

Types of Publishers

When you're getting ready to float your manuscript off to publishers, it's handy to know what type of publisher would likely be most receptive to the kind of material you've written. To get you started, here's a crib sheet of the primary types of publishers:

Trade Publishers

They're the grand-daddy of the publishing empire, because the books they put out are most often distributed to the bookstores where book lovers like you tend to hang out. Trade books are typically hardcover books with impressive jackets (and equally impressive price tags.) But that doesn't mean trade publishers thumb their noses at softcover books. More and more, trade publishers are pumping out paperbacks, either as new releases of existing titles that have already shown a solid sales history in hardcover, or as original works that for various reasons may enjoy better shelf life as paperback originals. Authors who land deals with trade publishers are generally rewarded with royalty contracts.

Mass Market Publishers

Hello, K Mart shoppers! You'll find a blue-light special on paperbacks in aisle 9. Yup. Discount stores, drug stores, supermarkets and airports are important distribution points for mass market publishers. Small wonder. As the name implies, distribution is keyed to the market where the greatest mass of people is likeliest to pass. Most often, mass market books are paperbacks produced on cheap stock, but don't worry about that. They've grown so popular in the last decade that no respectable Barnes and Noble would open its doors without them. Authors who write for the mass market often get royalties, but it's also common for them to receive flat fees.

Book Producers

Also known as packagers, book producers create books for publishers who lack the staff, time, or expertise to do the books themselves. Indeed, book producers have grown in importance to many big publishers, who rely on them for specialized projects or series. The books typically come out under the publisher's name, but if you hunt closely on the copyright page you'll often find the book producer's name as well. Book producers are frequently more receptive to new authors than traditional publishers, but they often pay in flat fees only. They also don't always put author names on the book covers.

Educational Publishers

These are the folks who produce material primarily for the school and library market, though some have expanded their lines to embrace prisons and other institutional settings. Don't imagine for an instant, though, that educational books are the staid tomes you may recall from your growing-up days. Today, most are far more like trade books than not. As a matter of fact, there is an increasing overlap between where educational and trade publishers market their books, and distinctions between the types of publishers are blurring. Educational publishers might offer royalty contracts, but don't hold your breath. They tend to farm out work on a flat-fee basis.

e-Publishers

These tend to be smaller, niche publishers who primarily focus on the e-book market. Some of them will also offer books as print on demand (POD), the quality is sometimes sketchy. These publishers will do a limited amount of promotion for individual authors. Most offer cover design, layout work, and reasonable royalty contracts.

Self-Publishing

Many companies now offer access to both print and e-book formats, and the author retains complete control over the work. There is no editorial service – unless you pay for it, no marketing service – unless you pay for it, and no cover design service – unless you pay for it. Often, editors and cover designers are not as skilled and tend to charge fairly high rates.

Subsidy Publishers

Subsidy publishers produce books for authors willing to pay some, most, or even all of the cost associated with production, marketing and distribution. Subsidy publishers typically operate with royalty contracts, but the books they publish are often spurned by traditional outlets such as bookstores. Thus, going this route can get expensive quickly unless you're willing to do a lot of--if not most or all of-- the marketing yourself.

Vanity Press

While not as common as they used to be, vanity presses (and agents) still exist. Their hallmark is presenting a new writer with a flattering offer for a contract, but on further investigation, the author discovers that they are expected to pay certain costs and fees in order to publish. Unlike self-publishing or subsidy publishing where costs to publish are made known up front, vanity presses and vanity agents hide their charges in complicated contracts and try to convince authors that it is standard practice.