

The Self Publisher's Newsletter

[**selfpub@wexfordpress.com**](mailto:selfpub@wexfordpress.com)

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We're Back—Again

You've been a patient bunch. We've been too busy to create new editions of the Selfpub Newsletter. Among other things we have been busy moderating the self-publishing list on yahoogroups.

That experience, my own work as a columnist, typesetter and indexer, and the posts I see on various mailing lists all reinforce the need for us to stay in contact. So I have reached into the crypt and resurrected this newsletter one more time. The main article in this issue deals with rewrites. It was previously published and I got paid for it. But for this issue I rewrote it. Read on!

Rewrites are a Good Writer's Friend

By John Culleton, selfpub@wexfordpress.com

A paradox: Good writers can put together a well-written document at first draft. They write without much thought or effort. George Bernard Shaw once compared it to breathing—done every second of every day without conscious thought.

Yet good writers write and rewrite. They edit every word, every phrase, every sentence, every paragraph. I am doing it now.

A small story to illustrate the point: At the Sebring 24 Hour Automobile Endurance Race, years ago, an American amateur had been invited to drive for one of the British racing teams. He took the race car out during practice and drove with great gusto. After two laps he was flagged back into the pits. When he

inquired about the reason the team manager told him: "Practice is for sorting out the car. You are already supposed to know how to drive."

Similarly, a writer is expected to have mastery of the medium. For the professional the spell checker is only used to catch typos, and the grammar checker is ignored. Those who struggle with grammar and orthography cannot hope to do well. But among successful writers, even "natural" writers rewrite obsessively. They are not looking for errors in grammar or spelling. Writers who have not mastered those basics don't belong in the car, so to speak. They seek to make the good better—and the better perfect.

It is possible to overedit, to kill the passion and the flow that first came out of the pen or keyboard. Nevertheless the good ones edit themselves with great vigor. They know their own flaws. They kill their brain children. They

return the next day or the next week and reread as critics, not authors. They calculate the impact on the target audience.

Writing must go beyond correct—beyond stylish—and become effective. So we edit for effect on the reader. When the issues are heartfelt, this is often hard to do.

I write political columns for two local newspapers and Op Ed pieces as well. Recently, I wrote an election Op Ed piece for the local paper. I had a point of view, some issues that were dear to my heart, and some candidates that I wished to support. But if I flailed away at the bad guys in the first paragraph, no one who did not already agree with my politics would read through to the end. So first I got my feelings off my chest, then I rewrote for greater effect on my readers.

In my rewritten version I discussed the results of a recent primary dispassionately. I never

mentioned the candidates I favored. Instead I pointed out some flaws in my opponents' strategies. I offered them helpful advice, stating that if they pursued their current line they might well help elect an opponent. In short, I edited myself from the readers' standpoint. I could have just plunged in with fire and brimstone. Instead, I disguised my opinion piece as a faux news article. I killed them with kindness. I damned their candidates with faint praise.

Why do I write for local papers? As a writer I write whenever I can. Why do I edit everything I write? Because I want to practice my art at every opportunity. Am I a great writer? Hardly. But I am a better than average writer for two reasons. I have a solid grasp of the basics, which I credit to a good education and a lifetime of reading. And I edit everything I write, even email. I look for correctness, style, and effectiveness in engaging and affecting the target audience. I must write better every day.

Go thou and do likewise.

POD Explained

No acronym is more abused nor causes more confusion than "POD." The confusion comes because a certain class of vendor, the subsidy publishers, have misappropriated it, along with the phrase "self publishing."

So what is POD? It is a printing process that makes possible very short print runs, from one book to 500 at a time, with relatively low setup costs. POD stands for "Print on Demand." Most subsidy publishers use POD technology. But anyone can use POD technology. The disadvantage of POD is that the cost per book does not go down significantly as the volume goes up. And the total cost per book is higher than traditional printing methods in any volume above about 750 books.

Who are the subsidy publishers? Basically a subsidy house is any publisher who will take your book and publish it under their own name, using their own ISBN¹ and charge you a fee for publishing it. With one exception these pay for publishing companies use POD technology so as to hold down initial costs. But the cost per book is very high, much higher than if the author were to deal directly with a POD printer.

Here is a list of some well-known subsidy publishers:

- Booklocker.com
- Infinity.com
- AuthorHouse.com (formerly 1stBooks.com)
- Trafford.com
- Lulu.com
- XLibris.com
- PublishAmerica.com
- WritersCollective.org.

These firms are not all alike. If you are at all interested in publishing through a subsidy house may I suggest that Booklocker.com is straightforward in their approach. They screen for quality.

The Writers Collective has a different approach from most of the others and call themselves a “Hybrid” publisher. Although they started publishing books using the POD process many of their books are now printed via the offset process. They also screen for quality. TWC as it is called in the trade insists on high quality of editing, cover art and interior layout, all paid for by the author. They have a recommended list of vendors for these services and they collect a “management fee” from these vendors for work done for TWC authors, in effect a commission for recommending them.

PublishAmerica claims to be a traditional publisher, but their quality standards for the

¹ International Standard Book Number, a kind of part number for the publishing industry that identifies the publisher and the particular book.

books they publish are non-existent and most of their authors pay to be published.

Books published through the subsidy process average about 100 copies total sold per book. Most of these are review copies and other author-purchased copies.

The major alternative to using a subsidy publisher is to self-publish, buying your own ISBN block, establishing your own publishing name, and handling all the complexities of publishing yourself. Self publishing gives you a much bigger gross profit per book, which makes bookstore sales at least fiscally possible.

There is a way to self-publish without becoming an instant publishing expert. Vendors known as book coaches, packagers or publishing consultants will take the burden of managing the operation off your shoulders and are in general a more promising way to publish and actually sell books. A list of packagers, coaches and consultants is found at:

<http://wexfordpress.com/tex/packagers.tex>

In summary POD is a printing process. You can use it either through a subsidy publisher or by self-publishing under your own imprint. POD has low startup costs but high unit costs compared to offset printing.

Final Thoughts

Remember, welcome your input and will include it in a newsletter if you wish. Just write: selfpub@wexfordpress.com

and share your views with the rest of us!

Take care.

John Culleton, Editor
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