

Chapter 1

Welcome to Self-Publishing!

In This Chapter

- ▶ Determining whether self-publishing is right for you
- ▶ Creating and editing your manuscript
- ▶ Diving into administration and design tasks
- ▶ Choosing the right printing option
- ▶ Distributing and promoting your new book
- ▶ Checking out a brief self-publishing timeline

Do you have expertise that other people can benefit from? Do you want to share an amazing story? Do you have basic writing skills and a good command of the English language? Do you have the discipline to write a full-length manuscript? If you answered yes to at least two of these questions, you may have the “write stuff” to become a published author. But there’s one problem: Many major book publishing companies aren’t willing to work with first-time authors with little or no writing experience. In the past, this fact could’ve kept you from achieving your dream of becoming a published author but not anymore!

Thanks to new digital printing technologies anyone with good writing skills and a great idea for content can have a book professionally published and made available to the general public. The process is called self-publishing. *Self-publishing* offers many awesome benefits and allows ordinary people, business leaders, celebrities, entrepreneurs, educators, students, retired people, stay-at-home moms, and just about anyone else to become a published author for a relatively low financial investment. What’s required, however, is a tremendous amount of time, creativity, and discipline to write, edit, design, publish, promote, distribute, and sell your book (that is, if you want it to be successful, and who doesn’t want to be successful?).

This chapter provides an overview of what becoming a self-published author involves. The rest of this book takes you step-by-step through the entire self-publishing process. By the time you’re done reading *Self-Publishing For Dummies*, you can put your knowledge and ideas into writing and have them published in book form.

Figuring Out Whether Self-Publishing Is the Best Option for You

When you get hired as an author by a major publishing house, your job is to write the book's manuscript and perhaps gather some or all the artwork that's included within that book. For this work, you're typically paid an advance and a royalty on book sales. Various experts working for the publisher handle all the other steps (and there are many of them) in the publishing process.



Self-publishing is different. As the author, you're still responsible for writing your book's manuscript, but you're also responsible for every other aspect of the book publishing process. (Don't worry; as you delve into the self-publishing process, you're able to hire a wide range of freelancers and companies to handle some of the major steps in the publishing process, but you ultimately are the decision maker and person in charge of the project.)

In Chapter 2, you find out specifically why you should consider self-publishing, and you discover the benefits of the process. Chapter 2 also reveals how just about any type of content, fiction or nonfiction, can be self-published and transformed into a paperback or hardcover book. You also find out the specific skills you need to become a self-published author.



Don't get too excited just yet! Self-publishing does offer an amazing opportunity for just about anyone to have their book professionally published. However, compared to having your book published by a major publishing company, self-publishing has some drawbacks as well (covered in Chapter 2).

Gathering the Right Publishing Tools

Before you sit down to write your potential bestseller, gather the proper writing and publishing tools. Chapter 3 focuses on what you need to write a book with success. Some prewriting tasks you need to accomplish include

- ✓ Creating a comfortable writing environment
- ✓ Identifying and minimizing distractions when you're writing
- ✓ Putting together the perfect writer's toolbox



As an author, you need certain tools to make the writing process easier and to be able to maximize your productivity. A desktop or laptop computer that's equipped with a powerful word processor (such as Microsoft Word) and that has access to the Internet and a printer can be your most important tools, unless you plan to write the first draft of your book freehand, using a pad and pen. (If you do this, expect to wind up with a very tired hand!)

Putting Together a Winning Manuscript

The beauty of self-publishing is that almost any type of content can be transformed into a professionally published book. Depending on the type of book you're writing, a full-length manuscript may be anywhere from 50,000 to 100,000 words (or longer). There are plenty of exceptions, however. A children's book may contain 500 or fewer words, but a compilation of poems or short stories or a photo book or a cookbook containing recipes may all follow different formats altogether.

The trick to writing a successful book is carefully defining your book's audience and then making sure that the content of your book (and later all the marketing for it) targets that same specific audience. I explain how to determine your target audience in Chapter 4.



Coming up with the perfect book idea — something that's unique or that offers a new twist on something that's been written about before — is an important step in the book writing and publishing process. Equally important is researching your information and making sure that you have enough interesting and informative content to fill a book. The information then needs to be properly organized so it makes sense and is useful to the reader.

Most authors begin the writing process by creating a detailed outline for their book before they actually start researching, writing, and adding visual elements like photos and illustrations. Chapter 4 focuses on how to prepare an outline, research the content for your book, and decide what elements you want to incorporate into your manuscript.

Editing Your Work Effectively

After writing the book, it's time to edit. This process includes correcting spelling and grammatical mistakes, ensuring that the content is well organized and comprehensive, and doing some fine-tuning to ensure that the book properly targets its audience. At this stage in the publishing process, you

may want to hire a freelance editor to review your manuscript. Even best-selling authors use professional editors to fine-tune their work before it's published.



The editing process requires several steps. It's an excellent strategy to begin by editing your own work and then hiring a professional editor to fine-tune the manuscript. In Chapter 5, find out what a professional editor does and how to hire someone who's highly skilled. Editing requires a very different skill set than writing, and people train for years to learn how to edit well.

Dealing with Administration and Design

Depending on what your goals are for your book, some self-published authors establish their own small publishing company (a formal business entity), especially if they plan to directly sell and distribute their book. Discover in Chapter 6 why forming a company can be beneficial.

Even without establishing your own publishing company, as a self-published author, some administrative tasks need to be completed before your book goes to press. For example, all books need an ISBN, a Library of Congress Card Number, and a copyright notice. Chapter 7 outlines many of these tasks.



Many companies that offer comprehensive publishing solutions for self-published authors, including Print-On-Demand (POD) publishers (described in Chapter 11), can handle some or all these administrative tasks on your behalf. Using one of these comprehensive publishing solutions is helpful to first-time authors because the service makes the whole process easier and saves you considerable time and money.

In addition to the many administrative tasks that must be completed before a book gets published, the manuscript must be laid out and designed, and the book's front and back cover need to be created. These steps you can handle yourself, using desktop publishing and graphic design software, or you can hire a professional graphic designer to do this design work for you.



Graphic design is a skill that takes tremendous creativity, artistic flair, and training and experience. For your book to look as professional as possible, consider hiring an experienced graphic designer to handle your book's interior layout and design and to design your book's front and back cover.

Chapter 8 focuses on how to design and lay out the interior of your book, using desktop publishing software, such as InDesign CS2, QuarkXPress, or Microsoft Publisher. Chapter 9 provides the information you need to create the most impressive and high-impact front and back cover possible.

Checking Out Your Printing Options



Published books come in all shapes and sizes. You have a handful of options when it comes to actually printing your book:

- ✓ *Traditional printing* options involve using offset printing technology to publish a large quantity of books at one time. This process is used by major publishing houses and offers many advantages but also a few drawbacks for self-published authors. See Chapter 10 for more details.
- ✓ *Print-On-Demand (POD)* has become the most viable publishing option for the majority of self-published authors (despite some small drawbacks). POD requires a relatively low initial financial investment and requires the author to maintain little or no inventory. For all the benefits and drawbacks of PODs, see Chapter 11.
- ✓ *eBooks* are another popular form of published material. Chapter 12 delves into how and why you may want to publish your book as an eBook and how you can potentially use a local print shop to photocopy and bind your book for small print runs.



Before choosing which printing and publishing option is right for you, consider your goals, your distribution plan, and your budget of your book. (Keep in mind that marketing, advertising, and promoting your book also requires a significant investment.)

No matter which printing and publishing option you choose, you should develop a good rapport with the company you work with. Chapter 13 focuses on how to develop a good rapport with any printer.

Delving into Distribution



As a self-published author, one of your biggest challenges (besides writing the book) is to get it into the hands of readers. You can sell your book in many ways; the trick is to find distribution methods that work best for your book and allow you to achieve your sales goals. Here are some methods:

- ✓ **Online booksellers:** In Chapter 14, you find out about distribution through online booksellers, like Amazon.com and Barnes & Noble.com, which for many self-published authors is the most viable and inexpensive way of making a book available to the general public.
- ✓ **Retail distribution:** Chapter 15 focuses on traditional distribution through retail booksellers and other specialty retailers. You find out about working with wholesalers and distributors, independent bookstores, specialty retail stores, direct mail, and professional organizations.



When you try to distribute your book through major retailers, you may be competing head-on with the major publishing companies that are supported by teams of professional salespeople who've well-developed connections to key buyers at the various retailers. You may be at a disadvantage in this situation, but as you can see in Chapter 15, your book can find its way onto the shelves of major bookstore chains and mass-market retailers.

If you plan to sell your own book to distributors, wholesalers, retailers, book-sellers, or individual consumers, you need to deal with warehousing, order fulfillment, and shipping. Chapter 16 provides an overview of what's required when it comes to distributing your book.



After achieving some level of success as a self-published author, many people team up with a major publishing house to obtain nationwide distribution through the major bookstore chains and other retailers. For some self-published authors, approaching a major publishing house is a viable option. The benefits of working with a major publisher are explored in Chapter 17.

Getting the Word Out with Publicity and Marketing



Your book may not sell no matter how good it is unless you develop a comprehensive, effective, and well-timed marketing, publicity, and advertising campaign to reach and convince your intended audience. The following elements are a few successful publicity and marketing campaigns:

- ✓ Generating free publicity in all forms of media (radio, television, newspapers, magazines, newsletters, and the Internet) is one of the most powerful and cost-effective ways for self-publishers to generate awareness of their book. If handled correctly, public awareness can be transformed directly into book sales.

In Chapter 18, I cover how to develop the publicity materials you need to promote your book properly. I cover items such as the press kit folder, press release, author bio, author photo, and pitch letter. Chapter 19 focuses on how to use those materials to generate media reviews, articles, and features about your book.

- ✓ Another way to educate potential readers about your book is through paid advertising. Advertising allows you to distribute your exact marketing message through appropriate media outlets. Chapter 20 covers how to create effective ads to promote and sell your book.

- ✓ The Internet offers you the opportunity to utilize cost-effective niche marketing techniques to easily target your book's intended audience. Tapping the incredible power of the Internet to promote your book is the focus of Chapter 21.



Whether your book sells for \$9.95 or \$29.95, your profit potential is ultimately limited because the book itself is a low-priced item compared to most other products with higher profit margins. Self-published authors need to use the recognition and credibility they receive as a published author and repackage their book's content into other, higher-priced items, such as DVDs and audio books. Many self-published authors also generate additional revenues by lecturing and hosting seminars or training programs relating to their book's topic. How to generate additional revenue streams from the content of your book is covered in Chapter 22.

Surveying a Brief Self-Publishing Timeline

Self-publishing your book isn't a fast and easy project. Plan on investing considerable time into each step of the process, especially when it comes to actually writing the manuscript.



Unfortunately, determining how long it takes you to sit down and write the full-length manuscript for your book is impossible until you actually begin writing and understanding more about your personal work habits as a writer. For some people, the researching and writing process takes weeks. For others, it takes months or years. After you've completed your manuscript, you can more accurately calculate a production timeline for your book, based on the printing and publishing decisions you make.

Here is a rough timeline of tasks to handle after you finish writing the manuscript:

- ☐ Establish your publishing company (if applicable).
- ☐ Have the manuscript edited.
- ☐ Choose a self-publishing option, such as offset printing or POD, and then hire a printer and/or publisher.
- ☐ Apply for an ISBN, copyright, and other book-specific information, if necessary (this step may be handled for you, depending on the publishing process you choose and the company you work with).

- ☐ Set the cover price for your book.
- ☐ Select a publication date.
- ☐ Have the manuscript's interior pages designed and laid out.
- ☐ Hire a graphic designer and create your book's front and back covers.
- ☐ Develop press materials for your book.
- ☐ Plan and implement a comprehensive marketing, public relations, and advertising campaign.
- ☐ Develop a Web site to promote your book.
- ☐ Begin pre-selling your book (pre-selling includes putting together and sending out press materials, promoting the book to distributors, lining up booksellers to sell the book, taking out ads, and so on).
- ☐ Have your book listed with online retailers.
- ☐ Publish the book and ship it to consumers, booksellers, retailers, and distributors (as appropriate).
- ☐ Continue promoting and marketing your book as you take orders.



As you develop your timeline, allocate ample time for each step of the publishing process to wind up with the best possible finished product. For example, a professional editor may take several weeks to edit your manuscript. It can then take a professional graphic designer at least a week or two to create a professional front and back cover (potentially longer), and additional time may be needed to do the layout and design work necessary for your book's interior.



As you read each chapter of this book, consider how long each step in the process may take you, based on your unique lifestyle, responsibilities, and personal situation. Make sure that the timeline and deadlines you set for yourself are realistic, using the time estimates you read about in each chapter. Stay focused on your goals and deadlines, and work hard to achieve them!

After the manuscript is complete, with proper planning, you can potentially have it professionally published in as little as two to three months. Just think, in 60 to 90 days, you can be a published author!