

HOW TO SELF-PUBLISH A BOOK

A Resource Guide
For Beginners



Rachel Rueben

Preface

This guide is for those who find themselves lost in the self-publishing process. I took great care to make this guide easy to skim through so you don't have to thumb through tons of unnecessary verbiage. There are multiple resources listed with links to various articles and websites. I am not affiliated with any of the businesses, products, or even the websites mentioned in this book. I'm just a regular ol' independent author who has been in the publishing game for almost 10 years. I've learned through my own mistakes and from those fearless pioneers who went before me. I've made all the mistakes so you don't have to!

A lot of these chapters can be found on my blog, writingbytheseatofmypants.com so if you wish to dig through years of old posts, feel free. However, for those of you who don't have time to read blogs, this guide is a huge time saver. It's under 16,000 words and easy to read. This guide was created with several friends in mind who wanted to make the leap to self-publishing but were overwhelmed by all the options. I hope this guide can help you avoid scammers and find legitimate businesses that can assist you along in your journey to publication.

~Rachel Rueben

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Chapter 1

Getting Others to Pay for Your Self-Publishing Expenses

Crowdfunding has been called the no money, no problem solution in self-publishing. Back in the day, aspiring authors would charge all their publishing expenses on credit cards or even withdraw money from their retirement accounts in order to make their dreams come true. Sadly, those authors watched their life savings depleted by expensive vanity publishers and unscrupulous con artists. However, a lot has changed as cheaper businesses sprouted up during the digital revolution. Just a few years ago, a book cover might have cost you thousands of dollars, but today, you can create one for a buck on Canva.

Though self-publishing is becoming less expensive and a lot easier, it isn't free. You still have to pay for a book cover, hire an editor, as well as pay for marketing. So how do you pay for all this when you're broke?

Well, since we indies (independent authors) are running a business, we can raise capital like a normal business. Yes, with the help of the internet, we can finance our businesses through crowdfunding campaigns and straight-up ask people to back our projects. There are several online sites that authors can use to fund their self-publishing projects such as; Kickstarter, Indiegogo, and Patreon just to name a few.

No, This Isn't Begging

In a popular [Ted Talk](#), performance artist Amanda Palmer encouraged artists to “ask without shame.” Amanda by the way held the previous record on Kickstarter for raising the most money for a music project with over one million dollars in donations. The money she raised not only went to fund the project but also allowed her and her band to give away their work free of charge. In an age where most artists discourage torrents and file sharing Amanda and her band actually encourage it. This is blatantly counterintuitive to most corporate business models in which freebies are used only as a short-term marketing ploy. However, Amanda’s strategy is more long-term, using digital music as a promotional tool, rather than a moneymaking venture. As the industry argues over .99¢ songs, Amanda and her band have successfully cut out the middle man and are setting up their next tour.

I can hear you already, *that's nice Rachel, but how are authors doing on Kickstarter?* I'm so glad you asked, in 2020, fantasy and sci-fi author Brandon Sanderson, successfully raised \$5 million on Kickstarter for a publishing project. Although he had an established career and a large fan base, he was the first author to raise millions for a fiction book. And there are others within the industry crowdfunding their projects as well such as publishing companies and comic book writers. Heck, even Sesame Street did a campaign in the summer of 2019, for an enhanced digital book. So if Big Bird can ask for donations, you can too!

How Does This Work?

First, you decided how much you'll need, and once you figure that out, you'll need to decide which platform you'll want to use. Kickstarter is the most established and popular site for artists. However, Indiegogo is also a good site to run a campaign. The big difference between the two is if you don't raise the full amount for your crowdfunding campaign, Kickstarter will withhold the funds because it's an all or nothing deal. On the other hand, Indiegogo will give you whatever amount you raised which makes it a little more enticing even if their site is a bit smaller.

Patreon is another crowdfunding site that is subscription-based so people can donate to your project every month. This is good for those authors who have a blog or podcast that requires funding and don't want to advertise, here, readers or listeners can support the project. Patreon is also good for those authors who have a book they'd like to share online as they write it. If you'd like to learn more about the various crowdfunding sites here are some links:

- [Kickstarter](#)
- [Indiegogo](#)
- [Patreon](#)

Here are a few basic tips on how to run a successful campaign:

- Plan well in advance.
- Keep your fundraising goals small in the beginning.
- Successful campaigns are funded by tiny increments, so set the pledges to smaller amounts like \$1 or \$5.
- It's not usual for authors to offer books but don't forget to offer swag for smaller donations like signed bookmarks, stickers, or pens. You can create those things at places like; VistaPrint, Zazzle, and CafePress.
- Campaigns with videos explaining your project and enthusiasm seem to do better than those without them.
- Have a compelling blurb explaining your project with a call to action.

- Promote your project on social media because most projects are funded by family and friends but don't forget to reach out to podcasts, vlogs, and the blogosphere. (I talk about how to reach those folks in chapters 10, 12 & 16)
- Fund other projects in popular niches like movies, gaming, or music to get visibility on the site as well as establish some good karma.
- Promote your campaign to your mailing list and in your blog posts.
- Do guest posts on popular blogs and include a link to your campaign in the byline.

Beware of Fees & Taxes

What a lot of indie authors get wrong, is the amount of money they'll need to cover all of their expenses. For example, most crowdfunding sites take a 2-9% cut of all money raised. However, the fees don't end there, some banks and middlemen like in the case of Kickstarter (through Amazon Payment), take another 3-5% for credit card processing fees.

Another thing to consider are the shipping costs because you'll need to ship your gifts or swag to those who supported your campaign. Ca-ching!

As if that weren't enough, authors can't forget the taxman because not properly including all income sources can easily trigger an audit. In fact, Kickstarter addresses this in a Tax Guide on their website. That means you are going to have to carefully do the math and possibly raise your monetary goals to accommodate these additional expenses.

Crowdfunding can be a viable path for the author who already knows how to promote a book since the steps are so similar, but even then, there are no guarantees of a successful crowdfunding project. Nonetheless, you should be aware of the alternative ways to pay for your self-publishing expenses, that don't include raiding your retirement account.

Chapter 2

Why You Must Spend Money on ~~Editing~~ Editing

It's the dilemma most indie authors face: should we bother paying for an editor? After all, we're understaffed, under budget, and often overwhelmed. The correct answer to that question will always be yes, yes, and yes! Thankfully, we live in the age of the indie author and with it are plenty of people peddling their editing services. But what kind of editing should an indie author pay for; copy editing, line editing, or proof editing? And what's the difference?

Let me begin by explaining the different types of book editing:

1. **Line/Developmental Editors:** go over the general story and look for poorly constructed characters and holes in a story's plot. If problems are huge they may ask you to rewrite sections.
2. **Copy Editors:** look over facts, and also go over punctuation or poor dialog.
3. **Proof Readers:** look only for grammatical errors and misused punctuation.

Many indie authors pay big bucks for several rounds of editing to avoid looking *self-published*, a problem that plagues many indie books. However, indie authors aren't the only ones who are using freelance editors. There are bestselling authors who pay for some light editing before sending it to their publisher to preserve their reputations as literary geniuses. So like it or not, we're all doing it.

Will Editing Get Rid of All My Errors?

No, editing will not make your book mistake-free, all books have errors but some less than others. For example, Fifty Shades of Grey and Twilight are considered some of the worst books ever written, yet both authors had editors. In fact, I'm sure their work passed through many hands before it went to print. Yet that doesn't stop the literary snobs from pointing out the poor prose and redundant verbiage in these bestselling books. Robert Kiyosaki, the author of Rich Dad, Poor Dad, said it best, "*I'm a bestselling author, not best-writing author,*" and that is the attitude that separates those authors who make it big versus those authors who believe in literary perfection.

How Much Does Editing Really Cost?

The typical editor makes about \$1 a page and up. However, there are those that charge per word, generally they ask anywhere from \$.03 – .35 cents and up. Also, some are paid by the hour and they're usually the most expensive. In any case, a professional editor will ask to evaluate your manuscript before they give you a final quote.

Be warned, price ultimately depends on your skill level and the overall complexity of your book. Some books require fact-checking and extensive rewrites. However, there are indie authors who forgo the entire process and just publish *as-is*. Then there are those on the opposite side of the spectrum, those indie authors who spend thousands on editors and still wind up with errors in their book.

What to Look for in an Editor

The rules are simple when hiring any freelancer and they are:

1. **Samples:** If someone has no samples, don't trust them.

2. **Testimonials:** Avoid those who don't have testimonials that can be verified.
3. **Research:** Go to author groups on social media to see whom they recommend. You can even Google the company name plus the word *reviews*.
4. **Policies:** Make sure a company has a money-back guarantee policy, or will at least correct any botched job for free.

Do not hire anyone who cannot prove they have command of the English language. There are some companies that outsource their work to people countries like India, or The Philippines to maximize profits. Do your best to find an editor based in the U.S., Canada, or the U.K., if you want decent results.

Here are some resources for legitimate editors:

- [Editorial Freelancers Association](#)
- [Reedsy](#)
- [ACES: The Society For Editing](#)
- [NY Book Editors](#)

A Final Note

I can't really say how many rounds of editing your particular book may need. Honestly, that depends on your budget, experience, and also, your self-esteem. Yes, I said self-esteem because some authors can't handle criticism, and refuse to allow a third party into their writing process. That's fine, but if you can't handle a professional editor's critique you're probably not going to like it when book reviewers and readers trash your book.

Chapter 3

Where do I Publish?

I hear this question all the time, *where do I sell my books?* This can be a complicated answer depending on the author. You see, many authors hate certain retailers like Amazon because they believe they're the *Evil Empire*. Then, there are authors who will only publish on Amazon because they don't see any point in selling elsewhere.

Now despite what you've heard, Amazon's self-publishing program Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP), is not a traditional publishing company, it's just a site that allows authors to upload their books directly to the Amazon store. Now don't get me wrong, Amazon does have several traditional publishing companies but KDP isn't one of them.

Getting Your Ebook into Amazon, or Barnes & Noble

There are two ways to get your ebooks into major retail stores, you can do what many frugal independent authors are doing and that is upload your books directly, which requires another chapter to explain.

However, in this chapter, I'm only going to explain how to find a service, (an aggregator) to upload your ebooks to most of the major online retailers.

First, let me define what an aggregator is, usually, an aggregator is a piece of software or website that uploads your books (files) to retail stores according to that retailer's specifications. For example, Amazon's Kindle only reads files in .mobi while Barnes & Noble's Nook only reads .epub files. It's often necessary to use aggregators because word processing software like MS Word, don't convert to these kinds of files.

The most popular aggregator by far is Smashwords, which doesn't charge an upfront fee, but they do take a 20% cut of your royalties. The second most popular aggregator is Draft2Digital, and the other is BookBaby. They all act as aggregators as well as distributors and most indie authors use these services to convert their files and upload them to various online retailers.

If you don't know who the major online ebook retailers are they listed for you below:

- Amazon
- Barnes & Noble
- Apple
- Kobo
- Google Play

If you can get into those major shops, you're pretty much set, but there are those indie authors who want their book available *everywhere*. They claim if your book isn't available everywhere then you're leaving money on the table which could be true if your book takes off. However, I don't hear many indie authors being inundated with sales from sites like OverDrive or Scribd. Most self-published authors make most of their money with Amazon.

Selling Your Print Book Online and Off

The most popular place for self-published authors to get their books printed and distributed is Amazon KDP Print. It's a print on demand publisher owned by Amazon and offers expanded distribution to all the major book stores for a percentage of your royalties.

There's also IngramSpark, which is owned by Ingram Content Group, one of the largest book distributors in the world and one of the few distributors that will take self-published books. They are the darling of book stores because they offer returns and returns are a must. That means if retailers can't sell your print books, you will be getting them returned, shipping paid by *you*, the publisher.

Unlike Amazon, IngramSpark has fees for uploading to their website and even catalog fees. However, if you want your book in brick and mortar stores or libraries, you'll need to publish your print book through IngramSpark and not Amazon.

Before choosing any print on demand service make sure they distribute to the major brick and mortar retailers like:

- Barnes & Noble
- Books-A-Million
- Half Price Books

Now, these aren't the only distributors for your books, but they are the most popular distributors that indie authors use.

Chapter 4

Ebook or Print? Don't Worry, They're Both a Pain to Format!

The big problem most indie authors have is how to format their book for either print or ebook. Honestly, many methods range from free and irritating, to expensive and not worth it. When given a choice like this, it's always best to learn what you can and farm out what you can't to a professional.

Ebooks

Despite what you may have heard, ebooks are not easy to produce especially, if you have images or hyperlinks in them. Though you wouldn't know that by the accounts of authors who've described the process as, "*Just click publish and go!*" I can't tell you how wrong they are. For example, I ran into several issues uploading my Word document to Kobo and Barnes & Noble. For some inexplicable reason, the darn thing wouldn't upload. So I had to convert my Word .doc to an .epub file. However, to do that, I had to get Scrivener, a type of software that converts Word documents into .epub, or .mobi. Scrivener cost me around \$40 and I soon discovered why it's so cheap. Apparently, Scrivener doesn't read its own compiled (converted) files! To read the .epub or .mobi file you just created, you'll have to get an extension on your web browser or download some free ereader software. See, I told you, it was a pain!

Resources:

If you must try to convert your files, here are a few resources to help you get started. Be warned, paid services generally have customer service, so if something goes awry, you can get help. The free sites, however, don't always offer those options so read the conditions carefully.

Downloadable Software that Helps Convert Word documents to eBooks

- [Scrivener](#) \$49
- [Ulysses](#) for Mac only \$49 yearly
- [Calibre](#) (Free Software)

Ereader Extensions for Your Browser in Case You Want to Read Your Darn Book!

- [Google Chrome](#)
- [Firefox](#)
- [Microsoft Edge](#)

Formatting Print Books, Another Type Of Hell

I published my paperback on the now-defunct CreateSpace and regretted every second of it. First, I'm no expert in book design or layout. I didn't know which size to choose, 6×9, or 8 ½ x 11? I had no idea which would look best. When you can't make a simple decision like this, you know you're in a lot of trouble! Foolishly, I listened to the advice of the self-publishing gurus and made the size of my book too large, which made my book appear too short, like a novelette.

To add insult to injury, after fixing my mistakes, the print books didn't sell nearly as well as the ebooks. That wouldn't have happened if I had done a little market research.

Free Templates

If this is out of your area of expertise then, you can go with a template to format your print book and do a copy and paste for free.

- [Book Baby](#) has some very basic templates to help you with the layout of your print book also, for free.
- [Self-Publishing Inc.](#) has templates that come in three book sizes.

Paying Someone to Format Your Print or Ebook Book

Paying a freelancer or professional designer is going to cost you anywhere from \$35 to \$375. Many services charge per page or even according to the genre, here are the most popular services:

- Reedsy
- BookBaby
- Pressbooks
- Fiverr

Disclaimer:

Always read the fine print before signing with any service and before putting any money down. Also, do your due diligence to find people who have actually used their services. Google the name of the company and the words, *reviews*, *complaints*, and *rip off* to see if there are any dissatisfied customers. Remember an educated author is a happy author.

Chapter 5

Cheap Book Covers that are Professional Looking

It's one of the biggest mistakes I made as an indie author, and I'm not the only one. Many self-published authors design their covers in PowerPoint or PhotoShop and guess what? It looks like it! There are so many indie books that look God awful! I'm pretty sure it compels readers to mock [lousy book covers](#) by both indies and [trade publishers](#) all over the internet.

The cover of your book is too important to leave up to personal taste. Your cover is going to be the first impression that readers get of you. It needs to be professional, as well as eye-catching to compete with the millions of other books out there. You have to understand that readers spend literally seconds deciding whether they'll bother clicking on your book. The cover you chose either draws them in or repels them.

Money Issues

The reason why I and most indie authors choose to design our covers is lack of cash. Many designers charge hundreds, if not thousands for their services and they deserve that kind of money. Sadly, many indies can't afford those prices unless we bleed our retirement accounts dry, or max out our credit cards. But never fear, there are ways to get cheap book covers that are professional looking.

Project Bidding Sites: Freelance Designers

Here's how it works, you launch a *contest* or project telling the potential designers what you want in a cover. You can even submit a sketch or photo to give them a better feel of what you need. Then, designers jockey for your project by submitting their work. [99 Designs](#) is one of the most popular and well-known cover designers to indie authors. They create not only book covers, but business cards, t-shirts, and even web banners.

Similar sites where you can hire freelance designers are Upwork, and Fiverr. You can hire freelancers by the hour or pay them a flat fee.

Direct Hire:

There are agencies either run independently or that consist of several book designers that can help indie authors with their covers. Some create unique art, while others use stock images that they've altered according to the theme of a book or the specifications of the author. Here's a list:

- [Reedsy](#)
- Robin Ludwig Design ([GoBookCoverDesign.com](#)) creates book covers using stock photos as well.

- [Indie Designz](#) provides basic book covers at \$150 - \$250. They also do print covers and format ebook covers for print.

Premade Covers:

It's just what it sounds like, here authors purchase book covers based on work already completed by a designer. So what you see is what you get.

- [The Book Cover Designers](#)
- [SelfPubBooks.com](#)
- [The Cover Collection](#)

If You Must do it Yourself

I know some of you are thinking, "*Why should I pay someone to format a stock photo? I can do that myself!*" Really? That's what I thought too. But if you are determined to do it, read on...

Stock Photos/Art: Licensing

When purchasing a stock photo or illustration, you are purchasing a license to put an image on your product. The image will still be available for sale on the site, leaving open the possibility for a copy cat cover popping up somewhere else. However, don't fret, many big publishers also buy stock photos for their ebooks, just check out this Goodreads thread called: [Cover Clones](#) and see for yourself.

The Perils of Stock Images: Terms of Use

Before buying any stock image you must read the conditions in the licensing terms carefully. Not all images are being licensed the same way. For example, an editorial license may forbid you from altering an image. Also, some licenses

limit the number of times you can print an image. If the restriction is 5,000 then you'll have to go back and purchase a new license if you sell over 5,000 print books.

Too Good to be True Prices Of Stock Images

Be wary of prices, I've seen pictures advertised as .20¢ but you have to buy *credits* on these sites which come in packages ranging from \$9.00 to \$1,000+.

You can buy all sorts of images like; cartoons, art, and even photos from these sites:

- [Dreamstime](#)
- [iStockphoto](#)
- [Shutter Stock](#)

If your books feature people of color, then you might want to check out these sites in particular:

- [Nappy.co](#)
- [Eye for Ebony](#)
- [Tonl.co](#)

Freebie Images

There are photo sharing sites that allow you to use a photo free of charge because it's either a public domain work or the owner wants free publicity, which means you have to give them or their company credit somewhere in your book. Again, read the conditions carefully.

- [Pixabay.com](#)

- [Pexels.com](https://www.pexels.com)
- [Unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com)
- [FreeImages.com](https://www.freemages.com)
- [MorgueFile.com](https://www.morguefile.com)

Jazzing Up Your Stock Image: Software

There are all kinds of software that help you edit photos, Windows for example, has Paint and it's standard with most home versions of Windows. Also, there's the standard Adobe InDesign and even Corel PaintShop, but if you don't have these programs, you can always get the same photo editing capabilities for free.

Free Photo Editing Websites:

I'm a huge fan of these websites because they're user friendly and there's no software taking up space on your hard drive. Here, you just upload an image or buy one directly from a site like Canva and Stencil. There you can alter your image on the website itself. No-fuss, no muss.

- [Canva](https://www.canva.com) (Free & paid)
- [Stencil](https://www.stencil.com) (Free & paid)
- [BeFunky](https://www.befunky.com) (Free & Paid)
- [Pixlr](https://www.pixlr.com) (Free)
- [PicMonkey](https://www.picmonkey.com) (Paid)

One Final Word...

I hope I showed you that you don't need a ton of money to have a professional and gorgeous book cover. For the cover of this book I only paid \$1 but I have paid higher prices for my fiction work. It's not only about our personal preference but about the preferences of our readers. What are they attracted

to? That's the question you have to answer before you decide how to proceed.

Chapter 6

Are ISBNs A Necessary Evil?

In this chapter, I want to talk about ISBNs, what they are, and why you may need one. To begin, ISBN stands for *International Standard Book Number* which is a 13 digit number that is assigned to a book which identifies its *bibliographic data* (title, edition, publisher, etc) to booksellers and lenders.

Whether indie authors even need an ISBN is a contentious argument that has many indie authors on a shoestring budget wondering if this is just another unnecessary expense? So let's cut through the hoopla and find out why you may, or may not need an ISBN for your book.

Myths About ISBNs

Myth #1: Indie authors who are only publishing ebooks need not worry about ISBNs.

Fact: Not true, libraries won't consider ebooks without ISBNs.

Myth #2: You can purchase ISBNs from anywhere.

Fact: There is only one place in every country where the owner/publisher of a book can purchase an ISBN. Places that offer packages or discounts on an ISBN are usually buying in bulk and probably not reporting the book's bibliographic data properly. It would be wise to purchase an ISBN on your own.

It could mean the difference between a reader buying your book, or accidentally purchasing another copy of Harry Potter. Seriously, J.K. Rowling doesn't need any more money!

Myth #3: You can't buy an ISBN after a book's been published.

Fact: You can indeed purchase an ISBN after a book's been published.

Myth #4: You don't have to buy separate ISBNs for a book translated into multiple languages.

Fact: Sorry, you do need different ISBNs for each translated version.

Myth #5: Barcodes and ISBNs are the same.

Fact: Barcodes identify either price, size, or even color of a product, ISBNs identify publisher, editions, etc.

More Need to Know Info:

Amazon's KDP assigns books an Amazon Standard International Number or ASIN number, for the sake of their database. You can capture the ASIN number of any given book in the URL Amazon assigns to each book.



If you only plan on publishing on Amazon then this is all you need. Apple, Google Play, and Kobo all have their own special numbers as well so you're covered.

As I said before, it's important to consider before you spend any money, just how far you want to go with your book? Do you want to sell your books only at your website or at conferences? If so, then an ISBN is an unnecessary expense.

Nonetheless, if you do want to sell your books far and wide, you'll need to purchase an ISBN.

Here are the official sources for ISBNs:

In the U.S., you purchase your ISBN through [Bowker's Identifiers Service](#) and the price for one ISBN is \$125.

In Canada: ISBNs in Canada are free and are distributed at the government website: [CISS](#) (Canadian ISBN Service System). First, you'll have to sign up and fill out a form.

In the UK: Things are a bit more complicated, the ISBN system is run by [Nielson Books](#) and you must buy ISBNs in blocks of ten. The price for ten blocks of ISBNs is £92.

I hope I cleared up the confusion about ISBNs, there's nothing worse than spending money when you don't have to. Indie authors have enough to worry about and unnecessary expenses shouldn't be one of them.

Chapter 7

Copyrights: Why You Need Proof of Ownership

Registering your manuscript with your government's copyright (intellectual property) office is one of the most basic responsibilities of any indie author. To claim the copyright of any work, one needs legal documented proof from a government copyright office. Though most copyrights are not free, they are much cheaper than hiring a lawyer and paying court fees in the event the authorship of your book comes into question. In [the U.S.](#), it will run you about \$45, and in [Canada](#), the fee is \$50 however in the U.K., you don't have to register at all.

What you get is not legal protection but evidence. Your work is legally yours once you commit it to paper or digital files. What you are paying for here is a paper with a registration number that legally connects you to your book.

Myths About Copyrights That Will Not Die

1. You can skip the whole legal process by mailing your manuscript to yourself via certified mail. This is called the *poor man's copyright* and no, it's not true.
2. It annoys editors at publishing companies who want to buy your work. Who cares?
3. Anything you write down is automatically copyrighted and can't be stolen. That's like saying your car won't get stolen because it belongs to you, try telling that to a car thief.

Still not convinced a copyright is a necessary expense? Here's a story for you: several years ago, there was a guy plagiarizing thousands of books on Amazon. Many of those authors he was ripping off sent several cease-and-desist letters to Amazon hoping for a simple solution. However, Amazon asked *them* (the authors) to prove they were the real owners of the intellectual property. Remember indie author stands for independent author, nobody's watching our backs, not Amazon, or anybody else.

For those of you in the U.S., the court system actually rewards copyright owners with more money in damages in the event of a lawsuit. Though it's possible to win a copyright lawsuit without the actual legal document, you won't get as much money in damages as someone who does. That is written into the law.

I hope none of you ever has to defend your copyright but let's not base our writing business on wishful thinking. In the real world there are thieves and con artists, so don't open yourself up to being robbed of what's rightfully yours.

Chapter 8

Is Expanded Distribution Worth it?

Talk to any indie author and they'll tell you that distribution is a huge problem. Many authors can't get their books into certain stores without serious drama. So why is that and is there something we can do about it?

Expanded Distribution: Not Worth the Trouble?

Newbie authors often don't understand that distribution is a part of marketing. If your book isn't available for purchase, nobody will be able to buy it. There are expanded distribution deals offered by places like Amazon, and Author Solutions but they're often crap.

The sad reality is that most major book distributors won't touch a self-published book, because most retail stores won't touch a self-published book. It's all due to returns, if you don't offer a return policy on your book, stores won't bother. This is where the big publishers have us beat. They can afford to take books back or even pay to have them destroyed, most indies can't. However, if you're willing to risk negotiating this sort of deal with a store, understand what you're getting into. Many indies have been burned and have gotten books returned to them that have been used and worn out. One author online claimed she got a book back with coffee stains on it!

IngramSpark

For those of you who don't know, IngramSpark, a subsidiary of Ingram Content Group, (one of the biggest book distributors in the world.) is a POD service but

unlike Amazon, they offer returns, to their business partners (bookstores). This makes IS a darling to bookstores especially, smaller independent ones who can't afford to warehouse books on their shelves indefinitely.

You'll Have to Convince Stores to Buy

If you want to see your books in Barnes & Noble or your local bookstore, then you will have to pitch them. Just because your book is in a retailer's database and available nationwide, doesn't mean stores and libraries will buy it. They won't know that your book is available unless someone tells them and since you are the PR person for your book, that will have to be you.

That means creating a possible script, and practicing your sales pitch until you have it perfected.

Now, if you're terrified of talking to strangers, then hire a book shepherd or a salesperson to get your books into stores. As a small business, you can offer them a commission or flat fee for every book sold. Here's a list of people who can help you sell your book to stores.

- [Green Leaf Book Group](#)
- [Author Imprints](#)
- [IngramSpark](#)
- [Upwork](#)
- [Freelancer.com](#)

Despite what you may believe, you'll have to price your book competitively just to make money. There is a reason why many bestsellers are priced at \$20+ and it's not because some big named author wrote it. It's because there are so many people taking a cut of the profits and the publisher needs to get the most from the initial marketing push.

Final Thought:

It's quite simple if your book is popular, then more people will want it. This is why it's called expanded distribution, if you're lucky enough to become the next literary sensation then, your books may warrant wider distribution.

Chapter 9

Websites: The Hub of an Author's Career

Today's author has to be more tech-savvy than the previous generations before if not, they risk being left behind. It's a blessing and a curse. Sure, we're free to create hubs that are independent of a publisher but there is so much work and information to digest that many authors just avoid it. I know I am guilty, I put off building my website for about a year. But if you want to self-publish and secure sales on your own, independent of Amazon, or any corporate entity then, a website is a necessity. So let's get started...

Domain Names

You need to claim or register a domain name first. Usually, authors claim their names/pseudonyms, book titles, or company name. I've purchased two domains, one for my author name *Rachel Rueben* and the other, for my business/blog, *Writing By The Seat Of My Pants*. Typically, a domain name will cost you anywhere from \$2 to \$19 a year. Yes, you must renew yearly or biyearly, or risk losing your domain name.

To get you started, here are just a few services that get high marks from their customers.

- BlueHost
- GoDaddy
- WordPress
- Shopify
- NameCheap

Themes/Templates

Themes are just templates that people can use to personalize their website. One must have a little tech knowledge to make this work, but it's not over the average person's head. If you can personalize a blog, and know a little HTML, you're halfway there. A website template can be free or cost you thousands depending on how complicated you want to make your website.

Most popular websites like CNN and even eBay use WordPress because it is considered the gold standard in website building. So if you want to DIY your site you should definitely check out Wordpress.org. However, if you're not tech-savvy then I suggest the following paid services which can help you build your website. They can handle domain registration, theme design, and even web hosting:

- GoDaddy
- SquareSpace
- Wix
- Weebly

What should be on this Website?

Your website doesn't need to be flashy, but it does need to be easy to read and use. A website's main purpose is to tell people who you are, what's for sale, and how to buy it. It also needs to be mobile friendly so people can access it on their smartphones. Here are more things that should be included on your website:

1. **A Contact Page:** On this page ought to be your professional email address and social media handles.
2. **Bio Page:** A bio page should tell people who you are and what you write. Also, a photo wouldn't hurt.
3. **Media Kit:** A place where you offer your bio, contact info, and the name of your books to the media. There should be a downloadable form of the information in case someone wants to download it or print it.
4. **Sales Page:** Let people know where and how to purchase your books. It should include gripping sales copy and links to retailers.
5. **Hire Me/Available for Speaking Engagements:** If you're interested in securing any business, like paid speaking engagements, consulting, or hosting special events like workshops or seminars then, this is a must.

What if You Can't Afford it?

Another alternative a lot of indies on a tight budget do is use a free WordPress.com blog as their website and link their domain name to it. Other services like Wix.com, SquareSpace, and Weebly also offer free services but they're very limited.

Keep in mind a website is imperative for an author these days, you need *something* to send people to in order to find out more about you. Sorry folks, but Facebook and Twitter aren't enough. It's too restrictive. You can't sell your books directly, or even run contests without a heap of rules, which by the way, are *constantly* changing. You need something you own. A place where you can't be censored or harassed by someone else's rules.

Chapter 10

Marketing: the ABCs

Marketing is a subject so misunderstood that many authors find themselves demoralized when they post a Facebook ad and don't magically wind up on the bestseller's list. Newbie authors don't know that marketing is a layered and complex process, I mean, people go to college to learn this stuff!

Case in point, author James Patterson, one of Forbes highest-paid authors, was the vice president of a marketing firm before becoming an author. Do you think this multi-bestselling author's success was a fluke? Hardly!

Now despite what you may have heard, advertising and book reviews alone are not marketing. Marketing consists of production, distribution, and sales, so let's break this down:

- **Genre:** Book marketing begins when an author chooses a genre or topic to write about. The more popular the genre, the better your chances of selling well.
- **Packaging:** By creating a book cover and interior that is competitive with what's on the market, you increase your odds of success.
- **Distribution:** You need to get your book to as many people as possible to get lots of sales. Many authors are going to Amazon, the largest online retailer to give their book the best shot at reaching as many readers as possible.
- **Sales:** You need to generate buzz via advertising, reviews, media (both off and online), or by holding giveaways and contests.

Looks like there's nothing to it, huh? Sadly, none of that is true. This is a complicated project to manage. It takes time management skills, coordination (team building), and business communication skills to succeed.

So how does an indie author win at this? Easy, we study the big publishers and learn from their mistakes by adopting what works for them and discarding what doesn't.

Secrets of the Big Five: The Soft Launch or Prelaunch

For those of you not familiar, a soft launch is where you put your book on sale, but tell only a select few like; reviewers, members of the media, and even newsletter subscribers. Some authors suggest taking a few months before doing an official push, just so you can get your ducks in a row. Here's what an author generally does during a soft launch...

Look For Annoying Mistakes And Formatting Issues

When I published my YA novel, I found a grammatical error on the first page. Needless to say, I was very upset. I worked so hard on that darn thing and still, I missed things. Obvious things. If I had done a soft launch this wouldn't have happened.

Start Collecting Reviews

Ever wonder why when a famous author releases a book, there are already 200 glowing reviews on Amazon? It's because the book was already available for some time but kept on the down-low. A release date doesn't mean, a book was actually published that day. A release date is more like a push date, where the author and or publishing house start their marketing bonanza.

Score Blurbs

Blurbs are different from reviews because blurbs are a seal of approval from someone significant in your genre or within the publishing industry. Blurbs almost legitimize your book if you're an unknown. This is important for indie authors since the self-publishing stigma is alive and well. Finding a big name who is willing to give an opinion on your book is hard but could be worth it.

Create Media Kits

Creating a media kit would have helped me and those curious about me. If you're going to query book bloggers, journalists, or podcasters it would help if you gave them a link to your media kit. This way they don't have to Google you and get lost in a sea of authors.

Schedule Social Media Posts

If you don't use a social media scheduler for your social media accounts, I don't know what you're doing with your life. These services can offer the ability to auto-post during peak hours on all of your social media accounts. This way you can schedule posts telling your followers about sales, interviews, or giveaways you'll be doing. Priceless, for the author who is short on time and energy. Some social media schedulers offer services like analytics and even help with creating posts, though you do have to pay for those things in most cases.

Nonetheless, here are some options to choose from:

- [Hootsuite](#) (Free & Paid)
- [SocialOmph](#) (Free & Paid)
- [Buffer](#) (Free trial then paid)

- [Loomly](#) (Paid)

Schedule Guests Posts & Interviews

This will take the most work and time, but it is necessary to find people who allow authors to guest post on their blogs. If you're going to make this work, you'll need to offer a sweet incentive, maybe a bribe, like a book for their audience, or offer them a favor, such as hosting them on your blog or podcast. This is totally up to you.

If you want to find blogs that offer guest posts try [this article](#) on Website Hosting Rating where they list 200 sites that accept guest posts. Also, [Self-Publishing Review](#) listed 15 sites where authors can find guest posting opportunities.

However, if you want to snag an interview on a podcast, I wrote a post called [Podcasts That Feature Indie Authors](#).

Chapter 11

Building Your Social Media Following the Non-Douchey Way

Imagine being at a rock concert and the band hands you the microphone, the spotlight is beaming and all eyes are focused on you. What do you say? How do you act? Social media can often feel like this to a lot of shy authors. The anxiety of saying the wrong thing at the wrong time is real. It doesn't help that some authors have ruined their reputations simply by being inappropriate or crude online. Please don't be that author!

Regurgitation And Deviation

I'm going to regurgitate some of what the other gurus have said but to build a following, you may need to bug your family and friends. But what happens if nobody responds to the call? Then you'll have to go where all the other nerds go to find ~~dates~~, umm...I mean *likes*.

Now here's where I deviate from the advice and tell you how people really get followers without spending money or humiliating themselves. On just about every social media site there are hacks for finding fans, likes, and followers. Let's start with the world's largest social media site, Facebook...

The Secret World of Facebook:

On Facebook, there are pages, groups, and even like events where page owners help each other by liking one another's page. It's a reciprocation thing and if you're not cool with it then, forget it. You'll have to advertise or use a promoted post.

Having said that, there are also groups and pages devoted to helping page owners get a few likes. It really is this easy to find these people just by typing, "Like My Page" in the Facebook search engine.

1. [Like 4 Like](#)
2. [Like/Votes Exchange For All](#)
3. [Like For Like](#)

On Twitter

You can search hashtags like, [#TeamFollowBack](#), [#INeedTwitterFollowers](#), or [#FollowMeBack](#)

Goodreads Likes, Votes, etc

The same rules apply to Goodreads but you must be careful here, this is a place where you don't want to make a fool out of yourself. It's where the readers and reviewers hang out.

On Goodreads:

1. [Instagram for Goodreads Authors](#)
2. [Bookstagram & Booktube Engagement Group](#)
3. [Indie Authors Monthly Magazine for Authors & Readers](#)
4. [BookTok Book Club](#)

Getting Followers The Lazy Way

If you don't want to follow anybody and just want to skip the unpleasantness of actually interacting with people then you're going to want to use ads. Most social media sites allow you to promote your account in an ad to attract more followers. However, for this to work you have to have an account worth following. That means good content, good engagement, and possibly contests.

Getting Followers The Laziest Way Possible

There are people usually celebrities, athletes, and yes, even authors who aren't into social media and would like to just farm it out to a service. Some sites claim they can help build your social media following while remaining compliant with terms of service. Some of these services include AI software while others list your account in a directory. I'll include some of them below:

- [Twiends](#) (Twitter)
- [Tweepi](#) (Twitter)
- [Like4Like.org](#) (Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, Instagram)
- [Kicksta](#) (Instagram)

Why Are We Doing This All?

It's a sad but God awful truth, that agents and editors want authors to have a large following on social media as this former editor explains [here](#). It's also a fact that some agents have been [Googling prospective clients](#) just to see what you're up to online. So if you're self-publishing to get the attention of an agent or publishing company, you'll need to show them some sort of online presence.

Keep in mind, many authors have done well without social media, but if you want to get an agent or a decent contract with a traditional publisher then, you'll need to impress them. Tragically, the only thing that seems impressive to them these days is not your ability to write, but your ability to pimp a book, after all, publishing is a business.

Chapter 12

How to Approach and Pitch Social Media Influencers

It's a problem that many social media admins and page owners complain about all the time and that's strangers wanting favors. Don't think it's a problem? Just go to Twitter and type the words *Please RT* or *Help Me* into the search engine and you'll find an endless feed of begging. Now, I'm not shaming anyone because I used to do it too, thinking that was the way social media worked. Unfortunately, I listened to the social media *experts* who told people to ask, ask, ask, which got me absolutely nowhere. In fact, I'm pretty sure I lost a few followers because of it!

The Inherent Problem with Social Media

The biggest problem most indie authors have is that their following on social media is small to nonexistent. I mean, who follows an unknown author? With little or no money, we can't buy ads or promote posts which naturally puts us in a pickle. However, what most indie authors don't know is that they can *borrow* somebody else's network. So how do you get someone to lend you their audience? Well first you have to find them and there are many ways to do that.

You can go to the social media platform of your choice and type in the words; publishing, books, book reviewers, reading, etc. Then join groups, pages, and follow people that are relevant in your industry.

However, if you're short on time, some apps can help you find influencers on social media. They can also show you what's the most popular content people are sharing in your niche. Here's a list of a few:

- BuzzSumo
- FollowerWonk
- Triberr
- Hootsuite
- TrendSpottr (Instagram)

Whatever You Do, Don't Skip This Step!

If you want to get on someone's radar, you'll need to join the community you'd like to target. And keep in mind, you're going to have to be a *good* community member, which means sharing, and commenting on posts whenever you can. If you're friendly as well as helpful, you'll get noticed in no time. If not, you might want to consider moving on.

Now keep in mind, you're building a relationship so this will take time. For example, when I joined Red River Writers, I was a member of their community for nearly a year when they announced they needed a virtual assistant. Of course, I applied and didn't need to feel anxious about approaching them because I was already acquainted with them. Keep in mind, you're in this for the long haul.

A Cautionary Tale:

In [2014](#), a young woman approached a job recruiter on LinkedIn for a position at the recruiter's company but instead of help, she was berated for her poor etiquette. The recruiter called the young woman, "*entitled and tacky*" and despite everyone's outrage, I understand the hostility. Now I'm not agreeing with how the recruiter behaved but I do know this could've been easily avoided if the young woman had simply introduced herself and expressed interest in becoming a part of the recruiter's community. If you approach strangers in a needy manner, you're likely to receive a negative response. When approaching an influencer, you always need to remain professional. In business, the question is always, *what's in it for me?* This leads me to my next point...

Your Angle, You Have One, Right?

As long as you view this as a business proposition and not a handout, then you shouldn't feel uncomfortable pitching to a social media influencer or any influencer for that matter. However, you first need to ask yourself, what do you bring to the table? Can you offer a free book, a t-shirt, or a gift card? As a marketer, you're going to need an angle.

Things You Need Before You Pitch:

- Familiarity with the page admin and the community.

- An appropriate book. Don't pitch a romance novel to a sci-fi group.
- A bribe or special offer.

With Social Media Algorithms Come Many Opportunities

Since most social media platforms have limited the reach of posts, it has influencers scrambling to hang on to their following. It sucks for them because many of these influencers can't afford to advertise but you can easily bring a bit of buzz to their page with gifts and bribes.

Tip: Social media influencers occasionally have author takeovers. A takeover is just like it sounds, an author takes complete control of the account to hold contests, answer questions, and even interact with the influencer's audience. Believe it or not, these types of accounts aren't hard to find. You can find author-friendly pages on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram by typing, *Author Takeover* in the search engine and investigate which authors are doing takeovers and where.

Before I sign off, I want to warn you that social media websites are constantly changing and it can get overwhelming sometimes. If it's possible try to automate as much as you can while not sacrificing authentic engagement. This will keep you sane and focused on the main thing, which is your writing time.

Chapter 13

Cheap Advertising for Indie Authors

Recently, a friend of mine asked me where was the best place to advertise her book? I mean most indie authors know about BookBub, but not everybody can afford that, so I decided to go on a mission and find out.

Before I go on, I have to give the obvious disclaimer: Advertising of any kind isn't going to guarantee book sales. In fact, I met an author whose book sales went *down* while doing a BookBub ad.

Trends In Book Advertising: Social Media & Amazon Ads

Thriller writer Mark Dawson started a Facebook advertising course for authors which was very popular with indie authors. However, not all authors saw success, for example, YA and children's authors didn't seem to get the results that romance authors do. Also, Facebook advertising is a tricky beast and many authors don't have the ability or patience to learn the intricate nuances of advertising. Another thing worth noting is that even though it's considered cheaper, Facebook advertising costs can add up if you don't know what you're doing.

As if that weren't enough, a year later, Amazon ads became hot and this made more sense to some authors like me. Instead of luring people to Amazon from Facebook, why not advertise to people already on Amazon? Chances are they're at Amazon to buy something so why not entice them with a book? Indie author Brian Meeks created a course on Teachable for those looking to learn about Amazon ads, the course is expensive but if you can't afford that, he also has a book on the subject called, *Mastering Amazon Ads* and it's available of course, at Amazon.

If you're not sure which one you want to try, Amazon has a free course for beginners and Facebook has courses that are also, 100% free. Also, Dave Chesson, of Kindlepreneur, has a free course on Amazon ads.

- [Amazon Ads](#) course
- [Facebook Ads](#)
- [Kindlepreneur](#)

To add insult to injury, BookBub announced they would be offering PPC (pay per click) ads and PPM (pay per impression) ads. BookBub has a large community of readers and it's a very popular place for indie authors who want to advertise a book. If you want to learn more Reedsy, has a free video course taught by author David Gaughran [here](#) and a very thorough blog post [here](#).

The Obvious Problem:

The biggest barrier for most authors is the learning curve, it requires authors to study copywriting, keywords, and graphic design. Not all authors are capable or willing to learn these things. Many indie authors work 9 to 5 jobs or have personal obligations and this is just another hurdle in the publishing world. That's where discount newsletters became a Godsend. You just gave them the money, and they handle the rest but as I said previously, not everyone could afford it.

Alternatives To BookBub: Those Other Discount Book Sites

Believe it or not, BookBub is not the only discount newsletter geared towards readers. There are others and though, many of them don't have the reach of BookBub (which has [3.8 million subscribers](#) in crime fiction alone) they are cheaper and some of them reach hundreds of thousands of readers. Like BookBub, many of them charge according to the popularity of the genre as well as the type of ad such the *as Deal of the Day* type or a simple slot in the newsletter.

Below, I only listed those that feature *book sales* and not freebies sites:

- [Free Kindle Books & Tips](#)
- [Book Gorilla](#)
- [Kindle Nation Daily](#)
- [Ereader News Today](#)

- [Robin Reads](#)
- [Fussy Librarian](#)
- [Bargain Booksy](#)
- [Book Sends](#)
- [Red Feather Romance](#)
- [Reading Deals](#)
- [EreaderIQ](#)
- [Book Barbarian](#)
- [Book Runes](#)
- [EbookSoda](#)

A Tip For A Stress-Free Experience

The first thing I would recommend an author do before putting down any money is to read the rules of these sites carefully. Several of them have requirements regarding; reviews, covers, and pricing. Also, some of them offer refunds while others do not, so author beware.

Chapter 14

Where to Find Beta Readers

For those of you who don't know, beta readers are readers who get to read your book before it goes on sale and provide feedback. Depending on your goals, beta readers can be fans of a particular genre or even a fellow author. The ultimate goal is to get the feedback you can use to strengthen your work. "*It's cool*" or "*I liked it*" won't cut it for most authors. The typical beta reader goes over a story to check for consistency in style, glaring grammar mistakes, and even plot holes. In short, they critique books before they're published. They

don't provide reviews only feedback. In other words, book reviewers review books, and beta readers read books.

Should You Edit First?

Most authors edit before giving a beta reader their book but there are those who use beta readers as an *editing filter* so they don't have to pay so much on editing later on. I don't like that kind of thinking, I mean, what beta reader is going to like a manuscript that's not edited properly?

Don't Troll for Beta Readers

A few years ago, I found this blog post called, "[When I Bought Your Book I Didn't Sign up to be Your Beta Reader.](#)" It's an interesting take on authors responding to reviews and even changing books according to those reviews. Beta readers can help you avoid this publish and republishing nonsense.

What to Look For In A Beta Reader

Some authors are looking for a writing partner, while others are looking for a mentor, and some just want to see what the average Joe Shmoe thinks. Again, it all comes down to your goals. Whoever you choose, make sure to do your research. Make sure that person has actually done some beta reading in the past. This way you won't waste time on those who are just looking for a freebie and avoid the flakes who never critique anything.

Different Types of Arrangements

- Writers who offer an exchange, they'll read yours if you read theirs. These are most popular with indie authors.

- Paid beta readers who offer their time and opinion for a price. The quality varies depending on the service as well as the beta reader.
- Regular readers who will offer an honest opinion on your work though they are rarely skilled at offering an in-depth critique.
- Writing groups usually made up of aspiring or rookie authors often critique manuscripts but beware, not all groups are created equal. Some consist of writers from various genres and may not have any clue about what your target reader likes.

Be Mentally Prepared to Hear Their Opinion

Some authors have described their experiences with beta readers as either pointless or nightmarish. Remember as an author, it is your responsibility to allow readers to hate your work without fear of retribution. They are not stupid or tasteless just because they don't like your book.

Where to Find Beta Readers

1. **Absolute Write** has a forum called: [Beta Readers, Mentors, and Writing Buddies](#)
2. On **Goodreads**, there is a group called: [Beta Reader Group](#)
3. Even **Facebook** has several groups for [Beta Readers](#)

If you're not interested in cultivating relationships, then you may have to pay someone. You can find beta readers on [Fiverr.com](#) where they charge anywhere

from \$5 to \$350. Also, the Self-Publishing Review charges around \$129 for a beta reading.

Chapter 15

Paid & Free Book Reviews

I've been fascinated with this subject and even wrote a little about it but I've never met an author who actually paid for a book review. So I went to the internet to find out what you get when you pay a reviewer. Investigating the most legitimate (popular) paid services Publisher's Weekly Select and Kirkus, I tried to find out the truth.

What surprised me the most about this investigation was the belief that authors had about paid reviewers. Some authors believed that these paid reviewers were somehow more qualified to judge their work. But nowhere have I seen any resumes or qualifications listed on the reviewers. In reality, most of these reviewers are forced by the company to remain anonymous. So honestly, you have no idea who's reviewing your book.

Another shocking belief: All publishing companies pay for reviews. Honestly, that's unknown, though it's been alleged for years. The rumor being that big media outlets like the *New York Times* won't review books by publishing companies that haven't purchased advertising. However, publishers do send out free ARCs (Advanced Reader Copies) to reviewers and various media outlets which costs money, so yes, they do pay for reviews in that sense.

Kirkus Confessions

It was the [confession](#) of a Kirkus reviewer who talked about how difficult it was to fulfill his assignments that got me thinking. If they're having issues with meeting assignments how on earth are these books getting reviewed?

According to a few dissatisfied authors, they're not! One author I found in a chat room, claimed that Kirkus simply skimmed her submission and gave an incorrect review of her book. In her complaint, the author alleges that the reviewer didn't get the arc of the story right and didn't seem to even know what the book was about. That's bad, considering they charge around \$425 to review a book, not to skim one.

Publisher's Weekly (Select)

It gets no better with Publisher's Weekly Select program. Again, a few authors discussed the merits or lack thereof on the [Kindle Boards](#). Some cited that the reviews are necessary if you want your books in libraries and book stores. The logic being that since Kirkus and PW periodicals are marketed toward book stores, libraries, and those within the publishing industry, your book will get in front of the right people. However, I don't agree, the industry wants to see big sales, not good reviews.

As I read on, things got worse, one person claiming to be an agent said, that several of his clients paid for reviews only to have them put in a newsletter squished between 50 other reviews. Another author said it was a waste of money and that their book was never reviewed. While another alleged that PW only chooses poorly edited books to slam.

The Inherent Problem

The problem with the review business is there's no real way to manage it. How would a supervisor or managing editor know for certain a job is being done unless they read every single book themselves to make sure details are not skipped or forgotten.

Another problem is lack of understanding, how can someone review a book on World War 2 when they don't have any knowledge of the time period? And how can an elderly grandmother review a YA urban romance? See how this is all subjective? Indie authors are paying real money for an opinion that may or may not be relevant.

This is the Part Where I Tell You How to Get Free Book Reviews

There are sites that indie authors can submit their books for free, or only for the cost of shipping, to get an honest review. Hopefully, you've built a network on social media of readers and bloggers who review books in your genre. And don't forget to solicit reviews on your blog or newsletter. Below, I list free and paid options for finding even more book reviewers.

Free:

- [Goodreads](#)
- [Litsy](#)
- [BookLikes](#)
- Library Thing [Member Giveaways](#)
- [Prolific Works](#)
- [The Kindle Book Review](#)
- [The Indie View](#)
- [Book Sirens](#) Database

Paid:

- [Hidden Gems](#) \$20 - \$400.
- [Reedsy Reviews](#) \$50
- [Book Sirens](#) \$10 - \$180
- [Author Marketing Club](#) \$97
- [NetGalley](#) \$450 and up

Chapter 16

How to Get Your Book into the Library

How can indie authors get their books into the library? It's a question that has many authors stumped. Before I go on, I need to emphasize that this won't work unless you have legitimate buzz and impressive sales. While indie authors have successfully gotten their books into their local libraries, many can't seem to break out further than that. That's because acquisitions librarians only purchase books based on their budget as well as a book's popularity.

Another point I need to make is that your book needs its own ISBN (For both the ebook and print edition) as well as distribution via Baker & Taylor or Ingram for a library to consider your book. These endeavors will cost you some money, but since you asked, I'm telling...

Catalogs

Many Librarians are busy and don't have time to discover the latest and greatest book. They instead rely on catalogs to alert them to new releases and those books with the most buzz. Getting into one of these catalogs is not cheap but if you want to get on a librarian's radar, you'll have to pay to play. So here are just some of the catalogs that are popular with librarians:

Edelweiss

[Edelweiss](#) is a catalog used by many librarians across the country, it is also a site used by publishers to get their books in front of the acquisitions librarians.

NetGalley

Though technically [NetGalley](#) is about posting galleys it's also got a newsletter you can get into via their marketing program. It's very popular with librarians looking for a *try before you buy* scenario.

Getting Your Book Noticed By Librarians Through Book Reviews

It's no secret that many libraries are under budget and understaffed. In response, many acquisitions librarians use book reviews as an important part of their vetting process. Some of these reviewing services require a fee like Publisher's Weekly Select and Kirkus but there are free sites like ForeWord Reviews and Midwest Book Reviews that are free to indies.

ForeWord Reviews

[ForeWord Reviews](#) offers indie authors a place where they can submit their books for an honest and professional review. It's considered a place where media professionals go to find the latest and greatest in indie publishing. Did I mention it's free?

Midwest Book Reviews

[The Midwest Book Review](#) services are free for print books but have a \$50 fee for ebooks, ARCs, and uncorrected proofs.

Publisher's Weekly Select

In 2010, PW introduced an indie program where they *announce* books on their website and even offer the *possibility* of a book review. It's only a small

possibility because according to PW's site there's a 75% rejection rate so the odds aren't good. This means you're basically paying for a blurb on a website, which seems more like advertising to me, but I digress...

Kirkus:

[Kirkus](#) is a site used by publishing professionals as well as librarians. Unlike PW, they don't relegate indie books to the back of the bus. Getting a review here will cost about \$425-\$575.

Library Journal

[Library Journal](#) is a media source for librarians all over the country, sadly, they're not open to unsolicited books. However, Library Journal does accept photos, guest posts, and letters on a variety of topics. Just make sure you get a byline and mention your book in said byline.

Getting Your Ebook Into The Library

[OverDrive](#) is like the Amazon of digital retail store for libraries. You can get your ebooks into the OverDrive system through Draft2Digital, Smashwords, and StreetLib.

There are other distributors just like OverDrive such as:

- PublishDrive
- IngramSpark
- Baker & Taylor

Getting Your Audio Book Into The Library

[Findaway Voices](#) is the only audiobook distributor that can get a self-published book to the library as of this date. I've heard stories of some indie authors who have gotten their books successfully into OverDrive's audio distribution

through email petition but that's rare and those indie authors often have a large back catalog.

The Free Way to Get in the Library

I know what you're already thinking, "*Rachel, why don't I just donate my book?*" and that's a good way to get your book in a library but if you want a library to *buy* your book, then you'll have to get on their radar in other ways. Besides, I've heard stories of authors having their book donation rejected by their local library. Ouch!

Telemarket/Spam Your Way into the Library

There are directories that authors can use that list the websites of [libraries around the U.S.](#) You can email or call the acquisitions librarian and ask them if they would be interested in your book. Many indies have done it though there are no stats on how successful it is. However, in telemarketing, I hear a 2% response is considered a good thing.

In Conclusion

There is no easy way to get your book into the library. I think many indies are putting the cart before the horse when they approach libraries at the beginning of their book launch. You don't want to start here, many libraries are on a tight budget and have no room to spend carelessly on unproven books. Also, if you haven't noticed, it's expensive to get into the catalogs and online stores that librarians seem to favor. Save it for when you start to make a profit. You don't want to do too much too soon and wind up broke.

Chapter 17

Assistants: They're Not a Luxury Anymore!

Sadly, most authors figure assistants are only for the rich, while the other half are control freaks and couldn't imagine handing over any aspect of their business to someone else. However, both of those excuses are total BS, if you are finding yourself overwhelmed by social media, email lists, and blogging then an assistant is exactly what you need. I'll admit, it took me a long time to become comfortable with farming out work to someone else. I mean what if they screw up? Worse yet, what if they walk out on a project? But what if they do an amazing job and save you time while preserving your sanity? I hate to break it to you but the latter usually happens.

The Money Excuse

It's no secret that most indie authors are flat broke even after publishing multiple books. But we can all afford *something* and that's where we're going to start. If you value your time as a business owner then there are many things an assistant can do for you:

1. They can handle your social media accounts.
2. An assistant can investigate the names and email addresses of acquisition librarians.
3. They can deal with technical issues on your website, or with your ebooks.
4. They can research markets and databases to help you find more places to sell your books.
5. Pitch the media for interviews/reviews.

Author Assistants are a Growing Business

Many vanity presses are notorious for over-billing self-published authors for services like press releases and file conversion but a virtual assistant is *way* cheaper. When in reality, they're sometimes thousands of dollars cheaper than what a vanity press charges. Here are just a few sites to investigate if you're considering making the leap.

- [Author E.M.S.The Author's Assistants](#)
- [Kate Tilton's Author Services, LLC](#)
- [Book Branders](#)

Dead Broke?

If you're publishing on a shoestring budget, you might want to consider hiring a college intern. The only caveat here is that you must offer them real-world experience. Also, there are laws governing how businesses utilize free labor, such as, how many hours they can work before they're considered an employee. So be sure to research the labor laws in your part of the world before hiring an intern.

Here are some places to get you started:

- [Internships.com](#)
- [Barefoot Student](#)
- [InternJobs.com](#)

I hope I gave you something to think about in the future when you begin to find yourself overwhelmed and overburdened by administrative tasks. Remember, there's no shame in needing help. Most businesses and even the Fortune 500's

are hiring interns to help with redundant tasks like social media management, and PR, so they can keep the main thing, the main thing.

Chapter 18

Book PR 101: How to Find Interview Opportunities

When I was marketing my novel, I would often find myself envious of all the media attention some authors received. Little did I know that author had a team of helpers to scour the earth for interview opportunities. Another fact I didn't know was that sometimes these teams were hired by the author and not their publisher. In fact, many traditionally published authors spend their entire advance (if they get one) on marketing their book.

This is where that assistant comes in real handy (chapter 17) because book PR is a lot of work. If you hire an assistant, you can bypass that awkwardness when asking for an interview. Just write a pitch letter for your assistant and ask *them* to send it, this way you're still in control.

Timing is Everything

It's been said a million times but I need to remind you, most magazines and websites publish by an editorial calendar. For example, some magazines start looking for Christmas stories in July and Halloween articles in May. This is why it's so important to send a pitch or query many months before your promotional blitz. Consider this part of your soft launch.

Pitching the Right People

It should go without saying that you have to be careful as to who you pitch because not all media members are indie-friendly. So save yourself the frustration and anger by learning about the publication you wish to break into. Also, learn the name of the editor or assistant editor responsible for the section you'd like to appear in. It's no secret that editors hate those, *Dear Editor* pitches and often delete them or worse, they forward them to the interns who then reject them.

What to do if you Want to Break into a Magazine that Doesn't Feature Indies?

If you absolutely must get your name in O Magazine, or the New York Times, then you'll need to write an article that will captivate their audience. In some instances, it's best to be interviewed but if you're writing nonfiction, then it would be wise to write a few articles on your book's topic and become known as an expert in that topic.

Here are a few resources to find the right interview opportunity for your book:

- [Poets and Writer's Database](#) (Literary Magazines)
- Wikipedia Database of [Book Review Magazines](#)
- [World-News Papers](#)
- [RadioGuestList.com](#)
- [InterviewGuestsDirectory.com](#)
- [HARO \(Help A Reporter Out\)](#) (Nonfiction writers)
- [Webwire](#)

Finding Opportunities on Social Media

Social media is a great place to find information for opportunities not available anywhere else. Some newspapers and magazines update their social media accounts more often than they do their websites. The search engines of LinkedIn, Facebook, Goodreads, and Twitter should be your best friends.

Research Tips:

Try typing the words: *author interviews* or *looking for author interviews* into the search engines and see what you find. You can do the same thing for the Goodreads search engine, just be sure to click both the *events* tabs as well as the *groups* tabs at the top.

Podcasts

I would be remiss if I didn't talk about podcasts. This past week, Red River Radio launched its first Facebook page and the turnout was tremendous. In less than 24 hours, they had over 270 likes, and several authors contacted them directly about wanting to be on the network.

Podcasts are a great way to land an interview as well as get a book reviewed. Hat tip to BookBuzzr for this list of [Podcasts for Authors](#).

Research Tip: Go to Blogtalkradio, Podbean, or iTunes and type the words: *authors* or *books* into the search engine. Be sure to listen to the podcast before you request an interview to see if it's the right fit for you.

Radio Programs

Yes, it's been said radio is dead but in certain parts of the country and even the world, radio is alive and well. Many radio programs offer interview segments and some are absolutely desperate for guests. This is where you come in with your free books and swag. You can find thousands of stations on The U.S. [Federal Communications Commission](#) website which has a database of thousands of stations all over the country. It's not user friendly, but it's very large.

Television

Believe it or not, television is still an option for indie authors promoting a book. Sure you may not end up on *OWN* (Oprah Winfrey Network) or *Ellen*, but you don't need to. There are plenty of places that want to interview authors of any stripe. Just check out a few local programs in your neck of the woods. Here's an online [station locator](#) and another [here](#).

Who and How to Approach?

Many radio and television stations have a contact us page like this one [here](#). Depending on what you have in mind, you can offer a contest of some kind or just request an interview. Whatever you choose, make sure to perfect your query/pitch letter before clicking send. It would be wise to approach the producers (if you want an interview) or the marketing department (if you only want to run a contest) to get an actual response. If that information isn't easy to find on the site, Google it. That's how I found the producer of the local morning show in my town.

Chapter 19

Building & Growing Your Email Lists

If you haven't noticed it's getting harder and harder to stay in touch with your readers on social media. I'm not only talking about the social media algorithm changes, as more people and corporations build websites and blogs, it makes for more competition online. So what do we do?

Lots of authors are building their email lists and are having success at getting readers to sign up. I've heard of authors who have over 30,000 people on their lists. Yes, some authors have more subscribers than some major newspapers.

And don't think this is an indie thing, I know several traditionally published authors who are quietly building their email lists. You know, in case they get the shovel from their publisher. That way, readers can follow *them* and not the publishing company.

The cool thing about email lists is that they're not at the mercy of an algorithm. Some bestselling authors have even replaced blogging with email newsletters. So if you find yourself overwhelmed and short on time, this may be the route for you. An email newsletter once a month is doable even for the busiest author.

Email Newsletter Services

There are many places to choose from, and most of them are free, up to a certain point, after that, you must pay a monthly fee.

- MailChimp (Free up to 2,000 subscribers)
- MailerLite (Free up to 1,000)
- AWeber (Free up to 500)
- Constant Contact (\$20-\$45 per month)

Keep in mind most of these sites have rules you must adhere to or risk losing service which brings me to my next point...

Learning The Law

Before you go out and start blasting readers with emails, remember there are laws you must obey. The most important law being the CAN-SPAM Act, which is a law regarding unsolicited marketing emails. In the U.S., The Federal Trade Commission or FTC has a guide on their website which you can read [here](#). It's

something you should become familiar with if you don't want to be fined big bucks for sending unwanted emails.

In Europe, they have a similar set of regulations called the General Data Protection Regulation or GDPR, which you also need to be aware of if you are sending emails to readers in Europe. You can read about that on the official website [here](#).

I urge you to sit down and read through the legal material carefully before you begin *any* email campaign.

Marketing Your Email Newsletter

You will have to market your newsletter as you do pretty much everything else. If your goal is to build a massive email list, then you're going to have to make readers want to sign up. There are several tried and true ways to go about that and below I list just a few.

Free Ebooks

Hands down, many authors swear by this technique, after all, who doesn't like a free book? Here's how it works, an author offers a free book, readers opt-in, and boom—new subscriber. Don't worry, if you have only one book out, you can always write a short prequel. This way you don't feel like you're sacrificing your work to freebie snatchers.

Social Media

It's my opinion that you should use social media to promote your email list, not the other way around. If you have any social media accounts, then you must promote your email list to your readers there. Also, don't forget your bio, you can add your signup link there as well.

Blog or Podcast

The most obvious place to put your opt-in link is on your blog or website via a pop-up. This way when someone visits your site, they are immediately greeted with an offer to sign up for your email list.

If you have a podcast you might want to mention your list and where to sign up. Just like when you have advertisers on your shows, you need to advertise your products as well.

***Tip:** It also wouldn't hurt if you put a link to your opt-in form in any existing ebooks you've already published.*

Ads

If you have a few bucks lying around then why not advertise? Just beware that there are people on the hunt for freebies who may just sign up, collect their freebie then, unsubscribe. So be careful where you advertise.

Blog Tours or Guest Posting

If you're going to post on someone's blog it would be wise to leave your form's link in the bio. If they don't allow it, create a sales/landing page on your blog with your opt-in form.

I'm sure you've gotten the point by now, that authors really have to promote their email lists and not so much their social media accounts these days. This way we can weather the storms of social media and advertising extinctions without breaking a sweat. There's nothing worse than being dependent on

something or someone that cares nothing for your success, that includes your publisher or whatever social media platform everyone is using this month.

Chapter 20

Bonus Chapter: Getting Featured By Online Retailers

There are some things you just can't know unless you ask and I, as well as many indie authors never ask one important question and that's: how do you get your book featured on websites like Goodreads or The B&N Review? In this very long chapter, I lay it all down and give you email addresses as well as submission guidelines to the editors at Goodreads, Kobo, and even Barnes & Noble. So enjoy!

How to Get Featured on Goodreads

Just mention Goodreads to some indie authors and you may get a hostile response. There's no doubt that there have been several nasty author vs reader fights. But there is no reason to treat Goodreads like a social media ghetto. Seriously, you don't need to clutch your books tightly to your chest every time a reader passes by! Yes, I'll admit, there are trolls who wish to ruin your day, but on the flip-side, there are also *authors* harassing people on the site. In fact, it's gotten so bad that several groups on Goodreads have banned misbehaving authors like this one called, [Anti-Asshat Indie Authors](#).

You see, it goes both ways. My advice for social media has always been avoiding drama, by having nothing to do with the people who cause it.

Things to do on Goodreads

Your first mission on any social media site is to claim some space of your very own. That means creating a profile and joining the [author's program](#). You have to do this to add your books and hold giveaways on the site.

Once you're done with all that, you're going to want to build up your fan numbers but before you go spending all your efforts on that, you might want to consider jazzing up your Goodreads author page. That means posting videos, creating quizzes, and sharing quotes from your book.

Make Friends with the Cool Kids

If you're going to follow someone, follow the people who are the power users. These people generally visit the site daily and sometimes have hundreds if not, thousands of reviews to their credit. Goodreads helps you find these folks using their [People](#) feature. It can help you find the most popular reviewers, and librarians who review books in your genre. First, go to the home page and click on the *Community tab* at the top, and in the drop-down, select *People*, then on the righthand side of the page click on *Top Reviewers*.

Getting in the Goodreads Newsletter

Did you know Goodreads has a newsletter? Actually, they have two, one for adults and another for the young adult crowd. Though indie authors aren't likely to get interviewed or reviewed unless they buy one of the advertising packages, there is still a way to weasel your book into that newsletter.

Every month, the kind folks at Goodreads select the most popular Q&A sessions and put them in their newsletter which goes out to thousands of people. If you can pull off an awesome Q&A then there's a good chance you can wind up in their newsletter. However, you must contact them well in advance before your Q&A is scheduled.

Here are suggestions from [Goodreads' website](#): *“Create a special group ‘Ask [Author Name]’ or ‘[Author Name] hosts a Q&A.’ Make sure to categorize it as a ‘Goodreads Author’ group. The group description should clearly state what time range the author will be available to answer questions—we recommend running your group for a single day.”*

You can contact them about it [here](#) and select Author Program in the question type drop-down box.

Another Approach:

The editors at Goodreads are open to book submissions from publishers (which you are by the way) so why not send yours? Keep in mind, it's very competitive, there are tons of authors and publishers submitting and wanting in, but it's still worth a shot. [Here is the list](#) of the editorial team, as well as the instructions as to where and how to submit your book.

How to get Featured on Kobo

Kobo is quickly becoming a book retailer to be reckoned with, with over 26 million registered users on its site, it's a place indie authors should start paying serious attention to. Although they don't have a large share of the American market, (that honor belongs to Amazon) they do command 13.4% of the global ebook market.

So how do you make your run with Kobo successful? Easy, you take advantage of Kobo Writing Life, which includes a blog as well as a podcast that gives authors good tips on how to promote their books on the site. Also, you get your ebook featured in Kobo's BookHub. And unlike Goodreads, Kobo will feature a book for *free on their website* if you meet their [requirements](#).

Just like Amazon and Goodreads, Kobo has several newsletters that regularly go out to readers alerting them of sales and new releases. Also, Kobo prominently features books on the front of their website, and guess what, it's indie-friendly!

How to get Featured on Barnes & Noble

It's the second-largest book retailer after Amazon, and there's no doubt the past few years have been rough for Barnes and Noble but things are looking up with the sale of the company to Elliot Advisors, the owners of Waterstones, a U.K. book chain.

The difference between Amazon and Barnes & Noble

Barnes and Noble was a company founded in 1886 and began as a simple book shop in New York. However, Amazon dominates the book market and sells a plethora of products on its sites such as air conditioners and clothing. While B&N's merchandise can't compare, the only real advantage they have over Amazon is their brick and mortar book stores. B&N is offline as well as online and can offer things to authors like book signings and even book fairs in their stores. All one has to do is call up one of their many book stores using their [store locator](#) and speak with one of their managers directly.

In the beginning, there was the Ebook...

When ebooks first hit the market, readers had two choices, Amazon's Kindle or Barnes & Noble's Nook, and believe it or not, many book lovers preferred the Nook over the Kindle for a short time. That alone is why it's a good idea for indie authors to get their books uploaded to the Nook.

The Site Formally Known as Pubit, & Then Nook Press

For those of you who don't know, [B&N Press](#) is the only way indie authors can upload their ebooks to the Barnes & Noble site directly. I talk about how to do that in [Chapter 4](#).

Wait a minute, You're Not Done Yet!

Like Goodreads and Kobo, Barnes & Noble has a newsletter and podcast called B&N Review where they interview authors and review books. You can find out more info on how to get a book featured [here](#).

Before You Send Off Your Masterpiece to Everybody

Keep in mind, you need to have all your ducks in a row. When you submit your book, make sure you have the correct editor, and the genre they review. Don't give them an excuse to dismiss your book. Also, keep in mind, they are under no obligation to review any unsolicited material.

Important Tip: Be sure to pitch during the end of your soft launch so that you have a few reviews just in case they need social proof.

What to include in your mailing:

1. A review copy or proof.
2. A brief cover letter with an awesome blurb/synopsis.
3. Your contact information; website, blog, or email.
4. If you don't have any online presence, create a media kit with a picture, bio, etc.

In Conclusion...

Before I sign off, I think I need to advise you to not get too depressed when a major company like Goodreads, doesn't feature or review your book. The publishing industry is very competitive and it was way before self-publishing

even took off. It takes time to get noticed and there are rarely any *overnight sensations*.

Self-publishing is a business which means it could take years to make a profit and that's normal. You'll need to take risks and be willing to make mistakes in order to find out what works for you. If you approach self-publishing like a business and not merely an art form, you can make a pretty good living from it and isn't that what we all want?

Author Bio Page

Rachel Rueben is the author of several YA novels as well as a romance suspense book. She is also the head unicorn (blogger) at [Writing By The Seat Of My Pants](#) where she discusses self-publishing and whatever comes to mind. You can learn more about her at author website at: [RachelRueben.com](#).