

Why I decided to go Print-on-Demand with my book(s)

I had two manuscripts finished, a non-fiction and a novel that I was pitching to publishers and agents with no success. I met an author that had published a couple of books and was working on her next book, through a Print-on-Demand (POD) Publisher. I spoke with her at length about the process and she convinced me to at least publish one of my books through her POD. She also offered to help me through the process. I decided to give it a try.

We set up an appointment and I went to her office with a diskette with my manuscript on it as well as an author bio and the annotation (jacket blurb). Unfortunately the cost for the setup had just increased that day so I wound up paying a higher fee. Oh well, I was still on my way. We reviewed the contract together and she pointed out what I should watch for and what to expect.

She uploaded everything for me but the cover art. I had licensed a photo from a combat photographer that I was going to use for the cover and I had not finished that process yet. (Once I did, I uploaded the photo and my cover was set.)

The whole process was surprising simple and basically straightforward. Within six weeks I had a copy of my now published book on my desk, pretty exciting. I began selling copies almost immediately (and gave way too many away, first book and all). The thrill of having a published book for sale and distribution was something that I can not describe.

I had decided to take one of my manuscripts through the print-on-demand process for two main reasons. The first, of course is because I would have a published book and the second, to see what print-on-demand publishing was all about. I was happy with both.

Meanwhile, my second book was languishing through the rejection process, I continued to pitch my novel, but with the same results. One day as I was opening the latest rejection letter, I had my published (albeit POD published) book sitting on my desk and I decided that moment that I would publish my novel through the print-on-demand publisher as well.

This time, I did it alone. I perused the publisher's web site; found a copy of the contract, which I reviewed. I did the upload myself, following the pretty straightforward instructions. For this book, I chose to go with both a hard cover and trade paperback version. I was somewhat more involved in the process this time than I had been with the first book.

Once again, I had my published book (hardcover and trade paperback) in about six weeks for me to sell and promote. I gave very few away this time. I now had two published books that I could sell.

Once I finished my third manuscript, I gave it to my editor, followed his direction and made the changes. I now had a another manuscript, ready for

submission. I originally thought I would pitch this manuscript to an agent or two that I know, if for no other reason than to get their reaction, and if that didn't work I would simply use my POD publisher for this work as well.

However, therein was a dilemma. Should I go through the motions of submitting it to an agent, waiting to hear back, one month, two months, six... one way or another, possibly resubmitting to another agent and waiting to hear back, or, suppose, the first agent likes it and wants to see a full manuscript, subsequently submitting that and again waiting to hear back. Assuming I make it to that point and the agent offers to represent the work and then starts the process of submitting to publishers. I'm on my way... Or am I?

Let me digress a moment. As I was restarting my writing career, I saw an ad for a job at a literary agency, which sparked my interest. What better way to learn the business than from the inside? Well, I didn't get that job, but, I convinced a semi-retired agent, living in the area, to allow me to work in her agency as an agent with no salary, only hoped for commissions.

My duties were largely as the purveyor of the slush pile, that is, searching through the piles of submissions to find that diamond in the rough. I didn't find any diamonds, but I did come across a couple of projects that I thought might have a chance. She allowed me to sign them and basically do the representing and pitching to various publishers (under her supervision). I learned two important things from this experience that there is so much submitted, you look for ways to reject rather than accept and that even if you thought something was good, it was just as hard for an agent to convince the publisher. I had a contact at a major publishing house tell me once, that even though she really liked the work I had submitted to her, there was no way to get it past the marketing department so she would have to pass. A real eye opener at the time.

After a couple of years, I grew weary of the industry as a whole and I decided to retire from the agency, as did my boss. I had originally convinced her to give it another run and she thought my enthusiasm was refreshing, but her thirty-five years in the business and overall skepticism, kept me grounded. I decided to pursue other interests, specifically my writing. It was shortly after this, that I published my first book, *The Protected Will Never Know* through that Print-on-Demand publisher.

We notified the authors we had signed of our decision (and released their contracts), one author asked if I would stay on, with her, especially since we did have one solid connection that we were negotiating.

I had signed her in January 2004 and that summer, at a trade show, I had made contact with a publisher that was interested in her work, a non-fiction project. Due to the fact we had an ongoing negotiation, I agreed to continue, at least through the term of this negotiation. Over the next year, or so, we went back and forth, with rewrites, adding, subtracting, structuring etc., until finally we had something the publisher liked, then, we started the negotiation process. During the summer of 2006, we finally hammered out a deal and signed the

contract for publication in the late 2007 catalog, an exhausting, but highly satisfying event. Certainly a reason to celebrate and I, we, do celebrate this; it is every writer's dream to have a published work. I couldn't be happier for her. So why wouldn't I follow the same course?

Good question and the reason for the dilemma. From the date I signed her as a client, to the potential publication date, a time span of three and one-half years had elapsed. Actually not bad, considering this process can go on for five years or more. So what is bad about that, you ask, to ultimately have one's book published. What does it matter how long it took? Not a thing, I answer. However, once you've had a book POD published with the turn around at about two months, as I have, it's harder to consider that option. To go through that process, that still can be extremely uncertain. I know, from experience, that I have a slim chance of getting published, that the advance will probably be small and most of all, the very real probability of the book having a very short shelf life. (My time as a summer intern at a major bookstore chain, taught me that.)

Of course, there is always the chance that my work will be accepted and eventually published by a traditional publisher and all that goes with it, and yes that is any writer's dream; to have the work published that way. However, I know that I can submit my manuscript to my POD publisher and within six weeks I will have a copy of my new book sitting on my desk, available to sell, promote etc., and I can rejoice in the fact I now have my third book completed, published and available. Hard to argue with that, as well.

If I chose, "the find an agent, and hope for the best" route, I run the risk of not being accepted, or accepted by the agent, but not by a publisher and maybe a few years go by and the book is still languishing, whereas if I go the POD route, my book is available in six weeks, for sure.

Maybe POD publishing, like self-publishing, is a form of surrender, or just a vanity thing, and maybe the detractors are right, that you are not really published until you have been published by a traditional publisher, but at the end of the day, my published book is sitting on my desk that I can sell to someone right now. Will I get rich, probably not? Will I get recognition, maybe? Will I get satisfaction, absolutely? Who's to say who's right?

I always thought that I would submit a manuscript or two the POD route, while I pitched one of my other manuscripts the traditional route of agent to publisher, that way having the best of both worlds, and maybe I still will. The dilemma is that, this work is finished; several people have asked me when is something new coming out and that they can't wait to read my next book. Do I tell them in a couple of months, or do I say I don't know, maybe never?

My heart said to submit a query and synopsis to my agent friend and see what the response is, maybe she will like this work and she will want to take it on. Just do it and forget about it, let it run it's course, work on the next manuscript, maybe there is a chance this one will break through and make me a traditional published author, maybe...

In the end, the choice was actually easy. I decided to take my next manuscript through a print-on-demand publisher. However, I choose a different publisher this time. A publisher that I felt would take my work to the next level. Even though it is still a POD Publisher, I felt the product this publisher produces, was more in keeping with the product I hoped to put out.

I haven't given up on the dream, but I am also a realist. My new book will be in my hands soon and I'll be selling copies rather than opening rejection letters. Surrender or not, it's the course I continue to chose to follow.

That's why I decided to go with a Print-on-Demand Publisher with my books!