

# Small Publishing in a Big Universe

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- Myths and Truths About Publishing
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# Introduction

## Who I Am

- Managing Editor of Paper Angel Press and its imprints
- Novelist, short story author, and technical writer
- Technical Publications manager and college instructor
- Many, many years of experience in all areas of the publications field
- Executive producer of *Small Publishing in a Big Universe* podcast

## Who We Are

- Our imprints
  - Paper Angel Press: fiction and mysteries
  - Water Dragon Publishing: speculative fiction
  - Unruly Voices: memoirs, poetry, and self-improvement
  - Graveside Press: horror (*April 2024*)
  - Cupid's Arrow Publishing: romance (*April 2024*)
- Small Publishing in a Big Universe
  - Podcast
  - Marketplace

# What is Small Publishing?

## Small Publishing is ...

- Also known as “independent publishing” (not connected to one of the large publishing corporations)
- Publishing by a small organization
- Self-publishing

## Small Publishing is not ...

- Publishing by a small imprint of a large publisher
- Vanity presses

# Myths and Truths About Being a Writer

## Myths

- You can make a living wage working solely as a writer.
- There are guaranteed techniques you can use to help make your book sell.
- There are consistent editorial standards you can follow.

## Truths

- Most authors earn most of their income from writing-related activities, not from book sales.
- There is no single “magic bullet” for book sales and promotion.
- What one editor/agent/publisher says is almost certainly not valid for all editors, agents, and publishers.
- The best thing you can do for your writing career is to write your next story.

# Myths and Truths About Publishing

## Myths

- An advance is like a bonus you receive when you sign the contract for your book.
- Publishers will take care of all of the promotion and marketing of your book for you.

## Truths

- Advances are rarely paid in a single lump sum.
- You don't begin earning royalties until after the publisher has earned back the amount of your advance.
- Most books never earn out their advances.
- You are going to be responsible for much of the promotion and marketing for your book.

# Traditional vs. Small Publishing

## Traditional Publishing

- “Big 5” Publishing (corporations)
- Agent-driven
- Pays advances against future royalties
- Agent receives % of advance and earnings
- Long lead times (years)

## Small Publishing

- Small organizations and teams
- Small budgets
- Rarely pays advances, but tends to pay much higher royalty share
- Accepts direct submissions by authors
- Turnaround time between submission and publication can be very fast (months)

# Small Publishing vs. Self-Publishing

## Small Publishing

- Variable creative control
- No (or few) costs to Author
- Benefit of ongoing support from the publisher and its author network
- Author receives share of sales profits
- Publisher manages all accounting and issues annual 1099-MISC to author

## Self-Publishing

- Full creative control
- Author covers *all* costs
- Responsible for *all* marketing and promotions, including events, networking, etc.
- Author receives all sales revenue
- Author manages all accounting

# The Publishing Process

## Getting Started

### Traditional Publishing

1. Acquire an agent.
2. Agent shops manuscript around to publishers.

Or

### Small Publishing

1. Author submits manuscript to publisher.

## Publishing the Book

1. Publisher offers to publish book.
2. Negotiate and sign contract.
3. Book cover development.
4. Author receives editorial changes for their manuscript.
5. Author receives proofs for review and final corrections.
6. Book is published.

# Monopoly: The Publishing Edition

Publishing is essentially controlled by these companies:

- **ISBN Management:** Bowker (exclusive in the U.S.)
- **Print Distribution:** Ingram
- **Online Marketplace Sales:** Amazon ... and then everyone else.
  - **Printed Books:** Amazon — 70+% of market
  - **eBooks:** Kindle — 80+% of market
  - **Audiobooks:** Audible (Amazon/ACX) — 90+% of market
  - **Middle Grade:** Scholastic ... and then everyone else.

# Getting Into Bookstores: The Reality

## Bookstores

- Determine what gets purchased and stocked on their shelves.
- Want to stock books that will sell and bring readers into the store to buy other books and merchandise.
- Have limited shelf space (even large chain stores like Barnes & Noble devote a considerable amount of their space to non-book items).

## Authors and Publishers

- Want to see their books on the shelves in bookstores.
- Need to convince bookstores that there will be a demand for their books, enough to reserve space for it rather than for another book.
- Need to drive the publicity to generate demand for their books.

*<5% of sales are through bookstores*

*~2% of books end up in bookstores*

# Marketplace Challenges

## Pricing

- Readers have become accustomed to (and many expect) \$0.99 or free content. Getting them to spend more has become an increasing challenge.

## Events

- Tables and booths at events can be prohibitively expensive — particularly for general fiction events.

## Bookstores and Libraries

- Getting into most bookstores, except on a case-by-case basis, is nearly impossible.
- Getting your book into systems for libraries (particularly school libraries) that do not order from Ingram is extremely difficult.
- Getting the digital edition of your book on OverDrive for libraries is fairly easy.

# Getting Reviews

## Reader Reviews

- The number of reviews drives visibility on Amazon and other marketplaces.
- Reviews by authors of similar books seems to drive awareness and sales better than other reviews.
- Getting reviews continues to be challenging. (Our ratio is less than 10:1.)

## Professional and Paid Reviews

- The most prestigious venues for reviews (*Publishers Weekly*, etc.) request review copies at least six months in advance.
- Paid reviews (from services such as Kirkus) — even good ones — may influence credibility with buyers and readers, but do not seem to drive sales.

# Choosing a Small Publisher

## Small Publishing Often Gets A Bad Reputation

- Vanity presses (pay to publish)
- Shady practices (particularly contracts and payments)
- Short-lived businesses and sudden closures
- Author perceptions around what a small publisher can deliver

## What To Look For In A Small Publisher

- Length of time in business
- Number of titles
  - Currently published
  - Published per year
- Promotional activity
  - Website and social media
  - Industry events
- Contract terms (negotiable, copyright, duration, rights reversion)

# Measuring Your Success

## What are Your Personal Goals?

- “I had a book published!”
- Building a legacy for your family
- To become better known in your writing communities – local or worldwide
- Being identified as “a writer”
- See your book on a shelf at a bookstore

## What are Your Business Goals?

- Number of book sales
- Amount of money earned
- Number of different books published

*Set realistic goals.*

# Contacting Us

- Websites

- Paper Angel Press:  
[paperangelpress.com](http://paperangelpress.com)
- Water Dragon Publishing:  
[waterdragonpublishing.com](http://waterdragonpublishing.com)
- Unruly Voices:  
[unrulyvoices.com](http://unrulyvoices.com)
- Small Publishing in a Big Universe:  
[spbu-podcast.com](http://spbu-podcast.com)

- Email

- [publishing@paperangelpress.com](mailto:publishing@paperangelpress.com)
- [spbupodcast@gmail.com](mailto:spbupodcast@gmail.com)

- Social Media

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- YouTube

- Presentations available here:

[spbu-publishing.com/resources](http://spbu-publishing.com/resources)