

Media Comments on Self-Published Books

Prepared by Paul J. Krupin, Direct Contact PR

Aerial M. Ellis wrote "As a new author, I am about to begin the process of self-publishing my first book." He asked for advice.

Every year for the past several years I've done a survey questionnaire of media and asked them to provide me with responses to several crucial questions. This year one of the questions I asked was "How do you feel about self published books?" The questionnaire was transmitted in early November and nearly all the responses were received by Nov 3 to 14, 2008. So the data is about a month old.

So here it is straight from the horses' mouth. Media Comments about Self Published Books.

What follows is pure and unadulterated, fresh and very revealing responses from media in magazines, newspapers, radio, tv and news services and syndicates across in the US and Canada. I have not edited the responses at all. What they wrote to me is what you see.

Warning! It's not a pretty picture. Self publishing is not viewed in a favorable way. You can understand why when you see what these people have seen and read what they wrote.

What this means is that if you choose to self publish, it's crucial that you be aware of these issues and do your best to create a quality product so that you don't perpetuate the rather dismal perception people have of this industry.

>>> The key lessoned learned is simple: Write a good book. Make sure it is a really good book. And then do a really good job telling people you wrote a good book. <<<

Comments and discussion welcome! Are you ready? Here goes.

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How do you feel about self published books?

Lynette Rowland, Executive Editor, Midwest Parenting Publications (Publisher of Indy's Child and Cincinnati Parent Magazines)

Self published books are a positive step towards allowing talented writers with little resources to print and market their own talents and we encourage writers from all publishers to submit their work. As an independent publication we enjoy seeking out local and independent self-published books.

Keir Graff, Senior Editor, Booklist Online, Booklist

I'm willing to consider them, certainly, but in our business we really value the expertise of established publishers. They perform a valuable vetting process that we don't always have time to do. I'm all for democracy in publishing, but I can't tell you how many self-published books I've seen that suffer from fundamentally poor

use of the English language--sometimes on the cover itself. A lot of press releases for self-published titles suffer similarly. But there have been self-publishing success stories and I'm certainly happy to see them.

Elizabeth Devereaux, Children's Books Review Editor, Publishers Weekly

Times are changing. Occasionally -- very occasionally -- a self-published book merits serious appraisal. Self-published authors can do themselves a favor by educating themselves before contacting us, however, and checking out the detailed guidelines for review submission that are posted on our web site.

Ms. Gina Stepp, Book Reviews Editor, Vision

If they are well-researched and the author has a credible reason to be considered an expert on the subject, I have no objection.

Fran Hawk, Children's Books Contributing Columnist, The Post and Courier, Charleston, SC

Occasionally there's a gem.

Ms. Denise Mort, Book Reviews Editor, Great Falls Tribune

If it's not good enough to be real-published, it's not good enough to be published at all. Most self-published books I've encountered are a horrid mess, needing enormous amounts of editing and organization before they'd be anything approaching book level, even if they had a point to make or story to tell. Usually they're so vague, self-indulgent, and confused, no one will ever know what they intended to say or tell.

Meredith Jacobs, Book Reviews Editor, The Fayetteville Observer

We do not review POD or self-published books. This policy was based on a number of factors, such as what our readers wish to see on our books page, the overwhelming number of books published in this category of varying quality, and on the best use of time on a small daily newspaper with breaking news to cover and without a full-time Books page editor or writer. As a courtesy, we will publish a short, fact-based book-release announcement for local authors ONLY.

Shaley Melchior, Freelance Writer

As long as they have been proofread and edited extensively, I don't mind reading and reviewing them. However, I'm much less likely to review self published books, because they typically are so much less cohesive and 'put-together' than traditionally published books.

Mr. Jim Adams, Book Reviews Editor, The New Hampshire Union Leader

We don't review self-published books. The general feeling is, if the book was good, a "real" publisher would have published it. Yes, there are some good self-published books, and some go on to be big sellers, but in general, self-published books tend to be poorly written, poorly edited, poorly marketed, "hard" to read and, well, boring.

Laura Miller, Book Reviews Editor, Contexts

They are of very uneven quality. For the most part, I don't have the time to do without a publisher I can count on to have performed some level of screening and editing of a book.

Kel Munger, Books Editor, Sacramento News & Review

Most of them would be better off not published at all. I've written about it here:

<http://www.newsreview.com/sacramento/bibliolatry/blogs/post?oid=659278>.

The rare good books that are self-published take too much work to find; most of them really need an editor.

John Landry, Book Review Editor, Harvard Business Review

I'm skeptical about them, so these have to do more to prove themselves appropriate for review, but I'm open to considering them if the accompanying press release focuses on the new idea in the book, the insight that's surprising or contrary to intuition. .

WaveLength Magazine, Book Reviews Editor

The standard is normally very low. Most are ill-conceived vanity works. The focus is usually very narrow and doomed commercially. They are usually immediately evident as self-published works for all the wrong reasons, even if carefully hidden by creation of a publishing company, etc.

Joe Meyers, Book Reviews Editor Connecticut Post

They go to the bottom of the pile.

Kathleen Robinson, Book Reviews Editor, The Calgary Sun

I have maybe seen one ever that would rate coverage in a newspaper. Usually the audience is way too narrow.

Morley Walker, Book Reviews Editor, Winnipeg Free Press

From an author's perspective, there can be many advantages to self publishing. But getting reviewed or interviewed is not one of them.

Carolyn See, Book Reviews Contributing Writer, The Washington Post

It's a pathetic swindle 99% of the time, because writers expect that company to do the work of distribution, getting reviews, etc., when that never happens. If you want to publish 50 copies just for your family and friends, that's OK. Otherwise, it's pitiful.

Ms. Heather Shaw, Book Reviews Editor, Spirituality & Health magazine

I'll look at anything.

Prudy Taylor Board, Book reviewer, Boca Raton News, Florida Weekly, Fort Myers, FL, Florida Weekly -- Naples, FL

I'll consider them, but seldom review them because the quality isn't sufficient. I recently reviewed a self-pub, but only because the author had sold a substantial number of copies. I definitely do make the distinction between self published and print-on demand.

Jean Westmoore, Children's Books Editor, The Buffalo News

We do not review self-published books. Most of the ones I see do not match in quality the books from established publishers.

Doug Rieder, Book Reviews Editor, Erie Times-News

They must be looked at with some caution. I'm not saying that there are no worthy self-published books, just that there are a lot of unworthy ones, and that the standards of the actual publishers of these books can be very low. Still, we've run many a review of local vanity works.

Dan Webster, Book Reviews Editor, The Spokesman-Review

If there's a local angle, I will look at them.

Carolyn Price, Book Reviews Editor, Outdoors NW

I applaud these authors but I don't think the books would have as much clout as if they were published by a publishing house.

Daniel Grotta, Freelance Writer

Under no circumstances, do not query me on them, do not send them, i will not read them, i will not review them. Period.

David Neff, Book Reviews Editor, Books & Culture: A Christian Review

Self-published books have a much higher threshold to get my attention. There are reasons for self-publishing, but those very reasons will usually preclude coverage in a mass medium.

Deb Taber, Book Reviews Editor, Northwest Horse Source

The self-published books I have received thus far have considerably lacked appeal, and I'm very wary. I'll still take a look at them in hopes of finding that one gem, but so far I have not found one that I would recommend to any reader, or even that I could read all the way through. Small press publications (not vanity press) that are well edited, however, receive equal treatment to those received from major publishers, and I've read a few excellent offerings from small presses that take editing and story selection seriously. For self-published authors, remember that your delivery is just as important as your message. It makes our magazine look bad to recommend a poorly written book. If your idea is worth writing about, it's worth writing right and getting the input of a qualified editor.

Dave Williams, Editor, Asbury Park Press

My feelings are irrelevant, since my paper has a strict policy against covering them (if we didn't, we'd be deluged with local would-be authors, most of them dreadful).

Della Watson, Editorial Assistant, Sierra magazine

We will consider them, but it is unlikely that they'll be reviewed.

Carolyn Kuebler, Managing Editor, New England Review

We don't review them, but we have no hard feelings toward them.

Peter Cannon, Book Reviews Editor, Publishers Weekly

We don't review them.

Jon Fear, Editor, Waterloo Region Record, Kitchener, Ontario

I have no bias against these. Some are incredibly sloppy, however. Self-published authors shouldn't expect a review to sell their book. Writing a book and selling it are two different things. Authors of self-published books should pay as much attention to all of these questions and answers as any book industry professional would. In the course of a year, I probably get sent about 60 self-published books written by people who live in my market area. I try to look at them all.

Ira "Skip" Singer, Business and Technology Journalist, Freelance for GQ, Men's Journal, Ziff-Davis, Washington Post, Advanstar

Not as turned-on by them, unless they are outstanding.

John Williamson, Professor, Book Review Editor, SIM News

Rarely do I examine such a book, the quality is likely unappealing to readers.

Jeanette Larson, Book Reviews Editor, Parent Wise Austin

There is nothing necessarily wrong with self-published books but my experience has been that few self-published authors do the groundwork, such as editing and revising, that is needed for a successful book. In 4 years of reviewing for Parent Wise I have published a review of one self-published book. I've looked at some others that sounded good but were poorly edited, didactic or preachy in their message, and illustrated by amateurs. I feel sorry for some of these authors because even if I did review their book they are probably never going to sell more than a small number of copies.

Julian Suchman, Producer, Sirius Radio

They must look great and be well edited to compete with professional publications.

Nanette Morges, Features Editor, The Hour Publishing Company

It varies as the quality does. There is a world of difference between self-publishing/POD and vanity projects. Given how hard it is to break into the traditional publishing industry these days and how repetitive the product from those houses can be, I am more willing to give self-published books a chance. It can be a source of new, edgy material. But it is all about quality. Books still need to be well-written, look professional and be marketed professionally to be taken seriously. Don't send me something that is in 12 points, double spaced, with spaces between the paragraphs, bad layout and an awful cover and expect me to consider it a published book to be profiled in my paper.

Ellen Barcel, Leisure Editor, Times Beacon Record Newspapers

Many self-published books are excellent. Large publishing houses are looking to sell a lot of copies and turn down important or interesting books as a result, because they only seem to have a limited market. I am, however, more cautious in reading self-published books since I don't necessarily know the credentials of the author.

Bill Highlander, Editor, Times Media Inc.

Not likely to get reviewed.

Ted Newsom, Features Editor, Hustler magazine

Sorry, but if an author doesn't make the grade with a fellow editor and there are thousands of them), why would i waste my time plowing through essentially a printed version of an over the transom manuscript?

Rich Ott, Business Editor, West Valley View newspaper

They are not "real" books. The quality on several we received in the newsroom is pretty low.

Colleen Truelsen, Editor, Valley Community Newspapers, Inc.

They're fine -- but too many of them needed a good editor to catch grammar and misspellings. A book with even a few glaring inappropriate words makes me hesitate to tell our readers about it.

Todd Shryock, Managing Editor, Smart Business Magazine

Depends on the quality of the information. I know it's difficult to get published in today's world of a few giant publishers with cookie-cutter books, but some of the self-published stuff is awful, both in presentation and quality.

Blair Robertson, Staff Writer, The Sacramento Bee

I'm not necessarily biased if it's a good book, but newspaper editors are reluctant. If it's a new idea and it resonates, then go for it.

George Mocharko, Editor of Tomorrow's Business Leader, PBL Business Leader, The Professional Edge & Several Advisers' Hotlines.

I like the fact that anyone who is interested in authoring a book has the ability to publish one as well. That being said, a lot of self published books do not have a clear audience. The first thing an author must figure out is: who will read and benefit from this book?

John Wilkens, Features Staff Writer, The San Diego Union-Tribune

Depends on the book and why it's self-published. Paper generally avoids them, but I have done both reviews and features on self-published books. I reviewed Jim Bouton's Foul Ball, because the reason it had to be self-published was part of the story. I did a feature on a woman who self-published a book about people from all over the country named George Bush. A couple of the George Bushes were from San Diego County, so it had a local tie. And it was just an interesting idea for a book.

Eric Taub, Technology Contributing Writer, The New York Times

Don't expect to get many sales; and be prepared to spend a lot of time doing pr around it.

Barbara James, Business Deputy Editor, The Columbus Dispatch

My husband's cousin does that. how do you spell 'e-g-o'?

Albert Reinoso, Producer, SIRIUS Satellite Radio

A good book is a good book. If they let me know about it, there's no difference.

John Biggs, Technology Contributing Writer, The New York Times

I find them dubious at best and foolhardy at worst.

Mike Cottrill, Business Associate Editor, Smart Business

My take is this: if a book is solid, it's solid. I don't much care about how it got glued together.

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