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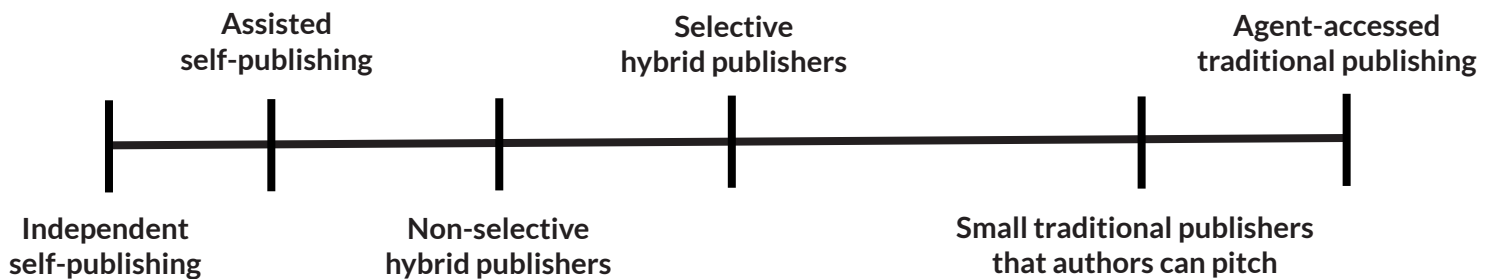
Bridget's Guide to Publishing Options

A couple of years ago, I would have written this tip sheet to say, "There are two routes to getting published: traditional publishing and self-publishing." Then I would have put them in two columns and compared them side-by-side.

The industry is not that straightforward anymore. I see the publishing world as existing on a spectrum now, with agent-accessed traditional publishers (which you often hear called "The Big Five") at one end and totally independent self-publishing at the other. In between are a number of different landing zones, thanks to the emergence of hybrid publishing and self-publishing support companies.

My goal in this tip sheet is to present the full spectrum of publishing options and highlight the advantages and disadvantages of each. Keep in mind that **no one option is best for everyone**; you will find an option that is best for you, given the goals you have for your work, your financial situation, your timeline, and a host of other factors. Know that I help a lot of people navigate this maze, and I am always available to talk through the details of your individual situation.

With that in mind, let's first take a look at the full spectrum, laid out in this graphic:



In a nutshell, there are four routes to getting your book published:

1. Pitch agents who in turn pitch traditional publishing companies.
2. Pitch small traditional publishing companies directly (only some allow this).
3. Work with a hybrid publisher (there are a range of these; I'm dividing them into two rough categories above).
4. Self-publish (this can be done entirely on your own or with support, hence the two categories above).

Quick and Dirty Explanations:

Traditional Publishing

Traditional publishing outlets are those that assume 100% of the costs of publishing your book. They are taking a financial risk on you; therefore, they are very selective in whom they work with and tend to exert a fair amount of editorial and design control over the final product. They typically have relationships with distributors, bookstores, reviewers, and other key players in the industry that can help your book reach the widest audience possible. They also keep most of the proceeds from the sales of your book, paying you royalties of between 8 and 12% of the cover price per book.

Most traditional publishing companies can only be accessed through agents. You pitch agents, land one, and then the agent pitches the publisher. This is true for “The Big Five” (Penguin/Random House, Harper Collins, Simon & Schuster, Hachette, and Macmillan) and all of their imprints. Unless you are well-connected, it’s a long, slow, and daunting process.

Some small traditional publishing companies, including most academic presses, can be pitched directly by authors. A publishing company’s website will always indicate whether or not they can be pitched directly. If they can, guidelines for the submission process will be on their submissions page.

Self-Publishing

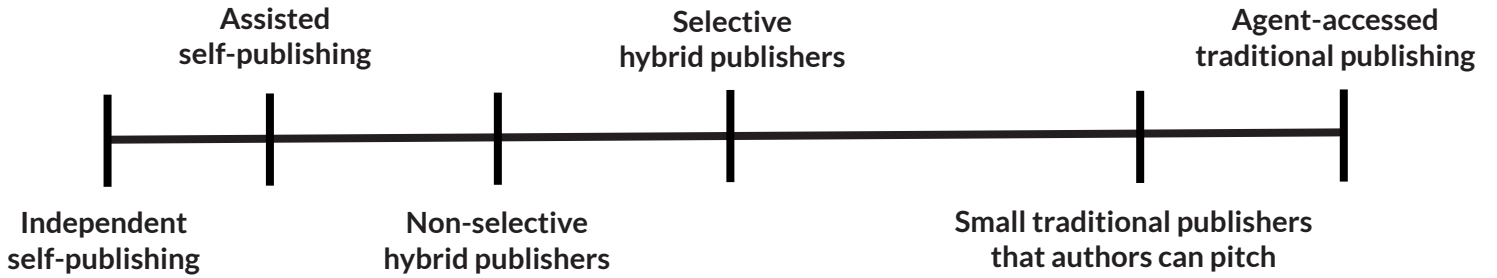
While the first self-published book emerged in the late 1970’s, self-publishing really took off in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s with the advent of ebooks and an easy outlet to sell them on: the internet.

Depending on your level of motivation and desired level of polish, you can upload a draft straight to Amazon and publish it yourself, or you can pay a service to help you with the various details involved, such as layout, cover design, acquisition of an ISBN number, etc. Either way, it’s often very quick. You have full control of the book and keep all of the proceeds from its sales. You also have to do ALL of the marketing.

Hybrid Publishing

Hybrid publishing evolved more recently. As its name suggests, it’s a model that mixes elements of traditional publishing and self-publishing. You, the author, pay a portion of the cost of producing the book. That amount can vary between \$2000 and \$10,000. In exchange, you get editing, design, and production support—and sometimes marketing support too, though with most hybrids you should expect to be doing a lot of the promotion on your own. Hybrids tend to pay higher royalties (since their risk is lower) and allow you more control over your final product. Some are quite selective, though they are typically less selective than traditional publishers. Others are not at all selective; these are often referred to as “vanity presses” and primarily serve to help people in business produce books to support their businesses.

Now that we've gotten those definitions out of the way, let's look at how these different options play out in terms of six factors that you're likely to be weighing.



Creative Control

TOTAL VARIABLE

Cost

VARIABLE HIGH NONE

Speed of Production

VERY FAST VERY SLOW

Marketing and Distribution Support

NONE VARIABLE HIGH

Selectivity

NONE LOW SOME VERY HIGH

Royalty Payments

HIGH LOW

So, how does each option work?

Traditional Publishing

In traditional publishing, you pitch agents or small publishers with either a query letter and sample pages/chapters (fiction) or a query letter and a full book proposal (nonfiction). Details about what exactly is required (how many sample pages, what elements they want in the proposal, etc.) can be found on the agents' and publishers' websites.

I have already talked about how to search for an agent in another tip sheet called **Bridget's Guide to the Agent Search**, so I won't do that here. What I say in that tip sheet about agents also applies to small publishers that you can pitch directly.

I have also already offered extensive guidance on how to author a query letter in a tip sheet called **Bridget's Guide to Query Letters**. Please see that resource for details.

I have not yet assembled a tip sheet about book proposals (but I will soon, I promise!), so here's a quick summary of what is typically included in one:

- a one-page overview of the book
- a chapter-by-chapter outline/synopsis of the book (in paragraph form)
- an overview of the book's prospective audiences (including statistics about them)
- an author info sheet
- up to 3 sample chapters (or 10-30 pages of excerpts from the book)
- a marketing info sheet – This addresses questions like: How is this book ideally positioned in the market? How does it contribute to the conversation? What is its publishing strategy? And, most importantly, who will buy it and how will you get the word out to those people?
- a competitive title analysis – This is an examination of 3-5 recent titles that are similar to the book being queried

You submit what is requested to the agent or publisher, then you await their response—which can take anywhere from a couple of days to six months. If they are interested in your book, they'll ask to see the whole thing. If they're still interested after that, you'll begin negotiations for a contract, and, from there on out, they call the shots. They tell you what is going to happen, step by step. They make those steps happen, and they pay for them: That's the gift of the contract you busted your butt to get!

Hybrid Publishing

Finding the right hybrid publisher requires a bit of research on your part. There are a lot of them out there. Some are terrific; they are in the game to help more people get published—the kind of people who are writing solid books but don't have the years of time and effort in them to pitch traditional publishers or don't have the social media networks/connections/publishing history that would make the process easier. Yes, they make some

money off of you, but producing solid works is their goal and they will help you achieve that with editing, marketing, and other kinds of support. Other hybrid publishers are happy to print whatever comes their way for the right amount of money. They may or may not provide much support. This is where you need to do your research.

Questions you should be asking include:

- How much is this going to cost me?
- How many books am I required to buy? (some hybrids don't charge you anything up front, but they require you to buy, say, 500 copies of your book (@ \$15/book = \$7500...there's your cost). Of course you can turn around and sell those—if you have 500 people to sell them to.
- What's your royalty payment structure?
- How much editing support do you provide?
- Is there a selection process to work with you, or do you take all manuscripts?
- Do you design the cover? How many rounds of drafts do I get to see?
- Do you get the book reviewed?
- Do you work with bookstores and/or distributors?

You get the idea. Do your research before you sign anything. This should include talking to other authors who have worked with the press.

Self-publishing

Self-publishing can look a lot like hybrid publishing if you choose to work with a business that supports self-published authors. These services help you to lay out your book, get a cover design, get an ISBN number, and get your book onto Amazon. If you are shopping around for support, do your research and find out what aspects of the process they will and will not help with. Also look into how they charge for their services. Do they offer a package deal or an a la carte menu? If there are things they won't do, how will you get them done, and how much will you pay for them? Consider also if you plan to hire a marketing professional/book publicity manager to help you get your book out there. If so, how much will they cost? Will they do a better or worse job than a hybrid publisher, and at what expense?

If you are not planning on using a service to support your self-publishing effort, then you will need to do each step alone or contract with an individual to do the step for you. If you've never self-published before, it will take a bit of time for you to learn about each of the steps. If this sounds like fun to you (and definitely it can be!), great—go for it! if it sounds like torture, you might be better off seeking support.

Final Thoughts

Before closing, I need to make one thing clear about the order of operations. **Once you have self published, you cannot turn around and pitch that same book to an agent or**

traditional publisher. The book has been published; it's done. There are very, very rare cases of a traditional publisher being willing to republish something that was self-published; almost all of these involve people who suddenly became famous. Don't count on this being an option. As a result of this reality, if you think you might want to go with a traditional publisher, it's best to try that route first. You can give yourself a window of time to work at that—say, 6 months to a year—and then, if you have no success, opt to hybrid or self-publish. Hybrids and self-publishing aren't going anywhere; they are always an option.

Whatever you do, remember that your time on this planet is precious. What do you want to spend it doing? How much of that time do you want to spend pitching your book vs. learning how to self-publish vs. getting someone else to deal with it and moving onto your next project? How will you feel if your book sells only 100 copies, and are you willing to do what it takes to get it to sell 10,000 copies? Do you really want to hold this book in your hands by Christmas, or can you wait three years to see it? And, of course, how much money are you willing to spend?

As with so many questions in life, this one is a matter of weighing your options and priorities and then making the best decision you can. This sheet has been my attempt to help you understand your options. You'll need to evaluate them with your life and creative goals in mind.

And...I'm happy to help you with this process. Feel free to reach out to talk about your specific situation when you're ready to do so!