

I thought I would write my story concerning writing a book. My purpose is to help a preacher/writer understand the process and some do's and don'ts in order to save one's money and time. I self-published my book, and chose not to go through a publisher or a normal print-on-demand company. I will explain why at the end of this document.

First of all, my book started with a burden, then I preached a few messages in the church on the subject that was burning in my heart (how to get through long valleys in our lives victoriously through Christ). By preaching the messages related to the subject that I was considering writing about, it prompted me to study and articulate my thoughts more in depth. I transcribed the sermons, went through the transcription, and reworded the text. The way you preach typically is not in book form. It does not flow for reading, and we typically make statements that are open-ended and are not substantiated. For example, we may say statements in our preaching like, "We only use the KJV Bible." For our people this statement is perfectly clear and understood. However, the reader of your book does not know you, and has not sat in your church services, listening to all the reasons why you stand on the KJV. I call these dangling thoughts.

Then I wrote the manuscript out until it reached about 25,000 words. After this, I sat on the manuscript for a year, preached messages and counseled many people that dealt with the subject (Walking Through the Valleys of Life).

Then I proceeded to write on it again and the word count went up to 45,000. From then on, I read through the manuscript about once a week looking to complete thoughts, word usage, and general improvements to the future book. I then passed the manuscript around to people in the church and had them read it and give their opinions. (Unfortunately your people and friends are very nice and will not be overly critical of your book; but it never hurts.)

I went and found an editor. I went to www.thechristianpen.com and asked for referrals, and about 10 editors contacted me and offered to give me a five page sample of their editing. (If you search on Google, you will find many Christian editors.) If a person was clever, you could get fifty pages of your manuscript edited for free. Most editors use track changes, a neat feature MS Word has built in that allows you with a click of the mouse to accept and decline the suggested changes from the editor. If you reject the changes then your manuscript goes back like it was prior to the edit. This also allows for you to email back and forth concerning the changes also.

I chose an editor for my first book that was a fiction writer on purpose, even though I was writing a non-fiction book. For the second book, "Christian Modesty," I chose an editor that was sympathetic to the cause of the book, and was both a devotional writer and a technical writer. The reason for this is because I am a preacher and tend to be "preachy." I wanted someone who would be opposite of my style. This was a great idea for my books, but it may not be for everyone.

WARNING! If I was going to skimp monetarily on any part of my book, it would not be the editor. Yes, your sister-in-law is good in English, but she has never written a book! That would be like asking your brother-in-law, who is smart and knows the Bible, to fill the pulpit for the Christmas service. Though he is smart, he is not a preacher. The old saying is, "you get what you pay for." You can expect to pay about

2-8 cents per word, depending on how in depth the editing. Not all editing is the same. There are different types of editing, and your editor will tell you the difference.

Another note about editors, they are not perfect! No matter how much they have written and edited, they still are humans. Most books are printed with many mistakes, and some larger than others. I have never met an author who was completely pleased with the first printing of their book. After getting my manuscript back and accepting the changes, my wife and I tirelessly went through about ten times. My wife is very articulate and able to catch many more things than myself. But when my book was printed, it had no less than ten errors in it. Now, not all of them were our mistakes, some of them were mistakes of the interior formatters. However, no book is perfect, even the big publishers have mistakes in their books. They don't worry that much about them because most people skim read and never see the errors. One person told me that if there are 15 errors or less, the publisher never does anything about them. The errors will bug *you* more than anyone else will even notice. You can fix the problems in later printings (which we did). Go ahead and resolve that there may be problems, and if there is not, rejoice, and if there are, you will not be let down.

Next, I started working on the interior formatting and cover design. First, the interior formatting can be a bear. If you create your book in Word, you will probably have to have it converted to an Adobe product. Adobe products and other professional programs do better at kernelling the text, and it will look a little better, but you can format it in Word. I did my last book in Word, and converted it to a PDF document, and it looks great. I would hire someone to do the layout though. Most printers require a print-ready PDF. Most formatters just want a plain text document with just paragraph separations, that way they don't have to clean up after you. For my first book, I let my printer do the interior formatting, and I regretted it. I paid my printing company 60.00 an hour and it got costly, about \$1000.00 dollars in all. Search the internet and you will find many people that will help you with this part of your book. The price could range from \$200-\$1000. It is a lot of work for them, but it is worth its weight in gold in the end. Look at some of their prior work to see if you like it or not.

The same goes for your cover! You get what you pay for. Select someone who has prior work that you can preview of which you are prompted to say, "WOW! That is impressive!" There are hundreds out there, but they are not all the same. The gentleman I used was good, but I had to come up with most of the creativity and ideas. He was very patient with me and changed the things I needed him to. Another note, people buy books because of their covers. I have seen books that were written by Baptist pastors, printed by some big name publishers (Independent), but they appeared simple, like a third-grader put them together. Ask them how many of them they have sold? I had about \$500.00 in my cover over all.

Then you need to get an ISBN number. Many book stores will not carry your book without it. Expect to pay about \$150.00 for this. If you want to copyright your work, expect to pay about \$60.00 for your copyright. The law protects your work without it, but it may give you a better sense of security with the copyright.

Then it is time to find a printer. Again, there are many who will want your business. I found out who the big publishers use, like Moody and Zondervan, and I went with them. For my first book, I used Color

House Graphics in Grand Rapids, MI. They were not perfect, but treated me fairly when I had concerns and problems. For my second book, I have used Lightning Source. (See my links for the link.) I have had nothing but good things to say for them. My books look great, and they are the only print-on-demand company that I would recommend. They also distribute your books through Barnes and Noble and Amazon. I will publish all my books through them because I don't need to stock books, and their cost is only a few cents more than Color House.

There are a couple of options when it comes to printing, either short run digital or offset. You really cannot tell the difference between them when the book is finished. With short-run it is printed on a machine that looks like a copier, but you can print as few as 100 to start and only pay \$4.00-5.00 a book. **I printed 500 books and paid \$2.35, with shipping, close to \$3.00 per book.** When you go to larger quantities over 1000 it pays to do offset traditional printing. Short run book printing has less turnaround time also. I recommend short-run first, then after all the kinks are out, then go for a long-run. (My books through Lightning Source are between \$2.70 - \$3.00.)

Once you get your book in hand, don't expect people to beat down your to buy it. You assume that everyone who knows you will buy your book. You may say, "I thought they liked me!" They may like you, but not enough to buy your book. Like Jesus said, "A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house" (Mark 6:4). Likewise, bookstores will be hard pressed to put your book on their shelves. 175,000 books are printed every year. (Around 10,000 are Christian books.) Bookstores are bombarded by calls from self-published authors and salesmen from book distributors looking to get books on the shelves. And honestly, let's say they buy three copies of your book at 40% off the retail (which is the minimum discount), and let's say that your book retails for \$10.00. This means they have \$18.00 invested. Let's say they only sell one book. That means they go in the hole- \$8.00. Let's say they did this with 100 authors. That is a loss of \$800 a year. Most book stores struggle to stay in business anyway, with all the information that can be found on the internet and online sources taking their business. If you offer the bookstore a return policy, they are more apt to take your book. But you have to pay return shipping, which is sometimes more than you have in the books in the first place.

Online books stores are similar, and most want a preview copy to read first. This could take upwards to 3-10 weeks, with numerous calls and emails. Just sending a book, and not following up will never sell a book, it is a waste of money. Promotion of your book will be harder than actually writing the book because you are trying to convince skeptical people that they need your book. Plus, you have hundreds of people competing against your book. But it is doable! In 6 months, we sold over 1300 books, but we gave most stores 60% off the retail. This meant we made very little money from the book, and did not recover all of our startup cost. (If you go through a publisher or a print-on-demand company, you cannot afford to give this kind of discount, because you will have to pay from 40-60% to purchase your own books, so you will have to pay people to sell your books.)

Why I Chose Not to Use Traditional Publishers

It really was not a choice; you have a better chance of getting struck by lightning than getting your book picked up by a traditional publisher. 90% of all publishers will not even look at your manuscript, and before you think of ways to skirt the system and get your book to them, they know all the tricks that authors try in order to get their manuscripts to them. They suggest an agent. Good luck finding one of these, especially if your book is Bible-based, and convicting. Most of these agents are business people and they want books that will speak to all people. But Bible-based books tend to polarize people.

Most publishers instruct you that the solution to listing your book is to find a manuscript service (costs a fee) and they say when they are looking for new manuscripts they go here, but I have never heard of this actually happening. What they are really saying is, "Don't call me, we will call you." The only way I think to get published is if you know an agent, or a published author who will go out on a limb for you, or possibly know someone in the publishing company. I chose self-publishing because I know this material would transform lives, in which it has, and I did not need the publisher's business to approve my burden/book. It would be nice for a publisher to pick up the book, but you still have to promote your book, and work as hard as you would to sell your books as a self-publisher does. Most publishers make you buy a certain amount of books upfront. A minimum would be 1000 books at 50% off the retail. So if you have to pay \$5.00 per book- that would be \$5000.00. On another note, the average Christian book sales from Moody and other big names in the publishing world are about 3000 books. Some books do much better, but this is the average. I heard the other day that a well-known Independent Baptist publisher makes you buy 5000 books upfront.

Why I Did Not Do Print-On-Demand.

Many companies such as Lulu, Booksurge, and others will be more than happy to do your book for you. This is an option for many, and it might be for you. This is how it works. You pay a company \$700-\$1200 to do a book cover and interior formatting (editing is extra). Then when you want books, they will sell them to you. They have your book in a document and print your book one at a time. You can buy your books about 50% off the retail. Let's say your book retails at \$10.00, so that means your cost will be \$5.00. Note: the company profits \$2.50 per book from you and they have nothing invested, because you have paid them for their services already. If you sell your book to a bookstore and give them 40% off, then you make \$1.00 per book. This kind of business has capitalized on the thousands of authors who write but the publishers will not even talk to them. Let's say for example, you buy 500 books from the company; that would mean they profit \$1250.00 off of your book, plus your setup fees of \$1000. That's \$2250.00 profit for them. Let's say they work with 1000 authors, you do the math. See the linked article below and you decide.

I hope this helps you avoid mistakes and encourages you. Writing a book is hard work and frustrating. But it has been one of the most fulfilling experiences I have had. May God Bless you!

There's [a very useful analysis of self-publishing via the POD route](#) on the [Writer Beware website](#). While this extract discusses sales statistics, the complete article is far more extensive and essential reading for everyone who is considering self-publishing their work.

Sales Statistics

Despite some highly publicized successes, the average book from a POD service sells fewer than 200 copies--mostly to the authors and to "pocket" markets surrounding them--friends, family, local retailers who can be persuaded to place an order. According to the chief executive of POD service iUniverse, quoted in the New York Times in 2004, 40% of iUniverse's books are sold directly to authors.

POD services' own statistics support these low sales figures. AuthorHouse's online [Fact Sheet](#), updated in September 2008, reported 36,823 authors and 45,993 titles. According to the [New York Times](#), AuthorHouse reports selling more than 2.5 million books in 2008, which sounds like a lot, but averages out to around 54 sales per title.

iUniverse's most recent Facts and Figures sheet reports that the company published 22,265 titles through 2005, with sales of 3.7 million: an average of 166 sales per title. Obviously some titles can boast better sales (Amy Fisher's, "If I Knew Then" sold over 32,000 copies)--but not many. According to [a 2004 article](#) in Publishers Weekly, only 83 of more than 18,000 iUniverse titles published during that year sold at least 500 copies. And in [a 2008 article](#) in The New York Times, iUniverse's VP, Susan Driscoll, admitted that most iUniverse authors sell fewer than 200 books.

As of 2004, stats for Xlibris were similar. According to a Wall Street Journal article, 85% of its books had sold fewer than 200 copies, and only around 3%--or 352 in all--had sold more than 500 copies. Things looked up in 2007: according to Xlibris's own internal reports, recently obtained by Writer Beware, 4% of its titles had sold more than 1,000 copies. However, the averages still aren't good. As of mid-2007, Xlibris had 23,000 authors and had published 23,500 titles, with total sales of over 3 million--around 127 sales per title.

Once independent companies, AuthorHouse, iUniverse, and Xlibris are now all owned by the same company, Author Solutions. In [a New York Times article](#) published in early 2009, Kevin Weiss, Author Solutions' CEO, put the average sales of titles from any of the company's brands at around 150.

Lulu.com, one of the most popular and cost-effective of the POD services and still independent despite the apparent trend toward consolidation among POD services, is explicit about its long tail business model. In a 2006 article in the Times UK, its founder identified the company's goal: "...to have a million authors selling 100 copies each, rather than 100 authors selling a million copies each." A Lulu bestseller is a book that sells 500 copies. There haven't been many of them.