

THE FOUR PATHS TO PUBLISHING

Revolutionary changes and unprecedented opportunities in publishing have established four clear paths that authors follow to achieve their publishing goals.

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The past four years have brought about more upheaval in the publishing industry than the previous 400 years combined. From the time Gutenberg invented the printing press until the introduction of the paperback about 70 years ago, there weren't many groundbreaking innovations. However, in the last few years, the publishing world has undergone an indie revolution similar to what occurred in the film and music industries.

With the introduction of desktop publishing, print-on-demand technology, and the Internet as a direct-to-consumer distribution channel, publishing became a service consumers could purchase, instead of an industry solely dependent on middlemen (agents) and buyers (traditional publishers). In addition, the exponential growth of e-books and digital readers has accelerated change, because physical stores are no longer the only way for authors to connect with readers.

While these changes have made now the best time in history to be an author, they have also made it one of the most confusing times to be an author. Not that long ago, there was only one way to get published: find an agent; hope he or she would represent you; pray they sell your book proposal to a publisher; trust the publisher to get behind the book and believe in the project; and hope that readers would go to their local bookstore and buy your book. This description of traditional publishing (or what some now call legacy publishing) is still a viable path for authors today, but now there are three other distinct paths an author can pursue to get published: *DIY*, *General Contractor*, and *Publishing Package*. Each of these could be appropriately labeled as self publishing, but each offers distinct advantages.

Let's look at each of these paths and then compare their advantages and disadvantages.

Even if you choose the DIY path, you should have your book edited, and you will likely have to spend something on marketing.

1. DIY PUBLISHING

DIY is a self-publishing option in which an author uses an upload tool like Booktango (an ASI imprint) or Lulu to create a book and get it into distribution. Some of these solutions may be e-book only or have limited distribution, but if you follow through, you can get your book formatted and available for sale in at least one format and through at least one online retailer. Many of these options are promoted as “free” to publish, but there is a misperception that *DIY* means you don’t have to spend any money. Sure, it is possible to publish at no cost, but I wouldn’t recommend it. Even if you choose the *DIY* path, you should have your book edited, and you will likely have to spend something on marketing.

ADVANTAGE:

Usually the least amount of financial investment needed to publish a book in at least one format.

DISADVANTAGES:

Formats and distribution can be limited. Most options do not have any professional services available, so an author has to find the services needed to complete the project apart from the publishing solution.



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2. GENERAL CONTRACTOR

The second option an author can pursue is the *General Contractor* publishing path. This requires hiring a number of independent service providers—such as an editor, book designer, publicist, etc.—and coordinating all those activities. (See Sample List of Publishing Tasks.)

Typically, you will need to obtain quotes from each of the vendors, based on the project, and it will likely require more of a financial investment than *DIY*. More importantly, if you decide to be your own general contractor, it will definitely take significantly more time to manage the process and coordinate the activities. You also have the option of hiring someone to be your general contractor. That’s because, as this option has emerged, a number of people have begun to promote themselves on the Internet as “publishing consultants.” They usually have some publishing experience but don’t typically offer any services themselves other than helping you find the vendors you need.

Depending on which services you choose and which vendors you use, this option can require the largest financial investment of any of the publishing paths and can take the most amount of time to manage the process.

ADVANTAGE:

Select the special individuals who work on every aspect of your book and promotion.

DISADVANTAGES:

Can require the most time and money, depending on scope of the project.

PUBLISHING TASKS

- Write book
- Create title
- ISBN
- Copyright or protect
- Edit
- Cover design
- Interior design
- E-book formatting
- Illustrations
- Cover copy
- Distribution for print formats
- Distribution for digital formats
- Print books
- Ship books
- Sell books
- Track royalties
- Website
- Social media
- Publicity
- Events
- Video interview
- Video trailer

These are just some of the tasks that are needed to get a book published and promoted, so you want to have a clear idea of how much work you want to do yourself versus having someone else do the work.

3. PUBLISHING PACKAGE

The third way you can get your book ready for sale is to work with an author-services company whose bundles of services help you get your book and cover designed in print and digital formats, in distribution, and available for sale. In addition, these companies typically offer a full menu of professional services for publishing, promoting, and selling your book. Most of ASI's imprints, including AuthorHouse, Trafford, iUniverse, and Xlibris, fall into this category. The biggest advantage to this publishing path is it's a one-stop shop for everything you could possibly need to meet your publishing goal. Sure, it requires a financial investment, but because there is a range of package offerings and price points, it's apparent from the start what you will get and what it will cost. This transparency is not always possible with the *General Contractor* path, because you won't know what you will need to spend until you get all your estimates. Another advantage to this path is that you typically have only one number to call. In the case of ASI, you have 24/7 customer service available. In addition, you have only one relationship to manage no matter how many services you use. With the *General Contractor* path, you will likely have multiple vendors, which can take considerably more time to manage.

ADVANTAGE:

One-stop shop for everything you need to publish, promote, and distribute your book, and you have selection, service, and convenience.

DISADVANTAGES:

Can require more of a financial investment than *DIY*, and packages may include services you do not want or need, although some customization is usually possible.

4. TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING

The fourth path, *Traditional* (or legacy publishing), was the one discussed in the introduction of this paper. Historically, if you had a manuscript or book proposal, you needed to find an agent to represent you. Then, he or she would take the project to publishers with the intent to sell it and get an advance against future royalties. Unlike the first three paths, where you retain your rights to the content, on this path you assign the rights to the publisher, so you don't have the same degree of control of your book as you do with the *DIY*, *General Contractor*, or *Publishing Package* paths. In addition, publishers can take a long time to evaluate, select, and actually publish a book, so you will need to be patient and resilient if this is the only path you want to pursue.

If you do find a traditional publisher who wants your work, you will likely find they can improve it because of their experience and expertise at making books better. They may also have a sales force in place to push certain books to retailers, so you may find support from them that you won't have if you self-publish. However, as a result of the changes we have discussed, traditional publishers are now looking at self-published books as a source of content they may want to pick up. In fact, if you watch the headlines, you will see publishers acquiring the rights to titles from all three of the self-publishing paths discussed in this paper.

ADVANTAGE:

Typically will improve the manuscript because of editorial expertise and potentially have sales force to push book. You may also get some money up front in terms of an advance.

DISADVANTAGES:

The number of new titles and authors being published continues to shrink, so the odds of getting "picked up" are shrinking as well, and it usually takes the longest time of any of the options to get to market.

A simple illustration to help you better understand your options

Now that I have laid out the four paths, I want to give you a simple way to think about these options, to help you have greater clarity as you compare your choices. Making a publishing decision today can be compared to options you have when you want to eat a meal.

Your first option is to make a meal at home, which is typically your least-expensive alternative. However, you are limited by your own ability and knowledge of the cooking process and the availability of ingredients. *DIY* publishing is akin to this.

Your second choice if you are a hungry is to go to a food bar at a grocery store. There, someone has prepared a variety of options for you, and you pay based on what you select. You don't do the same amount of work as you do at home, and you will pay more, but you meet your needs. The *General Contractor* path is a lot like this option.

The third way you can decide to meet your goal to eat a meal is visit a full-service restaurant. Not only will you have food prepared, but you have a menu of packaged options from which to select. In addition, you will have people available to cook for you, serve you, and clean up after you are finished. You will pay much more for the restaurant salad than you will for the salad you make at home, but you are not just paying for the ingredients. You are also paying for the preparation, service, and convenience. To me, author-services companies are like restaurants, so to compare the costs of individual services on these different paths is like comparing the cost of making a salad at home versus having it made in a restaurant. While each uses the same ingredients, they are very different experiences.

So how does traditional publishing work in this illustration? It is like going to a really fine restaurant and having someone pick up the tab for you. The only caveat is they will decide who eats at the restaurant and have final say in what is on your plate. That's not necessarily bad, but it certainly doesn't give you the control you have with the other three options.

PUBLISHING PATH	LIKE
DIY	Making a meal at home
General Contractor	Going to a grocery store food bar
Publishing Package	Going to a full-service restaurant
Traditional	Having someone order and pay for you at a restaurant

Choosing a publishing path is like choosing how you want to eat a meal. There are trade-offs between convenience and cost you should consider.

How do you know which path is best for you?

I hope this framework has been helpful for you to better understand your options, and the advantages and drawbacks of each path. But to make the best decision, you need to make sure you are clear on four key items.

Goals and expectations:

If your measure of success is *New York Times* best-seller and appearance on the *Today* show, then no matter what path you pursue, you will likely be very disappointed. Set some realistic goals for what you would like to see happen with your book, and be realistic about what you might be able to achieve. There is no perfect system to predict which books will be breakout hits, so publish the best book you can, market it to a clearly defined audience, and stay committed to your work.

Skills and experience:

While there are options now for you to do things by yourself, if you don't have the skills or experience needed to format your book or garner publicity, you should leave it to professionals. Hire the experts or work with an author-services company so you publish the best book possible and give yourself your best opportunity for success.

Time commitment:

How much is your time worth? That is a key question when it comes to publishing, because—make no mistake about it—getting your book into the market will take time. If you want to manage the process yourself, you can, but many choose author-services companies simply because they are the most convenient and easy ways to get a book into the market.

Budget:

As with any consumer purchasing decision, you should have a budget in mind when you are ready to publish.

The best time in history for authors and readers will only get better.

Not that long ago, very few people could get published, but now everyone can get published if they pursue one of the four paths. Some would say that is a bad thing, but I disagree. If you look at the transformation that has already taken place in the film and music industry, you will see content creation in those industries has exploded, which has given consumers more choices than ever before. Most importantly, new careers have been launched, many of which might not have happened had there not been a revolution.

Publishing is in the middle of its own revolution, and while self-publishing doesn't mean everybody will be successful, it does mean everybody has the opportunity to be successful. In my opinion, that is a very good thing for authors, readers, and the industry.



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Keith brings a unique set of experiences to his role as Senior VP of Marketing and Product Development at Author Solutions, Inc. As the author of three self-published books, *A Clear View*, *Eli the Stable Boy*, and *7 Secrets of Successful Self-Published Authors*, he offers a unique understanding of and perspective on the industry. Additionally, he writes and maintains the indie-publishing thought-leadership blog, www.indiebookwriters.com, and has presented at leading industry events, including the San Francisco Writers Conference and the Writer's Digest Conference. He also has been a webinar presenter on the Author Learning Center and the Writer's Digest website.

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Author Solutions, Inc. (ASI) is a member of the Penguin Group and is the world leader in indie book publishing. ASI's leading self-publishing imprints—AuthorHouse, AuthorHouse UK, iUniverse, Palibrio, Trafford Publishing and Xlibris—have helped more than 150,000 authors self-publish, promote and bring to market more than 190,000 new titles. Through strategic alliances with leading trade publishers, ASI is making it possible to develop new literary talent efficiently, and providing authors with a platform for bringing their books to market. Headquartered in Bloomington, Ind., ASI's global reach includes imprints developed specifically for authors in Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. For more information, visit www.authorsolutions.com, and follow @authorsolutions on Twitter for the latest news.



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