

# PROBLEMS AND PITFALLS IN SELF PUBLISHING

By Susan and Howard Hands

So you've written a book on history. You feel that it's a well researched work with something new to say in the annals of history or even a new way of looking at a certain aspect of history. And you feel ... your work is well written. You've had it checked for spelling, grammar, accuracy and now you're ready to share your work with the world. So what happens next?

A Publisher. Who?

You search the internet for just which publisher might accept history furthermore which publisher might accept from you rather than through a Registered Agent. Then you send off your manuscript - double spaced with return postage, or it will be thrown directly into the rubbish bin. Some weeks later your manuscript is returned with a thank you, but no thank you. After all the time and effort you put into your work this rejection can be very upsetting. Still you try again with another publisher. When it's returned again and again, you have to rethink the whole project. A number of history writers, including yours truly, then decided to go down the Self Publishing track.

## **Self Publishing: The three Ps: Publishing, Printing, and Promoting**

### **1. Publishing**

What is meant by that term?

In this case, it means your manuscript, be it double spaced or not, has to be turned into book form. But what size book? There are quite a number of sizes you can select: Pocket book; A5; A4; Manuscript size - all of these are only some of the sizes that call themselves books.

Generally if you intend doing this at home with Microsoft Word, A5 or A4 are the chosen sizes. We'll choose A5, an extremely common size and easy to hold in the hand and read. Yet this size has problems with pictures and maps. They do not appear as clear as in an A4 size.

Now you must choose the size of the actual print within your book. Again it's your choice - as large or small as you wish. Why not pull out some books and count the words per line and note your preference. We'll choose size 11 which is compatible with an A5 page and "Times New Roman" as the font, though others like "Arial" work just as well.

Next you have to look at your page "setup". Margins, what size do you select for top, bottom, right, left etc? Where will you place your page numbering? Will you have footnotes or endnotes? Footnotes tend to break reading continuity, nevertheless a number of readers like the notes to be on the page they are reading. It's helpful, they say, for a quick referral.

If you decide on endnotes rather than footnotes do you "chapterize" your endnotes? That is, give them the same chapter number as in your book. It's all choices.

Your page looks OK and you have of course measured other margins etc in already printed works, so you know yours will work when printed. At this point you are ready to insert your manuscript using "Insert File". Then watch the computer flicking from page to page to page with your maps and photographs doing strange things. When the computer gives you the all clear sign the first task undertaken is to save it as a copy or even two copies. Now you are free to start checking your work.

Are all your paragraph headings at the top of the page? Are your pictures clear? Can you read your maps? Are your maps symmetrical?

Have any of your maps or pictures jumped a page because they would not fit? If any of the above problems exist then your illustrations have to be tweaked to fit or even tweaked to fit their paragraph companions. Are you Appendices in their correct place?; your bibliography? All problems.

By the way endnotes in Microsoft Word always do just that - go to the end of your written work.

Your manuscript now resembles a book, or partly so. To complete your book a number of pages have to be entered into the front of your work. A page containing your Title; then a page containing ISB Number, publication date etc. This is then followed by a Contents page, Acknowledgements, Glossary, in fact all you may need for your particular work to be read and to be understood. Once again it pays to check with other books.

Now and only now can you begin to work on an index through Microsoft Word. This too will take quite a deal of time as you go through your work page by page marking all the words to be indexed. And every time you decide to readjust anything in your book or add a new picture, take away a sentence, your index has to be reset - or it's wrong.

Last or perhaps first if you so choose, there is the Cover to consider - the picture, the words, the title, the back cover, the words you need to describe your work and the colour of your cover. Microsoft Word will always have a margin so any colour will not completely cover your A5 page.

It's all there now on your computer, you've even viewed it as a book so to speak by using "File, Print Preview" and multiple pages. At this point you're bound to want to print one copy at home to see how your book looks as a whole. . . Right. No problem doing the pages 1 to whatever - the Odd pages, but doing reverse sides - if one page sticks...

## **2. Printing Your Work**

You are now satisfied with your book - its layout and content the world needs to benefit from your research and all your hard work. So a number of copies must be made. How many: Fifty, a hundred, a thousand? In other words how many are you going to get printed and by whom? What are your options?

### Number one:

With care you can run off a number of copies on your home computer and printer. This is a long and tedious process as you must first print one side of each page keeping in mind odd or even numbers. Wait for the curl to flatten out and then print the reverse side checking as you go that there are no glitches. If there are mistakes then you must stop there and then and iron out the problem. When you have waded through ten copies you have the problem of binding. No! there must be an easier way.

### So to option number two:

Transfer your book to a CD or USB carrier, pick up the phone and obtain quotes from recognised Printers and Bookbinders for printing and binding your book. Most big companies like this usually quote for minimum runs of one or two thousand. The economy of scale usually makes for a good cost per book. But where are you going to store that number of books and keep them in the pristine condition that your reading public expects? And just maybe even one thousand is too many for a limited audience.

Susan's father in Kurangee opted for this option - that is the volume option. 2000 books from a Book Printer and Binder. The result is a nice neat book with a good price per book - but ten years after their printing we are still storing numerous books and look like doing so for some time yet. Still they sell - little by little.

It is option number three that we, from experience, have found to be the best option for us. We did examine the first two options. The first proved so laborious and costly in ink and paper, and ended up as a second rate product that we quickly abandoned it as a method of production.

So to option number three:

We will deal with this on a local Cairns basis, but the method could as easily apply in any big city. Having made sure that your book is correctly stored on a USB carrier you then visit a photocopying service. For "Road Rage" we chose Cairns Copy in Grafton Street, mainly because this is where the Historical Society prints its bulletins. We obtained a quote for copying a double sided page, along with the covers, and contracted to obtain just fifty copies of the unbound book. These were then taken to Cairns Plan Printing in McLeod Street where they were bound using a heat process and a spine welded onto the book. We ended up with a presentable product, which although slightly dearer per copy than that obtained by using option two, we were not burdened with multiple copies. Additionally we could, and did, obtain further copies in batches of fifty when we required them.

For this second book "The Cussed and the Cursed" a slightly different approach was made. By now we were quite well known at Cairns Plan Printing and they offered to both print and bind our book in job lots at a cost, which although marginally higher than that for "Road Rage", did include a coloured cover and eliminated the carrying of fifty books, no light weight, from one place to the other. Further because Cairns Plan Printing made a copy from our USB all we need to do is phone them with an order for as many copies as we may need in the future.

### **3. Promoting**

Right you are now in possession of fifty or maybe one hundred books on history, researched, written, published and printed by your good self. But you don't want that many books; what you want is fifty or one hundred members of the public at large to have one book each. How do you achieve that goal?

Before you go any further you must realise that several of these books have to be given away. "Legal Deposit" in Australia requires that any book with an ISBN must be deposited with the National Library in Canberra, and a further copy with the State Library of the book's State of origin. Then of course you will want to make donations to such institutions as the Cairns Historical Society, who helped you with your research, and of course to Aunt Mabel and Uncle Tom, because they too helped with their reminiscences of days gone by. So by the time you are through you are down ten books or so without a penny profit from all your work.

Eight steps to promoting and selling your book, which in essence is promoting and selling yourself.

Step one. Add up the cost of printing a single copy, then add on what you think is a reasonable profit for yourself. Say the cost of printing is ten dollars per copy and you might want say three dollars per copy as profit - so thirteen dollars.

Step two. Establish a Recommended Retail Price (RRP). When you sell through a retail outlet - bookseller or newsagent etc., then that outlet will ask for half of the RRP. This is to cover their profit and to pay GST. In the above case you RRP will be twenty-six dollars.

Step three. Visit local book outlets to see if a book of similar size and content is selling for the price you have established. Remember the only adjustment you can make is to your own profit margin.

Step four. Retail selling - in this you are the wholesaler. You are asking thirteen dollars a copy for your book. You will need an Invoice/Statement book and a receipt book. Do not expect that all retailers will actually buy your book, most will only take them "On Consignment". That is they will display your book

and if any are sold then you will get your money. If no sales are made you will, after a respectable period of time, take them back. All this will be noted in your Invoice/Statement book.

Step five. Direct selling. Here you become the retailer. Visit your local library, your University library and similar institutions, most will buy a well researched book on local history, and they will buy it direct which means you get the entire RRP. Or you can take a stall at a local market, either alone or with another author of similar work.

A word of warning here, any expenses incurred during the promotion or selling of your book, (fuel for the car, parking fees, market fees etc.) must be assessed when you are working out your profits.

Step six. Promote yourself and your book. Obtain interviews with your local newspaper or even your local radio station, such people are always keen to get "local interest" stories.

Step seven. Revisit all the local retailers with whom you have lodged books, just to remind them you are around and to make sure your book is being displayed to advantage.

Step eight. Don't forget the "Legals". If you are retired and on a pension it is a wise move to contact the Australian Taxation Office about your work. They are helpful and wont bite your head off. Also when you are selling to a company or institution you do not have to have an Australian Business Number (ABN) and there are forms to absolve you from that necessity, further you may be required to furnish your bank details as such bodies usually pay direct into your bank account.

Finally all the very best in promoting History into the community - don't expect to get rich, but you will get a lot of satisfaction.

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