). www.ConnieFairbanks.com.*