



## Info Sheet: Vanity Publishing

When you sign with a traditional publisher, they will (in most cases) pay you an advance for your work and will pay for all the associated costs of producing your book: editing, printing, distribution and promotion. They take a percentage of the earnings and you will earn a royalty for each book sold.

Vanity publishers, on the other hand, charge authors for publishing books, oftentimes way over and above the actual cost of printing. They make their money out of the process, whether you sell one or ten thousand copies. Vanity publishers have no vested interest in helping make your work a commercial success.

Vanity publishers use many different names to describe themselves: joint venture publishing, co-operative publishing, subsidy publishing, share responsibility publishing, hybrid publishing, equity publishing, publishing services, and partnership publishing. Some misleadingly use the phrase self publishing.

This is different from paying a commercial printer for a print run of your books. A commercial printer will quote you a price per book. Self-publishing digital-only authors often do this so they can have physical books to sell at author events.

The minute a publisher asks you for money, be wary. Get some independent advice on what you are getting for the money before you hand over any money.

### **Are there any benefits in vanity publishing?**

Some books are not of interest to the highly competitive commercial publishing world. You may want to publish a book for yourself, friends and family, or a niche group — like a sporting club or community organisation. Self publishing can be intimidating. It involves many processes: editing, cover design, typesetting, printing, marketing and distribution.

Vanity publishers may do some, or all, or this work. But you bankroll the entire process. Vanity publishing is unlikely to result in financial or commercial success and, in some cases, you may be considerable out of pocket if you have purchased a sizeable quantity of books.

## What are the traps and pitfalls of vanity publishing?

Vanity publishers can often be scams and the many of those businesses are not recommended by the Australian Society of Authors (ASA). The fees can be exorbitant and you may be required to either order excessive quantities of your book, or be charged extremely high rates to purchase copies. You will have to cover all production costs, usually upfront, and usually with high add on administrative fees. It is extremely difficult to recoup this cost.

However, in today's rapidly changing market, there are many situations where a shared cost publishing arrangement can work well for both publishers and authors. For example, this is often seen with poetry publications.

Always do your research and be fully aware of the implications of any agreement you sign. The ASA accepts the role of vanity publishers in two situations:

- Small poetry publishers may ask you to share printing costs, but will offer higher royalties
- Universities may request a 'subvention:' a grant from your institution to help cover publication costs.

It is not hard to self publish these days. Cut out the third party, do it more cheaply, have the same or a better result, avoid the difficulty finding a reliable vanity publisher. See our Info Sheet Self Publishing for advice.

If you do decide to use a vanity publisher, beware of illegitimate practices. It is always a good idea to search the name of the business with keywords like 'review' or 'scam' to find negative feedback. You can also find information on the website Predators & Editors.

## Warning signs: things to look out for

Some publishers will swear that they are traditional, independent or small press, even if they charge for editing, presales, printing or reviews. These are vanity publishers.

Be aware of any of these signs:

- A vanity publisher posing as a traditional publisher
- A sales guarantee where you must pay the difference if your book doesn't sell a certain amount of copies, by a specified amount of time. With no marketing, distribution or other assistance, sales will be hard and you will probably end up paying
- Any excessive promise is a warning sign, such as promise of profit. There is no guarantee that you will profit financially with a vanity publisher
- Repetitive contact from the publishers via email/phone, with high pressure sales tactics



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- Pressure on you to sign a contract immediately, getting in during a 'limited time only' offer
- A referral from a literary agent. Reputable agents will not work with fee-based publishers. There will be an arrangement in place between the two parties — one that does not benefit you.
- Refusals to provide information or referrals from happy clients.
- Refusals to give a set price.

## Other tips

- Have a contract and understand what you are getting (and what you are not). Be clear on what you need to do and what the vanity publisher will do for you. Make sure any contract is detailed and comprehensive. Do you retain copyright? Is the license exclusive or non-exclusive? Is it for print only, or electronic and audio as well? What of subsidiary rights, payments, cost, termination and reversion? If you can't understand every clause or the legal wording is baffling, make sure you seek legal advice — available through **Arts Law Centre of Australia** on contract assessments with **Australian Society of Authors**.
- Don't rely on verbal promises. Make sure everything agreed to is written into the contract.
- Check that their costs meet industry standards. You'll find those on the **Australian Society of Authors** website or in the most recent edition of **The Australian Writer's Marketplace**.
- Read up on vanity publishing, common pitfalls, and the vanity publisher you are intending to use before signing a contract.
- Contact writers who have used the vanity publisher's services. Do they give a glowing recommendation?
- Order proof copies to assess quality of the printing, materials utilised, cover and typesetting. Was the actual process of production prompt and without error?