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De-bunking Subsidy Publishing Horror Myths

By M. LaVora Perry

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Subsidy publishing companies are those that require an author to pay to produce her or his book. These companies are also known as co-publishers, or pejoratively, "the vanity press."

Some of these companies make unreasonable promises about how their services lead to books becoming instant, phenomenal best-sellers, or engage in other unscrupulous business practices. However, legitimate subsidy publishers do exist.

In this article, I'll explain the 6 factors that led me to choose the subsidy publishing company with which I partnered to publish my children's book, Taneesha's Treasures of the Heart.

First, let me say that whether one self-publishes solo or uses a subsidy publisher, the expense of paying to publish can be high. Publishing print-on-demand (POD) is a form of subsidy publishing that can greatly reduce this expense. However, this article will cover conventional subsidy publishing in which a certain number of books are printed in anticipation of orders being placed.

If you can afford it, and you do your homework and footwork, partnering with a subsidy publisher can have its advantages. In my case, the factors that influenced me to select the company I chose were:

1.) I pay a one-time, flat fee that includes free reprints for the duration of my two-year contract, and I will not pay for reprints if I renew my contract. My intention all along was to produce a top-selling book. I invest the book promotion hours and effort it takes to make this happen. As a result, my book was

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published in June of 2003 and I'm presently into my 3rd free printing; books are being sold both nationwide and internationally.

2.) My fee includes worldwide distribution through Baker & Taylor—which means something to those vendors to whom it means something.

3.) I don't have to pay for or personally handle warehousing and shipping, or pay additionally for these essentials—no matter how many times my book is reprinted.

4.) I own the copyright to my work—not the subsidy publisher.

5.) The company's finished products have a professional appearance in terms of paper and bookcover stock and print quality.

6.) I didn't want to wait until a traditional publisher picked up Taneesha's Treasures of the Heart; the story was unconventional enough that I believed I had to make substantial sales before traditional publishers realized there was a market for this type of book.

Now that Taneesha's Treasures of the Heart is in print, my co-publisher has provided me with a significant additional reason to be glad about my decision to use their services: As I continue to learn more about the publishing business and approach them to revisit certain terms of my contract, they have been flexible about doing so.

I would never tell anyone that they should stay away from every subsidy publisher, no more than I would dissuade someone from totally self-publishing, publishing POD or seeking a traditional publisher. Rather, because I realize that so much of what I've learned and achieved in relation to my book is the result of people sharing their expertise with me, my approach to disseminating information is to provide balanced assessments of what the reality of publishing is so that writers can make well-informed decisions about how they want to proceed with their work.

In 1995 M. LaVora Perry became the first African-American staff greeting card writer in the world's largest publicly-owned greeting card company—American Greetings (AG). She is the author of the critically-acclaimed children's book, Taneesha's Treasures of the Heart. Sign up for her email free newsletter at www.fortunechildbooks.com. Email her at lavora@fortunechildbooks.com

Publishing Pit Bulls

By Lisa Hood

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You have invested a great deal into your writing: time, attention, your heart and soul, maybe even a few tears, and now you're considering investing even more: your cold hard cash. Rather than accepting "No" as an answer to your dream of being published, you have decided to publish your book yourself. Before you put your money where your mouth is, be aware there are publishers willing to take your money and offer little in return.

To self publish, you must take on the expense of printing, marketing, distributing and storing of your manuscript. You will be involved in every aspect of the publishing process, which could leave you with very little time for writing. However, you will keep 100% of the profits from your book sales.

You may work with a vanity press, which will print and bind the book for a substantial fee. Vanity presses are not selective, they will publish the work of any one willing to pay, and they do not edit, market, promote or store the books once printed. Some vanity publishers do not require upfront money, but require payment for other "services" such as editing, set up charges, promotional charges, or they may ask authors to buy their own books for resale. While they may call themselves "small press" or "traditional" the fact remains they are a pay for print publisher.

A subsidy publisher will promote their services as a partnership, perhaps offering to absorb some of the publishing costs or provide marketing services. You are still expected to pay a large fee for the cost of publishing, but you do not own the books once printed and you receive only a portion of the profits from book sales. You need to be very careful about using subsidy publishers. The only benefit over vanity press is the promise to market and promote your work. However, they have already made plenty of profit just from printing your work and are likely to forego any marketing to make a few more dollars in book sales. It's much more profitable to just move on to the next new author desperate to see their name in print. According to Writers Beware (2004) "...it's rare that this financial investment is ever recouped through sales. Vanity/subsidy publishers have no economic incentive to get books into the hands of readers, since they've already made a profit from the author's fees. Despite what they may promise, they won't effectively market or distribute your work. Some vanity/subsidy publishers don't even have arrangements with book wholesalers, making it impossible obtain books except through you or maybe the publisher's website."

There is also a stigma attached to vanity and subsidy publishers, because they are not discriminate in works they publish. There are also many disreputable firms who "engage in a wide range of unethical or fraudulent practices, including grossly overcharging for their services, renegeing on contract obligations, producing shoddy books, failing to print the number of books contracted for, and even providing kickbacks to agents that refer manuscripts to them." (Writers Beware, 2004)

Many authors are opting to epublish in order to avoid expensive printing, distribution and storage costs. Epublishers may offer royalty payments up to 40% of the sales price and do not require up front fees.

However, be wary of hidden charges like formatting charges, cover art or editing fees. Never conduct business with an agent or publisher who requires you purchase services as a condition of representation.

Resources

Writers Beware, <http://www.sfwaw.org/beware/agents.html>

Unknown Author (2004) Writers Beware. Retrieved March 12, 2004 from www.SFWA.org

Lisa Hood is the author of "Shades of Betrayal" and "Shades of Revenge". She has been writing for over 10 years and is presently working on her third suspense novel, "Shades of Jealousy." She is also the Talent Liaison @ BOOKJOBBER.com. Other articles by Lisa Hood can be downloaded from <http://www.bookjobber.com/articles.asp> or mailto:lisa_j@bookjobber.com



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