

## 16. Vanity publishing v self-publishing

Look through any magazine aimed at writers and you will find a number of companies offering to publish your novel, autobiography or poetry collection. They will offer editorial assistance, arrange for the final work to be printed and bound, and undertake promotion and distribution – at a price. This industry is known as vanity publishing, and it exists to satisfy the writer's burning, and very understandable, desire to see his or her work in print.

To a degree, the majority of such companies do exactly what they promise, but the process will set you back several thousand pounds and simply being in print is no guarantee that your work will sell or be read. This is true of all published work, but at least mainstream publishers will back their belief in you by publishing and promoting it at their own expense – and may even give you a modest advance against future sales. Vanity publishers expect you to take all the financial risk. As for poets, they should be very wary of competitions that cost nothing to enter, but that offer winners publication in a 'sumptuously bound' anthology that can be bought at a special price. Needless to say, everyone's a winner.

If you are so desperate to see your work in print that cost is irrelevant, then by all means go ahead ...as long as you do so with your eyes open. But if you really want your work to be appreciated for itself, then you will just have to persevere with mainstream publishers and hope that one of them will finally see the talent that you know you possess. If your work is good enough, then it will sell. Any offer to publish your work at a price should be avoided.

Self-publishing, although it bears some superficial similarities, is not quite the same. For one thing it means a lot of hard work on your part, but it's undeniably cheaper and you are entirely in control of your own destiny. At the most basic level, all you need is a manuscript and the services of a good local printer, most of whom will help with cover design and book layout, though it will be cheaper if you are able to do the basic typesetting yourself, preferably using Apple QuarkXPress (the industry standard). The printer will give you a quote covering the cost of design, setting, layout, printing, binding and delivery.

What you then do with the finished product is up to you, but be very cautious about the number of copies you ask for. The cost per copy is much cheaper the more you get printed, but you will have to be realistic. Once every member of your family and all your friends has one, what is the size of your remaining audience? Local newspapers and local radio stations are always on the lookout for good human interest stories, so they may provide you with one channel for publicity, but you really need to get your book into bookshops if it's to stand a chance in what is a very crowded market.

To get your book into the shops, you will have to become a proper publisher. Your book will need an ISBN (International Standard Book Number), a bar code (so that the price can be processed through an electronic till system) and, preferably, a printed spine (booksellers simply don't have the space to display books face-on). Inevitably, this all adds to the cost, but – who knows? – you may even decide to go on and publish others in the same position as yourself. For more information on becoming a publisher, visit the UK ISBN Agency at [http://www.nbdrs.com/isbn\\_agency.htm](http://www.nbdrs.com/isbn_agency.htm).