

Which Self-Publishing Firm Should You Choose?

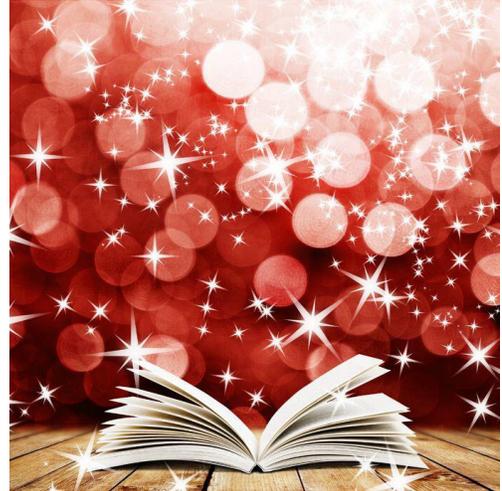
Special Report by Stephanie Chandler

There are many, many options for hybrid/vanity/custom book publishing and it can be overwhelming to wade through the choices.

Unfortunately, there are also some predatory firms out there, plus other reasons to avoid working with some of these brands.

What to Watch For

Some companies use deceptive tactics to acquire new publishing clients by offering a submission and review process for manuscripts, and then congratulating authors when their manuscript is accepted for publication (which the author then pays for). This is misleading because behind the scenes, few to no manuscripts are ever rejected because these companies are simply churning out books and treating authors as commodities.



Some of these companies even send authors a one-dollar bill along with an acceptance letter, with the dollar symbolizing their advance royalties! Unfortunately, this is the kind of practice that leads to author regret down the road.

Other concerns include an upsell for alleged “marketing services.” I put them in quotes because that’s not really what is being offered. Sending mass emails or press releases about a book is not marketing.

As a general rule, publishing firms rarely offer worthwhile marketing services. If you’re looking to hire help with marketing, it’s best to look for publicists or separate firms that exclusively focus on marketing books.

Other considerations when shopping for a publisher:

- **Contract Terms** – You should be able to cancel your contract with the publisher at any time.
- **Book Pricing** – The wholesale pricing for your book should be clear and based on the final page count of the book. And you should have a say in the retail price of your book so that you aren’t forced to sell your book at a rate outside of typical market value. And within all of this, you also need to make sure there is room for you to earn a profit from your book sales, including having enough profit margin to allow for discounting.

- **Quality** – Do they publishing anything in exchange for a check? Is there any kind of quality control process?
- **Fees** – The price you pay to produce your book can vary widely, but on the low end you often get what you pay for. And on the higher end, be sure there are extra services included. Keep in mind that self-publishing requires an investment. To produce a well-edited, professionally designed and typeset book, you should budget \$5,000 to \$10,000 or more, depending on the amount of editing needed.
- **Customer Service** – Do you want to receive guidance when going through the process of producing your book? Most of the “big box” publishing firms host call centers where you dial in and speak with a different operator each time you call. These people are not experienced with the publishing industry and cannot offer you industry advice. Conversely, the smaller publishing firms often have experienced project managers who can help guide you with planning for things like launching your book and managing distribution.
- **Outsourcing** – It’s not uncommon for publishers to outsource design and editorial services, but ask where they are outsourcing to. Many firms utilize inexpensive overseas contractors while charging a premium for services.

Self-Publishing/Vanity/Hybrid Presses to Avoid

Author Solutions is at the top of the list of companies to avoid because it has been embroiled in a number of lawsuits for misleading its author customers. Unfortunately, several other companies are also affiliated/white labeled with them: **iUniverse, Balboa Press, AuthorHouse, Trafford, xLibris, Palibrio** and **Book Tango**.

Author Solutions was owned by Penguin Random House—a highly respected traditional publishing conglomerate, but was sold to a private equity firm in January 2016. And while Random House is one of the top traditional publishers in the world, its quality was not carried over to its subsidiary. If you speak to just about anyone experienced in the publishing industry, they will tell you to stay far away from Author Solutions due to its negative history.



Bottom line: Until this company improves its practices, I recommend avoiding any of these brands.

Next up is **CreateSpace**. It's favored by many new authors because of its low pricing, but unfortunately, this is one of those cases where you get what you pay for.

CreateSpace is owned by Amazon and that relationship limits your potential distribution. Barnes and Noble won't stock or order any books that come from CreateSpace, which can include in-store book signing events. B&N has made it abundantly clear that it doesn't want to partner with Amazon in any way.

In addition, CreateSpace isn't exactly known for quality production. Its production services, including cover design, interior typesetting and editing, are outsourced to overseas contractors (limiting jobs it could be offering in the US).

And if you want personal service, forget about it.

CreateSpace offers up a call center, largely staffed by college students with no publishing industry experience whatsoever. All publishing production is do-it-yourself through the website, and after each step in the process, you have to wait for approval before you can proceed with the next step. For example, once you upload your book cover file, you have to wait to hear back from CreateSpace before you can proceed with additional book details—sometimes approval takes up to 24 hours.

And the CreateSpace brand isn't well-loved in the publishing industry because there is virtually no vetting process or quality control. I've seen CS books with multiple fonts on the same page, poorly laid out, with homemade book cover designs and no sign of editing. Unfortunately, this is true of most of the "big box" publishing firms.

The same is true of media professionals. If a local newspaper reporter is interested in interviewing you for a story, chances are when he finds out your book came from CreateSpace, that opportunity will evaporate.

Bottom Line: If you're on a tight budget and don't care about distribution to bookstores or media coverage, then by all means proceed with caution to CreateSpace. But here's a big tip: *Establish your own publishing company name and logo.* Whatever you do, avoid putting the CreateSpace brand on your books. It would also be wise to hire your own editor, cover designer and typesetter.



Other Companies to Avoid:

Dorrance Publishing – I have heard from numerous authors over the years about their terrible experiences with Dorrance. The first issue is that they set the retail price for your book, so your paperback that should be priced at \$14.99 could end up getting priced at \$24.99, making it virtually un-sellable. And when you want to purchase copies of your own book, Dorrance will sell them back to you at 45% off of retail (outrageous pricing!).

But the biggest problem of all is that the company's author contract locks you in for TWO YEARS. This is outrageous. If Random House calls and wants to acquire the rights to your book or if you decide you want to take your book and publish it elsewhere, you are stuck waiting for two years to run out.

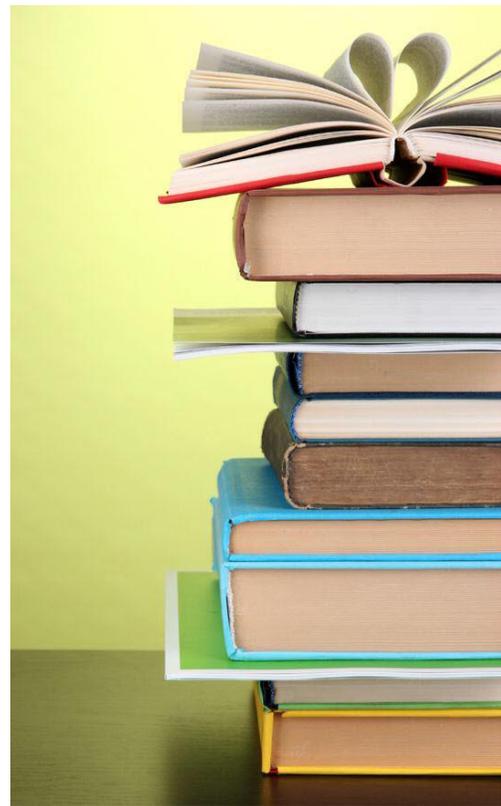
Lulu – I personally used this service many years ago to produce spiral-bound workbooks, and it worked fine for small projects like that. However, this is very much a DIY service with virtually no customer service, and individual book pricing is higher than it should be because there are few upfront fees. If you're producing a book that you want to reach the masses, this isn't your best option.

Publishers Worth Considering

Now that you have some ideas about what to watch for when pursuing a publishing company, following are some recommendations.

Keep in mind that I can't personally guarantee you won't have problems with the companies listed here, but as of this moment, they are on my personal list of companies that I recommend.

[Lightning Source](#) – If you want to truly self-publish your book and form your own publishing company, and if you plan to produce more books in the future, Lightning Source is an excellent choice as a print-on-demand PRINTER (this is not an actual publishing service). You must apply to become a publisher (a formality with a quick approval process) and then you must handle all of your own production (design, typesetting, editing, acquiring ISBN, etc.). But if you want to become your own publisher, then printing with LS puts you in control as a publisher because LS also distributes books to all the major online retailers via its parent company, Ingram.



Ingram Spark – This is Lightning Source’s effort to compete with CreateSpace. IngramSpark is very much a DIY service, however the publishing process has been simplified and the distribution to online retailers is included as well. Book pricing is competitive and it’s an excellent solution for the do-it-yourself-er.

Aloha Publishing – A small firm based in Boise, Idaho, Aloha cares about producing high-quality books and works closely with its author clients to deliver exceptional book production services. If you want to work with experienced professionals, this is a great option.

She Writes Press – Focused on hybrid publishing for women, She Writes offers comprehensive services and expanded distribution to bookstores.

Authority Publishing – Full disclosure: I own this company! Founded in 2008, Authority Publishing focuses on producing high quality nonfiction books. These days we primarily accept clients through referral only, however, inquiries are always welcome.



**For additional publishing advice and resources,
visit the [Nonfiction Authors Association](http://NonfictionAuthorsAssociation.com).**