

Setting Goals For Self-Publishing

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Joining CCC's Chris Kenneally to offer insights on self-publishing and to help authors ask the right questions before they self-publish is Joel Friedlander, who blogs at thebookdesigner.com where he draws on more than 30 years in publishing.

Friedlander also recently presented at the [Self-Publishing Boot Camp](#) held at Stanford University (the next session will be in San Francisco, February 20, 2012, in partnership with [San Francisco Writers University](#)).

Q: The work of a book author has long been a solitary one. But in 2011, more authors are on their own than ever before. And many like it that way. Welcome to *Beyond the Book*, Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. My name is Christopher Kenneally. From Amanda Hocking to Seth Godin, who have each published self-published books this year – and bestsellers at that – the ranks of DIY writers have swelled in recent months.

As the ebook market flourishes, the appeal of self-publishing grows. And we're not talking about your father's vanity press. Joining me to offer insights on self-publishing and to help authors ask the right questions before they self-publish, is Joel Friedlander, who blogs at thebookdesigner.com where he draws on more than 30 years in publishing. He also recently presented at the Self-Publishing Boot Camp held at Stanford University earlier this fall.

Welcome to *Beyond the Book*, Joel Friedlander.

A: Thank you very much, Chris. It's great to be here.

Q: It's a pleasure to have you join us, and to be talking about something that, as I say, looking back on the last 12 months, certainly has to be one of the great stories of the year in publishing, the growth of self-publishing. But your presentations – which I find very informative online and at your own Web site thebookdesigner.com and elsewhere, really make a point that it's about strategy and your summary of that is, when you know who your readers are and you have a marketing plan, every step of your publishing strategy will be predictable. But those are big questions that authors probably don't think about so much at the beginning, even though they ought to. Tell us about why a publishing strategy needs to come first.

A: Well, that's a great question, Chris. And the reason is that a lot of people – writers who want to get involved in self-publishing – they've heard the stories of people having fantastic success, or maybe they're frustrated with the publishing paradigm,

the way it's been playing out the last 10 years or so, and they decide to jump into self-publishing. After all, how hard could it be to create a book? We take books pretty much for granted. They're very commonplace objects that we've grown up with.

But it's usually surprising even to published authors how much goes into creating a book that is actually a book that people want to buy – that's available for them to buy.

Q: Right. And I think the point you're making there is something – authors haven't had to think a lot about publishers, they've been able to complain a lot about publishers for many years. I used to say – and I'm an author myself – that if you scratch an author, you find someone who has a problem with a publisher. But now they are discovering – and it's not all to their dismay, there's great opportunity, we don't want to scare people off, right?

A: Well, yes, exactly. And I am a big advocate of self-publishing and indie publishing, since I started self-publishing myself in the 1980s. And it is just a fantastic outlet for personal expression and also it's quite possible for authors to compete toe-to-toe with publishers, particularly in the online environment, where the playing field has been leveled to a great degree.

But authors, as soon as they get excited, they start to rush into it. Oh, my God, I'm going to do a book. We'll just throw it together. I've got the manuscript here. And then they get stopped, because they – the choices and options facing authors today are so confusing – and there are so many options, so many ways to go, so many vendors, so many formats, ebooks, print books, it's just quite confusing. And unfortunately, Chris, this really stops a lot of people and they just get completely lost in paralysis analysis.

Q: Right, well let's – yeah, exactly, Joel. And I think let's, if we can, take that apart. You mentioned a couple of important points there. And of course you can't have a strategy unless you know what your goals are. What are some of the possible goals that an author deciding to self-publish ought to be considering?

A: Well, this is really the most important thing, Chris. And I think you would agree that – I know when I sit down with a client who's considering publishing, the very first question I ask them is, what would you consider a success to be with this particular book or publishing project? And there are so many answers. So some people want to publish strictly to create immediate interest in their own work or their ideas. Some people publish books solely for private use. I have a number of clients who publish family histories or a compendia of family facts – influences their family had on a certain socioeconomic region.

And these are all great strategies. I mean, there are many consultants who publish strictly to gain authority in their field and perhaps even raise their consulting rates.

And all of these strategies are quite legitimate. And what's interesting is, even though it's become far easier to publish a book today in 2011 than it's ever been, and more people are publishing, a published author still gets a lot of these benefits anyway, just from being published.

Q: Well, does it matter what kind of a book I publish? You pointed out in one of your presentations, that there are a number of options even with ebooks. But, should it matter to me as an author which one of those I choose?

A: Well, confronting the print book versus ebook or ebook formats versus ebook formats, you have to keep returning to what your goal is. Now many people, part of their strategy in publishing is to spread their work as widely as possible. And with ebook formats, each format is restricted to certain kinds of devices that can actually use that format. So if you don't publish in all these formats, you're limiting your own audience. So it may be that for your goal that you're going to adopt a strategy that implies that you will publish to every single format, whether it's the Kindle format or the ePub format or any of those formats to reach the widest number of readers.

Q: Well, when you have a self-publishing candidate in front of you, how do you help them do that analysis? You talked about paralysis analysis. Is it a reasonable objective to want to publish as widely as possible? I mean there may be certain formats that appeal to certain kinds of readers. I mean, you mentioned readers, we want to get to them at some point. They are the crucial piece in all of this. You can write all you like, but if no one reads it, what difference does it make?

Is nonfiction – is it better to be in the Kindle because that's where the nonfiction readers are purchasing their books? Any insights on that?

A: Sure. And you have to take all of this with a grain of salt, because the publishing industry – and reader's habits are in such a flux right now. There's new technology, new devices, and let's face it, Chris, reading is an activity that hasn't changed hardly at all in about 500 years. So the phase we're in now, anything that we might say on this podcast could be proven true or proven false in a matter of months, because the change is so widespread and constant.

However, having said that, I think that nonfiction publishers seem to still be having the most success with print books. And fiction authors seem to be having the most success with ebooks and particularly on the Kindle platform more than any other. And most of the big publishing successes we've seen with self-published authors are almost all genre fiction authors. And that's – the Kindle just seems to be the – becoming the preferred place for readers who like to consume that kind of literature. The books are much cheaper, they're easier to get, they're easier to buy. It seems like a match really made in heaven.

Q: Well, that kind of reading is, pardon the expression, is a kind of addiction, isn't it? If you're talking about genre, once you've finished the mystery, you want another one right away. It's like potato chips, or cigarettes, or that sort of thing.

A: Absolutely. Now with nonfiction, depending on the kind of book it is, because nonfiction is a pretty big box that we throw a lot of different stuff in, but any kind of book that people want to work with, like if you have an instruction manual or a step-by-step guide to how to do something, mostly it seems that people still want that physical book. They want to put the book next to them on their desk. Maybe they want to write in the margins, or make notes, or stick papers in there. But the paperback – particularly the trade paperback book, is still doing OK. It seems like a preferred format for a lot of nonfiction.

That doesn't mean to say that nonfiction isn't going on ebooks and I encourage all authors to seriously consider publishing their works in both formats – both print and e, if they possibly can. Because otherwise, you're just definitely going to leave certain readers out of your equation.

Q: Well, I think that's a great point and we're talking on Beyond the Book today with Joel Friedlander, who blogs at thebookdesigner.com and presents often about self-publishing. He recently was part of the Self-Publishing Boot Camp held at Stanford University. I understand there will be another Self-Publishing Boot Camp coming up in February in San Francisco. If you're on the West Coast, you might want to look into that.

And Joel, I checked out your blog, and saw some pictures that go back to the beginning of your career. And you're working on a letterpress there, and I'm guessing that, like me, at some point you fell in love with books. And if you love books, you love everything about them – the physical object, the design, the production, the quality of the paper, and the quality of the printing and so forth.

And since you've brought the values still of the print book, that really complicates things for self-publishers. Do they again find themselves in a kind of paralysis analysis when it comes to the actual print product and is that where someone like you a consultant can kind of step in and help them?

A: Yes, and certainly the way that technology's developing, excuse me, it's much more complicated to produce a book that's going to be printed, Chris. You have to deal with the physical object. You need book printers, binders, you need paper, cloth, all those different physical objects that have to come together. Your reproduction has to be right. So it's a much more complex task than doing an ebook, which an author, to be honest, if you have a very lightly formatted manuscript like a novel, you can publish that probably yourself with no help except from an editor and maybe somebody to do a book cover design for you.

But a print book, you're almost certainly going to need a professional to help you put that together. And make sure that it actually prints properly. And yes, as a longtime book designer, that's exactly the kind of work I've done for authors and publishers for many years. And any kind of competent book designer will be able to help an author out – help them select vendors, because let's face it, the average writer, why would they even have any idea who a book printer is? There's just no reason to know that kind of information.

So like it's when you're plumbing breaks. You're not going to go and buy a book on how to learn to be a plumber. You're going to call a plumber and get the problem fixed. And I equate that with book – if you're going to do one book a year or every two years, it is probably better to find somebody to do that book for you.

Q: And I guess the kind of help that you can offer, isn't only to suggest what people ought to do, but to warn them about what they shouldn't do. Give us a couple of things – quick bullet-points about what you shouldn't do if you're a self-publisher.

A: Yeah, well the first thing you shouldn't do is publish a book that has not been edited by a professional editor. It's really a bad idea. And that is my number one – even though I'm not an editor, and if I need a book edited, I have to hire an editor like anybody else, but that's my number one thing to self-publishers. It's also important, if your strategy involves selling books in bookstores or retailing books that are going to compete with books from trade publishers, then you really need a professional. Cover design, you may need an interior designer to make your book look the way it should look if it wants to compete.

And then there are a lot of run-of-the-mill things that we have to actually instruct people on, Chris. And you might find this surprising, but I've actually seen books with the odd-numbered pages on the left. And that's really kind of a big no-no. Or books with no copyright notice. Books with –

Q: We don't like that at Copyright Clearance Center.

A: That's a really bad idea to publish a book with no copyright notice, as you can tell us. So there are a lot of these –

Q: And some people – just to say Joel, it's not a requirement of the law any longer, but it's a very good way for people to, first of all know that you're claiming the ownership, and also B. how to find you.

A: You know, other things that I find self-publishers frequently fall into these traps are, for instance, also in your part of the world, quoting songs or quoting other authors without permission. Using pictures they find on the Internet without permission. And these things are not going to make your book better, they're going to land you in a lot of trouble potentially. And there's no real reason you need to

do that, because if you know how to get permission or how to find a photo that can be used properly, then it's easy to do that.

So I find a lot of what authors are confronting when they try to move into self-publishing is just a need for training or education, just to know how to make that jump from being an author and taking that hat off, and putting on the hat of being a book publisher, which is a whole different business.

Q: Well, Joel, finally, the other perspective that an author frequently overlooks isn't just the publisher's perspective, now they have to kind of sit in that person's chair, but the reader's perspective. Why are readers important as regards to the decisions a self-publishing author makes?

A: I think it's fascinating, Chris, how the readers have started to wield even more influence than they ever did before. And how authors are starting to get much more into direct contact with readers and losing the intermediates in the publishing distribution chain. But authors have to think about readers right from the beginning. Particularly like nonfiction authors or genre authors, you really need to know who your potential readers are. If you're marketing online as a self-published author, and I really recommend that, it's the place you can do the most promotion with the least amount of work or money involved, is online marketing, then you have to know how to find those readers.

There are bazillions of people online, how are you going to find the people who are interested in what you're writing about? So there are lots of things that writers have to know about their readers – their habits, what they expect the book to look like, how to make a book that's readable and doesn't give you eye strain, or cause you to forget where you are, while you're reading. And those are technical things your book designer can help with.

But there's a heck of a lot that authors really need to start thinking about a little bit differently than they've ever thought before, when they move into self-publishing.

Q: Well, Joel Friedlander, who is himself an award-winning book designer and blogger, and the author of *A Self-Publisher's Companion: Expert Advice for Authors Who Want to Publish*. Joel, thank you so much, because you really have, I think, identified some key points and I'm betting if there's some self-publishing authors out here, they've heard what you said, and they're going to really thank you for it later on. Joel Friedlander, thank you for joining us on *Beyond the Book*.

A: It's been a pleasure, Chris. It's a very exciting time for authors and I'm really excited to be part of it.

Q: Thank you again, Joel. *Beyond the Book* is produced by Copyright Clearance Center, a global rights broker for the world's most sought-after materials, including millions of books and ebooks, journals, newspapers, magazines, and blogs. You

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