

The Well-Fed Self-Publisher

*How to Turn One Book
Into a Full-Time Living*
by Peter Bowerman

Why Self-Publishing?

Fact or Fiction: *"The only reason to self-publish is because you can't find a publisher who'll take you on."*

Every time I hear that, I've gotta smile. The unspoken message, of course, is that the preferred route is to land a publisher. Well, call me crazy, but I disagree. For me, self-publishing was the *first* choice. I actually did not pursue the conventional publishing route with any more than halfhearted zeal. Given the subsequent success of the book, I have zero doubt that I could have attracted any number of conventional publishers should I have decided to go that route. But I knew pretty early on in the process that I wanted to keep more control over the whole project, keep the rights to my work, and, most importantly, keep most of the profits.

A Full-Time Income

And speaking of profits, I decided to affix the "Well-Fed" brand to my upcoming book on self-publishing for one simple reason: self-publishing has absolutely been "well-fed writing" for me. For close to four years, my first book supported me full-time. Now, we're not talking about "picking-out-chateaux-in-the-South-of-France" kind of money, but the book paid all my bills (including an average of two book printings each year), allowed me to still take some nice vacations, save a chunk of money and incur no new debt. Not too shabby.

And remember: the reason that sort of financial return is possible is because you don't have to sell zillions of copies of your book to make a living from it. That's the power of self-publishing. When your per book profit (after all expenses) is three, four, or five times what you could make with a conventional publisher, you can be nicely profitable with much lower numbers.

A few caveats. My genre - non-fiction "how-to" - is, arguably, the easiest to self-publish (with straight non-fiction not far behind...). Why? For starters, there's an insatiable appetite for information in the buying public and if you can provide the "how-to" information people want, package it in a compelling way and are aggressive about getting the word out, you'll do well. Secondly, with non-fiction "how-to," it's relatively easy to identify and pursue specific target audiences. Fiction is harder to self-publish but for first-time novelists, it's also *far* harder to attract a conventional publisher.

Second Caveat

All the above and all that follows is good advice if your goal is to have your book be a commercial success. Not, "I'd like it to be a commercial success." Everyone wants that. If you're just interested in writing a book about a subject you love, and with no concern whatsoever about whether a dime ever flows your way, fine. That's wonderful AND these words aren't for you. If that's you, you'd be better off with a conventional publisher or in a POD scenario, where your upfront financial obligations are far lower or nonexistent.

This book is for those who really want to turn their passionate creative efforts into real "pay-the-mortgage" money. I

can't guarantee it will happen with your book because I don't know anything about you: how driven you are, the genre of your book, your relative level of marketing savvy, business experience, etc. What follows are some things that have worked for me.

Third Caveat

All this applies if you've got a healthy chunk of time to be able to devote to the marketing and promotion of your masterpiece. If not, you might be better off going the conventional route. That said, if you're thinking – scratch that, *fantasizing* – that you'll find a publisher who will allow you to simply drop off your manuscript with a cheery, "Thanks! Off to write my next book!" while they handle that whole "icky marketing thingy," think again. Msrs. Grisham, King, Clancy, Gray and a few others are lucky enough to enjoy that luxury, but not you and I.

Yup, even with a conventional publisher, unless you're a totally proven commodity, you're going to have to be far more involved in the marketing of your book than you ever imagined or hoped. Why? Because your publisher will be far *less* involved in the marketing of your book than you ever imagined or hoped. Why? Because they don't have the time, personnel, or resources to devote to crafting a focused, sustained, and effective marketing plan. Why? (I know, I'm starting to sound like a five-year-old...) Because you're one of a bunch of books in their stable. And if another hot property comes walking in their door, you could easily be relegated to the B-or C-list in a New York minute.

Wanted: Multitalented Authors

Most publishers these days want to work with authors who come to them with, not only their book, but also a plan

for promoting and marketing that book. It only stands to reason. Given how many people want to see their books in print, publishers are in the driver's seat and can afford to pick and choose. If someone's got a promising book and no marketing savvy while another has both...

In a larger sense, this is pretty much becoming the case in any arena of creativity. If you want to succeed in a creative field these days, you'd better be good at something else besides the creativity or you're not going to make it. Unless, of course, you have a prodigious talent and/or you're surrounded by deal-makers looking out for your best interests. Good luck. So if a publishing company expects me to be an integral part of the marketing of my book, then the case to be made for conventional publishing becomes weaker still, given the anemic royalty rates paid to authors.

Writers As Businesspeople

Writers need to start thinking less like writers and more like businesspeople. You've got a choice. You can just be an "artist" – focused on the creative process. In that case – unless your talent is prodigious – chances are excellent that writing will only be a sideline hobby and a relatively unprofitable one at that. Or you can become both – not always easy or fun, but worth it – a creative force *and* a businessperson.

I say the only compelling reason for not going the SP route is that you simply don't have the upfront cash to produce (i.e., design, typeset, index, and print) your book. But even those non-trivial financial hits can be softened by shorter initial print runs, bartering strategies for services, short-term loans, etc. How committed are you?

Conventional Publishing Today

Now, given that I never seriously considered the conventional publishing route, I'm not going to claim to be some know-it-all expert in that arena. But I've seen enough to know that it's just not wise to deify the average conventional publisher as being so much smarter about how to get books (or *your* book) out into the public eye than you might be.

The "shotgun" approach to promotion and publicity certainly appears to be the order of the day with most publishing companies. Mass e-mailed press releases to mainstream media outlets seem to be the norm. And then there's the often-mystifying approach for sending review copies (and usually with little or no follow up...). I've probably received a dozen unsolicited review copies over the past few years due to some casual affiliations with certain associations or lists. The books arrive, typically with nothing more than a brief cover letter, if that. Given that I wasn't expecting it and likely have little interest in it, the chance that I'll review it is mighty slim.

Never Send It Unsolicited

EVERY single one of the roughly 500+ review copies I have sent out over the past few years has gone to someone with whom I had communicated in advance. Every single one was expected. Yes, that approach takes more time (but not as much as you'd imagine) but yields far superior "bang for the book," so to speak.

Old-Time Thinking + No Time For Thinking

I assert that the marketing model employed by many publishing companies is a result of some antiquated thinking married to the garden-variety

modern workplace reality of overworked, understaffed companies. The Internet, as I'll discuss, has dramatically changed the promotional possibilities for book publishers and I'm guessing most companies haven't begun to truly tap these strategies to more effectively promote their wares.

Just as importantly, a self-publisher has a luxury (and arguably, a *necessity* if commercial success is your aim) that most conventional publishers don't enjoy because of time and personnel restraints: the ability to focus on one's title and find the most effective ways to promote that specific title, as opposed to simply laying a standard promotional template over the book: hitting only mainstream media (already subject to a daily bombardment of releases), and indiscriminately sending out review copies. By contrast, as a self-publisher, I go where the traffic is lighter, the reception is warmer and the people speak my language.

Read a great article on self-promotion by author Jessica Hatchigan (*How to be Your Own Publicist*) in the September 2003 issue of *The Writer* magazine entitled, "Bestsellers are made, not born."

In it, she makes a point about the pitfalls of dealing with a publishing company, observing, "Unfortunately, authors who receive modest advances for their books – and that's most authors – can expect scandalously little in marketing support from most publishers. (One insider recently told me that many publishing houses today, because their profit margins are so thin, don't even bother to send out review copies of their newbie authors' books.)"

There's virtually no way you *couldn't* do a better job than most publishers. Not that they're greedy, evil people. Hardly. Just that their day-to-day realities preclude doing an optimal marketing job for your title, meaning you'll have to be an integral part of the process. Heck, if I have to do most of the work anyway to make it successful, I might as well be making most of the money. So, let's look at a few ideas here...

The Goal: To Be Seen "Everywhere!"

A year or so back - I'll never forget the day - I was checking my e-mail and I got another book order notification. On my web site I have a little information capture mechanism that asks for name, e-mail address (for future mailings) and where they heard about the book (a good idea for your web site, FYI...). Her response? "Everywhere!" Now if that isn't music to an author's ears, I don't know what is. It's proof that I was getting the job done.

That was only the first. I kept hearing different iterations of the same basic theme. One woman wrote: "I first heard about your book on writersdigest.com, then on writerswrite.com, and finally on writersweekly.com. After the third time, I figured I needed to see what the fuss was all about." What does that tell us (besides that I'd been busy...)? That people need to receive multiple impressions before they take action. Very useful information.

So, how did I get to this point? After all, I started with just my book and me. No big publishing house, agent, publicist or hefty promotion/marketing budget. Not to mention *virtually no mainstream media coverage*. Yet, I still landed three major book clubs - Writer's Digest Book Club, Quality Paperback Book Club and Book-of-the-Month Club. Plus reviews from

(historically self-pub-averse) publications as *Library Journal* and *Booklist*. Not to mention a "Full Publisher Contract" - typically reserved for the big boys - from Ingram. And several book awards. How did I do it? The Internet, of course.

Exponential Efficiency

The Internet has dramatically raised the bar on productivity, allowing for maximum accomplishment and "reach" in minimum time. In the hugely competitive scramble for attention in the book world, the 'Net can be the great equalizer for the little guy.

Let's take my book as an example: *The Well-Fed Writer: Financial Self-Sufficiency As a Freelance Writer in Six Months or Less* - a step-by-step "how-to" for establishing a lucrative full- or part-time freelance corporate writing business. With all the downsizing of the past decade, Corporate America is outsourcing plenty of writing projects at hourly rates of \$50-100+.

Okay, so who's my audience? For starters, how about any and all "wannabe" writers looking to make a handsome living with their pen? Add seasoned freelancers looking to diversify beyond magazines into higher-paying work. Plus at-home moms and home-based business seekers looking for a flexible, well-paying career from home.

Go to Your Market

To sell books, you need to get reviews. Book reviews are far and away the cheapest and most effective way to build demand and sales for your books. So, to get reviews for one's book, go where your various target communities hang out. Scour the Internet for web sites, associations (check print version of Gale's directory), newsletters (Oxbridge Directory of newsletters on-line and others) and newsgroups for folks in your target audience(s). Not to mention other writers of related books. Visit these sites, find the "Contact Us" link and make your pitch by e-mail. Make up one standard pitch letter, vary it slightly for your different audiences, and "cut 'n paste."

Try any URLs that sound right for your topic. Actual examples for me: writers.com, freelancewriting.com, athomemoms.com, writing.com, homebusiness.com, etc.

In the beginning, I was on the hunt for blurbs for my final edition. In less than a week, while still doing my corporate writing work, I lined up close to 25 commitments, not only for blurbs, but reviews, interviews, and articles (which I'd write). I was getting responses back in fifteen minutes! Out went the galleys.

A galley is your pre-publication version of the book, also known as an "advance uncorrected proof" (words you should actually have printed on the book cover, so it won't be confused with the final printed version, which would make it too late for many key reviewers), meaning it can still have typos.

And once I had my final books, I simply repeated that marketing process, over and over, as my laser-targeted review copy list beefed up fast.

Ask and Ye Shall Receive

Speaking of cover (and inside page) blurbs, why not shoot high? I went after Bob Bly, the freelance writing "guru" and author/co-author of 50+ books on writing and business. In freelance writing circles, everyone knows Bob. At the time I published my book, he had the only other book on the market that competed with mine. Part of me thought, "Why would he help promote my book?" Of course, let's be honest, he was far more of a competitor for me than I was for him.

I approached him through my editor at Writer's Digest Book Club, and his three-word reply to her request (on my behalf) for a testimonial was: "Be happy to." He ended up writing an absolutely fabulous blurb, which read, in part, "This book is the best information on how to make more money with corporate clients I have ever read. Highly recommended." Think I sold a few books with those words? You bet I did and many buyers told me just that.

I have a friend who's written a number of books (though not best-sellers) in the psychology and relationship genres and for his latest one, he landed a blurb from "Dr. Laura" Schlesinger. How'd he pull that off? At a book signing for the controversial talkmeister, he simply asked her assistant. All he had was a few chapters at that point, but left them with her and a few months later, got his blurb. And a pretty good one at that.

Funny sidebar. I found out about it when he called to ask my opinion on whether he should actually use it. Seems many of his friends (not in the book business) told him that using it would be the kiss of death, given the public's mixed feelings about her. Of course, I disagreed. Publicity is publicity and

even if you don't like her, it's still impressive that she officially took note of the book with her comments. And fact is, many people do like her or she wouldn't be as popular as she is. So, ask away. These folks are a lot more accessible than you might imagine.

Mainstream Media?

Certainly you should pursue mainstream media coverage in addition to your Internet contacts but know that the media is exponentially more fickle than if you can zero in on your target audience via the above-described process. Fact is, when I targeted my search to writers, at-home-Moms and home-based business seekers, I was getting a 90-95% positive response rate ("Yes, absolutely we'd love to review your book! And if you want to write an article and perhaps even..." - you get the idea.) No, they didn't all turn into reviews, but the high percentage of positive responses was a far cry from what I'd gotten from the mainstream media folks.

And the good reception was no surprise - I'd picked groups that, by definition, would have an interest in my book. Mainstream media is just that - mainstream, not nearly as focused.

Here's the reality: If you're an unknown author, the chances that a reasonably major-market newspaper will give you exposure or write an article about you and your book is slim. Doesn't mean you shouldn't try, but just a heads-up. If you do plan to go for it, DO NOT just send out review copies en masse with no personal contact. If you do, you will almost certainly succumb to the *Dumpster Factor*. The average big-city daily gets 125 unsolicited review copies daily, more like 250 during the holiday season.

I was told by someone who worked for one that they literally have a dumpster in the mail room and most of them get tossed, unopened. Or they have internal book sales for charity a few times a year to clear out the stockpile. I'm totally serious. I'm sure none of us mind making occasional donations to worthy causes but I'm not at all certain we'd want most of our review copies ending up with such a fate. And they *will* if you're sending out a pile of them to book editors who aren't expecting them. Which brings up the next point...

Forget the Book Review Editors

Unless you're a big name, a local talent or have a white-hot timely subject, forget sending a review copy to the book editor. They don't care. Do however, contact book editors with info on upcoming signings to go into their calendar, and try to get them to include your web address in the listing. A better bet for landing some exposure is to figure out which editor would be best for your topic. Does your subject fall into Food, Jobs, Career, Business, Features, Computers, etc.? Contact the appropriate editor and be sure to pitch, *not the book, but an angle represented by the book*. They simply don't care that you've written a book; they want to know why the book is relevant now.

With my books, I've been pitching three things: 1) the tie-in with corporate downsizing and accompanying outsourcing of writing projects at high rates, 2) the idea of a lucrative direction for all aspiring writers out there trying to figure out how to make a handsome FT living as a writer, and 3) the growing trend of people wanting to drop out of the rat race, start their own home-based business, and recapture precious quality of life, and time for leisure and loved ones, etc., etc.

Your Web Site

A web site is mandatory. Period. It's the linchpin of any Internet marketing push. Mine (www.wellfedwriter.com) has sample chapter, table of contents, reviews, cover art, Q&A, sample radio/TV footage and much more.

Go visit when you get a moment. Yes, it's a work in progress, constant evolving and improving but I think it's decent. Might give you some ideas. And remember, you don't have to have a full-blown site from day one. Grow it.

The key benefit of a web site is that it *duplicates* you: it works for you while you're off doing something else. And we self-publishers need all the help we can get.

By e-mailing press releases to media folks (or *any* reviewer) you give them instantaneous "click-thru" access to your site and all the things they need to make their job easier (like author pix, cover art, reviews, the interview clips, etc. Check out the "Attn: Media" link on my site) which in turn makes it easier for them to say "Yes!" Always add your URL to your e-mail signature going out on *every* e-mail you send. You'd be surprised where interest in your title comes from.

Drive Them There

Assume that most people visiting your site heard about it somewhere else, as opposed to stumbling on it. Don't count on search engines to bring people to your site who initially knew nothing about it. It will happen and certainly cover your bases in that arena, but work on building demand and traffic to your site through your marketing efforts.

Keep the site simple by making it easy for them to get in and out. Focus on

conveying information in a logical flow, and dispense with the fancy (browser-clogging) graphics. If things take too long to load, trust me, they *will* leave.

You may ask: "Should I hire someone to create my web site or do it myself?" My answer: If you love rolling up your sleeves and diving into a new software program, perhaps you have the temperament to do it. You'll save yourself a healthy chunk of money.

If however, you're a techno-phobe like me *and* you have a few bucks to spend, or you think you might be able to pull it off but aren't sure when, you're probably better off hiring someone. If I'd waited till I learned how to do all this, I'd still be without a site. The key is to get it done. Web designers aren't exactly scarce these days, which is driving rates down. By the way, do-it-yourselfers, word on the street from many web designers is that *Dreamweaver*® is the best program.

Raising Eyebrows

I made many of the above contacts with the writing, home-based business, and at-home-Mom communities before I even approached the huge trade wholesaler Ingram to be listed in their database. In the questionnaire Ingram requires as part of the application, I listed some 50-60 of these entities and got a pleasantly surprising response: they offered me - one guy, one book - a Full Publisher Contract, offering my title wider distribution.

The message they sent is clear: we want to work with *and* will reward those publishers - regardless of size - who are committed, through consistent marketing efforts, to promoting their book(s). Logical, no?

FYI, as of June 2001, Ingram no longer deals with publishers of less than 10 titles. To get into Ingram's database, you need to go through one of their preferred distributors. Check out www.ingrambook.com/new/distributors.asp to see the list of distributors.

OPD Vs. BBD

By the way, your "official publication date" (OPD) should be very different from your "bound book date" (BBD) - the date you actually have printed books in your possession. If you're smart, you'll put at least four or more months between the two dates, giving you plenty of time to build awareness in the traditional media and in your grass roots Internet communities. In the process, you'll extend the period during which the media will consider your book a "new release." Many publishers sell out their first printing before their OPD actually arrives.

Certain key reviewers (*Library Journal*, *Booklist*, *Publisher's Weekly*, *ForeWord* magazine, *Kirkus Reviews* and others) want to see books 90-120 prior to the OPD. Once OPD arrives, it's too late.

Get Personal

This next point was driven home for me as I was promoting my *Well-Fed Writer* seminar in Nashville, Tennessee. I had contacted the executive producer of a TV station by e-mail with a pitch to appear on their noonday show. I'd heard nothing back, so the next week, I tried to reach him by phone and got his voice mail.

I checked the station's web site and found an "office" number listed for the show. I called, a woman answered, and I assumed it was an "office" person. Wrong. It was one of the hosts! She was very nice, I pitched her, she asked for a

review copy, I said I'd get it out that day. In parting, I suggested she visit my web site. When I returned from UPS, I found an email saying: "Checked out your site. Looks great - I'm sold! Are you available on (x date)?" Convinced yet that you need a web site?

Whether you're promoting your book, seminar or both, try as much as possible to reach people personally. I'm certain that I'd have gotten nowhere with that TV station had I not connected with a real human being. Unless your book is so hot that the media is literally beating down your door, if you restrict yourself to impersonal shotgun press releases, it's liable to yield little fruit. It's always best to have an actual name. Obviously, few of us have the time to make hundreds of personal phone calls, but the more you can make, the more success you'll have.

When you're calling, always ask the receptionist for your contact person's e-mail address before he or she connects you. If you get their voice mail, leave them a message briefly stating your business and that you'll be e-mailing a press release to them. That way, instead of being just one more e-mail amidst the spam, they'll be expecting it when it arrives.

The Marketing Boomerang

Do enough marketing and you'll experience the delightful phenomenon I call the "marketing boomerang." In the beginning, you'll be contacting publications, web sites, associations, etc., asking if they want a review copy. After you've done a bunch of that, you'll start getting requests for review copies from people you've never heard of or contacted. Finally, you'll discover (as I did, to my pleasant surprise), that after you achieve a sort of "critical mass"

with your marketing, you start hearing readers refer to some entity you never contacted, as the place where they heard of your book. Apparently, they found your book on their own, bought a copy and reviewed it on their site or in their publication without ever even contacting you. You gotta love that. Speaking of review copies...

Send Lots of Books

Don't be afraid to send out LOTS of review copies. I know some books recommend that you really delve into who's asking for one, on the assumption that there are a lot of mooches who just want to score a free book and have no more intention of writing a review than the man in the moon. I'm sure that happens AND I'll probably still send one out. Even if they are mooches, if they like the book, chances are good they'll tell a few others about it.

Unless your books are VERY expensive, (i.e., lots of color photos), don't be stingy. My books cost about \$2,000 each to produce. Sent "Book Rate" (aka. Media Mail) adds another \$1.85. Add a press kit for maybe a buck and for less than \$5, I've got the very best form of advertising out there: the book itself.

Press Kit Tips

Want to make your press kit stand out? Get 250-300 extra book covers printed up when you print your books, fold them in half, staple the bottom and use them as folders. Include a press release, key reviews, news articles, flyers, copies of book club listings/inserts, author bio, and anything else you feel will make a strong case for the book. Never written a press release? Go to www.press-release-writing.com, and in the upper left of their home page are tips for putting together a good one.

Book Clubs

With galleys in hand, approach the book clubs early. Check *Literary Marketplace* (the bible of the publishing industry and in your library) for a complete listing with contact people. You'd be amazed at the highly specific niches out there. Check it out. And don't be afraid to shoot high. I landed *Writer's Digest Book Club* early enough that I could use it in all my Internet pitches - a phenomenal door-opener. I didn't even consider the big boys - *Book-of-the-Month*, *Quality Paperback Book, Doubleday* - until after landing the *Library Journal* and *Booklist* reviews.

Once I did, I got a little cockier, sent them on to BOMC and QPB (sister clubs under the *bookspan* name) and within a month, got the thumbs-up. I remember what the acquisitions editor said: "We just haven't seen any book quite like this on the market." Ponder that litmus test when you're contemplating your book's subject, title and cover design. Book clubs - and *anyone* for that matter - want unique, different, and distinctive.

Shortcut to Big Library Sales

A key to library sales *and* enhanced credibility in general is to land reviews in such prestigious publications (mentioned earlier) as *Booklist*, *Library Journal*, *Publishers Weekly*, *ForeWord* magazine, and *Kirkus Reviews*. They typically want review copies (galleys OK) 90-120 days prior to your OPD, making an even stronger case for an extended period between BBD and OPD. With limited budgets and time, librarians rely heavily on these industry pubs to pre-screen for them, often ordering *all* books reviewed. They figure if they've been reviewed (only 10-15% of those submitted are reviewed), even if it's not a fabulous review, it's a good book.

While the chances of getting reviewed in one of these publications are slim, go for it anyway. How can you boost your chances? Well, for starters, write a really good book – one that will appeal to a fairly broad audience. But as a self-publisher, there are a few things you can do to stack the deck in your favor...

- **Your Cover**

You've heard it before; you're going to hear it again: don't skimp on your cover. Remember: 150,000 books are published annually. Those people considering your title for purchase, distribution or review look for reasons to cull the herd. The cover is the no-brainer. Spend the money to get yours professionally designed (DON'T hire your cousin who's artistic...). Can you barter services with a graphic designer? I traded writing for design services with a professional graphic designer, who will need copy for her web site and marketing brochure. And when I say professionally designed, DON'T let your printer's "design department" design it. Most of the covers I've seen done by in-house designers at printing companies look cheesy and amateurish.

Think long and hard on your cover and title. For the title, brainstorm a bunch of ideas and run them past friends. Think clever *and* effective. Visit bookstores with your graphic designer and scan the shelves in your genre for titles and cover designs that catch your eye. Figure out why they do and try to capture what works. Just as important as a good title and cover, I assert, are...

- **Four-Color Galleys**

I remember having a lively, upbeat phone chat with a review editor at *Booklist*. She'd received my galley (but didn't have it in front of her) and asked me nonchalantly who my publisher was. I should have simply given her the name of my self-publishing entity, Fanove Publishing, and spoken of it as separate from me. But she caught me flat-footed and instead, I mumbled, "uh...me." Long pause. "Oh, really... well...we rarely if ever review self-published books." Yet, they still did.

Fact is, a lot of self-published books have gotten reviewed in *Booklist* and others. What makes the difference? Again, create a good book, in form and content. And "form" includes four-color galleys. Galleys can span the gamut in terms of aesthetics. They can be downright austere, with typed B/W covers or even as primitive as F&G (folded and gathered) pages. Or they can look identical to the final version.

If you're Stephen King or Tom Clancy, your galley could probably show up on a stack of cocktail napkins and they'd be fine with it. As self-publishers, we're already behind the eight ball with the review publications. Overcome their institutionalized reluctance to review self-published books by making your book look like anything *but* a self-published book. Oh, and if they ask who your publisher is, give the name of your publishing company, with a casual, "They're a small publishing house here in (your city)." And if you're Joe Smith, make sure you haven't named your publishing entity Joe Smith Enterprises or JS Publishing. You'll instantly identify yourself as a novice self-publisher.

Push for the Bookstores?

Some of the most successful self-publishers rank bookstore sales near the bottom of the scale in importance. Don't let your vanity get the better of you and be so anxious to get your books into the bookstores until you're sure people will be looking for it. By all means, approach Ingram (or Biblio now) and Baker & Taylor (the big library wholesaler), get listed on their databases, and make it easy for the bookstores and libraries to get their hands on it.

Once you're listed with them, anyone can walk into a bookstore or library anywhere, request the book, and the structure is in place to order it. No guarantee they *will* order it, but now they can.

If you've created the demand, and that demand drives enough people to walk into enough Barnes & Nobles or Borders asking for the book, I promise you, they'll find you. Once I started getting "Requests for Title Information" faxes from the big chains, *then* I went through the "small press review" process with Borders and B&N and they started ordering in larger quantities and stocking the book. Visit their web sites for links to that process.

Of course, they'll always order through the wholesalers or a distributor, never directly from you. Warning: If you push your book into the big chains before you've established a strong and enduring demand, you'll end up with a ton of returns *up to a year later, in any condition, for a full refund*. No fun.

Typical return rates in this business are 25-30% and I've heard no small number of horror stories of rates as high as 60%! My return rate through nearly 40,000 copies? Less than 5%.

A Word About POD

When many authors think "self-publishing," they think print-on-demand (POD), which, in truth, isn't really self-publishing (in a pure sense). POD isn't a "revolution" as it's often characterized; it's simply a technology to cost-effectively print one book at a time (but as you'll find, NOT cost-effective enough to compete against other books printed conventionally in much larger quantities).

There's a LOT of hype and misinformation floating around about POD. Bottom line, if you're trying to be profitable with self-publishing, POD won't get you there. Why? Because the POD business model is very different from that of a conventional publisher. POD publishers make their money on the front end, charging anywhere from roughly \$700-1500 to design your book (within very narrow creative parameters) and load it up onto their system.

They know that 98+% of all books won't make money (and in fact, by the industry's own estimates, the average POD author sells only 100-200 books, and he or she is buying two-thirds of them!), so as such, they have every incentive in the world to sign up as many authors as possible and collect front-end fees, and virtually NO incentive to promote them beyond that point. When investigating POD, *caveat emptor*, BIG time.

Excellent Ebook Economics

Pursue the ebook market. It's a no-brainer. Realistically, the market is still in its infancy and not many books do well really well, but on the flip side there's virtually no investment. Load them up to your site as PDF downloads, and find resellers willing to sell it on

their sites and split the profits. I've got about five companies selling my books at a 60/40 (me/them) split. No books or no inventory to worry about and you get checks every month. How much sweeter does it get?

Ebook sales will naturally drive hard copy sales. If someone likes your book – especially if it's a how-to or reference that they'll want to keep handy – chances are excellent they'll want their own "hold-in-their-hand" copy.

An Ezine in Your Future?

I started a monthly ezine two years after my first book came out, and built up the subscription base to 4,000 on the strength of good, relevant content AND no outside advertising. When my second book was released in late 2004, I marketed it the first month ONLY on my web site and to my ezine base. I sold \$9K worth of books that month, with an 80-85% profit margin. Yeah, it was worth it. AND I've packaged blocks of past ezine issues as ebooks, both selling them and giving them away as bonuses for web site book purchases. (Visit the "Free Ezine Signup" link at www.wellfedwriter.com for details.)

Be a Goodwill "Machine"

If you provide an e-mail address somewhere that your readers can use (I have mine on my web site, but not TOO obviously; I'm not trying to *invite* a flood of emails), answer all your reader e-mail (within reason), and with more than one-line answers. Address their questions. Give them advice. I promise they'll be blown away that they got an answer at all. Give them some real attention and you'll have a friend for life. And what do friends do? Talk. Most communities aren't that big and people share good experiences. Getting a

reputation as a nice, generous, and accessible author is a very good thing.

Hire a Consultant

As a naïve first-time, self-publishing author, one of the best things I did was hire a professional publishing consultant with beaucoup industry experience. He saved me a lot of time and aggravation and more than paid for himself. Now, I do the very same thing for folks starting out. See the Resources section at end.

Hire Out Distribution

This is a plug. BookMasters, Inc. printed my books (and galleys of my second book) and handles all fulfillment, from the one-book buyer to the Ingrams, B&Ts, and Amazons of the world. They do all shipping, invoicing, even collection. I can't imagine trying to manage all this myself. And I promise you, if you tried, you wouldn't save very much money – *certainly* not enough to justify the hassle. They do a GREAT job that lets me focus on my #1 JOB: *Building the Demand For My Book*. See their contact info at end.

I now have a merchant account to handle online books sales, but I forward those sales to BookMasters for fulfillment. BookMasters charges me about \$3.25 (including book rate shipping). A small price to pay for the convenience. And since in that scenario, even with the free shipping I offer, I'm still netting about \$14.50 a book, after all costs. That's about twice what I get from bookstore and Amazon sales.

Keep It Up

While I sent out about 100 review copies right after getting my finished books, and literally another 300+ more over the next year or so, a week doesn't go by that I'm not sending out at least two or

three more. Always be looking for more contacts in your target communities. A book is far and away the cheapest and best form of advertising out there. Don't be stingy. And remember: You can't do it all. Pick and choose your battles. Good luck.

Peter Bowerman is the self-published author of *The Well-Fed Writer* and *the Well-Fed Writer: Back For Seconds* (www.wellfedwriter.com), multiple-award winning selections of *Book-of-the-Month Club*, *Quality Paperback Book Club* and *Writer's Digest Book Club*, and acclaimed "standards" in the field of lucrative commercial freelancing. Visit his site at www.wellfedwriter.com.

He is also the author of the 2006 release, *The Well-Fed Self-Publisher: How to Turn One Book into a Full-Time Living*. For book premise, sample chapter, table of contents, cover artwork, and more, visit www.wellfedsp.com.

With over 50,000 copies in print, his books have earned him a full-time living for over five years.

Now Available!

The Well-Fed Self-Publisher :
*How To Turn One Book
Into a Full-Time Living*

Recommended Self-Publishing Resources*

Cover Design:

Talented, strategic, creative
DiNatale Design – Atlanta, GA
Contact: Chris DiNatale
PH: 678-819-1303 (1305 - Fax)
EM: chris@dinatalegraphicdesign.com
WS: www.dinatalegraphicdesign.com
Chris designed both my book covers.

Cover Design/Illustration:

Xero Studios – Atlanta, GA
Contact: Debbie Rohde
PH: 404/432-9926
EM: debbie@xerostudios.com
WS: www.xerostudios.com
Excellent designer – 20+ years
experience, very reasonably priced.
AND very talented illustrator as well.

*Typesetter** (TWFW):*

Good people; great work
Michael Hoehne Design - Michael
Hoehne (Haney) or Angela Werner -
Springtown, PA
PH: 610-346-6823
EM: michael@heyneon.com
WS: www.heyneon.com

*Typesetter** (TWFW: BFS; TWFSP):*

Joy to work with; creative, reasonable.
Contact: Shawn Morningstar
Short Hills, NJ
PH: 973-379-7518.
EM: shawnmstar@comcast.net

Printer/Galley Printer/Fulfillment:

**Great job all around – thorough,
reasonable, professional**
BookMasters, Inc.; Mansfield, OH
Contact: Shelley Sapyta
PH: 800-537-6727
EM: sapyta@bookmaster.com
WS: www.bookmasters.com

Self-publishing Consultant:

Knowledgeable, friendly, thorough ☺
Peter Bowerman – Atlanta, GA
PH: 770-438-7200
EM: peter@wellfedwriter.com
WS: www.wellfedwriter.com
Visit “Mentoring” link at site above
for details/rates/testimonials.

Web Designer: smart, highly technically savvy, nice guy

Marketing Masters, Ltd.; Atlanta, GA
Contact: Chris Papas
PH: 770/745-4695
EM: info@mm-ltd.com
WS: www.mm-ltd.com

Publicity/Media Promotion:

Professional, no-nonsense, delivers
KSB Promotions, Ada, MI
Contact: Kate and Doug Bandos –
PH: 616.676.0758 (Fax: 0759)
EM: info@ksbpromotions.com
WS: www.ksbpromotions.com
NOTE: I use KSB for *KSB Links*, their
thrice a year publication to 8,000+ media
folks. I’m about to tap them for their
contacts to publications serving the
Seniors market.

*I have personally used all these
vendors and can heartily recommend
them.

** To see both typesetters’ respective
styles, view my books using the “Look
Inside!” feature on www.Amazon.com.