

15 COMMON MISTAKES SELF- PUBLISHING AUTHORS MAKE

(And how to avoid them)



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15 Common Mistakes Self-Publishing Authors Make

(And How to Avoid Them)

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This ebook contains valuable tips and advice to help new writers who want to go into self-publishing. It may be shared freely online and offline, as long as the source is cited.

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So You Are Considering Self-Publishing Your Book?

Stop!

Read this eBook first. It will prepare you for some of the things you need to know, and the mistakes you **MUST** avoid if you want your self-publishing venture to be successful and rewarding.

As someone who started writing and self-publishing in 2007, I made many mistakes and I learnt from them. Since I started my own publishing and consulting company, I've been contacted by many authors who have made these same mistakes. They have spent time, money and effort in writing and self-publishing but they either did everything wrong, or they got ripped off by unscrupulous service providers. Many writers come to me, seeking advice so that they don't make these same mistakes again.

I have now compiled this list for writers who are considering self-publishing their works, so that they will be aware of what pitfalls to avoid. The right knowledge will ensure that the whole process doesn't end up in frustration, tears, and a lot of wasted time and money.

I hope you enjoy reading this ebook, and I hope you take away something useful.

To your success,

Tolulope Popoola

Introduction

These days, technology has made it easier than ever for aspiring authors to self-publish their work, whether it's a novel, a collection of poems, a memoir, a series or a non-fiction book based on their experience and expertise.

However, here is a note of caution to aspiring authors: it is even easier to make mistakes that could make your book a failure and cost you lots of money. The fact is that although technology and the internet access have somewhat levelled the playing field for aspiring authors, this does not eliminate the need for a strategic plan, in-depth knowledge of your audience and the marketing sense that goes behind a successful book.

Knowing what to avoid, also helps you to ask better questions when you decide to publish your book. If you are considering going with a publishing company who specializes in providing self-publishing packages, you should be aware of the terms and conditions that you're signing up for, as well as knowing what exactly you get for the service you are paying for. I'm met many authors who have been ripped off by dubious self-publishing companies, and they now have a fear of trying to publish their works.

Let me say this, not all self-publishing companies are bad or dubious. I sincerely urge writers to do their research and ask the right questions before committing their beloved manuscript and money to any company.

It is also important for authors who wish to self-publish to realise that their book is going to be competing against thousands of other books in the marketplace. If you're going to release a book, it's in your best interest to make sure that it is excellent quality, both in content and in the production. You would want a book that is not distinguishable from that published by a traditional publisher, and you don't want a book that will stand out for all the wrong reasons.

If you are thinking about self-publishing your work, here are the most common mistakes you should avoid:

Mistake #1 - Publishing a poorly written book

Many first-time authors are so excited by the prospect of having their work published, that they are impatient, and don't take enough time to do things properly. If you're writing non-fiction, you need to take plenty of time to research your material, ensure your points are written in clear logical order, make sure your work is engaging and gives the right amount of information to the reader. If you're writing fiction at the very least, you must make sure you have a strong plot, interesting characters, excellent spelling and grammar, and enough intrigue to keep your reader interested. Poor grammar or sentence construction, dull characters and a weak story line can be hurtful especially if you plan to publish more books.

You don't have to be a talented writer to publish a book. If writing is not your strong suit, but you have something interesting to say, there are several options you can employ to ensure that the book is up to par. You can look into hiring a ghost-writer or collaborate with a co-author to help you flesh out the story and bring your manuscript together. Once a book is published, it is released to the public and it will do the author no good if he receives bad reviews because of mistakes that could have easily been avoided from the start.

Mistake #2 - Choosing a poor title

A book's title is one of the most important components. This is how you introduce your work to the world. A book can succeed or fail based on its title alone. If you had to tell people about your book, what's the first thing they'll ask? "What's it called?" A good title should be fascinating and appealing enough for a potential reader to take a second look or ask for more details. If you're writing fiction, your book title should be intriguing and evocative. If you're writing non-fiction, your title should immediately tell the reader what the book is about, and the benefits they will gain from reading it. Before you decide on a

final title for your book, it might be a good idea to write down three or more suggestions, and then ask a few non-biased people to rate them. You can ask your fellow writers, potential readers, and friends. Their reactions will tell you whether your title is good, or it requires more thought to be put into it.

Mistake #3 - Bad cover design

No matter what we say, we all judge a book by its cover and so will your readers. The cover is your book's packaging and every marketer knows that before you sell the contents of any product, the packaging must attract the buyer. Think about your book cover as your chance to attract buyers, and give them a hint of what the book contains. When the reader browses Amazon, or the book shelves in a store, will your cover appeal to them?

Unless you have significant skills in graphic design and you know exactly what your target market will like, it is usually best to hire a professional to design your book cover. Some authors try to cut costs by choosing one of the DIY templates offered on some self-publishing sites. The problem with these templates is that they are made to work with general themes and therefore do not often match well with targeted content. Similarly, dropping your title on a stock photo and calling that your cover page might not be the most attractive thing if you do not have the graphic design skills to make it all come together. These mistakes could cause potential readers to bypass your book and cost you sales.

Before you start working on designing your cover, go online and search for books in your genre or niche. Look at the covers and analyse them for colours, fonts, images, placements, etc. Select a few and use them as the basis for you to start working on yours. Again, as with the title, it is wise to have two or more sample covers that you can test with your potential readers. If you are considering a template or doing the cover yourself, run a mini focus group with people who match your target audience to get their feedback on the cover design. If hiring a professional graphic artist, ask them to send at least two samples that you can test with the group. Make sure you take the feedback on board, so that you can produce a cover that you like, but also serves its purpose of appealing to your target audience.

Also a word of caution: some writers want to use their own photographs on the front of their book. Unless you are very famous and your audience will buy your book based on your brand alone, it's not advisable to do this. It is better for you to follow the conventions of your niche or genre. If you must use your photo, make sure it is a professionally shot image and it stands out on the cover.

Mistake #4 – Not hiring an editor and proofreader

One of the biggest complaints from readers, book reviewers and other people in the publishing industry about self-publishing is the lack of quality editing and proofreading that goes into manuscripts before they are pushed out. A big mistake many new writers make, is to underestimate the importance of an editor and the work they do to improve a manuscript. It is important to note that proofreading and editing are not the same. An editor is more involved in the manuscript than a proofreader, and there are different kinds of editors: developmental editors (who work with the most “raw” of manuscripts); substantive editors (who do significant restructuring and rewriting); and line editors (who do the final editing at the line-by-line level with an eye for clarity, succinctness, and style). Though many editors specialize in one of these areas as their strong suit, most are capable in all. The job of a proofreader is primarily to ensure technical correctness of language (grammar and spelling) and catch typos. While proofreaders may offer editorial suggestions for problems like run-on sentences, confusing syntax, and the like, they will generally stick to making sure the text is error-free. And ideally, they'll have few editorial suggestions because the manuscript should have already been through the hands of a competent editor.

Unfortunately, because quality editors can be quite expensive, too many self-published authors employ just a proofreader and not an editor to finalize the manuscript, completely missing the main (and important) function of an editor—to help create a manuscript that's ideally tailored for its intended audience.

One last bit of advice on this topic: don't think the creative writing student next door or the retired English teacher your husband knows can pass for a professional editor. And you

should not substitute with just your reading group or beta-readers either. There's a specific skill to editing, and it's best to trust your manuscript and the success of your book to a professional who does it for a living.

Mistake #5 - Producing Books below Industry Standard

If you're planning to publish in print, you have to ensure the quality of the book. It's easy for a new author to make many mistakes when preparing a book for print, simply because they haven't done it before. If you're not familiar with how manuscripts are prepared for printing, if you don't know how much white space to allocate to your page, things like gutters, layouts, the right trim size, and all of those terms, you'll need to work with a professional book designer. Simply uploading your Word document or pdf file to a printer isn't going to produce a professional book. If you don't want your book to say "Cheap, Amateur, Poor Quality" when you print it, then you must follow the rules that apply in your genre or niche.

Pick up a book similar to the one you want to publish. Look at it carefully. What's the size of the print? Is it paperback or hardback? What's the thickness of the cover, and what's the thickness of the interior paper? Is the cover glossy or matt? Look at the typing and layouts inside. How much spacing does it have in the margins? How many fonts can you see on each page? All these considerations (and more) go into professional book design, and affect the readability of your book once it's printed.

Finally, always request a proof copy from your printer before you order a larger print-run. The proof copy is for you to thoroughly go through the book and make sure you are happy with the quality. The binding should be strong and durable, the colours should match what you envisioned, the pages should be in the right order, etc. Only when you are happy with the proof, should you go ahead to print bigger numbers.

Mistake #6 – Not creating an adequate budget

Many writers choose to self-publish because of the minimal resources needed. However, this does not mean that you won't need to make a decent investment to create an eye-catching book, and let people know about it once published. Self-publishing is a DIY project but you can't do everything yourself. The most successful self-published authors did not just finish typing "The End" on a manuscript, and click "Publish", then sit back and watch the money roll in. Before you begin the process, you need to create a budget for your project and allocate sufficiently for all the related expenses. These will include some of these: editing and proofreading, manuscript formatting, cover design, printing and possibly distribution costs, as well as money for advertising and marketing.

The costs can add up if you decide to hire a professional cover designer, editor, or marketer to assist you, but the amount of money you invest will be evident once your book hits the market. Think of the costs as an investment that will enhance the quality of your book, and improve its saleability. Before you commit to anything, do your research and get price quotes from the professionals so that you have enough information to create an effective budget.

Mistake #7 - Poor Release Timing

Timing is everything in the publishing business, and it should still be a major consideration even if you're self-publishing. Your plan should include a detailed schedule of the publishing process with consideration to dates that are important to the target audience. For example, publishing a cookbook of summer recipes in December is not the smartest decision. Winter is not the time people are looking for summer recipes, that time of the year is geared towards sales of Christmas food and recipes. In January, motivational books about fresh starts, career changes, and weight loss are heavily promoted because they fit in with what people are thinking about in a new year. Late January to early February might be the perfect time for a book on love and relationships as Valentine's Day approaches.

If you're publishing a book with seasonal connotations, you'll need to get familiar with the peak dates for your content and build your schedule around it, knowing your deadlines, release dates, and marketing launch.

Mistake #8 – Inadequate Knowledge of the Distribution Process

After you finish writing your book, you need to think about your target audience, the format your work is going to take (e.g. paperback, ebook, hardback, audiobook, CD) and how your book is going to reach them. Would it be available only through online booksellers like Amazon, or will it be available in stores? In which countries or regions will the book be distributed? How will you determine a price that is affordable for the target audience? These are all questions that not only affect the accessibility of your book, but should be asked prior to the publishing as your choices would determine your publishing options further along the process.

Mistake #9 - Failing to plan for Promotion and Marketing

What good is writing a book if no one knows about it? Many self-publishers follow all the right steps to create a book that is well written, professionally designed and has interesting content. However, they falter at the marketing and advertising stage, which is crucial in spreading the word about their new publication. Promotion is arguably the hardest thing for authors to get their arms around. Most likely this is because the author was drawn to writing first, while promotion is seen as a necessary evil.

Many authors seem to assume that their books will just sell themselves. Asking family and friends to purchase a copy and post a review won't get you very far. You need a consistent, carefully planned, well-timed campaign of marketing and public relations strategies to attract publicity and get readers excited about your book. This may include blog tours, advertising and social media blasts, as well as press releases, media interviews, and guest

blogging to draw attention to your work. Some websites offer comprehensive marketing guidelines for self-publishers that can lead to some success if you are prepared to spend time to learn and implement the activities they suggest.

Mistake #10 – Not knowing your Target Audience

Some writers don't have a target audience, or they wrongly assume that their book will appeal to everyone. This is wrong, because targeting your book to "everyone" is like targeting it to no-one. Your message has to connect with certain people for it to be effective, so you need to know who you are writing for. If you're writing non-fiction, the topic, vocabulary and language should appeal to the audience you are targeting, and the content should be interesting and easy for them to understand. It makes no sense to write a book for accountants filled with scientific terms or a business handbook with colloquialisms. If you're writing fiction, you should know who your story is going to appeal to, and why. Ideally, your target audience should be people like you, who have similar interests. Narrow down your audience to a particular person. Next, you need to find them and target them with your message. Find out the places they hang out, both online and in real life. Find out what groups they belong to, what publications they read, what websites they browse, how they spend their free time, etc. This information will make it easy for you to reach them, and introduce them to your book.

Mistake #11 – Waiting until your book is published before you start promoting

As mentioned in point #9, most writers only think about promoting their book after they've finished writing and publishing it. But nowadays, smart authors are realising that they have to start marketing the book even before it is ready for the public. In fact, some successful self-published authors have mentioned that they start promoting their book up to a year before it is released! They build anticipation with their readers during the writing process,

get feedback, test their material, and more. There are many ways aspiring authors can do this, and start to promote their work: (i) talk about your book on your blog, (ii) mention it on your social media pages, (iii) share photos or anecdotes about your characters, (iv) talk about your research process, (v) share sample chapters of your WIP and invite readers to give feedback, (vi) engage your social media networks with regular updates about your progress with the writing, etc. If you're writing non-fiction, you can even write short articles on the topic and get them published on websites that will profile you as an expert. All these actions will get you noticed and build interest in your book. By the time your book is released, you should have a group of eager fans ready to buy, and spread the word about your book to their friends too.

Mistake #12 – Having Unrealistic Targets and Expectations

For many writers, who have dreamt of having their own book for years, the reality of finally achieving that dream can be very exciting, and it's easy to get too caught up in the excitement such that they start having unrealistic expectations for their book. Sure, you've worked hard, you've written the best book you could have, and you've put in a lot of effort into making sure it looks good. You may start to dream of winning the Nobel prize, hitting the bestseller lists, getting to talk about your book on Oprah and having a book signing event with hundreds of people queuing up to buy a copy and get it autographed by you.

At this point it is important to caution new writers not to let unrealistic expectations get them into trouble, for example, ordering a very large print run, or committing a huge amount of money to advertising and PR, without thinking of how many books they would have to sell to make their money back. Sure, a book may become a runaway hit, and surpass all your expectations, but you can't count on that to happen. Instead, try to imagine how you would sell your books if you print say, 3000 copies. Let's say you're able to sell 200 copies to the people closest to you, and a few online fans. However, what happens once you've exhausted your network of family and friends? How will you sell the next 200 copies? The next 500? Make a solid plan and follow through, so that you're not left with

hundreds of unsold stock and money tied down indefinitely. And if sales happen to exceed your expectations, you'll be in a great position to welcome the good news.

Furthermore, don't imagine that your very first book will make you a millionaire instantly. Writing and publishing a book is not a get-rich-quick-scheme. Most writers who earn decent money from their work often have more than one book in the market, and they're always adding more to their list. It takes time to build platform and a loyal fan base, it takes time to write good books that people want to read, it takes time for word of mouth to spread about a book, and it takes time for your investments to yield returns. If you're committed and you're patient, you'll definitely see rewards in writing and publishing, but usually, it's not an "instant overnight millionaire" path.

Mistake #13 – Overpricing or Under-pricing Your Book

In traditional publishing, there are many factors that affect the price of a book, and the percentage of that amount that the author earns as royalties. Typically, the publisher sets the price of the book, and sells the book at a 55% to a distributor. The distributor usually takes 15% of the cover price, and ships the book to a retailer who takes 40%.

Fortunately in self-publishing you have less middlemen and more control over the price of your book, and your royalties. But while you have the freedom to set any price you like, you may want to choose carefully. If you price your book too low, you risk lowering your profit margin and if you price your book too high, you risk lower sales. You have to find a happy medium based on your costs, your goals, the average prices of other books in your niche, among other things. When you're calculating the costs, make sure you factor in design, printing, shipping, promotions, etc. Of course if you're only publishing in ebook format, you won't have printing and shipping costs, so you can have a lower price point than if you were producing paperbacks or hardbacks. Be aware of the normal price range for books in your genre. If most romance novels sell for £6.99, then you shouldn't price yours at £15.99 even if you have the freedom to. Also, be aware that non-fiction books tend to be priced higher

than fiction books, especially if they contain very specific information that is not readily available elsewhere.

Mistake #14 – Not Networking with other writers and publishers

For most writers, working on a manuscript is a solitary experience. They work alone, creating imaginary worlds, characters and situations. However, when you finish writing your book, it's time to come out of the solitary world, and meet people in your industry. Especially if you're writing and publishing for the first time. You should educate yourself about the industry, you should start making connections with other people who have more knowledge and experience than you, and you should attend literary events, writer's conferences, and publishing industry seminars and gatherings. There's a lot of information available online, but sometimes, nothing beats meeting an expert at a book event face to face and having a conversation with them. There are also trade groups, associations and professional bodies that you can join, for example The Association of Independent Authors, The Alliance of Independent Authors, Independent Publisher's Guild, and many more.

Of course, if you're looking to arm yourself with up to date information about writing and publishing, it's also a good idea to follow people in the industry on their social media platforms, and engage in conversations that will broaden your knowledge.

Mistake #15 – Not organising an inspiring Book Launch

Finally, your book is done! You've written the best book you can, it's been professionally edited and proofread, the cover is brilliant, the proof has been approved, your pricing and every other factor is spot on. Now it's time to introduce it to the world, and celebrate your achievement. How do you do that? By having a book launch event! This would be an opportunity to drum up interest in you, your book, your message, your brand and hopefully

boost your sales. So how do you plan a successful book launch that will get potential readers lining up to get a copy of your book and your autograph?

It's important that you think outside the box if you're thinking of organising a book launch. If you've written fiction, think about how you might use elements from your book to hook and entertain readers. So, instead of just doing a reading from the book, why not have some friends act out a few scenes? Instead of just sitting down at a table in a book store, why not try a more interesting venue where you can link to your book? Say, for example if your book had a connection to an island, you could get a venue that you can decorate with palm trees and features of the island. You could even get creative with the snacks and drinks you offer to your guests. If you've written non-fiction, think of the best way you can demonstrate your knowledge and material.

If you're inviting people from the media and press to attend, you have to give them something interesting and newsworthy to report. What makes you and your book special?

Nowadays, authors also plan online launches if they can't afford to do a physical launch. This works well if you've already built a platform of interested readers, and you know they are waiting for your book release date. On that day, you can plan some interesting online events like a Google Hangout, an interview with you, competitions and giveaways, and so on. There is no end to the creativity and ideas you can incorporate. If you're stuck, go online and search for ideas. It may seem like unnecessary hard work, but it will be worth it in the end.

Summary

I've given you a list of the fifteen most important things you must do (or avoid) before you self-publish your book. Self-publishing can be a very rewarding and fulfilling venture, it is a viable alternative to traditional publishing but it is still a business venture. It requires investments, time, resources, planning, research and strategy. You, as the author, are responsible for the success or failure of this venture. Doing things yourself is already going to cost you money, but making any of these mistakes will inevitably cost you even more money. Give yourself and your book the best chance of success right from the start. If you want to self-publish a book, arm yourself with the right information and the right advice.

Who am I?



Hi! My name is Tolulope Popoola. I'm an Author, Book Writing Coach and Publishing Consultant. I'm also the founder of Accomplish Press. I love reading and writing, I love helping and inspiring people to pursue their dreams. I'm on a mission to help aspiring authors to write and publish their own books too.

If you need help with any of the topics discussed in this book, and you're not sure where to start, then I can help you. I offer coaching, consultations and training for aspiring authors who want to learn how to write and publish their books.

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I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Tolulope Popoola

Book Writing Coach and Publishing Consultant

PS: Here are my fiction titles – my novel [Nothing Comes Close](#), and two collections of flash fiction stories, [Fertile Imagination](#) and [Looking For Something](#).

