

## ***Brave New World of Indie Publishing***

### **Intro – A Brief History Lesson**

- First – A little of my Publishing History/Journey
  - I came on the scene in 2008, when I received my first publishing contract from a major Christian publisher, in what is now called “traditional publishing.”
  - Back then, it was just called “publishing.” There really were no other realistic or worthwhile alternatives.
  - Every writer who hoped to see their books on the shelves or in readers hands had **only 1 of 2 options**:
    1. Somehow become one of the select few able to get an A-list literary agent to take you on, who then helped you land a contract with a mainstream Christian publisher.
    2. Keep trying.
  - The term “indie publishing” was unheard of, and self-publishing was looked down upon (to put it gently).
  - I was very fortunate.
    - I finished my first novel in 2008 and signed with an A-list literary agent almost immediately.
    - She got a contract with Revell (Baker Publishing Group) in less than 2 months.
    - That book, *The Unfinished Gift*, did very well. It went on to win 2 Carol awards and has sold over 70,000 copies.
    - After 2 more novels, I started writing fulltime in 2010. In 2015, the last 2 of my books with Revell came out.
    - I wrote 12 novels for them (avg 2/year) and 1 for Guideposts.
  - Up until the end of 2014, I thought my writing career was all set and would go on like this forever.

- But around 2011-12 the publishing world began to undergo a revolutionary change.
- What Has Changed –
  - Essentially, the Readers have (the Place where they buy their books).
    - 70% of Americans haven't been in a bookstore the last 5 years.
  - To give you an idea of how much has changed...when my first book came out in 2009, I didn't know anyone who owned a Kindle.
    - There was only one version of Kindle, and it cost \$300.
    - My e-book sales were less than 3% that year.
    - Most people were afraid to use their credit cards to buy things online.
  - Now more than half of Americans own a Kindle or some other E-reading device.
  - Major bookstore chains have gone belly up, or drastically reduced their number of stores nationwide.
- This massive shift in readers' buying habits in a relatively short period of time, I think, is the primary catalyst for this surge and wide acceptance of indie publishing.
- The reason is...
  - The primary source of revenue for Traditional publishing, and for the advances they've been able to pay published authors, comes directly from book orders from these traditional stores.
  - When people stopped buying their books from retail stores, the money stopped flowing into the publisher's pockets. Without that money, they can't stay afloat.
- A lot of successful writers started to look into indie publishing.
  - Others (like me) figured out something..."Why should I keep giving away 80% of my book's sale price to get my books on bookstore shelves if people aren't shopping there anymore?"
  - Amazon is willing to give me 70% of each copy sold (I can get the books into readers' hands on my own).

- In 2015, my first Full-on Indie Year:
  - I published 2 novels and a 31-day Devotional book (pass them around).
  - They did well enough to keep writing fulltime.
- Between 2016-19, I've released 6 more novels (Now have 2 Complete series and Book 1 of a 3<sup>rd</sup>).
  - The past 3 years, my Book income exceeded my BEST years with my traditional publisher.
- I'm NOT ALONE – Indie Authors are doing better (on the whole) than Traditional authors.

### **NOT Saying Indie is the ONLY WAY TO GO**

- Having shared all this, I should mention a few words of caution...
  - Traditional publishing is NOT DEAD. It likely will survive in a much different fashion.
  - Those who do survive, however, are making radical changes.
- Also – There are OTHER OPTIONS in the indie publishing world besides doing everything yourself.
  - Many don't have the entrepreneurial skills to take on all these non-writing, publishing tasks themselves.
    - You can GIVE UP some of the 70% you could be making on your own to have qualified people handle these things for you.
    - If that's you, consider signing with a SMALL INDEPENDENT PRESS.
  - In my final word of caution is this: Do not view indie publishing as a shortcut to writing success.
    - There are no shortcuts.
    - In the end, if you don't put out a great book (great story, written well, that looks professionally done), you won't succeed.
    - The indie authors I know who are making it are successful because they write well, not because they are indie.

## Defining Our Terms

- Let's define our terms:
  - **Traditional Publishing** - Would have been simply called “publishing” up until a few years ago.
    - A writer writes a book and gets it ready for publishing, then tries to secure a literary agent.
    - A good agent then “shops the manuscript” to mainstream publishers known to publish your kind of book.
    - Hopefully, they secure a publishing contract and the publisher agrees to pay you an “**advance**.” A royalty arrangement is also hammered out.
    - Another Term Sometimes used on the Internet – “**Trad Pubbed**”
  - **Indie Author** or **Indie Published** –
    - “Indie” of course means independent or independently.
    - Usually when someone is an indie author or is indie published, what we are really saying is that either by choice or because they had no other choice, they are publishing their books outside the realm of traditional publishing.
  - What is the **difference** between being “**indie published**” and being **self-published**?
    - There may be none. The terms are often used interchangeably.
    - I believe the term “indie” arose because of the negative connotation formerly associated with being self-published.
  - Used to be Self-Pubbed = Desperate Writer
    - Back in the day when being trad-pubbed was only alternative, people who chose self-publishing regarded as desperate and subpar.

- So...being indie published usually means the author writes the book then takes off their “writing hat” and begins to wear all the other hats normally worn by staff in a traditional publishing house.
- BUT... being indie published can ALSO MEAN you signed a contract with a SMALL, INDEPENDENT PUBLISHING HOUSE.
  - Some indie authors either can’t, or don’t want to, wear all these hats.
  - Fortunately, many small independent publishing firms have arisen offering indie authors a “turnkey solution” to their publishing dilemma.
- Final Term – **Hybrid Author** –
  - As the name suggests, this is an author who does both. They write under contract with a traditional publisher, but also publish books as an indie.
  - A few years ago, this term didn’t exist, because trad pubs wouldn’t allow their authors to do this.
- What really opened the door for hybrid authors to exist was the changing market.
  - Traditional publishers were forced to allow their authors to do this.
  - It was either that or lose them altogether.
- What are some reasons an author might want to “go hybrid?”
  - They want to publish books in a different genre than the books they’ve been contracted to write. Typically publishers don’t want you to write in more than one.
  - They want to publish a book they believe in, but one their publisher rejected.

## *Making It Happen (2<sup>nd</sup> Half)*

### **From Rough Draft to Book Launch – A Step by Step Primer**

- So, you've completed your 1<sup>st</sup> Draft...when are you ready to publish your indie book? How can you know?
  - When the book is completely free of all errors (Editing, story itself, spelling and punctuation).
- The importance of **hiring a good editor and proofreader**
  - How do you choose a good editor?
    - Credentials and References are Critical (Anyone can call themselves an Editor). They should provide this on their website.
    - Look for successful authors helped by them (writing awards, bestsellers, etc.).
  - How do you know what level of editing you need (and when)?
    - Every novel needs Editing (beginners to the very best)
    - 2 Basic levels: Macro and Micro (some divide Micro into 2 pieces: copy editing and proofreading).
  - How much will it cost?
    - Some charge by word count, others by number of pages/chapters
    - Generally, more experience/proven editors charge way more than newbies and relatively unknown editors.
    - Macro - (for a 300-page, 80k book) - Prices I've seen on internet: \$165, \$405, \$760, \$1,600/\$3,000
    - Micro - (for a 300-page, 80k book) - \$360/\$525/\$1,500
  - Taking the time to rewrite and fix edits.
    - Allow enough time for this in your scheduling/planning –
    - Depending on your skill level, could take an extra week or two, or up to 6-8 weeks (if lots of rewriting needed).

- Cover Design and Formatting
  - A great cover matters a great deal –
    - You’ve heard the saying, “Don’t judge a book by its cover.”
    - Don’t believe it. In the world of publishing, the opposite is true.
    - Aim for Top Shelf Quality.
  - This means, unless you are a gifted with graphics and proficient at programs like Photo Shop or PixelMator (Mac), you need to plan on hiring someone to do your cover.
    - Costs range from about \$150 - \$600 (depending on who you use and what genre you’re writing in).
  - I would also suggest that you take the time to create a cover for a PRINT VERSION of your book, not just the e-book (front, back & spine).
    - Costs a little more, but worth the added expense.
  - Back Cover Copy – A necessary feature, for ebook AND print editions.
    - A few worthy endorsements (if possible). Only use if big recognizable names (See Example)
    - A compelling blurb (paragraph that summarizes and entices). Work on getting good at this (a difficult thing to master – reducing 300 pages to a handful of sentences).
  - The need for ISBNs (vs ASIN’s with ebooks).
    - \$100-150.00 for 1 book, WAY cheaper if buying several at a time.
  - Formatting - Hiring Someone vs Do it yourself.
    - Formatting involves taking your finished manuscript (from Microsoft Word) and reshaping it so that it works well in e-book or print formats.
    - This is something you can do yourself, but there’s a learning curve.
    - Programs that will help you format your book: Calibre, Scrivener, Adobe InDesign (VELLUM for Mac) are popular programs.

- Time to Upload your Book
  - After you have done all the above things, you are ready to upload your book to online stores, like Amazon.
  - It's a fairly involved process, but these online stores have made it fairly easy to accomplish.
- One of the biggest decisions every author has to make is: *Do I go with Amazon-only or should I "Go wide"?* (MORE ON THIS IN MARKETING SESSION)
  - Amazon-only means your books will only be available online through Amazon (print or Kindle).
    - You can still sell books directly to customers (like with PayPal), but not through other stores (like Barnes & Noble, Kobo, iTunes and Christianbook.com)
  - Going wide means Amazon will be just one of the places people can buy your books (can be purchased in all the other venues, also).
  - How pre-orders work
    - Amazon and others will allow you to set up a preorder for your book.
    - Usually you offer your book at a discounted price during preorder phase.
    - Allows you to promote and market your book in advance of its release date. WITH A LINK THAT IS PERMANENT.
  - Print books – Why You Should Make Them
    - It's true, it's nearly impossible for indie authors to get their books available in traditional stores.
    - Retail stores only take books from traditional publishing houses.
    - But sadly, THEY are shrinking and even disappearing.
  - Some of the reasons why you should still print your books.
    - It's fun having a real book in your hands with your name on it.



- With POD, print costs are very reasonable (\$3-5/book), and you only have to print as many copies as you need (I typically order 5-10 at a time).
- The only extra expense involved is to have the cover design include the back and spine, and to pay a little extra to have the print book formatted (unless you do this yourself).
- Deciding your Book Launch Date (Do Have One)
  - It's important to figure out a book launch date vs. just winging it and releasing it "whenever everything comes together."
  - Here's how to Plan it:
    - Create a schedule that begins with the completion of your manuscript (unedited).
    - Then list out all the various action-steps we have just gone over and think through how much time you'll need for each one.
    - Allow for some overlap between certain steps (Example: while my cover is being created, I can have my proofreaders going over the final edit of my manuscript).
    - When you've done this, you have a reasonable date you can use.
- When You've Done all this, you're ready to Launch Your Book (Which Leads to the NEXT LOGICAL Topic – **Marketing Your Books**)
- That's a Subject for Another Workshop I'm Afraid.