

# Publishing Tools for Indie Authors

by Kelleyne H. Riley

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### **Publishing Tools for Indie Authors**

The world of publishing is changing rapidly as it moves further and further into digital space, and authors and industry professionals alike are struggling to keep up. Indie authors in particular have suddenly found themselves with opportunities to take ownership of the process, and of their end product, in ways that were never open to them before.

Self-publishing is a way for anyone to get content out into the world, but it requires work and expertise to accomplish well. As the mass of published content (on the web and in print) grows, authors are beginning to understand that they need help to produce, edit, package and market a quality product that will be competitive. This understanding has opened up a whole new opportunity for publishers, editors, designers and entrepreneurs; companies offering services to this emerging group of indie authors are popping up everywhere, in a whole range of business models.

*Choosing a Self-Publishing Service 2014: The Alliance of Independent Author's Guide* divides the new publishing service models into the following categories (followed by examples in parentheses):

- Direct self-publishing services (Amazon and Lightning Source)
- Distributors (Ingram and Smashwords)
- Assisted self-publishing, à la carte (Createspace)
- Assisted self publishing, full-service (Hillcrest, Silverwood, and Matador)
- Trade publishing: large (Random Penguin) and indie (Tin House)
- Agent-assisted publishing (Jenny Bent)
- Partnership publishing (Pan MacMillan New Writers)
- Author co-ops (Book View Cafe, Triskele)
- Crowdsourced publishing (Kickstarter)

These categories are general; as evidenced by the list of service providers included in this paper, there is much crossover between categories, and some companies don't fit into any of these boxes. This paper does not offer a case study for each category, but the range of possibilities is both exciting and overwhelming. How does an author choose what services he/she needs, and which provider offers the best value and experience?

One concern is that the mechanics of publishing, which used to be somewhat veiled from authors, have become suddenly more transparent, and many authors have not yet caught up. They don't yet know how things work or what they need, and this lack of knowledge can put them in a position where they are easily taken advantage of. Some of these new

service providers may be easily confused with old-fashioned "vanity publishers", which take advantage of unwary authors; some may be those same publishers in disguise. There is most certainly some overlap, and it's pretty clear that many businesses are out to make money at the expense of eager-to-publish authors.

This paper examines five publishing service companies, detailing what services they offer, what they charge, how payment/author royalties are handled, which rights they expect to own and which will remain with the author, and what kind of reputation they have in the industry (if such information can be found), among other things. These case studies are not recommendations, just examples of the types of services available.

Following that is a longer list of companies offering services to Indie authors, including a few key points about each. This is nowhere near an exhaustive list, but hopefully enough companies are included as to offer a general picture of the services available.

Last is a list of resources which may be helpful to anyone interested in publishing services and self-publishing in general, offering more information about what options are available, how to make informed choices, and how to protect yourself from unethical companies. In particular, the book mentioned above, and the organization who published it (the Alliance of Independent Authors), offers evaluations of specific publishing service companies and information on maximizing your overall self-publishing success.

It is my hope that this project will provide a useful starting point for authors looking to hire professional help on their publishing journey.

**Indie Author Services**

<http://indieauthorservices.com/>

**Summary:** This is a small company offering only copyediting and design services, and they seem pretty representative of the one-man operations popping up all over. What I'd really like to see on the site is a bio of the person who will be doing the work, and maybe a photo. The anonymous "we" is not confidence-inspiring.

**Editorial:** They charge \$1.00/page for proofreading and \$2.00/page for copyediting, with a free sample edit of up to 1000 words. They do not offer developmental edits.

**Design:** Interior design and layout available, as well as cover design. Interior print layout is \$.75-\$1.00 per page. They offer pretty basic premade covers for \$30-\$60, and custom print wraparound covers for \$80. They have a portfolio of book covers online to show their work.

**Marketing:** No

**E-book conversion:** Yes. Formatting is \$40 and up, depending on length.

**Distribution:** No

**Packages or à la carte:** Mostly à la carte. They refer to packages, but no prices or descriptions are listed.

**Bookstore onsite:** No

**Print-on-demand or offset:** n/a

**Cost structure:** Cost for services only: see editing, design, e-book conversion.

**Rights:** Author retains rights.

**Royalties:** n/a

**Acceptance:** n/a

**Extras:** They claim to offer advice and support throughout the production process, as well as web design services.

**Negative/positive reviews offsite:** None found.

**XLibris**

<http://www.xlibris.com/>

**Summary:** One of the larger companies offering publishing services. They have a comprehensive range of services, and their site contains a lot of information for authors on a whole range of topics, to the point of being overwhelming. They have a package and a price for pretty much anything you can think of.

This statement is a bit of a concern: "Xlibris has developed a template-based design system that enables us to build books quickly and efficiently (at a cost savings to you). It's comprehensive enough to fit any application. Although Xlibris designers ultimately decide the final design, you can make suggestions and design choices from the beginning to the end of the publishing process."

**Editorial:** Yes: standard copyediting at \$.012 per word.

**Design:** Yes: basic cover design for \$349, advanced cover design \$599.

**Marketing:** Yes, a wide range of services available.

**E-book conversion:** Yes.

**Distribution:** Books are available through Ingram and Baker & Taylor.

**Packages or à la carte:** Many, many choices of packages, ranging from a \$499 ebook package to a Platinum Color Package priced at at \$15, 249. The packages vary widely in terms of what services they include.

**Bookstore onsite:** Yes.

**Print-on-demand or offset:** POD.

**Cost structure:** Author pays for services, either à la carte or in a package deal. Xlibris offers author discounts ranging from 30% to 60%, reseller discounts up to 48%, and discounts on direct sales.

**Rights:** Author retains rights, non-exclusive contract.

**Royalties:** Authors get a 10 percent royalty rate, or 25% from books bought on the Xlibris website.

**Acceptance:** No submission process, anyone can publish.

**Extras:** They can make leather-bound editions of your book. They also have an Author Lounge, which offers lots of tips and articles, but interestingly, no forum.

**Negative/positive reviews:** According to ALLi, XLibris is connected to Author Solutions, and the companies connected to Author Solutions are "among the worst suppliers, in terms of value for money, reaching readers, and author care.

**Deep River Books**

<http://www.deepriverbooks.com/>

**Summary.** Deep River is primarily a religious publisher, offering Partner Publishing-type services. They claim to work much like a traditional publisher, except that the author takes on some of the financial risk. This model seems to me to have a lot in common with old-fashioned vanity presses, which they claim they are not. They have no FAQ.

**Editorial:** Included.

**Design:** Included.

**Printing:** Included.

**Marketing:** Included (media kit, press releases, interviews, Christian trade shows).

**E-book conversion:** Not addressed, but Kindle versions of their books are available on Amazon.

**Distribution:** Included, through Send the Light in Tennessee, as well as Ingram/Spring Arbor and Baker & Taylor. They also claim that "the various warehouses for major outlets such as Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and Christian Book Distributors also carry copies of most of our titles."

**Packages or à la carte:** n/a

**Bookstore onsite:** Yes. Wide range of subcategories within the Christian book genre.

**Print-on-demand or offset:** Offset, with a minimum run of 1,500.

**Cost structure:** The author agrees to purchase a given number of books from the initial print run, thereby taking on much of the risk. The minimum order is 1,000 copies.

**Rights:** Not addressed on site, as far as I can tell.

**Royalties:** Yes: royalty rates are 12% for the first 5,000 copies sold; 15% for the second 5,000 copies sold; and 18% for all copies sold above 10,000.

**Acceptance:** Your book must be selected by their editorial review team.

**Extras:** The author can purchase his/her own book at discounts from 30-75% off retail.

**Negative/positive reviews offsite:** None found.



**WordBranch**

<http://www.wordbranch.com>

**Summary:** WordBranch is a "cooperative publisher", focused on ebooks, but also offering print. The site seems pretty down-to-earth and sets reasonable expectations. I thought I read somewhere that they are essentially an author's co-op, but the website doesn't present that way. They're using kickstarter to promote or fund one of their books.

**Editorial:** Editing (a few drafts) and proofreading included.

**Design:** Cover design included.

**Marketing:** Included.

**Ebook conversion:** Ebook formatting included.

**Distribution:** Submission to distributors included. They work with Ingram and Baker & Taylor, as well as other online and physical distribution services.

**Packages or à la carte:** n/a (although their sister company, CRT Creative Media, offers a la carte services).

**Bookstore onsite:** Yes. They have a pretty diverse set of offerings (not aimed at any particular niche).

**Print-on-demand or offset:** Not stated.

**Cost structure:** Cost to publish is a split of the royalties, broken down as follows: author, 36%; Word Branch, 37%; illustrator, 10%; editor 15%; reader, 2%.

**Rights:** Publisher retains rights, but the site does not say which ones.

**Royalties:** See cost structure, above. Paid quarterly, into your Paypal account.

**Acceptance:** Traditional submission process.

**Extras:** When you buy the paperback on Amazon, you get the Kindle version free. They have an author's corner with required "editing training" and "author training". They also started something called "Word Stream Book Market", which is a collection of books from indie authors and small presses. They offer a book club discount.

**Negative/positive reviews offsite:** None found.

**SilverWood Books**

<http://www.silverwoodbooks.co.uk/>

**Summary:** Full service provider in the UK, included here because ALLi gave them a pretty good rating. They offer a range of services and packages, and they encourage writers to have realistic expectations about sales. Interestingly, the first book I checked on Amazon was out of print.

**Editorial:** Yes. They offer estimates after seeing the work.

**Design:** Yes.

**Marketing:** Yes. They offer tools like ARCs, promotional postcards, websites, podcasts, social media and more. No prices offered.

**E-book conversion:** Yes.

**Distribution:** Yes.

**Packages or à la carte:** Both. Packages range from \$1100 to \$2500.

**Bookstore onsite:** Yes.

**Print-on-demand or offset:** POD

**Cost structure:** Charges for packages and services, and takes a proportion of profit.

**Rights:** Author retains rights.

**Royalties:** They retain 15% of list price, the rest is passed on to the author.

**Acceptance:** They don't accept all books that come their way.

**Extras:** They have a nice "Learning Zone" with lots of author information, and a "Code of Practice" that inspires confidence. They also have a page with news related to their books.

**Negative/positive reviews offsite:** ALLi gave them a 7/10, which was comparatively good.

Clearly indie authors have many, many choices in who, if anyone, they hire to meet their publishing needs. So how to decide? There's no clear one-size-fits-all choice; each manuscript is different, with a unique set of qualities, strengths, and challenges.

In an article for Forbes, Sue Charman-Anderson recommends starting with a good idea of what you have and what you are looking for. How long is your manuscript? Are you looking for a quick copyedit, or several rounds of more in-depth editing? What type of book is it? Does it include photographs? Tables? Illustrations? How much control of the final product do you need? How much are you willing to spend? What are your expectations? This last is important, because if you are intending to make money from the book you will make different choices than if you are only trying to get information out in the world.

From there, she recommends asking around and doing your homework. Do you know anyone who has used a service they were happy with? Do you have a writers group or forum where you might get leads on good companies? Use any contacts you might have for information-gathering.

If you can, it also pays to look at examples of a company's work: buy an ebook or a print copy of one of their titles, depending on the format you will be using for your own finished project. Is it cleanly and professionally edited? Is the design good, and appropriate to the content? If you can access Nielsen BookScan, is the title selling? Is the print quality acceptable (keeping in mind that offset printing will be higher in quality than POD)?

Authors wanting the maximum amount of control over their manuscripts might be wise to forgo the fancy packages of the full-service providers and act as their own project managers, hiring individual professionals for editing, design, marketing, or any other services required. This has a few advantages: 1) the author can choose an artist or professional who specializes only in one task, and who may therefore be more skilled in that task than someone who offers a wider range of services, 2) the professional or artist can be researched in terms of quality of work and customer satisfaction, which might be harder with a (possibly anonymous) cover designer, editor, or marketing manager in one of the big companies, and 3) the author has more control over the costs of the individual parts of the project, and can choose where to focus the most attention and money. Small companies like Indie Author Services might fit the bill here, or one of the service "marketplaces" like Writer.ly or BiblioCrunch, where an author can get bids on a job and choose from a range of offers.

For someone who has the extra cash on hand for an expensive package, and who is willing to let go of some control of the outcome, it may be more convenient to try out one of the packages offered by a full-service company such as Silverwood. The expert guidance offered may, in some cases, be an acceptable trade-off for the potential loss of control, especially for authors who are intimidated by the prospect of managing their own project. However, authors should be sure to find out which choices are ultimately their own; XLibris in particular states outright that their designers have the final say in how a book will look.

Authors looking for a slightly more traditional, small publisher-type experience might seek out models such as Deep River Books. These are less like publishing-service models than small publishers who are experimenting with alternative ways of funding books; in the case of Deep River, much of the funding burden has been shifted to the author. These companies seem to have the most potential for crossover into "vanity publishing", and should be researched particularly carefully.

Cooperative models like WordBranch have exciting possibilities for the future of self-publishing, but it's likely an author going this route will need additional help in editing /preparing their manuscript. Given the way Wordbranch's cost structure is organized, there can't be room for a lot of editing to be done by their in-house editors, and the fact that they have a sister company offering those services implies this must be the case. It would be interesting to learn what other kinds of author cooperatives formed, and how successful they might be in producing high-quality books.

In the end, the most important thing to remember, whichever kind of publishing service provider seems to be a good fit, is to thoroughly research the options, use common sense, and have realistic expectations.

A resource list of a few of the companies offering publishing services to authors and businesses. Authors should thoroughly research any company they are considering hiring.

### **Argo Navis Author Services**

<http://www.argonavisauthorservices.com>

This service offers ebook publication, conversion, marketing and distribution to published authors who hold ebook rights, with the goal of bringing "reverted and not-in-print works back to the marketplace." They work through agents only.

### **AuthorHouse**

<http://www.authorhouse.com/>

They call themselves a self-publishing company, and they accept pretty much anything. They have something they call "author-centric" publishing, which offers a team of consultants to help the author, while the author retains creative control. The author receives a 10% royalty rate (calculated and paid quarterly). AuthorHouse does offer all of the expected services, but the fees for these services are difficult to locate. This company is part of Random House.

### **BiblioCrunch**

<http://bibliocrunch.com/>

A site where authors can hire freelance editors and designers. You post a job, set a budget, and get bids. It appears as though the freelancers pay a percentage of their earnings to Bibliocrunch, and the author pays only the freelancer.

### **CreateSpace**

<https://www.createspace.com/>

This is Amazon's self-publishing service. A print-on-demand service, they offer design, editing and marketing services. Each service has a wide range of options, which are offered at set prices. Some of the custom options are pretty fancy—you can have a cover custom-illustrated for \$1199.00. They also sell promotional materials, like postcards, book trailers, and promotional kits.

### **Deep River Books**

<http://www.deepriverbooks.com/>

This company offers what they call "Partner Publishing". A book must be selected by their editorial review team. Once accepted, it receives "award-winning editing, cover design, typesetting and printing". It offers all of the marketing and distribution services of a traditional publisher, as well as royalties. The partnership comes in when the author agrees to purchase a certain number of books from the initial print run, thereby taking on much of the risk. They are primarily a religious publisher.

### **GGPublisher**

[https://www.xceo.net/pc/what\\_team\\_pub.php](https://www.xceo.net/pc/what_team_pub.php)

They call their service "Collaborative Publishing". As far as I can tell, this is a service where an author gets to use the company name as his/her publisher and receives advice on finding outside professionals to do all of the actual work involved. I assume they probably take a hefty percentage of profit, but no information is given. They claim to be picky about the manuscripts they take. The two books they actually list are business books. Quite frankly, the website seems to be all fancy words and no real information about what they are doing.

### **Indie Author Services**

<http://indieauthorservices.com/faqs.html>

This company offers copyediting and design services only. They charge \$1.00/page for proofreading and \$2.00/page for copyediting. They can do interior and exterior design, e-book formatting, and web graphics, and offer premade covers for \$30-\$60.

### **Infinity**

<http://www.infinitypublishing.com/book-publishers/we-want-to-be-your-book-publisher.html>

Infinity is a full-service POD company, offering different levels of service in editorial, design, marketing, e-books, translation, and distribution. They offer something called a "Preferred Partnership Program", which customizes business books for specific conferences or markets, including the creation of special covers and additional front matter, direct shipping and a discount. They also offer audio book creation.

### **iUniverse**

<http://www.iuniverse.com/>

Another company that is a part of Random House. They offer a full range of services and some full-service packages for a set price. They claim they can put out your book in a matter of months. You choose your own cover image from Thinkstock. Their books are available through wholesalers Ingram and Baker & Taylor.

### **Lulu**

<http://www.lulu.com/>

A free print-on-demand company with a bookstore. They do have a pro option offering some paid services: cover design, formatting, and marketing. They have a good list of marketing services available, including book fair representation (although they don't specify which fairs), book trailers and something called "Book-to-Screen". There are no prices listed on the site that I could find.

### **Night Owls Press**

<http://www.nightowlspress.com/>

Night Owls Press calls itself a "a small, independent press that publishes nonfiction books that challenge and re-imagine prevailing conventions about business, work, and life. We turn big ideas into great books and transform changemakers into authors."

They claim to offer the independence of freelance publishing with the services of a mainstream publisher. They have only a few titles listed. There is no up-front cost and they say they offer generous royalties, although they do not state what those are. The

main difference from a regular publisher seems to be that they are print-on-demand. They offer à la carte editing services for a fee, for books which they have decided not to publish.

### **Packt.**

This company "pays a royalty on relevant books directly to open source projects." They appear to be an ebook-focused publisher who accepts only nonfiction. All of their covers are the same format; only the colors and the cover photograph change, and most of the photographs have nothing to do with the subject of the book. They accept submissions for cover photographs.

<http://www.packtpub.com/>

### **Silverwood Books**

<http://www.silverwoodbooks.co.uk/>

Full service provider in the UK, and one that appears to be more highly rated by ALLi than most.

### **Smashwords.**

A distribution-only service. They don't offer any other services, and according to ALLi Self Publishing Blog, this means their motives are good: if the author makes money, Smashwords makes money. To quote their website: "Authors and publishers earn 85% or more of the net proceeds from the sale of their works. Net proceeds to author = (sales price minus PayPal payment processing fees)\*.85 for sales at Smashwords.com, our retail operation. Authors receive 70.5% for affiliate sales."

### **Whitefox**

<http://wearewhitefox.com/>

A full-service, UK-based publisher, this company offers all of the standard services, and even includes content creation and ghostwriting for biographies. They have a list of commercial clients on their site, and appear to be geared mainly toward that market, as the site has a very business-like feel. Potential clients talk to a consultant, who helps design a plan specific to their project, and matches them with specialists according to need and budget. There are no prices listed onsite.

### **WordBranch**

<http://www.wordbranch.com>

A "cooperative publisher", focused on ebooks, but also offering print. They claim: "There are no charges to publish with Word Branch Publishing—all payments are based on royalties."

### **Writer.ly**

<https://writer.ly/Default1.aspx>

A site that helps authors build custom publishing teams. You post a job, freelancers bid on the job, and you choose one based on experience, price or other factors. Writer.ly takes a 10% transaction fee, which has already been calculated into the bids you receive.

**Xlibris**

<http://www.xlibris.com/>

One of the larger companies offering publishing services and distribution Ingram and Baker & Taylor. They offer a comprehensive range of services, and their site features a lot of information for authors on a whole range of topics.



Listed below are a few resources where authors can learn more about publishing options and services available to them, including information on how to make the best possible choices.

### **SFWA: EDITORS AND ASSESSMENT SERVICES**

<http://www.sfwawriters.com/other-resources/for-authors/writer-beware/editors/>

This is a fantastic article from the Science Fiction Writers of America, with a lot of great information for authors about editing and publishing.

### **ALLi Self-publishing Advice Blog**

<http://www.selfpublishingadvice.org/>

A useful resource for potential self-publishers, this organization offers a book on self-publishing called *Choosing a Self Publishing Service 2014*, which has great information as well as reviews of many author service providers.

### **Scholarly Open Access: A list of print-on-demand publishers, self-publishing/"Vanity presses" and other non-traditional publishers for librarians and authors**

<http://scholarlyoa.com/2014/04/08/a-list-of-print-on-demand-publishers-self-publishing/vanity-presses-and-other-non-traditional-publishers-for-librarians-and-authors/>

### **Forbes: An Introduction to Author Services, Part 1**

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/suwcharmananderson/2013/06/21/an-introduction-to-author-services-part-1/>

### **Forbes: Author Services Part 2: Choosing Who To Work With**

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/suwcharmananderson/2013/06/24/author-services-part-2-choosing-who-to-work-with/>

### **Writer Beware's "Two Thumbs Down" Publishers List**

<http://accrispin.blogspot.com/2007/02/happy-valentines-day-from-writer-beware.html>

### **Anne R. Allen's Blog: How NOT to Self-Publish: 12 Things for New Indies to Avoid**

<http://annerallen.blogspot.com/2013/05/how-not-to-self-publish-12-things-for.html>