

POD'd The How to Guide

... and conversely why you shouldn't!

By Don Meyer

POD'd The how to guide... and conversely why you shouldn't! © 2009 by Don Meyer

No portion of this work may be copied, reproduced, transmitted, or used in any form without the written permission of the author.

Cover design by Brion Sausser

brion@bookcreatives.com

www.bookcreatives.com

I have also created a presentation for this material. If you would like more information, please feel free to contact me at:

don@dpmeyer.com

www.dpmeyer.com

Any questions, comments, suggestions, or opinions should be addressed to:

don@dpmeyer.com

Directory

Introduction

...How did I get here from there?

The Normal Course of Events

... Most will say the ONLY course!

Writing a Manuscript

... Actually creating a product!

Editing a Manuscript

... Why is my manuscript covered in red ink?

The Nuts & Bolts of this here Book Business

... And why you need to know it!

The Road to Print-on-Demand

... Are you Ready?

The Business Plan

... And good God the budget!

What is a book?

... And why should I care about this?

Selecting a Print-on-Demand Publisher

... Time to do your Homework!

The Print-on-Demand Publishing Process

... No Turning Back Now!

Marketing and Promotion

... Yeah, you have to sell the damn thing too!

Web Site

... Yeah, you do need one!

Closing Comments

... Yeah, I get to ramble some more.

Appendix A
... My Journey, A Case Study!

Introduction

... How did I get here from there?

I undertook the task of creating this guide with the hope of helping other writers, like myself that were stumbling (and sometimes floundering) trying to decide what to do, with their manuscript. This is especially true if we (the writer) are considering using a Print-on-Demand Publisher to produce our work. Consequently, it is essential that we understand the publishing process, specifically what goes into producing a book and most importantly, how to put together that book.

Let me also say at the onset that this guide is not the end all, be all, of what you need to know. More precisely, this guide should be used as the basis for you to start your own research and gain a better understanding of what you are about to do. Publishing is a very complex business and the more you know, and more importantly, the more you understand, the better you will be at making an informed decision, about what you are about to do, whatever that decision may be.

The sole intention of this guide is to highlight the publishing and book creation process and hopefully, to leave you with an idea of some of the basic steps. It was not my intention to be the all knowing, authoritative voice on the subject, but simply to open a window or two into this world based on my journey through it. It is up to you to use the information as an overview, a starting point. Take from this guide what you will. At the very least, I hope I will have presented to you an opportunity, that if nothing else will leave you better informed. Ultimately, to make a decision that you can live with.

However, before we go any further, I need to take a moment to explain a term I will be using throughout this guide. Specifically, my use of the word "traditional" as in "traditional publisher," or "traditional publishing." My use of the term simply refers to the historically accepted standards of publishing. I understand that this is a fairly recent term and that those publishers are commonly referred to as trade, or standard, or royalty, or...

The confusion arises only because with POD we now have a new breed of publishing that forces us to label the other older established publishing method. To say you were published in the past meant you were published by the long-standing publishing industry. There could be no question. Everybody knew what you meant. But now, to say you are published, when in fact you were "published" by one of the POD forms of self-publishing, ultimately clouds the water. In reality, according to the accepted standards, if your book has an ISBN then you are a published author. However, if your book is published by a POD Publisher "the publishing industry" will not recognize, nor will it accept you as a "published" author.

Unfortunately, there is no resolution to this dichotomy. Damned because you didn't, damned because you did. While we could debate this subject forever, let me end it here by simply stating that for all intents and purposes, the industry has established a distinction between who is truly published and those that think they are published. So, for purposes of clarity, I will continue to refer to that standard, trade or royalty publisher simply as a traditional publisher or traditional publishing, whereas the POD published author for all intents and purposes is still considered a self-published author.

To further clarify what I mean here, I will say again that my use of the word "traditional" simply refers to the normal, age old, accepted standard of publishing. In other words that was how it was "traditionally" done. That is, manuscript to agent, to publisher, to public, the normal process, the normal sequence of events. I mean it simply as a way to describe what went before, no more, no less.

Okay, now that I have that out of my system, I'll stop ranting and get back to business.

In this guide we will discuss the various stages, steps, considerations, ideas, pointers and generally everything else related to the creation of an actual book through the publishing process. Understanding what goes into turning your manuscript into a book should give you a better appreciation of the book business and the industry as a whole.

This is especially true, if you are sitting on the fence, trying to decide what to do with your manuscript, trying to decide if you should you go the traditional route and keep submitting, or do you just take the manuscript to a Print-on-Demand Publisher and be done with it?

At the very least, a walk through this guide will give you some insight into what is involved in the publishing business. Why it is so hard to get your book accepted and what the process will entail if it is “picked up” (although it is more commonly referred to as “a sale of rights”) that is, allowing someone to license your product for distribution.

The other side of that equation is to be your own publisher and do it yourself. Enter the Print-on-Demand Publisher, a vehicle by which you can bring your manuscript to market as a printed book for a reasonable setup fee. And just like that, you have a book!

What I have attempted to do is to create an overview of the publishing world for you to understand how a manuscript becomes a book, while at the same time including a sequence of events, basically a step-by-step overview, of the Print-on-Demand process. As you are about to discover, the concepts are quite similar, with the main difference being who will be doing all the work!

Initially attempting to write a piece or two for publication, I started highlighting various aspects of the journey taken, but the more I wrote the more it grew. That was when I decided I would try to put all of the pieces into some semblance of order and present the project as a whole.

I am a writer. That is what I do (or try to do anyway). Back in the '70s, yes the 1970s, I wrote two manuscripts, one non-fiction, the other a novel, which I tried to get published, but never did. I took the stack of rejections, the white bond paper manuscripts and threw the whole mess into a box that sat for some twenty plus years. My writing days were over, and a career and family put those silly thoughts to rest rather quickly.

Fast forward, just shy of twenty-five years later and I find myself in the middle of a move to a new house. In the hall closet, in the original box are those two white bond paper manuscripts, rejection letters, various notes and what have you from my writing days. My first inclination was to throw the whole mess away and leave those silly notions in the past.

Winding down my business career I found myself with a little time on my hands. Once again I opened the box with all that writing stuff inside and looked at those two white bond paper manuscripts. For no particular reason I decided to key the non-fiction work into the computer. In 1978, a typewriter was the only option,

but in 2002, we had the computer. The digital age had arrived. The options were endless...

Okay, why not? I set about retyping those pages into an electronic format, a word format, eventually creating a new, updated manuscript. Shortly thereafter, I decided to input the novel as well.

In the middle of this process, I saw an ad for a literary agency that I thought was for a job and I thought why not? However, "the job" actually turned out to be an offer to sell the business. In the end I did try to buy the agency, but was outbid.

However, the agent concept put the bug in me, so I checked around the area. In a short time, I found another agent, a tough old New Yorker with thirty-five years in the business who is mostly retired. We met and discussed some options. For some charitable reason she agreed to take me on as an associate agent on a non-paying basis. Basically, I became the purveyor of the slush pile.

The agency experience gave me a great opportunity to work with other writers, speak at writers' conferences, work with writers' groups and to work with writers one-on-one. Working in the agency was a great opportunity to see the business from the inside. Her guidance was and still is invaluable.

During this transformation, I also took a summer internship at a major chain bookstore - at minimum wage - to learn the book business from the retail side. If I was going to get back into the game, I wanted to know what this game is all about.

Working as an agent and bookstore clerk also gave me an insight into the world of publishing. As an "agent," I worked with several publishers directly and spoke with several editors. As a bookstore clerk, I saw how the publishers influence the trade and the overall world of books on the retail side of the business.

Also, as an agent I was asked to speak at several writers' conferences and had the opportunity to work with writers directly, a very gratifying experience. I discovered most writers are basically in the same boat... floundering, just like me! I always geared my presentations toward the informative, rather than the preaching. I tried to pass on everything I knew, however little that may have been.

During my travels I came across an author that had published a few books with one of the original Print-on-Demand Publishers. We got to talking about the industry and the process. This had been the first I had heard about the print-on-demand concept. Sure, I knew self-publishing was around, but I hadn't spent much time thinking about it. At the time I certainly didn't equate print-on-demand as a self-publishing option either.

After a couple of years, I left the agency to focus on my own writing. As an after thought, I looked up that author and through her help I published my non-fiction manuscript through her Print-on-Demand Publisher. I did it largely to find out what print-on-demand is all about. Not to mention the tremendous ego boost of having my "published" book in my hands!

Eventually, I decided to publish my novel as well, through that print-on-demand concept. For convenience, I used that same Print-on-Demand Publisher. Of course, this was after several rejection letters, from traditional publishers and the continuing development of a why the hell not attitude.

Also during this time, I finished my third manuscript. My next work was another novel that I ultimately decided to publish through the print-on-demand route, without ever sending out any queries. However, this time I took this work to a new and completely different Print-on-Demand Publisher.

At present, I am hard at work on my next manuscript, another novel. Well, that was until I started putting this ... well, whatever this is, together.

In addition, my web site: www.dpmeyer.com has a "POD Corner" where I post articles, essays and a Q&A on POD, including a published article on POD. Of course I continue to submit articles for publication on my journey through the world of POD.

As I mentioned above, it was while I was putting together another article, or two, on this topic that I started constructing and suddenly those articles grew into this tome. My thought was to write about this piece and maybe that piece, but also thought I should write about that piece and...

All I hoped to accomplish with these pieces was to give you, my fellow writer, some insight into this world we call writing and publishing, because in reality, it has very little to do with writing. It has everything to do with starting a new business venture. No different than inventing the next whatever and attempting

to create the product, set up a marketing plan, promote and eventually sell that new whatever!

Ultimately, we all need to decide what is best for me, the writer? Because, I still keep asking myself, how did I get here from there?

[Authors note: As part of an attempt to sell my second work (the novel) to a mass-market paperback publisher (the secondary rights market), I had to “beef” up the word count of that original work, because of the minimum word count requirement of that publisher for submission acceptance. By doing so, I significantly rewrote the story. However, not being successful with that sale, I further rewrote the story into something new and fresh.

Because of the significant change to the original story, I decided to pull that earlier work from production (terminate my contract with the POD Publisher – another advantage of POD is that you retain your rights) and pitch this as a new work. I then began the rounds of agents and small publishers, but only met with rejection after rejection, even though I continued to polish the pitch and the manuscript after each batch of rejections.

The phrase “... hard at work on my next book, another novel” refers to a follow up to the novel discussed here, not a sequence, but a new work using those same characters. I also have the outline done for a third work, again using the same characters. Consequently I have decided to package these works as a new trilogy, with that reconstructed (ever more so now) as the first book.

However, this new wrinkle doesn't change any of the facts of the process I went through to get that novel out with my original POD Publisher, discussed in the following pages, referred to as my second book, or work.

One last point, after giving the process a year plus, I have decided to re-launch that novel through a different POD Publisher that I hope will be the home for my new trilogy. Yes as of this writing, I plan to launch all three books through this publisher (go home with the one I brought to the dance this time!). This will be my third POD Publisher (the second one I used decided to become a traditional publisher – so I had to start over) and fourth (fifth and sixth) book I will be taking through that process. By the time this posts, there will be only three books listed on my “books” page, which are actually my first, third and fourth book.

Sorry for the run on, but I wanted to clear this up before we continued.]

The Normal Course of Events
... Most will say the ONLY course!

For purposes of illustration and further understanding, let us briefly review what the traditional process of publishing a book entails. This is considered the normal course of events. Actually, the only acceptable course of events.

These events are also referred to as the stages of book development, or the sequence of actions that leads to a published book. I have read, I have seen, I have heard discussed and referred to and in general been classified as “the process.”

Writing:

Obviously, the first step in the process is writing. Developing a story or concept. Putting pen to paper so-to-speak. Creating a manuscript with presumably some hope of ultimately selling the work to a publisher.

It doesn't matter if it is a work of fiction or a non-fiction project. It only matters that this is the best version (best product) that the writer can create, which means several rewrites, a full read through, or two, or three, possibly a rework of plot, characters or both, timelines, flow and cohesiveness. A tight, completed piece of work.

Editing:

Once a manuscript is created, the manuscript should be edited, preferably by a person that is capable of editing it – not your aunt Sadie that thought it was nice – but a person that is qualified to edit the type of work the writer has created.

For non-fiction work, it might be helpful to have a person familiar with the area that the manuscript covers. In a work of fiction, it may be necessary to have someone that can perform a copy edit, as well as someone that can perform a content edit, or someone who can do both. (There will be much more on editing later.)

Once the manuscript is edited and the changes have been made it may be necessary to have another run through, especially if there were concept, plot, or flow changes. Reworking often leads to reediting and vice versa.

Submissions:

At this stage, the normal course of events would be for the writer to put together a submission package.

The package would usually include a cover letter, a brief synopsis, some sample pages (or chapters), an author biographical sketch and an SASE (Self Addressed Stamped Envelope). It is imperative that the writer check the agent's or publisher's web site (or listing) to insure that the writer only submit what is asked for and the form in which it should be submitted. For non-fiction it is customary to submit a book proposal with a sample of the work. Again, we are looking for perfection here. The cover letter should be perfect (no typos) and the package put together professionally. No half-stepping here, make it the best you can.

With a non-fiction proposal there should be a focus on how this book will be marketed. I believe this to also be true with fiction. It doesn't hurt to have some idea of how the work can be marketed. What genre of work will it fit in? Why is it better, or similar, but different, than other books in this area? Why will anyone care about your book? It is the next ... or in keeping with ... or ... Something that will give the agent or editor (publisher) a step up on what they are looking at. Help the person reviewing the submission understand how this work will stand above the others. With the enormous number of manuscripts being submitted, any little thing that will set your manuscript above all the other submissions will certainly help.

Agents:

Once the package is completed, you are ready to start submitting your work to agents. That is, trying to convince an agent to represent your work to ultimately sell that work to a publisher.

The question often comes up as to whether to use an agent, or not. Well, for one thing, the agent can knock on doors that you, the writer, never could. Most importantly, there is someone working with you to get your work to the next

level (read “marketable” here) that is saleable both to the publishing industry and ultimately to the buying public.

An agent is a necessary evil (I say with all affection) in the quest to get to the next level. Once you’ve sold them on your work, you will have the strongest ally in helping you join “the club.”

Publishers:

There is also the option of contacting publishers directly, especially the smaller houses, or independents that are willing to look at material not represented by an agent. However, at the end of the day, once again, the work has to be beyond perfect as you will not have that extra someone, the agent, to work with you.

Manuscript Sale:

Even though, I said “sell your work to an agent,” you aren’t really selling it at this point. You are hoping to convince an agent to represent you in the ultimate sale of this work to a publisher. However, you are still doing everything you can to “sell” this work to an agent or independent publisher.

Now, let’s take a moment to clarify another statement. You never really sell the work, but more specifically you sell the rights to your work to a publisher to reproduce the work for sale to the public. Those “rights” can be sold over and over again, depending on your contract (publishing agreement). Typically, an agent will sell those rights to the publisher, then possibly to a secondary market, or foreign distributor or even to the film industry. But, hold on, we are getting way ahead of ourselves.

In the grand scheme of things, the agent will sell your manuscript rights to a publisher to turn your work into a book. Typically, that sale may include an advance - monies against future royalties - or front money based on the probability of future sales of your book. The agent will take a commission, usually previously determined in the representation agreement. This advance can be all over the place, anything from \$5,000 to \$100,000. Well, hold on a moment, don’t start spending that money yet. First time authors should expect the very low end.

However, a good agent can get you a nice amount, based of course on the quality of the work. In addition you can expect that advance to be paid out in stages, one

half on signing, the other half on publication. Another scenario would be one third on signing, one third on submitting an acceptable manuscript and the final third on publication. Of course there could be more, but these are the ones I have heard about so far.

There is another option with the sale of those rights. On a direct sale, the agent has convinced a specific publisher to buy the rights, "or made the sale." However, if the agent has interested other publishers as well, there may be more than one publisher interested in purchasing this work.

If that is the case, one of two things may happen. A particular publisher may offer a preempt. That is, offer enough money up front to close the deal before the other publishers can get involved. The other scenario is to have all the publishers interested bid on the work, with the agent taking the highest bid, or choosing the publisher that would be best for the work, with an appropriate offer. This is a very good thing, for an author, either way.

Publishing:

Publishing is an industry, comprised of conglomerates of major houses, independents, university presses, small presses and specialty houses. However, first and foremost, publishing is a business, and a "club" that takes care of its own.

In order to join this club, you will have to have created a marketable product. A product the publisher believes will make them money, preferably a lot of money. It is as simple as that. With the mergers and acquisitions of most of the older established publishing houses, decisions are not made simply on a project basis. These decisions are based on a number of factors that both lend themselves to the business acumen overall, as well as, how this project will fit into the business model of the parent company or companies.

Book success is based on sales, not story content, or any other wide-eyed idea. Now, there is no magic formula that determines that any given book will be the one, but at the very least it has to be perfectly done (clean, crisp, free of errors) and something the marketing department, yes the marketing department, believes they can promote and sell to the buying public. No different than any other product.

There will be a much more comprehensive discussion on the world of publishing in a later section. Suffice it to say, in order to be successful you, the writer, need to understand how all this works to better help you to get there some day, whether it is through traditional means or through a Print-on-Demand Publisher, or any self-publishing venue for that matter. Because, to understand what publishing is and how publishing works, will help you when you become your own publisher, as you will with Print-on-Demand Publisher (that is, self publishing).

Retail Sales of a Book:

In the normal course of business, the publisher will print a set amount of copies (25,000, 50,000, 100,000 or greater) that will be distributed to places that sell books to the public. These are typically the major chain bookstores, the independent bookstores, the big box discount houses that also sell everything else and the online venues that sell books with all their other products.

Books are sold at many venues with varying degrees of discounts, which will have a direct effect on sales, as well as royalties. There are a tremendous amount of books vying for shelf space at the major chains and the competition is fierce. The life of a book on a shelf is pretty short, especially at a major chain bookstore. Fortunately, it is not as fierce, or as controlled in the independent bookstores.

The next time you are in or near an independent bookstore, buy a book, whether you want it or not, because without them we budding writers have no chance. They keep us alive and give us hope.

Secondary Markets:

If the book is successful (and sometimes even if not that successful) the rights may be sold to the secondary markets.

A popular hardcover will often spawn a mass-market paperback, or maybe a trade paperback and/or mass-market paperback. Your work may be sold to foreign markets. A very popular book may ultimately be optioned for a movie, or film rights. It is very possible to make a lot more money through the sale of these secondary rights than you would by selling actual books. Of course, logic states that it would have to be a successful book to be valuable to the secondary market.

Remainders:

One last point, the flip side of sales are returns. Bookstores have the option of returning books back to the publisher at any time, for no particular reason. It is an industry standard dating back to the Great Depression.

If sales start to slow drastically and the publisher feels the book has run its course, the remaining books may be inventoried for awhile, but eventually, as activity dwindles, and no further print runs are produced, the book will go “out of print.” The returns and the remaining stock will ultimately become remainders, that is, the publisher is finished with promotion and sale of these books and will want to unload the inventory, which basically signals the end of your book.

These bullet points are but a brief reflection of the publishing cycle in the traditional life of a manuscript, some of which will be covered in much greater detail in later sections.

While the above is a lot of information to review, for now we will focus on the first two steps of the process. The writing and editing that is solely in the writer’s control, regardless of what future direction the writer may take. Because if the writing and the editing is not the best it can be, the rest will not matter. In fact there probably won’t be anything else to worry about, unless you do go the print-on-demand route, in which case the writing and editing need to be better than perfect.

Okay then, let’s get started.

Writing a Manuscript **... Actually creating a product!**

Why should we have a section on writing a manuscript? Isn't it assumed that if you are reading this guide, that you have written a manuscript already? Well let's assume you have a manuscript, or are about to finish one. Since writing a manuscript is the first step in the process, we need to take a moment to understand what a manuscript is and why you wrote it.

I wrote my first manuscript on a manual typewriter and my second on an electric typewriter, both of which gave me a deeper appreciation of what I had created. Imagine if you will, no backspacing, no fixing the word, sentence, or paragraph. Every change, no matter how minor required a complete page do over!

However, with the advent of the computer age, anyone (and I do mean anyone) can just crank out a manuscript (and unfortunately they do), without a true appreciation of having created something special.

Hold on now, before you start yelling and toss this guide across the room, let me explain what I am inferring here.

Isn't it a fact that all writers sit down and start pounding out words on paper for our own personal edification? It would be hard to imagine any of us would take on this daunting task with the sole purpose of marketing, or with only a sales oriented concept in mind. Besides, that in itself would be a problem, but I could be wrong. Let's see, let me write this novel so I can sell it later, what should I write about? A tad far fetched, but I'm sure some writers may do it that way. Let's assume not. Let's hope not!

I would imagine we writers sit down first and foremost because we want (need) to write this story. We have an idea in mind for a story that we want to grow and explore or maybe just to write, no strings attached, no fore thought of what to do when it is finished. Maybe you want to create a work of nonfiction, a how to manual, self help guide, some enlightening piece of work, or whatever vision you may have. Isn't that why most of us write in the first place? Sure, we always

have the idea that once we are finished we can envision the day when this work will be in print and... well, we are getting ahead of ourselves.

The point I am trying to make is that most writers don't put pen to paper (or actually strike a key on a keyboard) with any idea of how to sell this work. Maybe in a nonfiction work that focus is more prevalent, but us novel writers, we are a bit more unfocused. In fact there are those that say you should have a marketing plan before you even put the first word on paper. Now that may sound a bit drastic, but it's not far from the truth.

I often wonder if we writers still had to sit at a manual typewriter to create our white bond paper manuscript, how many of us would still do it? How many of us would be able to do it? But, to sit in front of our keyboard and computer screen, what does it matter? When we are done, we hit the print button and three hundred (four hundred) plus doubled spaced pages spill out of the printer and, like magic, we have a manuscript. Yeah, it really is that easy. Scary, huh?

Imagine if you will, to have sat in front of a manual, or even an electric, typewriter and written three hundred doubled spaced pages on white bond paper, which we then somehow made a copy of. Some writers were even known to use carbon paper to create their copy. Yeah, that sheet of inked tissue you stuck between two sheets of white paper and when you struck a key on the top sheet the character was copied to the bottom sheet.

We then safely stored the original and sent the copy out to agents or publishers and if it got lost or destroyed in the mail, we painstakingly made another copy. There wasn't a shop on the corner that made copies. (Often times we had to submit the original and if rejected the manuscript would be returned to send off to the next publisher or agent and if that original got lost, well...)

That writing process definitely gave us a deeper appreciation of what we did. If you don't believe me, try writing a short story on a manual typewriter. That is, if you can!

However, with the advent of the computer, there is less appreciation. It is just too easy. Now, writers can just sit at the keyboard, pound out a story, run a spell check, hit the print button and we have a three hundred (four hundred – hopefully not much more) plus page double spaced manuscript. Good God, perish the thought!

I'm sure we all write for a wide variety of reasons. I consider myself a storyteller that is learning to become a writer. I've always been able to tell a good story, which I keep trying to translate into a printed work.

Obviously, the single most significant enhancement to us writers is the computer, but it is also our greatest hindrance. With the ability to just pound out a piece of work, just about anybody can do it and unfortunately they are doing it, which brings us to the problem.

With so many manuscripts being created and ultimately being sent out to agents and publishers, our chances of being discovered or "picked up" are greatly diminished, as we all become lost in that jungle of paper. In addition, with the onslaught of these manuscripts being self-published through the Print-on-Demand route, we become buried in that quagmire of books as well. Consequently, facing that uphill battle we have to ask ourselves why in the world are we writing at all? What can we ever hope to accomplish?

Writing for most writers is the joy of writing, of creating that story, or piece of work that we can share with others. Of course we have hopes and dreams for that finished work. Will it become a book on a shelf in a major bookstore, optioned for film rights, sold to the secondary markets, foreign distribution...? Of course we want all of that, but reality speaks differently. Reality says that we must greatly lower our expectations - while at the same time we must significantly elevate our product standards. We need to figure out how to rise above the rest, or at the very least stand out from the crowd.

Again, let us assume you have finished the manuscript (or are in the process of completing one), so what do you do now? The first thing to consider is what makes your manuscript different from the others? Here we go with the first stage of marketing. How will you package the work? How will it entertain or benefit readers? Has this theme or concept been done before? And if so, what makes yours different?

The dichotomy here is that you want to leave your work as you wrote it, because that is the way you created it. But, you have to consider, is there anyway you can go back and refocus, rework, or retell the story that makes it stand out? Or at the very least, how will you frame the work so it rises above, or is somehow different than the others?

These are all things you need to consider before you even think about starting to pitch to agents or publishers. Now you are entering the product stage. How are you going to present this manuscript? You have to sell this concept to an agent or publisher. Same as you would the buying public, if you are considering going the Print-on-Demand publishing - the self-publishing route.

At this point, we should start putting together a business plan to determine what we will do with this work, because to do any less puts us at a great disadvantage in the sea of all those other manuscripts floating out there.

We can't just blindly start sending the manuscript around. We need some focus, some idea of what this is and what we are trying to do with it, because if we don't know, certainly anybody receiving our package won't know either. That uncertainty will only help to make it easier to reject the work, whereas a focused pitch just might help to keep your work in the slush pile a little while longer.

Writing a manuscript is so much more than putting a bunch of words on paper and hoping for the best. Writing a manuscript is the process of creating a piece of work that is now perceived as a finished product, which we need to thrust upon the buying public, whether they want it or not. Writing a manuscript is only the beginning of the journey, for all intents and purposes the easy part. To be a writer these days, we have to be so much more.

Writing a manuscript has become the launch of a product and if you are not willing to make that commitment, or "jump into the game" all you are doing is putting a bunch of words on a lot of paper. You have not created a manuscript and you have not earned the right to move forward. This is simply true, because if you don't do the work, no one will do the work for you.

So, before you sit in front of that keyboard and start pounding away, think about what it is you are about to do. Think about what happens when you finish your story, but more importantly, think about what your commitment will be. For those of you that have a finished manuscript, think about what you want to do with that work and why and what that will take to get there.

It may seem like I am rambling here, but all too often I have spoken with writers that just don't get that. They assume that all they have to do is put words on paper and the rest will follow. Unfortunately, they languish, in the publishing process, then get frustrated and jump to Print-on-Demand Publishing for all the wrong reasons often times creating those very books that make us all cringe

when we see them, because those writers become even more unfocused going the print-on-demand route.

The irony here is that if you use the advice offered in this guide, but more importantly, create the best possible product you can, determine what it is you have, what you intend to do with it, how you are going to do that and formulate a marketing (business) plan, you may have just significantly increased your chances of landing an agent, which is still the best, the very best, way to break into “the club.”

The last point I would like to make here is that, yes you need to focus in on everything presented here, but don't let it stymie your creativity. Go ahead and create your manuscript, get the story down, complete the work, then start to focus on what to do next. If by some chance, during the process, you can review what it is you are creating and what you plan to do with the work, it just might help you to be more in tune with the next steps.

With that in mind, there is one more area you need to address before you thrust your manuscript on the unsuspecting world and that is editing. No manuscript is complete until it has been fully edited by a competent editor, which brings us to the next section.

Editing a Manuscript

... Why is my manuscript covered in red ink?

There is no more important task than having your manuscript edited. Even if it is for no other reason than to have an objective eye give it the once over. However, the hard cold truth here is that most of us (probably all) need to have a trained eye review our work for everything from grammar, to structure, to typos and transpositions, wrong right words or right wrong words (like there, they're and their and so on), because as the writer, we can no longer see the words, but only the story.

In addition, we may need, and should probably have, a content edit. Does the story flow? Is there a cohesive beginning, middle and an end? Does the story come together and not jump around, or just jump?

Remember, editing begins at home. You can't expect to have a clean manuscript right out of the gate, even if you do, or think you do, you don't. It will usually take a couple of (possibly several) passes to get an actual completed manuscript.

In my world there are several stages I take in finishing a manuscript. The first pass gets the story down. What it is I'm trying to say, basically the beginning, middle and end. It doesn't matter if it is ten pages, a hundred or whatever the length may be. I usually write the basic story concept first.

Think of your manuscript as a three-act play. The first act, the beginning, is the opening of the story, the introduction of characters, setup of the conflict or potential conflict. A chance for the reader to get a grasp on what is about to happen, or has happened. The second act, the middle, may introduce more characters, sometimes sub or filler or secondary characters, starts to bring the pieces or facts together, further introduces or strengthens the conflict or creates obstacles. Or just generally moves the story along. This is usually where it all happens, this is the guts of the story. The third act is the end. It is where everything wraps up. The story comes together, conflict is resolved, the questions are answered and the suspense has ended with a resolution.

A successful writer once told me that the beginning is the opening line of the story and the ending is the final line. All the rest is the middle. Interesting thought ...

As a matter of style, I always add one more chapter after the true ending, as a sort of post action. That way if you open one of my books and read the last page or so, you will not read the end of the story, but rather a wrap up chapter I have finished with. Just a thing I do.

The next step is filler, scene setting, the back-story and character development, making or helping the pieces fit, which usually takes several tries and for me takes far longer to do than to write the original story.

Once I have what I believe to be the "finished" manuscript, I start to review for flow and continuity (and grammar and such, best I can). I eventually reach the point where I am finished. This is it. My story is done. I've done all I could. It's time to let go. At this point I'm ready to send the manuscript to my editor. But, that's just me. You may have a totally different approach. Again whatever works for you?

Well, before you sign off on that manuscript, let me suggest a couple of thoughts to consider. Once the manuscript is initially finished, one thought would be to create a reverse outline, that is, walk backwards through the manuscript, specifically to check to see if the ending supports the middle or beginning or both. Can you get here from there?

It is a great device for linking the parts together. Nothing fancy, a pencil and paper will do. It will also help you to determine if the scenes flow, do the characters flow through, don't just appear or disappear, will the plot carry through, so that the ending works. How the story gets there and how it all wraps up. Pretty basic stuff, I know, but not always obvious.

Usually, I start with a chapter outline to see the story flow. I then add story scripting, a way of packaging the story and last but not least I have a characters list. Who are they, how do they fit in, what are they doing, do they still fit into the story once I've finished? Do I need to add a character or characters? It gets a little deeper than that, but I believe you get the point.

Another option is to break down your manuscript by each chapter and read and proof each chapter separately, preferably out of order. That way you are more

inclined to focus on the parts. Reading your manuscript from beginning to end lulls you into a routine. You no longer see the chapters but become engrossed in the story. By proofing each chapter individually, you will not be caught up in the story, but rather you will focus on the flow of that passage. Besides you already know how it ends, so it doesn't matter where you start!

As I mentioned, I worked as an agent for two years, largely as the purveyor of the slush pile, so I had a real opportunity to read hundreds of samples, partials and full manuscripts. I can tell you that I encountered problems from one end of the spectrum to the other. In many cases, if the writer would have had at least one other person read through the manuscript, or even the sample pages before the work was submitted, I'm sure that would have made a significant difference.

There were stories that started great, but died quickly, stories that might have been good, but started badly. Sometimes I think the writer ran out of gas, maybe had a good idea, but didn't know where to go with it, or had a good ending but didn't know how to get there. Not necessarily bad stories, but stories that needed work.

I won't even get into the typos and grammar issues, because those are a given. You cannot submit a manuscript to an agent or publisher with those kinds of problems. You especially cannot have a manuscript with typos and grammar issues that you may be considering sending off to a Print-on-Demand Publisher – self publish your manuscript.

Since I am a writer as well, I tried to be very forgiving and more understanding, but my boss added to my pile everyday and eventually I started looking for ways to reject rather than accept. Typos were an easy reason, second was grammar, third was readability and last was story content. Even though I tried to be more personal in my rejection letters and point out problems, I reached a point where I used more "form" rejection letters than personal ones.

You have to understand that there are so many submissions, that the agency could only do so much. I regret to say that even when I found something I thought might be worth looking at, my boss, who had thirty-five years in the business, would raise her eyebrows and that was usually the end of the conversation. On rare occasions, I was able to get her to look at a couple of submissions. Work she would actually consider for a while, but ultimately reject. She would simply point out why and I would send the letter.

Remember that the agent takes over your role once she accepts your manuscript. She has to pitch the work to editors, so the better your product, the easier her job may be. It is often easier to reject a work for a myriad of reasons, rather than to go through the steps to finally accept a manuscript.

The work has to win her over at the onset. It can be anything from the pitch letter, the “hook,” the angle, or simply the writing itself. The only chance you have is to get it all right and hope one of those pieces piques her interest. To do any less makes you an easy rejection, maybe for all the wrong reasons. Without question, you have to rise to the top of that pile, which gets bigger everyday.

The point is that the agency received so many submissions, that I wasn’t necessarily finding things that were good, they were just not as bad as the rest, which is a really depressing way to say that.

When I did come across that sample that I liked, I would request either a partial or a full manuscript. When I found one that I did enjoy and thought might have potential, I was usually able to work with the writer. On several occasions, I requested a second (corrected) manuscript, which most authors were willing to do.

However, there were several authors that were not willing to change anything or work with me on suggestions and were sometimes combative about it. Hey, as a writer I fully understand that position, but as writers we need to be receptive to criticism, we don’t necessarily have to accept it, but at least we should be willing to learn from it.

If an agent is willing to contact you, dear writer, and suggest ideas, at the very least you should listen and do with those suggestions what you will, but arguing or becoming combative is not an option. Take the hit and move on. Appreciate the effort. Consider it part of the editing process.

The hue and cry I have read (and heard) from many agents, is that if they do offer a helpful suggestion or criticism, it suggests to the writer that they would look at a revised or updated version of the manuscript that they have already rejected. In fact, the reverse is the case. The fact the agent has offered a helpful hint or criticism is just that. Take the advice and move on.

I can attest to that situation as well, as it happened many times to me in my agent days. Consequently, form rejection letters have become very basic and succinct.

Believe me, if an agent wanted your work, they would be on the phone or email contacting you directly, not writing a letter. As I said above, take the “hit” and move on.

I remember being at a used car dealer looking for a second car. I found one I liked, but when we opened the trunk, it was full of water. The salesman smiled and motioned for the porter, who brought a vacuum and cleared the water from the trunk area. The salesman, still smiling, said simply: “I don’t want to lose the next sale.”

The point here is, while he may have lost my sale because of what I saw, he corrected it for the next potential buyer. Use the same analogy for your manuscript. You may have lost this opportunity, but take the suggestion or criticism, make the changes and move on to the next opportunity. It really is as simple as that. Keep remembering it is a business, nothing personal and in business, you don’t dwell on what might have been, but what may be. Keep pitching, keep perfecting and keep pitching again.

A final thought. I am often asked about writers’ conferences, or workshops and if they will help. Writers’ conferences are a good place to “rub elbows” with other writers and of course to listen to various topics discussed by industry professionals. Writers’ workshops are usually more focused than writers’ groups and study groups. In addition you can take college courses on writing essentials all the way up to an MFA. All good things for a writer to do, it can only help to perfect your craft.

However if you don’t practice, practice, practice, then none of it will be useful. Too many times, I have met a writer at a conference or some other function and when I asked how the writing was going, I was met with a stare and a sheepish “well, I haven’t actually written anything yet.”

If you want to “learn” to be a writer, that is certainly okay, but you don’t become a writer until you start writing. The quality may be good, bad or somewhere in the middle, but you need to write. Start with short stories, or just create passages. Conferences, workshops and especially writers’ groups are all very helpful to your writing career, but at some point you do have to write to become a writer. Use these functions as a bridge to perfect your work, and hopefully long before you ever consider turning your work over to an editor, or agent or publisher.

In closing, I have used an editor for all of my works and someone who is qualified to do an edit. And yes this tome came back covered in red ink! When I gave him his copy of my third book, I also gave him a box of red pens, because I was sure he had used up every red pen he had on that manuscript. This manuscript is no different, gloriously covered in red for a myriad of reasons.

No matter how hard you try or how good you think the work is, another set of eyes, especially someone who is capable of editing, can make a huge difference to the finished work and make it the finished product it needs to be.

As I said, I gave my editor a large box of red pens last time, so I believe I can get another manuscript by him before I have to hit the supply store again. Best investment I ever made, those red pens...

The Nuts & Bolts of this here Book Business ...And why you need to know it!

Before we go any further in the process, let us digress a moment. I thought an overview of the business as a whole would be in order, because we have reached a crossroad here. Do we continue on the normal course, or do we change direction and do it ourselves?

The very first thing you need to understand is that publishing is a business. You, the writer, are creating a product that you have high hopes of selling to someone else, hopefully for a profit, or at the very least, a recoup of your expenses. To believe any less puts you at a disadvantage right from the start.

Yes, of course you wrote this because it is your passion and it doesn't really matter if you make money or not, you just want to get your story out there, and all that... However, no matter the reason, you still need to focus in on the fact that publishing is a business. Everything you do after your manuscript is completed is business oriented. How will the author take that manuscript beyond a stack of dusty papers sitting on the desk? How does the manuscript become a book? What is the process to make that happen?

To answer that question let us review what is involved in the traditional way of taking a book to market. A subject we will touch on briefly here, but will also delve into more deeply later.

We often think of the book business in simple terms. We write a manuscript and then we will get it published. What else do we need to know? A reasonable question and one this guide will hopefully shed some light on.

The purpose of understanding the "Nuts & Bolts" of the book business is to help you to gain a better understanding of how it all works, as well as a better appreciation of the process as a whole. Too many times I've heard from writers that truly believe all they have to do is write something and the rest will just happen.

The more the writer can bring to the table, the better the chance the product will get to market. This is especially true if the author intends to pursue the Print-on-Demand route (self publish) and do all of this on his or her own, without any backing. The more that is understood about the book business, the better informed the writer will be in making a decision, whatever that decision may be.

Okay, ready? Let's take a walk through.

In the traditional course of publishing a writer has created a manuscript. Let's give the writer the benefit of the doubt and assume that someone qualified to do that type of work has edited the manuscript. Okay, we have a completed, edited manuscript, what's next?

The next logical step would be to put together a submissions package, comprised of a cover letter, a synopsis, sample pages (chapters), an author bio and I believe it should also contain some marketing ideas as your basic items.

There are various books, articles, blogs and everything in between on how to write a cover letter, a synopsis and putting a package together. It would be in your best interest to review those and create the best letter you can. It will be the first item the agent will see.

There are also several schools of thought on what length a synopsis should be, everything from one page to no more than five pages. My personal preference was always one page. I could hold the letter in one hand and the synopsis in the other. Think of your synopsis as your book jacket blurb, with the ending added. The synopsis is usually much harder to write than the actual book. Practice makes perfect. Write a first draft, then edit, try to reduce it to a single page, a couple of paragraphs, keep it concise and to the point.

Remember, if you are considering Print-on-Demand you will need to write the jacket blurb, which is the enticement for the reader to buy your book! A synopsis is the enticement for an agent to "buy" your work.

The package will also need an SASE (Self Addressed Stamped Envelope) for a response. I would recommend a #9 envelope, which will fit inside a #10 envelope, that is, if the rest of your package can fit inside that envelope as well. Otherwise an 8½ by 11 size mailer should be used then a #10 envelope for your SASE will be just fine. Don't tri-fold an envelope into another envelope the same

size, or use “cute” envelopes. This is business, so make sure you use a business envelope.

Obviously, in the computer age it is assumed you have the “originals” on your hard drive, (or a diskette, CD, flash drive...), but if for some reason you don’t, make sure you have an “original” copy stored somewhere before you mail anything, because you should not expect to get your materials back, unless you include the appropriate return envelope with the appropriate postage affixed on the mailer. Of course, there is always the chance, of your materials being lost in the mail, or some other calamity. Of course, you should never send out your only copy.

However, it is customary to only receive the respondent’s form letter in your (#9 or #10) SASE. If the agent or publisher wants to see more of your work, they will call or email.

Okay, now that you have your package together, you will need to start putting together the list of people to send it to. Those would include agents and a couple of small or independent publishers, as well.

I still believe the best way, the very best way, to get your work published is through an agent, because if you can convince an agent to take on your work, you have made a quantum leap over the first hurdle and you will have someone in your corner that can help you perfect and package your work for sale to a publisher.

There are a number of web sites and books that you can research to get your list of agents. First and foremost make sure the agent handles your genre of work. Don’t send a mystery novel to an agent that handles business books and so on... Yes, this does need to be said here, because we writers tend to push ahead in our quest and in our haste tend to gloss over the details. Also, there are several mailing services that will do blanket mailings to agents for authors, for a fee of course... Proceed at your own risk.

My suggestion would be to gather a preliminary list of agent names and then check out their web sites to learn as much as you can about the agent, before submitting to their agency. If they don’t have a web site, make sure you find their latest listing in the various publications (and/or articles online) available in the literary world to get the agent specifics.

Only send what is asked for, don't assume anything and please make sure you follow the guidelines specifically. Some agents want you to do this or may want you to do that, but others don't want you to do this or don't do that. Another question to determine is, do the agents accept electronic submissions or do they prefer paper? Make sure you only send in the format requested, no boilerplate packages. Don't assume every agent wants the same package. Always remember the agent gets a huge amount of submissions, be the one that catches her eye.

Contrary to popular belief, agents do take on new clients, because that is how they stay in business. Of course, there are some agents that have a pretty nice stable (yes, that is what we writers are called) of clients and they may elect not to take on new work. Generally, most agents are always looking to sign new clients, so you really do have a chance, albeit slim... but it is there.

Maybe yours is the one she takes a second look at today. The package is fresh, put together just the way she instructed. The cover letter caught her eye this time. She turned the page and saw your synopsis and something... maybe today you make it into the "think about" pile...

It should be noted here, an agent might still ultimately reject a work she likes, because she can't sell it, not necessarily because she didn't like it. There are just too many manuscripts with the same concept maybe it's too crowded a market for the work you submitted. Maybe there are similar projects that have already been done or are sitting in the wings. Don't dwell on it, refine your package to make it stand out, show how it is different in this crowded market and move on.

I would suggest that you send out five submissions initially. If you get five rejections, then review your work and your materials before you send out the next five. Maybe the submission package should be changed, or the cover letter reworked, or it needs a better synopsis. Always review and update your submission package after every five submissions and/or rejections.

Please, please don't just send out a mass mailing (or email) to every name you find. Learn and revisit, revise, with each batch of rejections. Keep improving the package, query letter, first chapters, manuscript, all of the above, before you submit the next set of five queries or so.

The submission package should be in a constant state of revision. Even if you already have packages out, you should still continue to review, edit, update,

change, rework... well, you get the idea. That is why I suggest you send out five or less initially so that the next batch is fresh.

A final thought about submission requirements. As both an agent and an author, I have had the opportunity to be involved with both sides of the equation.

At the agency, we had a set of requirements for submissions that we adhered to. Unfortunately, those requirements also served as a standard for rejections. If an author submitting didn't follow the submission requirements, we could easily reject the work. Although not usually for simple missteps, but most always for blatant mistakes or missing pieces.

I still remember the letter that started: "Dear Agent."

Even though the agency had the submission requirements posted on the web site and the various agent listings, all too often we would receive something totally different, or incomplete, and sometimes far more than what we wanted. We often received unsolicited submissions of full manuscripts. As an agent, you do try to understand but, with the pile growing by leaps and bounds every day, your rejection mode overrides your understanding mode. Besides, you already have piles of work from authors that did adhere to the requirements that demand your attention.

The point here is, don't make it easier for the agent to reject your work, follow the guidelines and do or don't do, what the agent wants. No more, no less.

However, as an author, I am usually put off by the submission requirements posted or listed by agents. All too often they are of a very condescending nature (although, unfortunately they have to be). "We don't do this, we don't do that, we only want this, we only want that." "Stand on your head in the corner and repeat after me..."

One of the hardest things to do as a writer is to summarize your book into a capsule and pitch yourself in a cover letter to some stranger who could care less about you or your work. But, hey, that is why it is called "selling yourself." You have to convince that agent that you have something worthwhile, something that she would be interested in, over and above the other stuff she has sitting on her desk, on the floor, all over her office and the mail has just arrived with the days' load...

You would think that since I had been on the other side and probably read hundreds (felt more like thousands) of submissions, that I would get it and be a master at the craft. Actually, it is quite the contrary, I still find it extremely difficult to summarize my work and pitch a cover letter about me! It is only because I understand the reasoning behind it that I am even able to do submissions at all.

The submission requirements are there to narrow the pile, to give the agent the opportunity to look at only what they need, more specifically what they feel will give them enough information to make a decision. If you ask any agent, there is no one specific item that turns their head, or piques their interest. Maybe it's the cover letter, or the synopsis, or the writing. More likely, it is some, or all of the above. But you can be sure that it is because you only submitted what was requested and in the format as instructed, that your material is even being looked at.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know there are always exceptions, but if there are twenty-five submissions in the pile that morning and the agent is already tired of looking at this stuff, anything that makes the decision easier to move stuff into the get rid of pile will work against you.

Of course, I could go on and on about submission requirements all day, but suffice it to say, as an agent, I expected no less (and certainly no more), as an author, I will always dread having to do a submission!

Now let's assume the stars have aligned and you have landed an agent that is willing to take on your work. That agent will then work with you to help strengthen the manuscript so that the agent may start submitting the project to editors (publishers).

Let's keep the dream alive and assume an editor offers to purchase the work. That editor will now work with the writer to get the work ready for production. The big day comes and the manuscript is ready to become a book with some future release date, usually geared around publisher's seasons of book releases.

The process to this point may have taken anywhere from two years to three-and-a-half years to complete, but could also be longer. If we were to assume everything fell into place, we would have spent about six months finding and landing an agent. The agent would then have spent three months to a year landing an editor (publisher) and the publisher usually takes eighteen to twenty-

four months to get the book out and sometimes, even though the book may be ready, it may be held until the following release season.

Alright, the book is on the street, shipping to bookstores, indies, big box discount stores, online venues and the author is off and running. Even if a “name house” has put out your book, you the author, especially a new author, will still be expected to be the best marketer for this work. Sure, book signings are arranged, marketing and promotion work is done, but most new authors fall into the “let’s hope we break-even and recoup the advance, fingers crossed” category.

Some reports say that the window of opportunity for success is about three weeks, while others put it as high as twelve weeks for the book to catch on, or take off. After that window of opportunity, the promotion and marketing efforts by the publisher, are moved to the next book(s) and your book may be left to languish. Sales of the book are not so strong as time passes, and the bookstores start returning your book back to the publisher, in mass. Eventually, the publisher will give up and sell the books off as remainders, simply to make room for all the new inventory coming in (which may be the strongest argument for POD books).

In a typical new author scenario, let’s say, for discussion purposes, 25,000 books were created in the first run. On average 12,000 to 15,000 books were sold while the rest were returned, meaning 10,000 to 13,000 books were left in stock. The publisher may hold these books for awhile, but other stock will force the publisher to “unload” the rest of this stock to a wholesaler as remaindered books, that is sell off the leftover books for the cost of printing and take the book “out of print.”

And that’s it. The book is no longer available, the rights are tied up and the author’s moment in the sun is over. But, hey, the book made it through the process and was actually “on the street” for a time and the author gained credibility, joined the “club.” Isn’t that what it is all about?

In all probability, the author received an advance, which means monies paid up front to the author against future sales and subsequent royalties. Let us not forget, the agent took a fifteen percent commission. All marketing and promotion was paid for by the publisher. If the book earned out the advance, that is, sold enough copies to cover the original advance, the author would then receive subsequent royalty payments.

Let's digress a moment and talk a little further about advances. Advances for new unpublished authors are usually in the five thousand to fifteen thousand dollar range, with ten thousand considered a "good" advance. More often than not advances are not always paid up front anymore, but rather spread out and based on benchmarks. For instance, an advance may be paid fifty percent on signing and fifty percent on publication (two years later!). They could also be paid one-third on signing, one-third on delivery of an acceptable manuscript and one-third on publication. Of course the payout could be further spread out, but I believe you get the idea.

Advances, while not an absolute, are hard won even if they are offered. It is only because your agent worked hard to get it that you are even getting one. Remember your agent doesn't want to wait three years for that first royalty check either. An advance puts money in their pocket, as well as yours, even if it is spread out. Don't take advances for granted and don't spend the advance until you have the check in hand, whatever amount it is.

An advance is not money in the pocket. Remember, advance money may have to be used to fund author-sponsored events, marketing and promotion items, travel, or other author-fronted expenses. In other words the advance may have to be used to pay for the author's book promotional work.

The good news here is that if the book doesn't earn out the advance, the author will not have to pay any money back. However, this may be all the author ever receives for this work and the success or failure of the book may impact heavily on future sales of manuscripts to that publisher or other agents, even other publishers.

So, why in the world would a writer ever consider suffering through this process? Well, the simple answer is legitimacy. Because, no matter how successful, or how many copies were eventually sold, the book was put out by a traditional publisher that actually paid for the work, which in fact has acknowledged the writer as having a marketable product they were willing to invest in.

But, the writer has made it. The writer is now a "true published" author, accepted into the club, one of the chosen few. It is what all of us writers hope for, dream of and would do most anything to accomplish. The Holy Grail for us writers!

Until a few years ago, it was the only option. Yes, there has always been self-publishing and the list of names that have previously self-published is impressive, but to the rest of us, it was unattainable.

Largely, it was too expensive, but most importantly it was way over our heads. We have to do what? How do we get...? And what do we do with...? It was simpler to say, we can't afford to do that, so we'll keep trying to get into the club. There was a time, before the computer came on the scene, that we did have a chance.

For those of us that cranked out a manuscript on a manual or electric typewriter (I did both), we had an actual white bond paper manuscript that we quickly copied and put away for safekeeping.

Our chances were better, simply because there weren't that many manuscripts being submitted. The requirements and the acceptance standards were still high, but you did have a chance. If your story was good, but your manuscript needed a little work, that was okay, agents and editors had the time and were willing to work with you to tighten it up.

However, once the computer entered the picture, anybody and everybody could write a manuscript and not necessary because that was what they wanted to do, but because they could. I don't want to be too negative here, because I'm sure the computer helped many a writer to fulfill their dream and that's great, but for every one on that list there are probably a hundred, a thousand... that hit the keyboard, because now they could.

Therein lies the dilemma. With so many manuscripts being created and submitted all over the place the chance of opening a door becomes slimmer and slimmer. Back in my agent days, I had a publisher tell me once that he received seven hundred unsolicited manuscripts a month and didn't open a single one. I had a fellow agent tell me that the first ten packages he opened in the morning he said no to, without ever reading any of the material, just so he could manage the pile. Staggering comments from a couple of the players.

The bottom line here is that you, the writer, have to play the game. Your manuscript has to be perfect, cleanly edited. The submission package has to be of the highest standard, follow the guidelines to a "T" and always make sure you are submitting to the appropriate agent or publisher.

Should you get picked up follow the suggestions, don't be combative. Give it all you've got. Be prepared to be your best salesperson. After all, it is your book. Sometimes I truly believe that writing the manuscript is the easy part. It is the rest of that stuff that we need to do that becomes daunting.

In the past, the only other option was self-publishing. Foregoing the usual process and just doing it yourself. The writer takes their manuscript, finds a printer, decides on a number of copies (print run, usually 2,500 to 5,000 copies), secures the ISBN, Library of Congress Number, creates the cover art, the interior formatting of the book and sets up the marketing plan.

Once the book is printed and available, the author becomes the warehouse, the distributor, the person who contacts the online services, the bookstores, sets up book signings and the like, generally becomes the sole champion of the book, with no outside help. But hey, the writer gets to keep all the profits.

Having said all that, and let me take a breath here.

There is another option to consider.

A new form of self publishing entered the arena a few years back, commonly referred to as print-on-demand or POD Publishing. Print-on-demand is actually a technology, but has become an acronym for a type of publishing process.

Print-on-demand means just that. A book is printed when someone demands it, even as little as one book at a time. In the traditional world of printing, books are printed on an offset press, usually in runs of 5,000 to 100,000 or greater, thereby reducing the cost per book.

A print-on-demand book, because of the higher cost of printing one book at a time, is still the same cost per book, whether it is one, or five or a hundred. This in turn, usually requires a higher retail price per book. However, with print-on-demand, there is no storage, no warehousing, because books are only printed when someone wants one.

Is there a trade off here? Maybe! Because, if you factor back in the costs of inventory control and warehousing, the cost per book on an offset print run becomes proportionately higher. It is certainly something to think about.

With the advent of this new technology, a whole new industry of Print-on-Demand Publishers burst upon the scene, which capitalized on this concept. As we discussed earlier, the cost of self-publishing was pretty expensive, largely due to the cost of the book run (printing). The writer had to order an aggregate number of books to get the best price per book. However, with print-on-demand the cost of the book is the same regardless of whether you order one or a hundred.

Basically, what happens is you select the Print-on-Demand Publisher of your choice, pay a set up fee and your manuscript is turned into a book, just like that. It is really that simple. Self-publishing brought to the mainstream, into the computer age. Your book is stored digitally and only printed as requested, leveraging electronic storage and inventory.

Well, before you grab those dusty pages off your desk and run down to the nearest Print-on-Demand Publisher and say here, make this a book, let's spend some time understanding how that whole process works.

The Road to Print-on-Demand ... Are you Ready?

This is the point in the process where you, dear writer, will need to make your final decision. The question is, do I keep trying to get published the traditional way, or do I bite the bullet and go for it on my own? I encourage you to read through the rest of this guide before you make any decision. This should not be a quick decision, but an informed, well thought out and totally committed decision.

I would also highly recommend that you have sent out at least five to ten submission packages, and yes you may have to burn six months to a year of time doing that, but it will do two things for you. Doing this will give you feed back, but maybe not - if you only get standard rejection letters - but at the very least, this will give you a chance to keep polishing your pitch, which you should do anyway.

This in turn will force you to revisit your manuscript to tighten it up as well. The other thing it will do, is give you that much more time to perfect your manuscript before committing your work to a “what you see is what you get” process. Besides, in the meantime, you can research and learn as much as you can about POD Publishers and publishing.

Okay, okay I hear you. You’re not going to subject yourself to that industry hierarchy and be part of that madness. Instead you’re going to take those dusty pages and hand them to some Print-on-Demand publisher (actually the electronic hard copy that you will upload) and just get this done. Well, I would still suggest a month or two “cooling off” period, if for no other reason than to take another pass at your manuscript.

Once you cross that threshold and make the commitment to take your manuscript to a Print-on-Demand Publisher, you are no longer just a writer, you are now about to start a new business. Yes, a business, the business of product development, which includes book creation, publishing including marketing and promotion.

The following passages are based on my experiences, both in the business and as a Print-on-Demand Published author. As I mentioned earlier, I worked as an agent for two years, worked in a major chain bookstore for a summer season and have taken three books the Print-on-Demand route, two with one publisher and the third with a new and different publisher. I have also spoken at several writers' conferences, worked with writers one-on-one and continue to hone my craft, whatever that may be.

If there is a slant to my writings, it is because I lived it. The opinions are certainly mine (as are the numbers) and you are free to ignore or brush them off without so much as a consideration. My intention was not to preach (although you may find that hard to believe), but to present a document that you may find helpful in coming to a final and informed decision, instead of floundering like I did.

I encourage you to completely read through this guide a couple of times, dog ear pages and highlight to your heart's content. Make it a working document, a reference guide. Take a blank sheet of paper and make notes. Create a pro and con list of why or why not. The intention of this project is to create a guide, a direction, and an overview of what comes next, whatever that may be.

One final point I will make here is this: respect your readers. Respect and appreciate them for what they do for you, the writer. Don't misjudge their knowledge and understanding. Don't expect them to buy something you wouldn't. Remember, the reader is the one you do this for. Don't give them anything less than your best, both in your writing and your product.

The subsequent sections have been arranged to help you better focus in on the steps required to accomplish that venture.

So, if you are ready, let's turn the page, cross over to the dark side and face the most important step of this journey.

Grab hold, here we go.

The Business Plan ... and good God the budget!

In order to launch a new product (your book) you need some idea of what it is you have, what you are going to do with that book, how you will go about that and why.

Of course the simple answer is: “Hey, I have a book that I’m going to sell to the public and they will buy it. What more do I need to know.” You would be surprised how many times I have heard that phrase or something just like it.

Well, in theory, that is true. You have a book that you want to sell and hopefully someone will want to buy it.

If you would have sold your manuscript to a traditional (standard, royalty) publisher, not only would they have given you (and your agent) money up front, they would pay for the marketing (business) plan, the promotional materials and the distribution to the bookstores. But, then again, if you had done that you wouldn’t be reading this.

Maybe your response is: “But, I’m a writer, what do I know about this stuff?” Well, unless you are planning to only have a few copies of your book sitting in your living room that you can hand to friends and relatives when they visit, then you are going to need to learn all about this stuff and then do it. Remember, I said in the previous section, you are no longer just the writer. Well, here’s the first step.

If you have made the decision to take your manuscript to a Print-on-Demand Publisher, then you are entering the world of self-publishing, with the operative word being: self! The most you can expect from your publisher is a printed book version of your manuscript. Oh sure, there may be some marketing and promotional materials that you can pass out, but pretty much when your book is finished, so is your publisher. Yes, they will put you up on the online stores, so the public can order your book, but if people don’t know your book is there, they won’t know to order it. You will need to tell them.

Okay, let's start putting together a plan.

One day, you, dear writer, decided to sit in front of your keyboard, look up at a blank screen and start pounding on the keys. A month, six months, a year or years later, you had what you perceive to be a completed manuscript. Of course you sent the manuscript off to an editor and maybe had someone else do a read through to let you know if the manuscript was cohesive. Okay, you thought you would send this work off to agents and/or publishers - or not - and everything will be fine.

Well, the rejections poured in and the frustration mounted, or maybe you decided right out of the gate, that nah, I'm not going to go through that, I'll just publish this myself and here you are. You are going to take the bull by the horns and plough through, master of your domain, king of your empire... and like that.

Let us review what comes next, more specifically what needs to be done to turn that pile of papers into a book.

You should have a pencil and paper in front of you at this point. Now write down these subject headings:

What is a book?

Select a Print-on-Demand (POD) Publisher

Research and Learn
Narrow the List
Pick One

The Print-on-Demand Process

Marketing & Promotion

List of book reviewers
Advertising, costs & benefits
Publicity, how to get it; interviews, ads
Direct mail
Word of mouth
Events, book signings, book fairs, libraries
Be creative
Hire out!

Web Site

Development and set up

Maintenance and updates

This is your cover sheet. Now grab some more blank sheets of paper and write each of the sub points on the top of a fresh page, then start writing items down under each heading, until you have a list of ideas, suggestions, thoughts etc.

Once you have a fairly comprehensive list of items, create a clean list of those headings with each of their bullet points underneath, review it a couple of times, edit it down (or up) and create a final copy. That is your business plan. That is the least of what you will try to accomplish while your book is being created and after it is available.

Of course, should you look at the final plan and say to yourself, "I can't do this," then by all means do not consider taking your manuscript to a Print-on-Demand Publisher. This list is the least you will have to do to get your book out there. So stop here, go back to the beginning and review the traditional process, sharpen your submissions package and keep sending out your pitches.

Seriously! Don't go any further until you grasp the amount of work required to take your manuscript to a Print-on-Demand Publisher and just what it is you will need to do. Taking this process too lightly will only leave you more frustrated than you may already be. Take another pass through the submissions process.

However, if you believe you are ready to travel down that POD road, then continue on. But, I would still suggest you read through this guide a couple of times, make notes, create ideas, map out your plan of action and gear yourself up for the adventure.

All right, the moment we have all been waiting for: the budget.

Budgets are just that, an estimate of potential costs that you could (will probably) incur in the launch of your book. Of course, all budgets should have an income line, a line that states how much we will need to make - to generate income - to cover expenses, but we will forego that for now. The purpose of this exercise is to gauge the cost of the initial launch of your book.

It is assumed that the Print-on-Demand Publisher you have selected will have their standard setup fees. Always, and I do mean always, remember you get

what you pay for! However, these fees (and whatever additional services you select) should be included in your consideration process when selecting your POD Publisher.

As you will find in your research, most of these publishers have a myriad of additional services, with additional fees that they offer. Again, this should be part of your research. You will need to determine just what services you want (need) and what the inherent cost would be for those additional services and, more importantly, if you can afford them. This will be the first line of your budget. The initial set up cost, manuscript to Print-on-Demand Publisher to book.

Once your book is produced you will want (need) to purchase copies for yourself, author copies that you can sell directly, copies to use as promotional books and copies to send to reviewers. Most of the POD Publishers will give you a small amount of author copies (in my case it was five, for the trade paperback version, variable on hardcover) as part of your package price, which you can also use as review copies.

Based on the retail price of the book, your author discount and a minimum quantity to order. Various POD Publishers may require you to order a certain number of books to reach specific discount plateaus. You will need to determine what those amounts are and set aside (budget) money for that purchase as part of the overall cost.

Next, you will need to factor in monies for marketing and promotion. These costs will include advertising, supplies, postage costs, printed business cards, printed bookmarks, post cards, travel costs and general expenses you will incur promoting your book.

Of course, costs will vary, and maybe one of the items is less expensive or maybe you spend more on a certain item, but for purposes of “facing the truth” the budget will give you an idea of the amount of money you will probably need to spend in order to make any headway with your book.

As I said before, unless you want to have a box of books sitting in your living room (and even then, there will be costs for those books) that you give out to friends and relatives, you will have to spend additional money to launch your book. Consider these expenditures as an investment in yourself.

The figures I use below are averages, and may vary widely depending on your choice of Print-on-Demand Publisher, what services you select, how many books you buy, what kind of advertising you do and generally what you are willing (able) to spend on certain items, especially on your web site development.

A web site can be pretty expensive. However, once your web site is developed, the cost of additional updates and of course your second book will be less expensive to maintain. My advice would be to keep your web site simple. Make it functional, showcase your book(s) and tell a little bit about you, the author and finally how to order your book.

On the following page, you will find the basic costs of launching your book broken down into simple categories. While these are basic, somewhat static expenses, please understand that there may be (probably will be) various other expenses. One such additional expense may be lodging, gasoline, especially if you need to travel a great distance for a book signing, or book promotion.

On this page, I have outlined a projected budget to give you some idea of what I am referring to:

The Budget

POD Publisher setup fees: -----\$750.00

Book Purchases: (50)-----\$448.50

Postage: -----\$125.00

Advertising: -----\$750.00

Supplies: -----\$100.00

Business Cards (printed): -----\$25.00

Book Markers (printed): -----\$150.00

Travel Costs (Gas): -----\$100.00

Web site: -----1,000.00

Miscellaneous: -----\$100.00

Total: -----3,548.50

While the numbers may vary widely (up or down), the concept of this simple budget is to illustrate that there is more than the initial set up fee associated with Print-on-Demand Publishing your book, which basically is only getting your manuscript into printed form.

The hard reality here, which you should be aware of, is that you may in fact be spending in the neighborhood of \$3,500 to get your book to the public and that number may (probably will) go higher.

Again, the purpose of this exercise is to showcase the other expenses involved with the launch of your product – your book, because the launch is so much more than paying the setup fees to have your manuscript turned into a printed book (published). Of course, you don't have to do any of this, you can simply have your book published (printed) and order a few copies for friends and family. However the reality is that if you want your book “out there” you will have to face the facts that it will “cost you” to do just that. But, then again, you can simply stick your head in the sand and pretend otherwise! Bottom line, there is no free ride.

Of course, you will have to front those costs, just like you would to start any type of business. This is no quick and easy process. Remember, it is called self-publishing for a reason.

Okay, let's look at the other side. You make the decision to move forward. You accept the numbers and you are prepared to spend the money. What can you expect, to make on this venture? Probably very little!

Let's look at some numbers. (At least my numbers.)

If we take a trade paperback that has a retail price of \$14.95 and assume you get the standard author discount of 40% off retail, (sometimes based on a quantity of books purchased – various POD publishers will have various pricing concepts or plateaus – I am using mine for discussion purposes) the cost will be \$8.97 per book. In this example the most profit you can make per book is \$5.98.

Remember you will be sending copies out for review; cost \$8.97, profit zero. Also you will probably discount the book for direct sales to say \$12.00 per book for a profit of \$3.03 per book. If you do get books into your local bookstore on consignment, typically they want a 30% discount (sometimes more), which means your profit per book will be \$1.50. All this means is that, on average, the profit will be approximately \$3.50 per book, give or take, all things being equal, the river doesn't rise and the sun comes up and...

Now if we were to take that formula and add it back into our budget to look at the income side of the equation, we would come to the realization that to just break even we would have to sell 1,014 books ($1,014 \times \$3.50 = \$3,549$).

However, in order to sell that many books, you will have to purchase additional books, which of course would impact the formula (costs of additional books equal additional books to sell to make back the costs of those additional books...).

Even if the additional books were sold exclusively through the various outlets, price discounts and royalty percentages may (will) impact that formula as well. A point of fact here, on average most POD books only sell around 100 copies. However, for purposes of illustration, you should be able to grasp the concept. To make money, you need to sell books, a lot of books, period.

Okay, okay, keep breathing into the paper bag. Sit back and take a moment.

The next question is, why in the world would anyone want to do this? I'll save that answer for the closing comments, but for now the short answer is, because they can. The question for you is, can you?

Now, before you get caught up in the excitement of having a printed copy of your manuscript, in the form of a book, which you can pass out, sell, hold in your hands, or whatever reason you have for doing this, take a walk through this guide again and make your decision based on facts you can live with, rather than a whim.

Make a decision that works for you, a decision that makes sense, a decision that pencils out. Most important, hopefully now you can see why your manuscript has to be the highest quality, clean, clear, crisp, fully edited, with great production standards.

Realistically, if you are about to put out this much money, it better be something you can be proud of, something that you will be proud to sell. Otherwise you might as well blow your money at the track, or the dice table or on lottery tickets, because your chance of making any money back is a whole lot better than putting out an inferior product and hoping someone buys a copy.

Now go back, and read through this section again, make your list of subject points, create your business plan, work up your budget, then sleep on it.

If the freshness of the following day still finds you wanting to move ahead, then go for it. If not, then work it out again in your mind and on paper, but in the meantime, keep submitting your manuscript to agents, until you decide, because it is still the best way to get into "the club."

What is a book? ... and why should I care about this?

The short answer is that a book is what you will be creating and ultimately your intended product, so you better know all about a book. The longer answer is that if you are pursuing a Print-on-Demand Publishing option - self-publishing route - then by all means you should understand how a book is put together, what a book is all about and why.

I originally had this section tucked away in the back, more as an add on, but the more I thought about it, the more I felt it should be at the top of the list of items to be considered and reviewed. Knowing these details would have really helped me in the production of my first two books. I encourage you to read this section in depth.

With a traditional publishing house, you have little (actually no) say in the design and format of your book. However, when you are doing it yourself you have all the say in the design and format of your book and conversely, you have to do your own designing and formatting of your book.

This is a fact I didn't know with my first two books. Sure, I offered some input and worked with an associate at my Print-on-Demand Publisher, but by not knowing anything I usually said sure and okay without ever challenging or questioning what I was saying sure and okay to at the time.

However, with my third book, I worked with a publisher that was very forthcoming and responsive to my wishes and questions. I'd like to say we worked together this time, instead of me standing on the sidelines watching. Quite frankly, I learned a lot about book design, structure and formatting working with this publisher.

Remember, at this stage, especially if it is your first book, your head is still in the clouds and your focus is on getting that book in your hands, not what you are doing or how to do it. You can easily overlook, or not even be aware of, the actual book creation

Books are published in three basic formats, a hardcover edition, a trade paperback edition and a mass-market paperback edition (of course we can also have an ebook edition, but we will concentrate on the “printed” book).

A hardcover book is the top of the line, the purist form of a book. The trade paperback is the same size as a hardcover, but significantly less expensive than a hardcover book, largely because of the packaging.

A trade paperback is the usual edition of Print-on-Demand Publishers. I understand that most of the POD Publishers may offer both a hardcover and a trade paperback edition in their packages. However, the trade paperback is usually the standard edition offered, with the hardcover edition as an option.

At least with my first POD Publisher, which meant I couldn’t get the hardcover edition without getting the trade paperback edition. I did have a simultaneous edition with my second book, the trade paperback and the hardcover, but it’s something that I would never do again.

Recently, I have read several articles claiming that the trade paperback is becoming the new industry standard of the traditional publishing houses and that hardcover books will disappear with time or at the very least become unique. The strongest argument to support this is the cost of hardcover books, which on average are approximately ten dollars more than the trade paperback edition. However, hardcover books do return the best profit, so we shall see what develops.

Quite frankly, I don’t see that happening anytime soon. More than likely, with the various discounts offered, especially in the big box stores, hardcover books are still quite affordable and still offer the best return. However, I will concede that, in the traditional publishing arena, releases by new authors or untested authors may find their first release as a trade paperback (TPO – Trade Paperback Original), with hardcover editions becoming very selective.

The third type of edition mentioned above is the mass-market paperback, more affectionately referred to as the “beach book.” This is the small version of a book that was originally referred to as a “pocket book” because it would fit in your pocket. Typically, these editions are re-release editions of a successful hardcover edition or trade paperback edition, in a smaller and less expensive version (smaller print, tighter packaging), enabling more of the buying public to pick up a copy.

The mass-market paperback is basically a separate industry unto itself. Mass-Market Paperback Publishers can be independents or arms of the major houses. Sales to this segment of publishers are usually referred to as the sale of secondary rights, or secondary market rights, that is to say, your original manuscript may be sold again to a different publisher even if it is an arm, or division of the original publishing house that initially bought your manuscript, for purposes of releasing your book in another less expensive edition. This new edition usually requires a separate, unique ISBN.

Your manuscript might also be sold directly to a mass-market paperback publisher and this edition will be the only release of your book, with no prior hardcover edition or trade paperback edition.

Mass-market paperback books are typically sold in supermarkets, airports and many other venues, not usually associated with books, as well as in bookstores. There is an interesting history surrounding the advent of the mass-market paperback, which I don't want to get into here, but I encourage you to research that history on your own. It is quite fascinating.

In the grander scheme of things, the traditional progression of a book is that it is first issued in a hardcover edition and then, if successful, a mass-market paperback edition may be released. In some instances, a hardcover edition is released, then a trade paperback edition and then perhaps, a mass-market paperback edition. You could also have a very successful trade paperback edition that is then released in a mass-market paperback edition. All of this is done over time, of course. A successful hardcover may spawn a mass-market paperback, six months to a year after the original hardcover release.

One of the lessons I learned was never to have two versions released at the same time – simultaneous editions - as I did with my second book. Sure, it gives the buyer the option of choosing between the two, but to me it was confusing having two editions of the book available at the same time. I'd rather just have a single edition initially, preferably a hardcover, then maybe later a less expensive version, such as a trade paperback, or mass-market paperback.

One point to consider, with simultaneous editions is, why would someone pay \$24.95 for the hardcover, when they would only have to pay \$14.95 for the trade paperback? It's basically the same book. Logic says that most readers will buy

the cheaper edition. Besides, it's much easier to focus on one book, one version in your marketing and promotion.

My third book is a hardcover edition only and I honestly don't know if I will do another edition, such as a trade paperback. I may just see if I can sell the manuscript (book) to a mass-market paperback publisher (secondary market) and have those two editions available.

The logic behind my thinking is that since my hardcover edition is with a Print-on-Demand Publisher, the book never really goes out of print, so that edition is always available and since a trade paperback edition is nothing more than a less expensive version of a hardcover, it becomes kind of redundant. Sure, the hardcover costs a little more, but it is also sturdier and more apt to last longer, a better product for the money. But, hey that is just me! By all means do what works for you.

As I said, the primary version for most Print-on-Demand Publishers is the trade paperback, with the hardcover as an option. There is nothing wrong with that concept. On average, trade paperback books are priced in the \$14.95 to \$19.95 range, (but can go higher), whereas hardcover books are in the \$23.95 to \$32.95 range, (but also can go higher), so trade paperback books should be easier to sell in the long haul.

I would recommend for your first venture into Print-on-Demand publishing you stick to the trade paperback edition, less expensive to sell, easier to focus on. You can always add a hardcover version later, if you must, even if it is only one copy for you personally.

Okay, now that I have that off my chest, let's move on to the creation of a book. Since the trade paperback is the norm, we will be focusing on that version, but I will point out the parts that are germane to a hardcover for clarity.

Let's review what a book is. Go to your bookshelf and grab a book, any book will do and set it down in front of you, face up.

Okay, ready?

The first thing you see is the cover, more specifically the cover art. If it is a hardback this is actually the dust jacket, but if it is a trade paperback it is the actual cover binding.

The cover is the greatest sales tool for the book. If the reader is impressed or intrigued or otherwise taken with the cover, more specifically the cover art, the reader is apt to pick the book up and look at it further. If not, you have just eliminated ninety-five percent of your chances of selling the book. The cover is the first “hook” to get someone to buy the book. This is where you need to put your best effort in designing and getting it right. To do any less puts you at a greater disadvantage than you already are.

Covers can be created from “stock” photography, or graphic design, or ideas that are developed by designers, or from licensed photographs. The cover for my first book was licensed from a combat photographer that was in Vietnam around the same time as I was. My second book’s cover was created as a sketch and my third book was from stock photography.

Unfortunately, there is no specific format, or simple idea that guarantees success. The cover has to be what works best for the book. The cover art should convey the story, maybe a picture of a scene or a character or characters, maybe a composite drawing, something that says look at me. Something that will make the reader pick up the book. There is no simple answer, no magic formula, the cover art will probably take several tries to create the finished cover. Whatever you do, don’t half step here, make sure it works for the story as well as you.

Once a cover is selected and agreed on, you will need to carry this to the back of the book, the back cover or the back of the dust jacket and the spine cover. Now don’t get too hung up here, it is the norm to carry the front cover art to the back, but if you have a different idea for the back cover, such as a full page photo of you, the author, then that would be a different back cover.

The title of the book and the author name will be printed on top of the cover art on the front, so make sure that works as well, fonts, colors, it all has to flow. Test this combination, look at it, print it out, and review it. Don’t let go until you are completely satisfied.

You might want to have someone else take a look as well, maybe someone that can offer an objective eye to the format. You only get one shot at this. The cover art will be on your book forever. The spine, don’t think about it, the title and your name will be printed sideways so it can be shelved. That is all you need to know about the spine.

On a trade paperback the front, spine and back cover are all part of the binding as well and usually the back cover will contain a blurb about the book, maybe a review or two, probably an author blurb and author photo. However, if it is a hardcover, with a dust jacket, the book blurb will usually be on the inside front flap and the author blurb and photo will be on the back inside flap. Again, look at the book in front of you to get a better understanding of what I just said.

In addition, the cover will contain a bar code that is the ISBN number transferred into a worldwide compatible optical character recognition (OCR) format that identifies the title, author and publisher of the book. It is essential that the bar code be present on the cover.

Before I finish about the cover art, let me reiterate the importance of getting this right. The cover, front and back will be the first things the reader will see and if you don't grab their attention right then and there, the reader will not pick the book up and you have lost the sale. Granted, the reader may still not buy the book after it is picked up, but at least you have them looking and hopefully holding the book, reading the copy, maybe looking inside. Oh, and I really need to mention that there shouldn't be any typos on the cover! And, yes I have actually seen this!

Okay, now let's open the book...

Usually there is a blank page, or two, followed by the half title page, the copyright and disclaimer page, the title page, perhaps a dedication page, or an acknowledgement page and a forward. In a non-fiction work you would also find a table of contents and maybe a table of illustrations. All of this is referred to as the front matter of a book.

Blank pages are found at the front and back of a book, sometimes used as filler, but usually they are the other side of pages (leaves). The half title page is kind of like a cover title, a place to start. The copyright and disclaimer page is the business piece of a book. The disclaimer is used in fiction that basically says it is fiction (look in any book to get an idea of how that is worded). The copyright is self-explanatory. You will also find on this page the ISBN, the Library of Congress Number and various bits of publisher information.

Often times a dedication is inserted into a book for various reasons. An acknowledgement page identifies those that may have helped or provided

information to the author in putting this book together. In fiction the acknowledgement is often found in the back.

The next part is considered the “guts” of the book, the story, basically the chapters. This is where you will focus on the formatting and there are several things to consider.

The very first item to consider is the point size (a typographical unit of measure). Simply put, the size of the typeface inside a book. The bigger the point size the more pages your book will have, conversely, the smaller the point size the less pages your book will have. Your job is to find something in the middle, something that will give your book a professional look and not cause the reader to squint or use a magnifying glass to read.

I was not aware of this concept with my first two books and basically went along with what I was given. A lesson I didn't learn until my third book and even then, I had to learn it the hard way.

When using a Print-on-Demand publisher, more than likely the proofs will be sent to you as a PDF document. My tired old eyes won't let me read a whole book on my computer screen, so I usually print the proof out and read it that way.

However, in the PDF formatting, there is an option to print as actual size (didn't know that), which will allow you to see the size of the print that will be used in the book. The proof has been formatted to be book pages at this step. Make sure, you pay close attention to this stage, because this is how your final product will look. If you don't get it (I didn't) don't hesitate to mention it to your associate, designer or whatever the designation is, of the person helping you at the publisher. If you are tech savvy and already understand all of this, just have your chuckle and move on.

The pages after the body of the text are referred to as the back matter, or simply the back pages of a book, which may be an epilogue, an acknowledgement and maybe an “about the author” page. If the work is non-fiction you may find endnotes, an index, a bibliography, glossary, an after word, an appendix and in either case, usually a colophon.

In a work of fiction you might have an epilogue and maybe an acknowledgement and perhaps an after word. In a non-fiction work you would probably find

endnotes, an index, a bibliography, glossary and an appendix. A colophon is an identifying mark, or an inscription, used by the printer, placed at the end of a book, with facts related to the book's production.

Well, there you have it, the pieces that make up a book. The best thing you can do is look at those books on your shelf and get to know how a book is put together, because you are about to embark on creating your book, your product, and the more you know the better you will be able to complete the task.

A good exercise would be to put together a "mock" book. Create all the additional pages we just discussed and include them with your manuscript. That would be a rough copy of your proposed book.

With a traditional publisher, the book setup and formatting is all done for you and while you probably won't have much say (probably none), you also won't have to think about it either.

However, if your final decision is to use a Print-on-Demand Publisher to produce (print) your book, you are the publisher and you will have to think about all of this and, more importantly, you will have to do it all. Sure the POD publisher will do the actual work, but you will have to provide the instructions of what needs to be done, otherwise they will just follow basic setup guidelines and put the book out their way, which may not be what you want, and probably not what you might expect.

Deciding to use a Print-on-Demand Publisher means you will be creating your own book. Let me repeat that: you will be creating your own book. You do need to know what a book is, how it is put together and why things are done, or not done. While most of the steps should be handled by the publisher, it is imperative you know what those are and why they are being done or not done and what you can do to get them done your way.

Understanding what a book is and how a book is put together, will save you grief later. There is no greater frustration than to hold the final copy of your book in your hand and discover something missing or wrong or just not acceptable, especially if the mistake is your fault. Trust me, I've been there. Make every effort to get it right the first time.

Remember, it is YOUR book and you do get to have it your way. If your POD Publisher is not receptive or uncooperative, dump them and find someone else.

Make sure you have an escape, or termination clause in your agreement. You are paying for a service that the publisher is providing. You do get to have the book produced your way. It is as simple as that.

Make sure all of the contract options, including termination, return of rights, etc... of the publisher is part of your research. What do others say about this particular publisher? What is the word on the street about them? Don't get caught up in the euphoria of being published, you are not! You are simply commissioning a service that will turn your manuscript into a printed, (albeit published, because it has an ISBN), book. It's as simple as that. No more, but it should not be less.

The last thing I would suggest is to order a book from the POD publisher you selected or, if you haven't decided on a specific publisher, then order a book from each of the POD Publishers on your short list. That way, you can see for yourself how their books are put together, the style, the cover, the formatting and the quality that goes into those books. Remember this is your book, more specifically your product. It has to be perfect. It has to be the best.

A book is your manuscript "packaged" and ready for distribution. There is no turning back. It is what the public will see and hopefully buy. It is your product. Focus on that and understand that. Your book is your product. Remember, if your final decision is to use a Print-on-Demand Publisher, it means you are in the business now - you are putting out the product.

Okay, I'll stop lecturing now.

Listed below are a few industry "book terms" that you should familiarize yourself with. The more you know about the book creation, the better prepared you will be.

Acknowledgement is the part of a book in which the author expresses appreciation and thanks to a person or individuals who helped with the book. This page can be in the front (front matter) or back (back matter) of a book. In fiction it is often times found in the back.

After Word is the author including parting remarks to the reader, usually found in a book's back matter.

Appendix is the supplemental material printed at the end of the general text, in the book's back matter, that includes lists of resources, tables or other reference material. Typically found in non-fiction work.

Artwork is any portion of a book that is not text.

Back Flap is the back part of a dust jacket that folds inward and contains copy continued from the front flap and usually a photo and biography of the author. On a trade paperback book this information would usually be found on the back cover.

Back Matter are the pages after the body of the text usually comprised of the epilogue, acknowledgement, an about the author page. For non-fiction you may find endnotes, an index, a bibliography, glossary, an after word, an appendix and in either type of work, a colophon.

Bar Code is a series of vertical lines that identify the book, the book's publisher and the book's price. Used universally in the book industry for automated ordering and inventory systems.

Bibliography is the part of a book in which other books or reference materials are cited as resources or for the reader's further reference. Usually found in a non-fiction work.

Binding is the gathering, folding, trimming, stitching, gluing and casing of assembled sheets, or signatures, along one edge of a book. These may be stapled or sewn, sewn and enclosed in wrappers, or by gluing the pages to the outer cover. A trade paperback book would be an example.

Blurbs are written endorsements of the book by reviewers or others to help promote the book. On a hardcover these appear on the back of the dust jacket, on the trade paperback they may appear on the back cover.

Colophon is an identifying mark, or an inscription, used by the printer, placed at the end of a book, with facts related to the book's production.

Copyright is the author's legal right to ownership of the work under federal copyright laws located in the front matter of a book.

Cover Art is the design of the book jacket, or paper cover, generally produced in-house by the publisher's art department, but can be supplied by the author as separate art or licensed photography.

Dedication Page is the page of a book, placed in the front matter, that lists the persons or individuals to which the author dedicates the work.

Dust Cover (Dust Jacket) The outer paper wrapper on a hardcover book.

Epilogue is additional text that appears at the end of a story, which brings the reader up to date, completes or finishes the story.

Foreword is the opening remarks, usually written by someone other than the author, located in the front matter of a book.

Four Color Printing is the code for color printing based on the four colors used: Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black (CMYK).

Front Flap is the front part of a dust jacket that folds inward and contains the description of the story.

Front Matter are the pages of a book before the main text, usually comprised of, but not limited to, nor inclusive of, a half title page, the title page, copyright page, the dedication page, an acknowledgement page, table of contents, table of illustrations and the foreword.

Glossary is a list of definitions and page numbers of words, names or phrases in the book that is located in the back matter of the book.

Gutter is the white space formed by the inner margins of two facing pages, front and back of a leaf, nearest the spine, in a bound book.

Hardback (Hardcover) is a book with stiff boards, which is bound and covered in either cloth, paper and in some special arrangements, leather.

Headpiece is a type ornament or decoration appearing at the start of a section or chapter of a book.

Index is an alphabetical listing of names or topics, with the corresponding page number, to facilitate quick reference to the contents of the work. The index is usually located in the back, or back matter, of a book.

International Standard Book Number (ISBN) is an identification number uniquely assigned to every book that is obtained from the R. R. Bowker Company, which identifies the binding, edition and publisher of a book.

Leaves are the sheets of paper that make up a book. An odd numbered page is one side of a leaf and an even numbered page is the other side.

Library of Congress Catalog Number (LCCN) is a unique number assigned by the Library of Congress to a given work for cataloging and identification purposes.

List Price (Retail Price) is the retail price that is printed on the book, usually established by the publisher, although there are some POD Publishers that let the author establish the retail price on their books. The price is located inside the dust jacket on a hardcover, or on the back cover of a trade paperback. It is the price bookstores and other outlets use to sell the book, or as the basis from which discounts are determined. Author discounts and royalties are usually based on this set price.

Octavo is the term originally used to refer to the number of folds (eight) in a standard book-printing sheet, but now the term commonly refers to the size of a book. The most common book size since the early 17th century is an Octavo book that averages about 6 X 9 inches, which is the typical size of hardcover and trade paperback books.

Page Layout is the assembly of the elements on a page, including text and graphics.

Perfect Bound is a method of binding in which signatures are folded and collated on top of one another and held together by adhesive and attached to the cover. A process typically used for trade paperbacks.

Point Size (Font) is a typographic unit of measure. The size of the print in the text of a book.

Preface is the introductory portion of the book that explains why the book was written, or what it is about, or how to use it, or the scope of the book.

Prologue is the text that appears at the beginning of a story, which usually sets the stage or introduces the story.

Recto is the right hand page of an open book and is the front of the leaf, the odd numbered page.

Signature is a group of folded pages that, when bound and trimmed with other signatures, form a book.

Simultaneous Edition is two different versions of a book published at the same time, such as a hardcover and a trade paperback.

Spine is the part of a book opposite the opening, which is visible when the book is shelved.

Subtitle is a secondary, and usually explanatory, title typically used to explain the book in more detail.

Table of Contents is the list of a book's chapters, a chart that features the sections of a book along with the page numbers.

Title is the name of (on) the book.

Title Page is the page of the book which contains the title and name of the author.

Trade Paperback is a quality paperback or soft cover book. A format increasingly considered as a less expensive alternative to hardcover publication.

Trade Paperback Original (TPO) is the term for a book first being released as a trade paperback rather than a hardcover.

Trim is the final dimension of a book after the printer or bindery has cut it to size.

Verso is the left-hand page of an open book and is the back of the leaf, the even numbered page.

Working Title is a preliminary title used to refer to a book as it is being written, before the official title is decided.

I realize there are a lot of terms listed here and you certainly don't need to be well versed, but more specifically just familiarize yourself with their usage. That way if someone mentions one of these terms, you will at least know what it means, or you can look it up.

These terms should help you to understand and appreciate what is involved in the creation of a book, because, again, it is your product and you should know about everything that goes into the packaging of that product.

Most of these are basically industry standard terms for book production. No different than realizing how any other product is put together. Where they become important is their usage in the creation of your book. How will you package it? What will you need to accomplish that task, to finalize the package?

If you know and understand the components of a book, then you can better understand what the process entails.

The last thing I would say is, don't get overwhelmed by all of this. You really don't have to be a book guru, but simply have an understanding of the process and the product. Use this section as a reference that you can review on occasion or look up a term. Relax and good luck.

Selecting a Print-on-Demand Publisher ... Time to do Your Homework!

This is where the real work begins. Now that you have a completed and presumably properly edited manuscript, the next step on the journey is to research, find and select the Print-on-Demand Publisher that will bring your work to market. There are numerous POD Publishers (somewhere in the neighborhood of forty [50, 60?] plus, as of this writing) to choose from, so you need to do an extensive amount of homework (research), before you make any decisions.

Before we go any further, let us review the various types of publishing options currently available to the writer for clarification.

The first is traditional (also known as standard, trade or royalty) publishing. Usually accomplished through an agent, the writer is typically offered an advance (front money against future royalties) for the purchase of the rights to their work.

The traditional publisher will work with the writer to enhance, improve or otherwise strengthen the manuscript, usually in conjunction with an editor assigned by the publisher for that purpose.

In addition the traditional publisher will pay for and promote a marketing campaign to sell the book. They will be able to get your book in bookstores, big box discount stores, online stores and all the other venues. As sales of the book begin to come in, the publisher will send the writer (usually their agent) royalty checks, assuming the advance has earned out. This is the Holy Grail all us writers hope to achieve.

These publishers can be one of the better known publishing houses now under the blanket of some conglomerate, an independent publisher, a university press, or other type of publisher that offers an advance (sometimes a token advance, or none), and pays for the printing, marketing and promotion, advertising and distribution. In other words they buy (license) your product and pay the

expenses to bring that product to market and reimburse you for the use of that license. This is as good as it gets.

The second layer of publishing is called Subsidy (or co-) publishing. The publisher and writer join forces to publish and promote a book, usually on a fifty-fifty basis, or some other combination acceptable to both parties. The costs of printing, promotion and expenses are born according to the split and the royalties are also divided according to the split arrangement. However, this form of publishing can take on many forms, all of which require the author to put up some front money to launch the book. Not necessarily a bad thing, but an option that requires a full understanding of what you, the writer is getting into. If it works for you, and pencils out favorably, then make your decision accordingly, but always proceed with caution.

Unfortunately, there is a real distrust in the industry any time the author has to pony up money, so any situation where that is required is automatically dismissed as suspect. However, there are aspects of the industry where certain conditions will prevail because the author chooses to accept them, such as a co-publishing arrangement.

In addition, there are trade publishers that require their authors to buy a set amount of books as part of the deal. While the author technically is not paying for any of the publishing process, this concept still forces the author to front some of the expense and puts some guaranteed money into the pocket of the publisher. Whether this is an acceptable practice is really up to the author to decide. Certain situations may work for a particular author and should not be condemned outright. Other types of arrangements that require authors to front some costs just may also be acceptable to the author. It's really their choice. Of course, the author should always fully understand what they are getting into. In every situation, caveat emptor should prevail!

The third layer of publishing is the original self-publishing (vanity) option. Basically, the author pays for the entire publishing process and will be responsible for all the steps, including the cover art, formatting and printing. The author will also need to handle all the marketing and promotion, but the author gets to keep one hundred percent of the profits. In effect, creating a small business that will bring the product (book) to market independent of any publishing house.

Until very recently, those were the only options available to publish a book. With the advent of print-on-demand technology, a whole new industry entered the landscape, offering writers a fourth option commonly referred to as POD. While POD, short for print-on-demand is actually a technology, but has become the acronym for a type of publishing business model.

Let us take a moment here to further clarify the concept of print-on-demand. Print-on-demand or POD is a technology for creating books one at a time, as opposed to offset printing that usually requires a minimum run of several hundred or several thousand printed books at a time. The print-on-demand model, while usually a higher cost per printed book, will not require inventory control or warehousing, simply because books are only printed as needed and usually will not accept returns of those printed books.

Many traditional publishers, whether large, small, or independent are either starting to use, or are already using this technology to print books. This does not automatically mean they are POD Publishers, but simply a publisher that uses this technology. This concept is totally different from what has become to be known as the print-on-demand publishing business model.

Print-on-demand technology allows a publisher to keep a book “alive,” rather than letting the book go “out of print.” It also allows a publisher to do “short runs” rather than committing to a minimum, or committing to a large run of books from an offset print run, that would require inventory control and warehousing. It also allows a publisher to reprint a backlist title as requested, rather than having to commit to a minimum offset print run to satisfy those few requests.

However, with the advent of the technology, POD, or print-on-demand, more commonly refers to a “publishing” option, rather than a “printing” option. Consequently, if a publisher says they use POD, which means using the technology of print-on-demand to produce their books, it is often assumed they are a POD Publisher, when in fact they are far from that simple designation.

The confusion is further advanced by the concept that by using one of the many “POD Publishers” you are getting your manuscript published, by a “publisher.” In fact, what you are doing is paying for a print technology, to get your manuscript converted to a book form, from a company that is providing that service.

Print-on-demand is the technology used to create books. It is the same as saying offset printing of books. It is simply another option in the production cycle.

As I mentioned above, self-publishing, that is the author paying to have their book published, has always been around. But now with this new technology, it has become much more cost effective to do.

Okay, let's go back to the original point. Using print-on-demand technology by a publisher is no different than using any technology to create books. It is all part of the print cycle. And if we keep the focus on the technology not the concept we should be able to make the distinction.

Now, let's continue further. With the advent of this new technology, a slew of companies sprang up incorporating this technology as their business model to produce books. Basically they "sell" the author the service for a fee, which at the end of the day, is self-publishing. Basically, what these companies are doing, is taking the once unattainable self-publishing model and brought it to the mainstream.

Again, this is not a bad thing. In fact it is a great revolution for the author, to have a new and exciting and cost effective option to turn that manuscript into a book. It is a printing technology that has become a publishing option. Just don't confuse the two!

Let's say that one more time. The technology that became the acronym, that became the publishing model, that really is a type of printing option, not a publishing option. But we have moved so far beyond that concept! Consequently we now have POD, or Print-on-Demand Publishing, as a business model!

Print-on-Demand quickly gained a reputation for being the quick and dirty way of publishing. The easy way out and more importantly, not up to the industry standards. Unfortunately, in the early days, as the technology developed, books were of a substandard quality. Stories of books falling apart and pages yellowing before the book was sold were the norm. Combined with the unedited or just plain bad manuscripts being turned into books, the publishing industry as a whole quickly condemned the process and the glut of POD books were dismissed as substandard work, not to be taken seriously.

To say POD got off to a rough start is putting it mildly, some will say it is still in the rough start stages and may never get out.

One of the problems with the POD format of publishing is its inability to comply with industry book standards. While the quality of the book may have improved, the result of printing that one book at-a-time is a higher per book cost, which causes the retail price of the book to be set higher. The higher price per book, coupled with the smaller margins, makes it harder to get the book into bookstores, especially the big box discount stores, where industry set discounts of up to fifty-five percent are expected.

In traditional publishing, books are created on an offset press with set run sizes, significantly lowering the per book cost based on the number of copies ordered. This not only lowers the cost of the per book price, but it also allows for the availability of huge discounts at the big box stores. Interestingly, however, when you factor in the cost of warehousing the boxes of printed books from print runs, the per book cost will actually price out higher.

Until recently, Print-on-Demand books were not returnable (and many POD publishers still do not have this option, or may offer the option for additional fees), which made it harder to convince bookstores to carry a copy of the book. All bookstores operate under the premise that books are returnable to the publisher if they are not sold, thereby removing the risk for the bookstore, an industry standard that originated during the Great Depression. Returns are an aspect of the book business that is continually hotly debated. How returns are handled is a unique option that is worth researching.

The competition is already great for shelf space under the current standards, but to try and compete outside that standard just closes the door even faster. Print-on-Demand Published books have little or no chance generally of getting into bookstores, certainly not on a national level. Without a sales force out there selling your book, and with the industry set discounts, a bookstore is not likely to stock your book just on your say so.

The other issue is the marketing and promotion of the book. Most (all) Print-on-Demand Publishers leave the marketing and promotion to the author. Often times this concept gets lost in translation. The author often assumes, since his book is being “published,” that the publisher will take care of the marketing and promotion for them. Let’s think about that for a minute.

If we were talking about a traditional publisher that has agreed to purchase the author’s work with the ultimate intention of making money off the sale of the

finished book, of course they will pay for marketing and promotion. The traditional publisher wants the product (book) to be a hit, so they can recoup their expenses and hopefully make a profit.

Unfortunately, we are talking about a POD publisher here that will make their money on the fees advanced by the author to get their book into print, period. The publisher will also make their money with the added fees of author purchased copies. Basically their job is done. They made their profit.

Yes, logic says they will make more money if more books are sold, but they haven't expended any money for this book (product) to do that. They haven't put out any money to promote the work, so there is really nothing for them to recoup. They made all their money up front. So, without any effort by the author, a few copies may get sold, but by now, the publisher has already moved on to the next author that will pay a fee to get their book "published." The more writers submitting, the more fees they collect. This is how the POD Publisher makes their money. It is as simple as that.

However, the biggest rap on Print-on-Demand is its reputation of being willing to publish (print) pretty much anything that is sent to them. There are no editing steps at the publisher level, you submit it, and they will publish it. The barrage of books filled with typos, grammar and content problems, far exceeded the number of books that were acceptable. Of course there are nuggets to be found, but with so many bad ones, everyone stopped looking, further adding to the dismissal of the industry as a whole.

Over the last few years, there have been a slew of negative articles written about Print-on-Demand Published books and POD Publishers in general. An almost throw up the hands reaction, to learning that a book was published through a Print-on-Demand Publisher. Pretty much as soon as it is learned a book was published through a POD Publisher, all credibility is lost (and I do speak from experience).

I don't think that will change overnight and it may even get worse before it gets better, but it will get better. Print-on-Demand Publishers will merge, while others will disappear or consolidate, thereby refining the industry.

The technology will get better and ultimately the costs will come in line with acceptable standards, or will ultimately set the standards. This will allow the product to somehow find its way into bookstores and the like. Of course this

won't happen overnight, and it may take several years to surface, but POD will establish its place in the industry.

The best thing going for print-on-demand is the lack of inventory, which means no warehousing. That alone may resolve the cost per book problem. If you consider the cost of warehousing and inventory control added to the cost per book for an offset run, that cost might price high enough to compare with the cost of a print-on-demand book.

As the technology matures and the logic starts to point to a print-on-demand model, rather than a large print run of books that need to be stored or warehoused somewhere, a standard will be established that will merge the two industries.

That all may sound like so much theory, with no substance at the moment, but as with any industry, companies can only buck the trends for so long before they start to embrace the changes and incorporate them into their own business model.

However, in the current state of affairs, Print-on-Demand Publishing, that is "the for a fee POD Publishers, are still lumped into that" not accepted on any level category. And there is something to be said about that classification.

So, what is a writer to do?

That is why I said earlier that you, dear writer, would really need to do your homework (research) before selecting a POD Publisher. With so many companies to choose from, there has to be a process of elimination.

To start with, search the Internet. You will find article after article talking about, against and everything in between on print-on-demand in general. Most of these articles will mention a POD company, good or bad, which they have focused on.

There are also several books on the subject that the writer can refer too. Start to build a list of POD companies and keep a pro and con column going for each. Make comments of what is liked about a particular company, or disliked. You really need to spend time doing that research, because it is the only way you can get familiar with the Print-on-Demand Publishers that you may be considering.

Use caution in selecting your POD Publisher. Maybe the best choice isn't one of the bigger names, but perhaps a POD Publisher that isn't so mainstream, or that has not been around that long. Maybe a POD Publisher that isn't so well known, that may have a reputation, good or bad. The logic for this is simply to use a POD Publisher that isn't being used by everyone else at the same time. I know, at the end of the day, it is still POD, but... Well, it is a thought.

Once the search is completed, start to narrow down that list. Will that Print-on-Demand Publisher provide the services you want (need)? Does that publisher offer the type of book, hardcover, trade paperback, format style, you want?

How is their contract worded? Are there clauses you are not comfortable with? What about the rights to your work? Do you keep them? If not, how do you get them back? How are rights handled? Don't let this one slip by. You do need to know this.

Lastly, what is it about this publisher that turns you on, or off? What does your gut say? What do others, the blogs, and articles and anything else you find say about that POD publisher?

Above all don't be swayed by cost. Remember, you get what you pay for, which also holds that, just because you pay more, doesn't mean you will get something better, on the contrary, you will probably get pretty much the same thing, just more expensive.

Before you can make your final selection, you have to determine if this POD Publisher will be the best option for your new business venture. Remember, you are starting a business, that is, the sale of your product, your book. So, the question becomes, will this company, the POD Publisher, be the best co-partner in your business venture?

As with any business venture, you will need to compare the costs of each of these publishers you are considering and how that will impact your business model. Are the setup fees reasonable, or in line with what you want to produce? How much control will you have? Should you have? How will the retail price of the book be set? Is that acceptable? How are royalty payments calculated? How are they paid? When are they paid? What are the author discounts? What are the discounts based on? All of these questions need to be considered and addressed before selecting your POD Publisher.

In addition, many of these POD Publishers offer a myriad of other services, ranging from editorial to marketing assistance and a whole bunch of things in between. Choose wisely as these services will cost extra, sometimes significantly more, and may not give you the results you want, or expect, or need.

For one thing, I firmly believe that you should have your manuscript edited by an outside objective person, (which will probably be more expensive) rather than by someone associated with the publisher that makes money by the writer using that service from the publisher.

There just might be a conflict-of-interest, at the very least a vested interest, rather than an objective opinion. All I'm saying is proceed with caution. Remember it is your product, your book!

On the other hand, additional marketing services may be worth it, since logic says they will also make more money by selling more books, but remember they are not in the business of selling books, so what will this service do for you is the real question.

You have to weigh that option for yourself. Pencil it out, and then price it out. What do you really get? How much will it cost? Will it be beneficial to you? The first order of selection is to pick the POD Publisher you feel is the best suited for your work and expectations and then review the other services.

Once you have narrowed your list of publishers, check out their websites. Print out their contract and review it until you understand it and if you don't you might want to have an attorney look it over. Whatever you do, make sure you are comfortable with what you are about to sign (agree to). Know what you are committing to. Do they offer what you are looking for? Do they have the services you need? Can they fulfill your requirements? What do others say?

I picked the Print-on-Demand Publisher for my first book through referral. I did my second book with them because I was already with them and that made the decision easy. However, I choose a different POD publisher for my third book because I did do my homework. I researched and read, then researched some more and read some more. I broke it down into what I needed (wanted) and made my choice based on several factors.

The one thing that was most important to me was the quality of the actual book. I felt that the product had to be the best to give me any kind of chance, specifically good cover art, inside formatting and a very high production standard.

Once I made my choice of publisher, for my third book, I ordered one of that publisher's books, similar to what I thought mine would be like, before continuing. I wanted to see with my own eyes what one of that publisher's books would look like. As you know, in an earlier chapter, I went into an in depth discussion about book production that you may want to review to get a better understanding of what I am talking about.

Remember, your book is the product that you will be selling. It is your product that has your name on it. It is your product and since you are paying for the production of that product, you need to make sure it is what you want, what you expect. To accept any less puts you at a greater disadvantage than you already are.

Do everything you can to make the work perfect. Then do everything you can to make the product perfect. Then, and only then, do you have a chance of bringing a product to market that just might rise to the top of that quagmire and be recognized.

It is way too easy to get caught up in the fact that your book is being published, but we need to get our heads out of the clouds and pay attention to what is going on. Believe me, I was just as guilty with my first book and probably just as much so with my second book

More specifically you need to take charge of the project and if you don't want to, or can't, don't do it, because to just sail along will leave you frustrated and wondering why this didn't work. All that Print-on-Demand Publisher is doing for you is turning your manuscript into a book with a few helpful steps, but the rest is up to you. All the rest is up to you. I'll say that again – all the rest is up to you!

Remember you are the customer buying a service. You do get to have it your way and in most instances the publisher will work with you, especially if prodded hard enough. Don't just accept anything the way it is, ask why you can or can't have something.

In order to better understand the industry, I have included at the end of this section, a few publishing terms that you should familiarize yourself with, because again, the more you know the better appreciation you will have for the publishing process. Keep reminding yourself you are in the business now.

Advance copies, or Advance Reader's Copy, or ARC, a prepublication edition of the book, generally used to generate reviews and publicity. Typically this is not available from POD Publishers, because books are created quickly and there is no lead-time for printing and production. However, some reviewers prefer to see this format rather than a finished book, so you won't be able to submit to them. Don't dwell on it just know about it.

Backlist refers to books published previous to the current season that are still in print. Not really something to think about in the POD world as our books are always "in print." In the early days, POD books were classified as back listed or out of print, because the books didn't physically exist until they were ordered. Just another term to know and why it may be used.

Book Fair is an event, or trade show, where publishers promote their upcoming books. As a POD Published author, you in effect are the publisher. If there is a local book fair in your area you might want to consider participating. Something to think about as this is also another event where an author might be able to do a book signing. Remember, the name of the game is exposure.

Books in Print is a database managed by R. R. Bowker, based on the ISBN numbers issued by them to publishers of books in print. This is the "ID" of your book. It is assigned and set up as part of the publishing phase. However, I understand that getting an ISBN is an option from some POD Publishers, so make sure you understand how that is done and more importantly, understand why you need one. It is also included in the bar code on the cover of your book for processing (sales) and other identification. With an ISBN your book will appear in the books-in-print database for ease of ordering.

Brick and Mortar is an acronym for a physical bookstore, as opposed to an online bookstore. It is near impossible to get a Print-on-Demand Published book into one, certainly not nationally, because the discounts are not favorable and the books are not returnable, an industry standard for bookstores. If you are able to open a few local bookstore doors, the quality of the books, both in appearance and content will be very important.

Damages – Hurts & Refurbished, is part of the return process problems. Once a book is returned by the bookstore (or big box store) the book has to be checked by the warehouse receiving the book back to determine if the book is re-saleable and can be put back into inventory. Otherwise if the book is damaged, no longer in a saleable condition, the determination is made whether the book is too damaged – hurts – or if the book can be saved – refurbished. The even darker side of returns, not only will the publisher get the book back, but the book may be too damaged to resell! Ouch, as in that hurts!

Distributor, a distribution company, that warehouses, catalogs, markets and sells books to bookstores, libraries and wholesalers on behalf of publishers. Typically the Print-on-Demand Publisher will use one of the major distributors such as Ingram or Baker & Taylor to distribute their books, even though there is no inventory to warehouse, but it is how bookstores order books. However the discounts are low and the margins are very slim. I had my local bookstore order copies of my second book from their distributor and their discount was only 15%. It is often best to order books (even for bookstores) direct from the POD Publisher, usually they will get a 30% discount, or better. You should check this out and understand all the discounts and margins as part of your publisher research, because it is how your book will be distributed. A must know.

List Price (Cover Price) is the suggested retail price that is printed on the book (on a hardcover, it is on the dust jacket). The POD Publisher, based on several factors, usually determines the price. Although there are some POD Publishers that let the author set the list price, typically the price is based on the number of pages in the book. Because POD books cost more to produce, the cover price is usually higher than a comparable book printed on an offset press. Author discounts are usually (and royalties may be) based on a percentage of the list price. You do need to know and understand how all this works.

Marketing is a concerted effort of promotion and advertising by the publisher (YOU) to maximize sales of books to the public.

Marketing Plan is the establishment of a comprehensive plan for selling the book that includes the creation of a budget, a sell sheet (usually provided by the publisher), the target audience, demand for the book, potential distribution channels, promotional materials (usually provided by the publisher) and a timeline to set in motion. Remember you are the biggest, and usually the only, promoter for your book.

Media Kit is a folder of promotional materials used for announcing information about a forthcoming book to the news media and other targeted outlets. The kit may include excerpts, reviews, quotes from individuals praising the work and a standard press release.

Out of Print (Out of Stock) is the designation of a title no longer maintained in the publisher's catalogue or inventory where the publisher doesn't intend to reprint. A phrase commonly used in the world of traditional publishing. Books were usually created in print runs and if the book was not that popular the publisher often chose not to do another run once the original stock ran out. In the world of POD, a book is never out of stock, because they are created as needed. In the early days, POD books were often listed as out of print because they didn't physically exist until they were ordered. Not something to dwell on, but be aware of the concept and why it happens.

Permission (Plagiarism) is the permission to reproduce, quote or copy work material from a copyrighted work from the copyright owner, usually in written form. Without permission, it is plagiarism to use copyrighted work as your own work. You should be especially careful here, because without someone vetting your work to check for these situations, as is common in traditional publishing, work you produce may be cause for liability later. Remember, as your own publisher (because POD is self-publishing) it is solely on your shoulders to get the permissions or clearances to use and/or reproduce another's copyrighted work. If you can't get permission, don't use the materials. This is very much a publishing issue. Make sure you know and understand what you are doing before you do it. If you are not sure, ask someone, seek help and advice, don't plough ahead assuming it will be okay.

Positioning is the placing of your book in a category, established by the Book Industry Standard and Communication group (BISAC). The publisher is usually the one who makes this determination. However, a POD Published book will need to be placed by the author, because the author is the publisher. As part of your marketing and promotion, you will need to determine what category your book belongs in and market around that designation.

PP&B is the acronym for paper, printing and binding, which is the bulk of the total cost associated with manufacturing a book, usually higher for a print-on-demand book. Don't dwell on this, just know it.

Press Release is an announcement of a new book sent to a news organization for publication.

Print-on-Demand (Print Run) is the technical capability to print and bind books in small quantities, specifically one at a time, as books are requested or ordered, rather than print runs of 1,000 or 5,000 or 10,000, or more, as is (was) the norm using offset printing to create books.

Proof Copy (Printer's Errors) is a reproduction of what the printed book should look like and is free of printer's errors, such as smudges, smears and inkblots on pages, prior to going into production. Some POD Publishers refer to this copy as the author's "free" book. It's not, you are supposed to get it!

Publicity Tour is a public circuit an author makes to publicize a book, either prior to or soon after the publication date. Typical places and appearances include book signings, book fairs and other book events. As a Print-on-Demand Published author, this would have to be arranged and set up by you the author, because you are also the publisher.

Publishing Agreement is a contract detailing an author's agreement to publish their work with the publisher, the author's and publisher's respective obligations under the agreement, the author's compensation and other provisions.

Publishing Format is the physical form in which the book will appear, typically a hardcover or trade paperback. Most POD Publishers usually publish in trade paperback format, but may offer both formats as an option. The format is also referred to as the edition.

Publication Date is the date when the publisher announces that a particular book will be available for purchase and distribution.

Public Domain is previously published work that has let the copyright expire, or was never copyrighted and is no longer protected by copyright. (See Permissions/Plagiarism for further details.)

Publicity is a marketing technique using free advertising outlets such as press releases.

Publicist is a hired person who prepares promotional materials and schedules media appearances such as book signings. This can be a very expensive option,

but often times, it is quite successful. Do the research on services and prices and decide whether to do it yourself or hire out, or a little of both.

Retail is the sale of books at the full listed price directly to the public.

Returns are the ability of retailers to return books for a full refund (usually they haven't paid yet and just return the books) back to the publisher. In the world of POD, returns are almost non-existent, or are set up for an additional fee, with certain restrictions. One of the biggest obstacles of getting POD books in Brick and Mortar stores is the non-return policy. Bookstores are accustomed to sending books back for a full refund, which is why they take a chance on any book. There is no commitment to buy until the book is sold. Basically since books are not printed until ordered, there is no inventory, no stocking of a supply of books, so if a bookstore orders a book, then wants to return it, there is no place to return it...

Return on Investment (ROI) is the amount of profit made after investment costs and other costs have been recouped. In other words, any money left over after all the fees, book purchases, marketing and promotion and general expenses are recouped is considered profit, or ROI.

Rights are the permission's granted by a copyright holder (you) that allows someone else (a publisher), to sell the copyrighted work. Typically with POD Publishers, the author retains all the original rights. However, make sure you read and review the contract you are signing and fully understand your rights to your work and what happens or doesn't happen to them.

Royalties are a percentage of a book's gross or net sales paid to the author as specified in the publisher agreement, signed (or executed) by the author. Another item to look for in your research, in determining which Print-on-Demand Publisher will be right for you. What are their royalty percentages, schedule of payments, benchmarks or plateaus and how are they paid, check or direct deposit?

Sell In is the ability of the publisher to get books out to the public through bookstores, big box stores and other venues and/or how well the retailers have responded to this book.

Sell Sheet is a concise, one-page document, resembling a flyer more than a press release, which provides details about the book. The sell sheet is usually created and supplied by the Print-on-Demand Publisher.

Sell Through is how well the bookstores or other venues have sold their copies of the book. Basically how well books are selling and not being returned.

Self-Publish is taking on the role of author, editor, publisher, marketer and distributor of one's own work. Even though you have an actual publisher, for all intents and purposes, publishing with a Print-on-Demand Publisher is still very much self-publishing.

Simultaneous Editions is having two different versions of a book published at the same time, such as a hardcover and trade paperback. Many of the POD Publishers allow you to produce both versions simultaneously, but don't! My advice is to choose one format or the other and concentrate on that version.

Termination Clause is the clause in a publishing agreement that specifies particular behavior, actions or events that would result in nullification of the contract. All agreements should have this clause, both for the author and the publisher's protection.

Trade Paperback is a book that is bound with a heavy paper cover. It is often the same size and bears the same cover illustration as the hardcover edition and is usually bound with glue only.

Traditional Publishing is a term used for the regular form of publishing, also commonly referred to as commercial, trade, standard or royalty publishing. A fairly new term that has garnered a lot of mileage with the advent of Print-on-Demand Publishing. (See my rant in the Introduction section for a further discussion on this term.)

These are just a few of the terms found in the world of publishing, which would be beneficial for you to know. Hopefully you will not be surprised by a term or more importantly, you will know the term when going through the stages of publishing your book. Stay informed, but don't get overwhelmed by any of this. These terms and definitions are basically for reference purposes so that you can be more informed while pursuing or preparing to use a Print-on-Demand Publisher to publish your manuscript.

The Print-on-Demand Publishing Process ... No Turning Back Now!

All right, here we go. You have narrowed down and possibly even selected the specific Print-on-Demand Publisher for your book. You know a little bit about publishing and you should know what a book is, so ... you are ready to start the process and turn your manuscript into a printed book.

The first thing you should do is familiarize yourself with the upload, or submissions requirements of the POD Publisher that you selected. Typically, you can download or print a copy of these requirements (or both), so that you can review the instructions before starting the process.

Most POD Publishers will let you print out these instructions in the form of a checklist. The process is usually pretty straight forward, but if you haven't done anything like this before, it might be a bit daunting. Again, you tech savvy folks have your laugh and move ahead.

Next, you should have all of your information together to upload, before starting the process that is your "upload, or submission package." In addition to your manuscript, you should have your cover art or at the very least an idea of what you want for your cover, the disclaimer page wording, the dedication and/or acknowledgement pages, author blurb and photo, book synopsis, ad copy and anything else you may want in the front or back of the book.

It is best to have everything ready before you start, so you are not trying to put your package together during the upload process, and yes you can usually always add or change items later. You will also need your credit card to complete the upload process to pay the setup fee and the fees for any additional services you are purchasing.

Get your checklist, gather your items and do a trial run, make sure you have all the pieces and you know what to do with them. In most cases the process is pretty straight forward, but if you haven't done this before it can be intimidating and a bit overwhelming. If you still have reservations, have someone with computer knowledge help you through this. Don't worry, if you don't get it right

the first time you can fix it, just tell your associate (or whatever the person is called) and they can walk you through it.

Once you are ready, follow the steps of the upload, submission instructions and wait to hear from the publisher. Typically, you will receive a confirmation email stating that your work has been received. Also at this stage, a person will be assigned to work with you to get the process completed and can help you, as well as answer any questions. This person will be with you throughout the process until your book is on your desk.

Okay, now take a deep breath.

As I mentioned, usually you will receive an email that tells you they have received the documents, the designate has been assigned to you and that the process has begun. If you don't receive an email in a couple of days, contact the publisher to follow up.

Your designate will work with you on developing the cover (on a hard cover, the dust jacket) next will be the formatting of the inside text. The publisher will usually secure the ISBN for you, unless that is an option that you need to pay an additional fee to get, but every book must have an ISBN, for ordering and identification, so make sure you do get one. However, you may need to ask about the Library of Congress Number and what is required to get one for your book, there may also be an additional fee required. The publisher may tell you that you don't need one or doesn't provide one, but ... the choice is yours.

Once these steps are completed you will be sent a proof copy of the manuscript in book form, typically as a PDF. This is your opportunity to make sure the inside of the book is formatted correctly, the point size, the headpiece, the chapter layout, the style, all are to your liking. This is also the time to make any minor corrections, even though you had the manuscript edited, typos can still slip through, stuff happens in the transfer, whatever, you need to review the whole proof. It will be your last chance to make changes.

I would recommend at least one read through, preferably two. At this stage you are not reading the work so much as reviewing it. If changes need to be made, submit a list of those back to your contact and another proof will be prepared and sent to you, which means you will need to do this again. Take as much time as needed to go through the proof very carefully. Make sure it is as good as it can be before you sign off and send the book to production.

With the first POD Publisher, I used, I had a time limit to respond to the proof, so be aware of the time limit as well. Set aside enough time to complete this task, but work within the publisher's requirements.

After you have signed off on the proof stage, the publisher will release the finished proof into production and a printed book will be created. You should then receive what is considered the proof copy of the actual printed book. Some POD Publishers consider this the author free copy. You need to read through and review this printed book. Yes, read it again. Make sure the printing didn't miss anything, a sentence dropped off, paragraph dropped and that the book is put together like you expected. No surprises. Any number of things can happen during the printing process.

It is often hard to imagine what the book will look like until you have the actual book in your hands. Sometimes that may be the only time you see something you don't like or need to change. That is why it is called a proof copy.

Once you are satisfied with the finished product - the actual printed book - give your final okay for the book to go to production. Order your author copies, at your predetermined author discount.

You should receive copies of your book in a week or two. Your book will be posted to the online sites and made available for purchase. Copies of the book should also be available for purchase direct from your publisher. That's it.

You now have a book that you can start selling and people can start buying! You have your product, now let's take it to market.

Marketing and Promotion

... Yeah, you have to sell the damn thing too!

Now that you have a book, you need to let others know that you have a book out and that your product is for sale.

There are a host of articles you should read and books that you may want to purchase, all on the subject of book marketing (I have several). This would be in your best interest to research, review and develop ideas. In fact, before you send the manuscript off to the Print-on-Demand Publisher of your choice, you should have already put together a basic marketing plan for your book.

Here are some general ideas for getting the word out.

Book reviews. Book reviews are a great way to get publicity and to get the word out to people that would otherwise not know your book existed. Unfortunately, with a POD book you will probably not get your book reviewed by any of the majors, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't try. There are a number of reviewers that will do POD books and that will get you legitimate reviews as well as exposure. The trick here is to get a number of reviews that you can include into your media (press) kit. The other factor here is to be selective in sending books out to reviewers. First, because of the expense, second to reviewers that you hope will review the book and respond fairly quickly. Lastly, be prepared for a tough or bad review. Reviews are a matter of opinion and should be taken as such. It is not personal (usually). If you do get a bad review, take the hit and move on, don't dwell on it. However, if they are all bad, you may have a problem!

Advertising. Placing ads are a great way to promote your book. Start with your local newspapers and local interest magazines. You probably won't be able (can't afford) to do any national advertising and it may not be beneficial, but anything you can do (afford) regionally may be beneficial and worth the expense. You should review your budget to determine where the advertising dollars are best spent. Spend your advertising dollars where they will be most effective, not where they may be lost or overlooked.

Publicity. Publicity comes in all forms, from reviews to ads to interviews to any mention in the print media. Reviews usually get posted either in print or online, maybe in a review site or blog or any number of combinations. Any post is beneficial. It is probably a good investment to advertise the launch of your new book in the local papers where you live, or perhaps to announce an upcoming book signing. Sometimes a simple mention in the calendar section of your local paper will let one more person know your book is out and available. Another form of exposure is interviews. Talk to your local paper, and/or local radio station about arranging an interview to announce the launch of your new or latest book. The idea here is to get exposure for your book any way you can.

Direct Mail. Direct mail and/or email are another form of letting people know about your book. Hit your address book to let friends and relatives know about the book. Maybe even an associates list or your email address book, but be careful here, you don't want to create a spam email and deluge people that might object to this type of solicitation. Post cards announcing your new book are another way of getting the word out.

Word of Mouth. Tell everyone you know or that will listen that you have a new or your latest book out. Get business cards printed up, not just the ones the publisher supplies about the book, but cards that showcase the book as well as you and don't say writer or author or wordsmith on the card, that is implied. Make a simple basic card that lists your book, or books, your name and address, email address, phone number and above all else your web site. Yes you should have (need) a web site. It makes you part of the online world. The web site can be as simple as listing your book, who you are, and how to order the book. You can hand someone your business card and tell them to check out your web site. That way, the person can look at your book and you at their leisure, rather than you having to hold their attention while you try to sell them a book.

Events. Hold events for your book. Do a book signing at your local library and make a contribution to the library. Maybe donate a book as part of the event. Check out local craft fairs around your town and see about participating or making copies of your book available. Maybe do a reading at one of the town's events. Join or participate in writer's groups, book clubs or other writer's events. Be creative, remember it is a product as well as a book and you need to make sales, so don't limit your events to book stuff, get out there and find other ways to promote it.

To summarize here, the name of the game is exposure. However, you accomplish that, the greater the likelihood someone will see your book and hopefully pick up a copy... and maybe even buy one!

In order to best maximize this effort you should start putting together a plan the day you finish the manuscript. Some say even before you type the first word.

If we look at the time frame from manuscript completion to book on the street, we should have a few months to work with. Your editor may take a month or two and the POD Publisher will take six to twelve weeks, so you will probably have a good three months to focus on putting together a plan.

The first step you want to do is figure out a budget (part of the business plan) for your marketing expenses. In addition to the setup fees and book purchases you will incur with the POD Publisher, you will need to set aside a figure for marketing and promotion. These will include advertising, travel costs, business cards, mailing materials and postage.

The second step, is to start researching and create a list of reviewers that you will query and/or submit your book to and why they would be beneficial to you, not just because they review books.

As I mentioned at the start of this section, it is harder to get a POD book reviewed. But there are a growing number of POD book reviewers, you just have to find them. There are also reviewers that may (or will) charge a fee for the review. Your choice!

My thought is to get three or more reviews if possible. Reviews are probably the best source of publicity, of getting the word out about your book. If you do nothing else to promote your book, try to get a couple of reviews.

The third step is to contact your local papers and inquire into their advertising rates, page layout and color or black and white print. Get some ideas of ads that you will want to place and cost them out.

The last area to consider is bookstores. While Bookstores should absolutely be another bullet point, I have elected to keep it out and discuss this option as a separate section.

A POD Published book has very little chance (read no chance here) of getting into most bookstores. However, there are other options to consider. Visit your local bookstores and talk to them about doing book signings or readings and signings, or events, at their stores. If they are not up to signings, ask them if they will carry your book on consignment and leave a few copies with them. No obligation on their part other than to stock the book. Typically the bookstore would like a thirty percent discount (or more) off the cover price for consignment.

Hopefully you received at least that much of an author discount, preferably more so you will make a little profit on these books. Either way, it still may be worth the cost for the exposure.

You should also create a list of bookstores that specialize in your genre and put together a package to mail to these stores about your book. Don't expect much here, maybe not even a response, but you do have to try.

Perhaps you can offer an incentive with your proposal, such as reviews to post with the book, a better discount, or maybe offer to pay their shipping costs.

Remember, most of the independent bookstores have a hard enough time staying in business with the mainstream published books. Taking on an unknown, especially with the slimmer margins, make these stores a bit hesitant to take the chance, so you need more than a "hey, here's my book for you to carry" attitude.

Unfortunately for us POD authors, bookstores are used to getting a forty percent (or higher) discount to sell the book. Remember the distributor also gets a cut, so a normal discount could be as high as fifty-five percent off the list price for the book to make it into the bookstore. Whereas a POD book may only have a thirty to forty percent discount and after the distributor takes a cut, the bookstore may only be getting a fifteen to twenty-five percent discount, plus they may have to pay shipping charges.

At present, under the current pricing, discounts and distribution practices, it is very difficult to place a POD book in a bookstore, not to mention you have to do all the work. There isn't a sales force or ad placement to let these stores know your book is out there. It is all on you, the author.

Learn and understand what goes into stocking a book in a bookstore. Remember there are many other books competing for shelf space in that bookstore, including books that might (will) have a better chance of selling than your book. During my summer internship at that major chain bookstore, I was amazed at the number of new books coming in every day that ultimately needed to be shelved, on already full shelves. In addition those “book” shelves were being squeezed by music, movies and gift item stuff. It is not much different in independent bookstores, because they really need to carry what sells and sells quickly and may be sharing space with other merchandise.

The Point here is that you need to figure out how best to make it beneficial to the store to carry your book. You already know why it would be beneficial to you.

I did a targeted mailing to ninety-six bookstores for my third book. (A caveat here, this publisher accepts returns.) I included a stamped postcard with the option of saying “Yes,” “No,” or “Go Away.” Several weeks later this is what I had:

15 responded, 4 Yes, 1 Maybe, 9 No, and 1 critiqued my letter!

That is a response ratio of 15.5% of which two-thirds said no! But, and a big BUT here, four said yes, which means four stores offered to carry my book, which means four more options for my book to be seen and hopefully purchased, than if I hadn’t done the mailing. Bottom line; you gotta try!

Bookstores are the albatross of POD books. But don’t get hung up on them. It’s not going to change overnight. Concentrate your budget and resources on everything else you can do to promote your book. There is so much more you can do than get hung up over getting your book into bookstores. Okay, enough of that.

The more planning you do ahead of time, the better prepared you will be when your book “hits the street.” You won’t be standing there with a box of books sitting on the floor of your living room wondering what to do next.

While this is a lot of work, time and expense, there is another way to go. You could hire a publicist, or marketing firm (or both) to help you do the work. The cost might be quite expensive, but the overall result may be more effective.

Remember, you are a business now and the best business decision may be to pay a firm to do the legwork for you. It is one more item on the expense side, but may result in better book sales, which means another item for the income side. Certainly something to consider.

Marketing and promotion is hard enough, even if you could do it full time. However, most of us have a “day job.” While there are books, blogs and articles on how to market and promote your book, when do you have the time? First, you have to read all the material. Then you have to have a “game” plan. Then you have to do it! And some of us just may not have the “moxie” to do it!

But, even if we had the time, the expenses of traveling around from place to place, promoting, signing, or knocking on doors, would far exceed what we would make for our efforts, in selling those few books.

Without a sales force behind us, like a publisher, our meager efforts can’t compete. We have to do everything we can to compensate for that shortcoming. No question it will take hard work, time and expense to be effective, but without it, we will have little or no chance of selling very many books.

Marketing and promotion are more important than anything else you will do in getting your book published, because if you don’t, you will just have that box of books sitting in your living room to hand out to friends and relatives when they visit.

Finally, as with any small business venture, the only way to get people to buy your product (your book) is to let them know about that product, tell them why they need to buy that product and convince them why they will be glad they did!

Web Site

... Yeah you do need one!

Web sites come in all shapes and sizes. Some POD Publishers let you have a link on their site. You can also piggyback onto other types of author sites...

Personally, I still believe the best solution is to have your own standalone site that focuses on you. Look at other author sites, both known and unknown writers for some examples. Feel free to visit mine at: www.dpmeyer.com as well. Okay, you tech savvy types, have your chuckle and move on.

If you are only a one-book author (and that's all you are ever going to be), perhaps the domain name could be the book name. However, I would recommend the domain name always be the name of the author. You know, you just might write that second book! Of course, if you are so inclined, you could have both web sites, with one linking back to the other. Again, my recommendation would be to have the main site in the author's name, rather than the book.

The web site can be pretty basic. Your site can be as simple as a home page, basically to introduce you and the book. Maybe a separate book page to further define, or showcase the book. You probably should have an "about the author" page. Lastly, you should have the ability for a visitor to be able to order the book directly from your site.

Typically the POD publisher will supply you with the link to your book on their site with a "buy now" button that you can put on your site. You could also include an order form so people can order your book directly from you. Of course, you should probably direct them to one of the online stores that carry your book, as well. The idea is to give the reader every option possible, to buy a copy of your book.

My first site was that simple and didn't change much with my second book. However, when I put out my third book, I decided to update my site significantly with new features and options, but still kept the site simple.

In addition to adding more information about the books, I updated the ordering options. At present you can highlight a book and order direct from the publisher, or you can select one of two online options direct from the book listing. I also have an order form, for the person to print out and order by mail, for those less tech savvy folks, like me! With three different options, I tried to make it as easy as possible for the reader to order my books right from my site.

Having a web site makes you part of the online world. Consider it part of your marketing and promotion functions. A web site is, after all, more exposure for the book. If you have the expertise, or are willing to pay for the service, you can have a site as elaborate as you want, all the pomp and circumstance, but I would still suggest keeping it simple and functional. All you are trying to do is sell books. Here I am, here's my book, here's how you can buy a copy!

The expenses for setting up a web site can vary widely. If you have the expertise, then by all means have at it, but if not, it would be well worth the cost to hire someone to put up a nice basic site for you. No shortcuts here.

Again, it is one of those things where you may have to incur the cost, because remember you are a business now and you have to decide what is best for the business, not what is easiest for you.

A web site is one of the expenses that should have been in your budget, but there is nothing wrong with keeping the cost down as much as possible. A basic site will work just fine.

That is about all I need to say about web sites.

Simply put, you need one!

Closing Comments

... Yeah, I get to ramble some more!

There are three basic reasons why someone would choose the Print-on-Demand Publishing route. I'm sure we could all make arguments for others, but when you cut through them it comes back to the basic three.

The first and foremost is ego. No question about it, there is no greater feeling than to have a copy of your freshly published (printed) book in your hands.

With the advent of print-on-demand technology, that goal is now more easily attainable. Just about anyone can have their manuscript turned into a book. So why not do it? Why play the game and try to get published the traditional way? Screw the establishment, they've been rejecting you for years anyway. Why not pay a reasonable fee and have a book in your hands in a few short weeks? Why the hell not?

The second is because you can. Before the print-on-demand technology and the surge of publishers offering that service for an affordable fee, it was quite costly to self-publish, not to mention quite involved, way beyond most writers' forte.

Let's not forget, that with the advent of computers it is easier to pound out a manuscript and now for an affordable fee, you can have your manuscript turned into a printed book and ready to go, so why not do it?

You do it because you can, simple as that. Just like that, the manuscript you pounded out last week can be a book by next week. Good God, let's hope not, but you certainly can do that now. Again, why the hell not?

The third is out of frustration. You simply get tired of the pitching and the waiting and the ultimate rejections and the time that passes by, especially when you know that you can have a book in six to twelve weeks.

Why should... no, why would you keep submitting and playing the game, when for a nominal fee you can have your book "published and in your hands in a matter of weeks."

When you realize just how long the traditional process takes (two to four years, if you are lucky), you start to question the logic of why you keep doing this. Responses to submissions can come within a couple of weeks, but more often than not the time frame is a few months, usually three to six months. Some agents and publishers post right on their web sites that it takes that long to respond. So you wait and you wait and sometimes you don't even get a response.

Yeah, I know, wah, wah, wah, quit whining, it's the way it works, everyone has to go through it to be accepted, to join the club. I agree completely and I did it for several years, but what I'm saying here is that now that we have this new technology, we have a new option. It doesn't mean it is the right decision or the best decision, but it is an option, even if it is born out of frustration. So maybe it is a reaction rather than a thoughtful decision, but frustration will do that to you...

Once you say I have had enough and start researching Print-on-Demand Publishers, you have crossed over to the other side. I will say though, that there is no greater irony than having your published book, even if it is POD published, sitting on your desk as you open the latest batch of rejection letters.

I am still a writer, well actually I am a storyteller that is learning to become a writer, but I am also continuing to learn the business side of writing. Since I had worked as an agent, and did a summer internship at a major chain bookstore, I felt I knew a little bit about the business, not that it gave me any greater advantage, but I do know and understand the basics.

I am still convinced that the best option is to go the traditional route, manuscript to agent, to editor (publisher) to bookstore to the public. For my third book, I even put together my pitch letter and my submission package. There were a few agents I had met in my travels that I thought I could start with. I was really all set to go... but didn't.

I'm sure many would say that I surrendered again, but I like to think that this time I made an informed decision, not out of frustration, nor because I can, but because I feel (believe) this is the right thing to do and with a publisher that produces a quality product that I can be proud of.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know how corny that sounds and that I am just trying to justify what I did, but you have to feel good about your decision and I have no regrets.

I had my manuscript edited by a former editor. I'm confident I did the best I could to present my story. I am pleased with the product (book) this publisher turned out. So at the end of the day, I have no hesitation having my name on my book. Books I am selling to the buying public and in the end, isn't that what this is all about anyway? To sell books?

I am currently hard at work on my next manuscript (actually the second leg of a new trilogy) and quite frankly I have not decided what to do yet. I can't. I have this vision that I will keep putting these stories (books) out there, the best and fastest way I can, while I work on my "epic" ... oh, don't we all have an epic in us? I will, of course, pitch the epic the traditional way, while I am creating more stories, the best of both worlds.

The point here is that whatever the reason you decide to use a Print-on-Demand Publisher for your book, just be aware of what it is you are about to do and above all, be sure you are comfortable with your decision. It is your manuscript, your work and if you do go the POD route, it is your product. Just make sure you do the best you can. Make sure it is your very best!

There are many reasons to go POD for your work. And, POD just may be the answer for you. You will have to decide that for yourself. Maybe you will be perfectly content to have a supply of "printed" books that you can hand to friends and relatives. Or, maybe that work of non-fiction is timely and you need it right now, as a companion to your speaking engagements. Or, simply so that you can have total creative control over your work...

Whatever your reason to go POD, make it the right reason, not just because you can. Print-on-demand has opened a whole new world for us writers, but it should not be taken lightly. Just because we can, doesn't mean we should. On the other hand, it does give us another option. POD Publishing puts the control back into our hands. And that's not all bad!

If you were to ask me what I would advise you to do, I would say without hesitation, don't do it! Yes, even though I have taken three books through the POD process, basically self-published all my books to date, I would still strongly recommend against doing it. I suppose you would like me to explain why I

would say that? Well, it is not easy to explain without going into a long-winded diatribe, but I'll try to keep it short.

Let's see, where should I start. Well, there is no question I first went with a Print-on-Demand Publisher to satisfy my own ego. There is no greater thrill than for an author to hold a copy of their printed book in their hands. Bar none! So when the opportunity presented itself, I jumped at it.

There was no thought about marketing and promotion or just what the hell I would do with this book once it was published (printed). Good God, no. Hey, my book is published, what more is there? And you know, that would have been okay. I had two completed manuscripts. I could spare one to give this a try. Besides, at the time, I honestly believed I was now a published author!

I was resigned to staying in the game and to keep submitting the other manuscript to agents and publishers, determined to see it through. Then one day, reason number three reared its ugly head. So out of frustration I said screw this and decided I was going to do my novel through the Print-on-Demand Publisher as well. I even used the same one again for convenience.

This is the moment where reality should have kicked in. Maybe the reason I was getting rejected was because the work wasn't ready, or my pitch wasn't effective, most probably both were lacking. So, rather than focusing on what I might be doing wrong, that old ego kicked in and rather than fix it and keep pitching, I decide to do this myself. In six weeks I had my second published (printed) book sitting on my desk.

[I should mention here that with the extensive amount of rewrite I did to that original manuscript, which was very much, the case, that this work wasn't ready!]

Of course I was no further along in the marketing and promotion of this book than I was with the first book. As usual, I hit all my friends and relatives to buy a book and since I live in a small town I was able to garner some local interest, but that is as far as the book got, no national exposure, most readers don't know my books are out there, probably never will.

I promised myself that with the third manuscript that I was working on I would absolutely play the game and go the traditional route, no matter what, positively, been there, done that thinking. Once I finished the manuscript I sent it off to my editor.

However, with other commitments and what have you, he took a little longer to get it back to me this time. That would be okay though, because as soon as I got it back and made the corrections, I'd put together my submission package and send it off.

Well, while I was waiting, I started doing some more research on POD in general and most of the information that I found was negative, almost bordering on hatred. You're not legit. You took the easy way out. Everything out there is junk. You have surrendered. The list went on.

I began to wonder if I should tell anyone how my first two books were published. Fortunately, I started finding some positive feedback. How this was going to revolutionize the industry, might even put a scare into the conglomerates, or something like that, anyway, maybe not so bad after all.

In my travels, I came across a Print-on-Demand Publisher that really piqued my interest. A different kind of publisher, one that offered the kind of options that I was most interested in. A publisher that I thought would fulfill my specific needs. Okay, interesting so far, although I still planned to go the traditional route. But the more I looked at this publisher, the more I thought about taking my manuscript this way again. [Unfortunately, this publisher has since converted to a traditional publisher, so I am forced to find a new publisher for my next works.]

I can't say that any one thing swayed my decision. I kind of just did it. This time I took control of what I was doing. I mapped out a marketing (business) plan, I took the time to lay it all out on paper, a blueprint of what I needed to do. I put together a budget, factored in all the steps and saw what this venture would really cost beyond the setup fee. I was going into this one prepared.

I have absolutely no regrets about having taken my first three books through the Print-on-Demand Publishing route, none what so ever. But, I wouldn't recommend that option to anyone! Yes, I did say I would not recommend!

First of all, there is a lot of work to be done that requires time and money to complete. It doesn't just happen. You really do have to do the work, invest the time and spend the money to get there. While I am doing the best that I can, knowing what needs to be done, it is nowhere near what should be done!

In addition, even though I'm very confident I put out the best work possible, how much better would it have been if I had an agent? Then had an editor (publisher) working with me to polish this work. Granted, they may have molded the work into something different (marketable) and maybe something I would not have liked. But, remember it is a product after all and that is what they do, they bring a product to market.

At the end of the day, the only true validation of your work, of your writing, is to be published by a trade, standard or royalty publisher. That is, to be traditionally published, simply because those publishers are in the business of creating and putting out a product.

It is just like any other product we may create. Sure I can build a bookshelf, but will it be as good as one made by a cabinet-maker? Will it be the best product it can be? And, who can do it better? Someone who is skilled at making bookcases, or me that maybe has some talent for doing this...

I'm starting to ramble here, but the point is simply this. Taking your work the print-on-demand route, that is self-publish, comes back to reason number two, because you can. It is not a decision, but an option. For some it may be a very successful venture, but you can be sure they worked at it very hard. For the rest of us, it may be an even more frustrating venture than that stack of rejection letters.

You often hear, or read about, that if all you want is a few copies to pass around, or sell to your family and friends, then POD is perfectly fine. I'm not so sure I can agree with that concept, because after all the work I put into writing that manuscript, I would want so much more than a few copies to pass out.

Yeah, I know, I went POD anyway, but I really did have greater expectations for my books. Yes, of course, it's up to me whether those books sell or not, but when you realize what it takes, the time, effort and expense involved, you quickly step back and say wow! (Actually, I had several other words to use, but didn't think I'd get it past my editor.) Initially, I thought I just wasn't putting in the effort, but again with a day job and other commitments, time has a way of slipping by.

I'm sure there are those real dynamos that are peddling books left and right, but even they are few and far between. Of course, a non-fiction work with a platform and an audience might have a better chance. But us fiction writers... we already

have such a huge uphill battle in the traditional publishing world that doing it on our own greatly increases our struggle.

I will say one last time, don't do it! But if you must, be sure you know what you are doing, how you are going to do it and be ready to suffer the consequences, whatever they may be. If you really do fully understand the ramifications, just maybe you will do it right, or maybe not at all.

Don't do it for any of the three reason stated above. If you must do it, make sure it is an informed decision, with all of the pros and cons worked out. Above all, make sure that you fully understand what it is you are about to do and why. Then ask yourself why. Then ask yourself why again.

I have gone to great lengths to include as much information about the traditional method of getting a book published as I did about the POD process. I did it for the simple reason that maybe if you better understand what is involved, perhaps a little more effort on your part in doing that will save you from doing this.

Read through this again and again. Then make sure you are satisfied with what you are about to do. Remember anyone and I do mean anyone, can get a book published through a Print-on-Demand Publisher, but very, very few can make it the other way. Wouldn't you rather be one of the chosen few? I sure would!

Whatever you decide to do, or not do, best of luck and start working on that next manuscript, because we writers need to write, that is what we do. Maybe we should leave it to the professionals to do the rest.

Best of luck in your endeavors, whatever they may be.

Appendix A

... My Journey, A Case Study!

While I was deciding what to do with my third book, which I did ultimately take through the POD route, I kept a running commentary of my journey. At one point I thought I might get that article published. When that idea didn't work out, and I started putting this tome together, I thought that article might be an appropriate inclusion here. This is a reworked version of that original article.

It is a blow by blow... ah, I mean, step by step chronology of the process as I thought it through, "kicked the tires" a bit and finally decided to go POD with my third manuscript. This time, I went with a different POD Publisher. Yeah, I know it is still POD, but... well, I explained all that already, so without further ado, here's the original article listing what I did and what I had to do.

* * * * *

POD – A Case Study

My latest work, another novel, had come back from my editor significantly marked in red as usual. I was considering what to do with it, go traditional, or whether to just submit it to the same Print-on-Demand Publisher as I had my first two books. Before I reached a decision, I proceeded to do some research and see what else was out there in POD land.

I did an exhaustive search on Print-on-Demand Publishing in general. I reviewed several articles and ultimately bought a couple of books on the subject. I remember when I did my first book, there were five of note, by my second book there were over twenty and now I find out there are over forty (50, 60). That sure makes selecting a POD publisher that much harder.

I began to compare and listen to what I was reading about the industry as a whole. I decided I needed something different, something that would take my manuscript to the next level. I believed I found that something in my next POD Publisher.

The first thing I did was peruse their web site several times just to make sure I wasn't missing something. I emailed their CEO directly with a few key questions that I needed addressed, to which he responded immediately. In the meantime, I downloaded a copy of their publishing contract and reviewed it thoroughly.

Okay so far. I then ordered one of their hardcover books that seemed to be similar in size to mine and waited. I received the sample book in a couple of days and I was quite impressed with both format and quality.

After considering several factors that were important specifically to me, I made the final decision to go POD again with this new publisher for my next work.

Deciding to go POD is more than just paying a fee to have your book printed. The more you understand about the book business, as well as the actual transition of manuscript to book, the better informed you will be in taking your product to market.

It is important to know and understand the nature of book production. The preparation of your manuscript, having it edited, selecting the POD Publisher that is right for you, the stages in designing and creating the actual book and finally the marketing of your product.

I have learned a lot more in taking my third book POD, than I ever knew with my first two. The more you learn (know) the better your chance is to have a viable product, because to do any less greatly reduces the little hope you have of being successful.

Okay now, back to the process.

After, the selection of my new POD Publisher, I signed back onto their website and proceeded to upload my manuscript, author bio and picture, jacket blurb and my ad copy, following a rather simple process. I received the "we received the work" email and waited for the next step.

Very shortly, I received an email discussing the cover options. Unlike my first two books, I did not have a visual on the cover this time and was at a loss. I was assigned a senior designer to work with and we discussed several options. Since it was a Friday we agreed to think about it over the weekend and discuss it again on Monday.

On Monday night (day job, you know) I had a return email with the first five samples of potential covers. A database of stock photography is used that will be enhanced, title overlay, graphics added, etc. As I reviewed the samples I kept coming back to a particular one. I offered some thoughts and suggestions. We went back and forth a couple of times and by the end of the week, we had a cover design.

A few days later I received an email with a sample of the interior formatting. Quite frankly, I didn't know there was such a thing as interior formatting, nor that I would have a say in it! I hadn't been asked that before and didn't know it was an option. Not knowing what to expect, I opened the PDF and reviewed the pages.

They were the layout for the inside cover sheets, the disclaimer page, some setup pages, the first chapter and the start of the second chapter. Basically it showed how the chapter headings would lay out, the headpiece used, how the margins (top, bottom, left, right) were spaced, scene breaks and print style. This was starting to look like a real book, pretty impressive so far.

Once I signed off on the formatting, I was informed the next step would be to continue that concept through out the rest of the book. I would then be sent a full layout of the interior.

While I was waiting, I started working on my marketing efforts. I researched information on running advertisements in the local papers. I met with my local bookstore (that has supported me in the past) and discussed the possibility of their carrying copies, as well as arranging a book signing in their store. I made a list of book reviewers I wanted to send the book to as well.

Also, I signed on with a "web site shop" to update my site with the new book information and to maintain my current web site on a regular basis. Previously it was hit or miss with updates, but now I wanted to have consistency, so I signed up for a maintenance program as well as updates.

I usually put together a budget, for launching a book, which includes the setup fee, book purchases, marketing efforts, including advertising, printed materials and general expenses such as travel and meals. I try to stay within those means until book sales can supplement future expenditures. It is a slow steady process, but so far it has been working.

My typical budget is \$2,500, which means, simply, I am prepared to spend that much to get my book launched without any expectations of income. Of course, I do expect to sell books and recover some of that initial expenditure, but the subsequent income typically will be used to buy more books (for me to sell direct), probably more promotion expenditures and certainly incidental expenses along the way.

A little dose of reality here. In order to recoup my expenses, I will need to sell, direct sales and royalties average, a few hundred books, just to break even. My first two books sold on average two hundred fifty books each, which means so far I am negative on those books.

However, with each new book, I have the potential of earlier books selling. It is an investment in myself. I have no specific expectation other than knowing my books are out there and are being read by people, but it is an expenditure with little expectation of financial return.

About the time I had my marketing planned out, I received an email with the completed interior formatting. This also served as my review, or proof copy, the first pass at reviewing the entire book for any and all corrections. I spent the next few days reading through the work (and reading again through it). I noted the errors I found and submitted them for changes. I got another copy, corrected, that I once again reviewed.

Once satisfied all was well, I signed off on the changes. However, my designer at the publisher sent me a list of recommended changes that she had found. Somewhat embarrassed, at not finding those myself I approved those as well.

I next received a full cover layout, which is the complete dust jacket, with the front, back, inside sleeves with author bio and annotation, price, bar codes and spine layout. After a change or two, we had a finished dust cover.

Once again I received an email with the full jacket cover, and the complete inside layout for one last review. Everything looked great and I signed off on the final product, releasing the files to the printer to create the book.

Shortly thereafter, I received the "Proof" Copy. That is, the finished copy of the book for final review (not the "free" author copy as claimed by my other POD publishers). I spent the weekend rereading (yes, again) and reviewing to make sure nothing got missed, or lost, or whatever, during the printing process.

The reason you get a "proof" copy of your book is to get one last chance to insure this is the product you want to present to the buying public. This is your first opportunity to actually hold a copy of the finished book in your hands, after all the changes, all the formatting and all the back and forth. I thought, it would be just a formality, that we had covered everything and I would say: "Okay, let's go," which I did.

Well, it happened. I missed a step. Actually I didn't know, or more specifically didn't realize that I had the option of determining the point (print) size of the book. I was just happy to be able to offer an opinion on the formatting.

I was completely satisfied with the dust jacket, the inside format and the book overall, I had already signed off on the proof, but after I sent the email saying so, I kept going back and looking at it. In the morning, I called my designer and we discussed the options. Since the book was not yet in production, we could make a change at this stage in the process. I truly believed the change needed to be made.

In the past, I was told that I could not change the print size that it was set based on something or other, so I just accepted it. When I ordered my sample copy from my new publisher, one of the features that most impressed me was the inside print font, a larger size for my tired old eyes.

If I had any doubts about switching to this publisher, this option removed them. Being able to get a "do over" after the fact was beyond my expectations, especially since it was my mistake.

Basically, we were starting over. I was sent a new sample of a page layout that I checked and double checked, measuring, comparing, generally looking at every angle. The reformatted inside was next, as the change affected page layout and page structure, which meant she created a new set of galleys that I had to read through again. Once that was completed, a new proof copy was created for my review.

Soon after signing off on the galley, I was informed that a new proof copy of the completed book would be coming. As soon as I received it, I did another read through to insure nothing had changed and that the book was "finished."

I soon received another set of emails with the book information. I was informed that my book was now available for ordering. The publisher had ordered my “author” copies that I would be using to send out for reviews.

The book was now listed on the publisher’s website. There were instructions on how to order my discounted author copies for direct sales. Included were the instructions for bookstores to order copies of my book direct from the publisher, because that will give the bookstore a bigger discount. Another email supplied me with the information, banner and formatted picture of the book for posting to my web site that I forwarded to my web person. I was on the way.

I contacted my two local newspapers and placed the ad announcing my new book was available and that there would be a book signing at the end of the following week. My very supportive local bookstore had ordered copies for me to sign.

On the evening before the book signing, I made one last check and was informed by the bookstore, that no, the books they had ordered had not arrived at the store.

For some reason way beyond my comprehension, it is a normal occurrence in the business to not have books available for your book signing, for a myriad of reasons. Everything from they were not ordered to they are backordered. Fortunately I did have the small supply that I was to use as my review copies that I was able to bring to the store for the signing.

There is nothing worse than being at a book signing without books. The lesson here is that it is imperative that you, the author, always, always, always have books in hand before you schedule a book signing.

In spite of that setback, the book signing went very well. I sold four of the books I had, which was a very good day. Average book signings sell one to two or no books. I live in a small town and with the ads, there was a local outpouring. However, now I did not have any books to send to reviewers. That process would have to wait until the bookstore got their copies and we swapped back.

The next step was to start contacting bookstores in the hopes of convincing them to carry my books, as well as continuing to announce that my book was available to just about anybody that will listen.

I had already sent the email to family and friends. I had requests from others in town that want a copy that I will fulfill directly.

My web site is being updated to list the new book and update the ordering process. I will continue to send out announcements, with the updated website and info on the new book. This will complete what I consider the launch phase.

In the next couple of months, when the initial hoopla of getting the book off the ground starts to subside, I will once again pitch the work to agents and publishers because, even though the book is out, it doesn't mean the process is over.

Quite the contrary, the quest has just begun. There are secondary markets to conquer. The best part is, I will be selling books while this quest continues and even if nothing happens, I will have taken this book to market, people have bought it and I can move on to the next book.

In conclusion, there is so much more to doing this than you can imagine, that without a full understanding of what you are about to do, it will be easy to fail on so many levels.

I'm not saying I have all the answers, but I believe I am at least in the game this time. My chances will be better. At least I know I have the best possible product that I can put out there. A product I can be proud of. A product that someone will pick up because of its quality and just maybe buy and isn't that what we all want?

Going POD isn't an option it is a job that needs to be done well, and if you don't know what that job is, don't do it until you do.

* * * * *

As a post-script to the article, the book is continuing to sell and reviews are still coming in. I did another book signing. Another local bookstore agreed to carry copies of my book on consignment and a couple of other specialty stores in town are carrying copies. I am also working on other options for the book. Remember promotion and exposure never ends. You are your best promoter. It is an ongoing process.

A final thought on the new book, I decided I would include my actual Income Statement for the first year (five quarters) of the book's release. These are the actual numbers from my spreadsheet.

Income Statement

Royalty Income -----\$150.88
Books Sold-----\$548.08

Total Income-----\$698.96

Book Purchases-----\$731.54
Marketing/Promotion-----\$1,243.10
Office Supplies-----\$0.00
Postage/Overnight----- \$53.86
Professional Services (Fees)----\$1,300.00
Research-----\$55.32
Shipping & Handling-----\$89.59
Travel Costs-----\$0.00
Web & ISP Expense (prorated)-----\$87.58

Total Expenses-----\$3,560.99

Net Income----- (\$2,862.03)

Let me take a moment to explain these numbers and classifications. Basically, how I choose to break it all down.

Income is derived from two sources. Royalty income is the money paid by the publisher for sales through them or sales through other outlets. Books sold are the books I have sold directly, usually at a discount I set.

Publishers pay royalties, usually quarterly, based on a myriad of conditions, with the simplest requirement being a minimum amount accrued. My third book has been officially out for one year, so I have received a royalty checks.

Books sold are those books that I actually sold to someone personally. I ordered a supply of books at my author discount of forty percent, which means I paid sixty percent of the retail price for each book. I then sell these books for eighty-three percent of the retail price, therefore, I make a little money on each book and the purchaser gets a little discount. In other words, I sell my books, listed at \$23.95 for \$20.00 a book direct. It is what I do.

Those two items are the income side of the budget. Now let us look at the expense side of the budget.

Book purchases are just that. In order to sell books, I have to buy copies. This is my cost for those books, the sixty percent per book charge.

Marketing/Promotions are those costs expended for advertising, printing bookmarks and books given away (such as to reviewers) showcasing the new book.

Office supplies typically, are mailers, envelopes, presentation folders and the like.

Postage/Overnight are costs incurred for mailing out books to people. My web site is set up so that you can order books directly from me. I do include the postage charge for orders, so this is a plus/minus number.

Professional Services (Fees) is where I list the set up fees that is the cost of having my book published. It is also where I would list any other professional services incurred, such as my editor, the web developer, a publicist and any other professional service I may elect to use that I had to pay for.

Research is costs incurred during the writing of the manuscript or any costs I may incur during the distribution of the book. Really, anything that requires me to spend money to get an answer, such as buying a copy of a book from the POD Publisher for review.

Shipping & Handling are costs incurred to receive the books that I ordered from the publisher. In addition to the cost per book, you also have to pay the shipping costs to get those books delivered to you.

Travel Costs are expenses incurred while I am traveling to book signings or conferences or any other event where I will be promoting my book.

Web and ISP Expenses are costs incurred, prorated for each book, to have a web site to promote my book(s). Usually I would have charged those costs to update my website with the new book, but since I did a major overhaul of the site, I took that expense as a general expense against my "book business."

Total expenses are derived from adding all the various expenses categories and reaching an aggregate number. As you will notice my expenses so far well exceed my income.

Net Income is the difference between total income and total expenses. If the income is greater than the expenses the result is positive, but if the income number is less than the expenses the number is negative.

At present, my expenses far exceed my income so my net income is negative. As more books sell and expenses stay static, those numbers will come closer together. The best result would be to make more income than expenses and actually show a profit. However, reality says that to simply break even, that is income equals expenses, would be a most desirable result.

The purpose of this exercise was to show you the cold hard facts of the cost of Print-on-Demand Publishing. Sure, your book may do better, maybe even great, but that requires a tireless effort of marketing and promotion. You have to keep getting your book out there.

The reality is that the margins, of the spread, the amount you make per book whether it is royalty or through direct sales are very slim compared to the costs expended by you to get your book out.

Now that may be perfectly acceptable to you, or you may use the least expensive publisher (remember you get what you pay for) and keep your expenses in check and the numbers may be closer. But at the end of the day you need to sell books, lots and lots of books.

The business model of POD, or any self-publishing venture is not compatible with doing that. Without a sales force or national distribution channel, you will be confined to your own little circle. I'm not saying it can't be done, on the contrary, it absolutely can, but it requires hard work and time consuming effort as well as a great marketing and promotional campaign. That is where most of us break down. Outside our little world (basically our family and friends), where do we go from here? Or more importantly, how do we get there?

I chose to do this, that is, take my books(s) through a POD Publisher. The first two were "head in the clouds" reality, but the third was, okay I kind of know what I am doing.

Overall I am in the red, that is, I have not made back my expenses. My wife calls it my nice little hobby. Which is true, I put out money to continue growing my hobby. I'd like to think it is so much more, but at the end of the day...

Yes, I am selling copies of my books to people and people are reading them, so I do have the warm fuzzy working. I am happy with what I have accomplished. I have no regrets.

The point here is that if you want to look at this from a business perspective, or more precisely getting your book published, then this route is probably not the first choice. Maybe not even a choice.

The last point I will make is this. If you want to go POD for your book, be sure you know what you are doing, how you are going to do it, whom you are going to do it with and why you are doing it. Otherwise, don't do it.

Finally, read through this guide again and again. Take a piece of paper and start a pro and con list. Determine what you want to do with that manuscript. Don't do anything just because. Fully think out what you want to accomplish with that work. Then, whatever you decide to do, do it with gusto, with determination, with everything you've got, because no one can have the enthusiasm for your work like you can. You did it, now do it!

