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No one Faces Rejection More Often than an Author

by Dan Poynter

Why do so many books get their start being published by the author? Rejection! The explanation is simple and let us not blame the publisher for failing to recognize good writing.

Publishers cannot be experts in every type of fiction and nonfiction. Let's face it, publishers specialize or, at least, they have a record of accomplishment with certain types of books. When your manuscript is rejected by a publisher, that is not a bad grade for your work. It simply means that the publisher does not get it! If a publisher specializes in travel books and you send a manuscript on vegetarian eating or parenting, that publisher will not know whether your work is good and will not know where to sell it. You do not want that publisher anyway. To find the *right* publisher for your work, do your homework and *match* your manuscript to the publisher.

Alternatively, to make more money, get to press sooner and keep control of your work, publish yourself. Self-publishing is legitimate, an early-American tradition. In the early days of the New World, the person with the printing press was often the author, publisher, printer and bookshop. Some people think that most of those who self-publish do so because several publishers have turned them down. That is occasionally true. However, most people today weigh the advantages and disadvantages of selling out to a publisher and make an educated decision to publish themselves. The big New York publishers (there are only five left due to consolidation) publish only 22% of the books. The rest come from the 55,000 small (mom & pop) publishers and single-title self-publishers.

Self-publishing should not be confused with “Vanity” publishing where an author pays (an exorbitant price to) a publisher to turn his or her manuscript into a book.

Here is a partial list of well-known self-published books. Some are still sold by the author, some authors have sold out and some books have started successful publishing companies.

- *What Color is Your Parachute* by Episcopal clergymen Richard Nelson Bolles. 22 editions, 5 million copies and 288 weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Now published by Ten Speed Press.
- *The Beanie Baby Handbook* by Lee and Sue Fox sold three million copies in two years and made #2 on the New York Time Bestseller list.
- *In Search of Excellence* by Tom Peters. Over 25,000 copies were sold directly to consumers in its first year. Then it was sold to Warner and the publisher sold 10 million more.
- *Real Peace*—Richard Nixon in 1983. He did not want to wait 18 months for a publisher to get his vital message into the stores so he went directly to a printer.
- *The Celestine Prophecy* by James Redfield. His manuscript made the rounds of the mainstream houses and then he decided to publish himself. He started by selling copies out of the trunk of his Honda—over 100,000 of them. He subsequently sold out to Warner Books for \$800,000. The number-one bestseller in 1996, it spent 165 weeks on *The New York Times* Bestseller list. Over 5.5 million copies have been sold.
- *The One-Minute Manager* by Ken Blanchard and Spencer Johnson sold over 20,000 copies locally before they sold out to William Morrow. It has now sold over 12-million copies since 1982 and is in 25 languages.
- *Fifty Simple Things You Can Do to Save the Earth* spent seven months on the *New York Times* bestseller list and sold 4.5 million copies in its original and premium editions.
- *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk, Jr. (and his student E. B. White) as originally self-published for his classes at Cornell University in 1918.
- *A Time to Kill* by John Grisham. He sold his first work out of the trunk of his car.
- *The Joy of Cooking* by Irma Rombauer was self-published in 1931 as a project of the First Unitarian Women’s Alliance in St. Louis. Today Scribners sells more than 100,000 copies each year.
- *How to Keep Your Volkswagen Alive* by John Muir sold over 2 million copies and led to the establishment of a publishing company.
- *Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun* by Wess Roberts sold 486,000 copies before selling out to Warner Books.
- *Embraced by the Light* by Betty J. Eadie spent 76 weeks on the *New York Times* Hardcover Bestseller List, 123 weeks on the Paperback List

and was sold to Bantam Books for \$1.5-million. The audio rights brought in another \$100,000. Then she established Onjinjinkta Publishing to publisher her future projects.

- *Sugar Busters!* by four Louisiana doctors and a former CEO sold 165,000 copies regionally in just a year and a half. Then they sold out to Ballantine Books.
- *The Wealthy Barber* by David Chilton has sold over a million copies in Canada (second only to the *Bible* in Canada) and two million in the US.
- *When I Am an Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple* has been through the press 42 times for 1.5 million in print. It allowed Sandra Haldeman Martz to build Paper Mâché Press.
- *Mary Ellen's Best of Helpful Hints* by Mary Ellen Pinkham became a bestseller and then she sold out to Warner Books.
- *The Macintosh Bible* by Arthur Naiman has become the best-selling book on Apple products with over 900,000 sold.
- *Dianetics* by L. Ron Hubbard has been in print more than 45 years, 20 million copies are in print and it has been translated into 22 languages. The book started a movement and later a church.
- *Mutant Message Down Under* by Marlo Morgan sold 370,000 copies before it was sold to HarperCollins for \$1.7 million. It was sold to two book clubs and the foreign rights were sold to 14 countries.
- *Feed Me, I'm Yours* by Vicky Lansky sold 300,000 copies. She sold out to Bantam and they sold 8 million more.
- *The Encyclopedia of Associations* by Frederick Ruffner led to the establishment of Gale Research Company with 500 employees.
- *The Lazy Man's Way to Riches*. Joe Karbo never sold out and never courted bookstores. He sold millions of his books via full-page ads in newspapers and magazines.
- *The Christmas Box* by Richard Paul Evans. The 87-page book took him six weeks to write. He published it and promoted it himself. It did so well he sold out to Simon & Schuster for \$4.2 million. It hit the top of the *Publishers Weekly* bestseller list and was translated into 13 Languages.
- *Twelve Golden Threads* by Aliske Webb was rejected by 150 publishers. After self-publishing and selling 25,000 copies, she signed a four-book contract with HarperCollins.
- *Life's Little Instruction Book* was initially self-published by H. Jackson Brown. Then it was purchased by Rutledge Hill Press. It made the top of the *New York Times* Bestseller List in hardcover and soft at the same time. Over 5 million copies were sold.
- *The Jester Has Lost His Jingle* by Barbara Salzman was turned down by eight publishers. The glossy hardcover book made it to *The New York Times* Bestsellers list.
- *Let's Cook Microwave* by Barbara Harris sold over 700,000 copies.

- *Juggling for the Complete Klutz* by John Cassidy has sold over two million copies and led to the establishment of Klutz Press with over 50 award-winning books.
- Ben Dominitz published *Travel Free* and then founded Prima Publishing. Prima now has 1,500 titles, 140 employees and does \$60-million a year.
- *How to Flatten Your Stomach* by Jim Everrode was self-published before he sold out to Price\Stern\Sloan. Since then, the book has sold over two million copies.
- *Red Sky in Mourning* by Tami Oldham Ashcraft and Susea McGearhart was self-published and then sold to Hyperion for an estimated \$500,000.
- Stephen King self-published an eBook titled *The Plant* and sold it online for \$1/chapter.
- *The Guide to Getting it on* was self-published by Paul Joannides after being turned down by a number of publishers as being too racy. After being adopted as a text by over 20 colleges and selling 150,000 copies, many of those same publishers approached him with offers.
- *Diets Don't Work* has sold over 600,000 copies since being self-published in 1982.
- *Howe!*, published in 1995 by Colleen & hockey great Gordie Howe has sold nearly 135,000 copies in hardcover and raised \$1 million for charitable causes.
- *Dry It! You'll Like It* (the bible of food dehydrating, essentially) by Gen MacManiman is now in its 29th printing since 1973 with 280,000 sold.
- *Life's Greatest Lessons: 20 things I want my kids to know* by Hal Urban was published by Nelson in 1992. It sold 16,000 copies. Urban republished it himself and sold 60,000 copies. In 2001, he sold out to Simon & Schuster for low six-figures.
- *The Self-Publishing Manual* by Dan Poynter has 166,000 copies in print after fourteen revised editions since 1979. The publisher is Para Publishing (Dan Poynter). Because of this book, Poynter has been called "the godfather to thousands of books."

Other well-known self-publishers include: Deepok Chopra, Louise Hay, Mark Twain, Ken Keyes, Jr., Gertrude Stein, Zane Grey, Upton Sinclair, Carl Sandburg, James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, Ezra Pound, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Stephen Crane, Mary Baker Eddy, George Bernard Shaw, Anais Nin, Thomas Paine, Virginia Wolff, e. e. Cummings, William Blake, Edgar Allen Poe, Rudyard Kipling, Henry David Thoreau, Benjamin Franklin, Walt Whitman, Alexandre Dumas, William E.B. DuBois, and Robert Ringer.

The news gets even better. Book writing, publishing and promoting recently became faster, easier and cheaper. Today we have ebooks and

short-run POD and PQN printing. Most authors are electing to make more money, get to press sooner and keep control of their book by self-publishing.

There is a way to combat (manuscript) rejection—circumvent the publishers and publish yourself.

Writing periodicals:

Dan Poynter does not want you to die with a book still inside you. You have the ingredients and he has your recipe. Dan has written more than 100 books since 1969 including *Writing Nonfiction* and *The Self-Publishing Manual*. For more help on book writing, see <http://ParaPub.com>.

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Book Publishing periodicals:

Dan Poynter, the Voice of Self-Publishing, has written more than 100 books since 1969 including *Writing Nonfiction* and *The Self-Publishing Manual*. Dan is a past vice-president of the Publishers Marketing Association. For more help on book publishing and promoting, see <http://ParaPub.com>.

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Professional Speaking periodicals:

Dan Poynter has written more than 100 books since 1969 including *Writing Nonfiction* and *The Self-Publishing Manual*. He is past-chair of NSA's Writer-Publisher PEG and the founder of the PEG newsletter. For more help on book writing, publishing and promoting, see <http://ParaPublishing.com>.

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