



PRESENTS

# WHAT ADVANTAGES DO TRADITIONAL PUBLISHERS OFFER AUTHORS?

A COMPARISON OF  
TRADITIONAL AND INDIE  
PUBLISHING FROM THE  
AUTHORS' PERSPECTIVE

# WHAT ADVANTAGES DO TRADITIONAL PUBLISHERS OFFER AUTHORS?

A COMPARISON OF  
TRADITIONAL AND INDIE  
PUBLISHING FROM THE  
AUTHORS' PERSPECTIVE

**BY DANA BETH WEINBERG  
JEREMY GREENFIELD**

PRESS COPY  
NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION  
*dbw*

**Digital Book World:** Starting with the only conference designed to address the radically changing commercial publishing environment, F+W Media's Digital Book World has evolved into a year-round platform offering news, analysis and educational and networking resources for consumer publishing professionals and their partners-including agents, booksellers and technology vendors-online and in person.

Copyright © 2013 by Digital Book World. All rights reserved. Published by Digital Book World, an imprint of F+W Media, Inc., 10151 Carver Road, Suite #200, Blue Ash, OH 45242. (800) 289-0963. First edition.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission from Digital Book World. For permission to reproduce excerpts from this report, please contact:

Jeremy Greenfield  
38 E. 29th St. 4th Floor  
New York, NY 10016  
P: 212-447-1400 x12266  
Jeremy.Greenfield@fwmedia.com  
www.digitalbookworld.com

**Author:** Dana Beth Weinberg and Jeremy Greenfield

**Editor:** Jeremy Greenfield, Editorial Director, Digital Book World

**Designer:** Wendy Dunning



PRESS COPY  
NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

## CONTENTS

---

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>5</b>
The Profile of Authors in the Survey	5
Authors' Perceptions: Comparing Self-Publishing and Traditional Publishing	6
Published Authors' Experiences Publishing Their Latest Book	6
Outcomes for Authors: Sales and Income	8
Conclusions	9
<b>What Advantages Do Traditional Publishers Offer Authors?</b>	<b>11</b>
A Comparison of Traditional and Indie Publishing from the Authors' Perspective	11
Survey Design and Methods	12
<b>The Profile of Authors in the Survey</b>	<b>16</b>
Genres and Audiences	16
Time Spent on Writing and Writing-Related Activities	19
Publishing-Related Priorities	20
Annual Writing Income	21
Summary	23
<b>Authors' Perceptions: Comparing Self-Publishing and Traditional Publishing</b>	<b>24</b>
Publishing Preferences	24
Comparisons of Traditional Publishing and Self-Publishing	25
Advantages and Disadvantages of Traditional Publishing	31
Summary	33
<b>Published Authors' Experiences Publishing Their Latest Book</b>	<b>34</b>
Number of Published Manuscripts	34
Most Recently Published Book	35
Types of Traditional Publishers	36
Reasons for Self-Publishing	37
Satisfaction with Publishing Experience	38

WHAT ADVANTAGES DO TRADITIONAL PUBLISHERS OFFER AUTHORS?

Movement from One Mode of Publishing to Another	43
Summary	44
<b>Outcomes for Authors: Sales and Income</b>	<b>46</b>
Royalties	46
Advances	47
Contracting for Services	48
Summary	54
<b>Conclusions and Caveats</b>	<b>56</b>
Recommendations	58

***Press: Please note that this is the complete table of contents for the full report.***

**PRESS COPY  
NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

---

The author community is abuzz with news of self-published authors who are making very good money by going indie. With the stigma of self-publishing diminishing, this alternative mode of reaching readers has become increasingly attractive to both new and seasoned authors. However, the 2013 Digital Book World and Writer's Digest Author Survey found that despite the excitement about self-publishing and complaints about traditional publishing, authors held a strong preference to publish with traditional publishers. Among many other things, this report seeks to understand why.

What advantages do traditional publishers offer authors? The 2014 Digital Book World and Writer's Digest Author Survey was designed specifically to compare the perceptions, experiences, and economic returns to authors associated with traditional publishing and self-publishing respectively. In this report, we take a close look at the case to be made to the author community in favor of traditional publishing as well as the areas where traditional publishers might enhance what they offer their current and prospective authors.

9,210 authors responded to the 2014 survey and included aspiring authors who had not yet completed or in some cases even started manuscripts as well as seasoned authors with multiple traditionally published and/or self-published books. Authors were characterized as aspiring (not yet published), self-published (indie-only), traditionally published (traditional-only), and hybrid (both self-published and traditionally published). This report examines their perceptions of self-publishing and traditional publishing and, for published authors, their experiences and outcomes with each mode of publishing.

### **The Profile of Authors in the Survey**

On balance, the profile of the typical author in the sample was of a commercial fiction writer who might also write non-fiction and who had a proj-

ect in the works that might soon be ready to publish. Most of the authors in the sample did not treat their writing as a full-time job, but some did, especially among hybrid authors, who reported spending significant time both on writing and on activities aimed at engaging readers. In addition, a substantial minority of the published authors responding to this survey viewed supporting themselves by writing books as an extremely important priority. For the typical author, publishing a book that people would buy was a key goal, suggesting a strong interest in selling books as well as a related interest in distribution and marketing. Finally, most authors in this sample made relatively little money if any from writing books, and on the whole they were not satisfied with their writing income.

### **Authors' Perceptions: Comparing Self-Publishing and Traditional Publishing**

The aspiring and traditionally published authors in the sample had the most favorable views of traditional publishing and were more likely to show a marked preference for traditionally publishing their next book than were self-published and hybrid authors. Nonetheless, the majority of authors across types showed an interest in traditionally publishing their next book. The authors in the sample viewed traditional publishing as offering advantages related to marketing, print distribution, and professional services, as well as in terms of advances and lower personal costs that shifted risk from the author to the publisher. However, they also viewed traditional publishing as offering less creative control, slower speed to market, lower royalty rates, and no guarantee of a higher quality finished product or of having a best-seller compared to self-publishing.

### **Published Authors' Experiences Publishing Their Latest Book**

In terms of actual experiences, traditional publishing seemed to deliver lackluster results relative to expectations. To the extent that marketing, print distribution, print sales, and professional services were viewed by authors

as advantages of traditional publishing, authors were less than thrilled with these aspects of their experiences in traditional publishing. They also found traditional publishing offering less creative control, slower speed to market, lower royalty rates, and no guarantee of a higher quality finished product.

Furthermore, the pattern of movement for hybrid authors is predominately from traditional publishing to self-publishing, and there seem to be both push and pull factors at work. On the push side, these authors tended to be less happy with their treatment by traditional publishers than were the authors who had only traditionally published. On the pull side, they benefited from more satisfying royalty rates, earnings, and a highly satisfying amount of creative control. While a minority of hybrid authors published their last book with a traditional publisher, we do not know from the survey whether they are using self-publishing in tandem with or in place of traditional publishing. However, given the high conversion rate from traditional publishing to hybrid publishing, the higher satisfaction with self-publishing among hybrid authors, and the fact that only 16.1% of hybrid authors reported an intention only to traditionally publish, we anticipate that more authors will elect to become hybrids and that, even if they continue to traditionally publish, traditionally published books may represent a shrinking proportion of their publications—unless traditional publishers provide these authors with advantages they cannot achieve on their own.

While traditional publishing left authors less than completely satisfied on the whole, so too did self-publishing. The proportion of high satisfaction related to various aspects of publishing differed little between the two types of publishing. These results may reflect the difficulty for the majority of authors of making a splash in the book market and a crisis of expectations that may be unrealistic or uneasily met. Alternatively, they might point to areas where traditional publishers could focus on enhancing services to authors in order to make themselves more attractive to authors or reduce attrition.

PRESS COPY  
NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



## **Outcomes for Authors: Sales and Income**

While advances were seen as a key advantage of traditional publishing, most of the authors in this sample who traditionally published did not receive them, while the royalty rates were also lower than those of authors who were self-publishing. Self-published authors were more likely to incur additional costs for editing than were traditionally published authors, but both sets were similarly likely to hire someone to help with marketing and promotion.

Traditional publishers may do more for authors in terms of marketing and promotion techniques, although the gap narrowed and even disappeared when compared to what hybrid authors did to promote their self-published work, with the exception of advertising in magazines and newspapers. However, it is not clear from the survey questions what was done by the publisher and what by the author. Nor can we distinguish differences in aggressiveness, expense, quality, or efficacy of the techniques used by publishers or by different types of authors. Traditional publishers did have an advantage in terms of distribution to bookstores, but it did not apply to about half of the traditionally published authors in the sample.

Finally, sales and earnings looked about the same for the authors in the sample whether they self-published or traditionally published, despite differences in royalties (higher for self-publishing) and distribution (greater for traditional publishing). Given that so many of the authors in the sample published genre fiction and that so many of the traditionally published authors published with houses that emphasized ebooks, did not provide advances, and offered higher royalty rates, perhaps it is not surprising that the traditionally published and self-published authors looked so similar.

Taking into account the expenses that a substantial, though not the majority, of self-published authors incurred in preparing their books, self-published authors may on average be slightly worse off in terms of net income than their traditionally published counterparts, particularly given the similarities in median income between the two groups. Further research is needed

into whether greater upfront investments by self-published authors lead to greater sales and eventually income, in which case the income divide might diminish even further or reverse.

## **Conclusions**

This report examined authors' attitudes toward, experiences with, and outcomes from self-publishing and traditional publishing. Authors held favorable views of traditional publishing and expected that traditional publishing would offer several advantages over self-publishing, and most of the authors wanted to publish their next book with a traditional publisher. However, authors' experiences with traditional publishing seemed to fall short of expectation, and authors were not overall highly satisfied with their experiences with traditional publishers. Nor, however, were authors wholly satisfied with their experiences with self-publishing. Neither mode of publishing, it seems, provided authors with what they hoped in terms of sales, earnings, distribution, or marketing in particular. Moreover, little if any difference was seen in terms of sales or earnings from an authors' latest traditionally published and self-published books. Finally, the rate at which traditional authors are embracing self-publishing and the correspondingly low percentage of latest books from this group that were traditionally published suggest that authors may be voting with their feet, despite a continued interest in traditional publishing.

While the study has several limitations and may not be generalizable to the population of authors, it nonetheless provides valuable information about the relationship between various publishing options and outcomes. Crediting the findings here that traditional publishing does not seem to differentiate itself from self-publishing in substantive ways for authors, what should publishers do?

Authors in general do not seem overly pleased with their publishing experiences, whether with traditional publishing or self-publishing. This unmet desire or expectation may be more a function of the disappointments

related to a crowded consumer market and issues of discoverability than a problem with the services attainable in each mode of publishing. In that case, traditional publishers looking to satisfy their authors might do well to manage expectations.

Alternatively, traditional publishers may consider ways to increase the value they offer their authors. One key area to nurture may be the relationship between author and editor, particularly as this relationship is a potential advantage to traditional publishers when more than a third of their authors found the relationship very satisfying and only a quarter of self-published authors had hired editors to help them with their self-published work.

Managing expectations and enhancing author services could be important avenues for reducing attrition, either of authors to other publishing houses or of authors to self-publishing. However, it is not clear the extent to which either is a problem for traditional publishers, in particular when there are so many authors and the majority would like to publish their books with traditional publishers.

A question for publishers to consider is the rate at which their authors leave them, either for other publishers or to self-publish, and to what extent these departures impact sales and revenue. Another key question to consider is the relationship between hybrid publishing and traditional publishing sales. To the extent that traditional publishers are benefiting from the self-publishing activities of their authors, they may seek various ways to partner or assist authors in these alternative publishing endeavors.

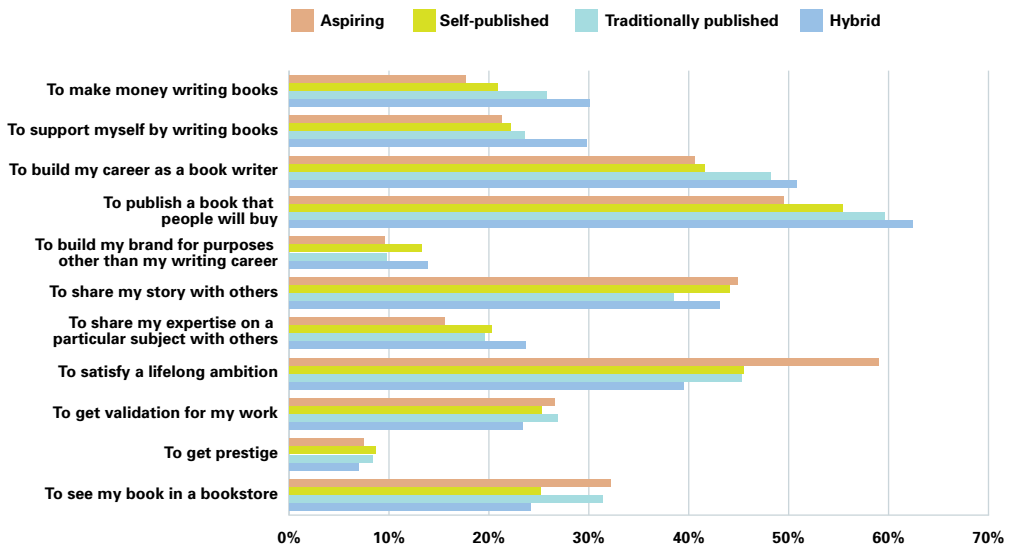
**PRESS COPY  
NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION**

## SELECTED GRAPHS AND CHARTS FOR PRESS

The remainder of the report offers 50 pages of graphs, charts, data and analysis. Please let us know if there are questions you'd like answered or data points you'd like to see and we will try to accommodate you. Please email Stacie Berger at [Stacie.Berger@fwmedia.com](mailto:Stacie.Berger@fwmedia.com).

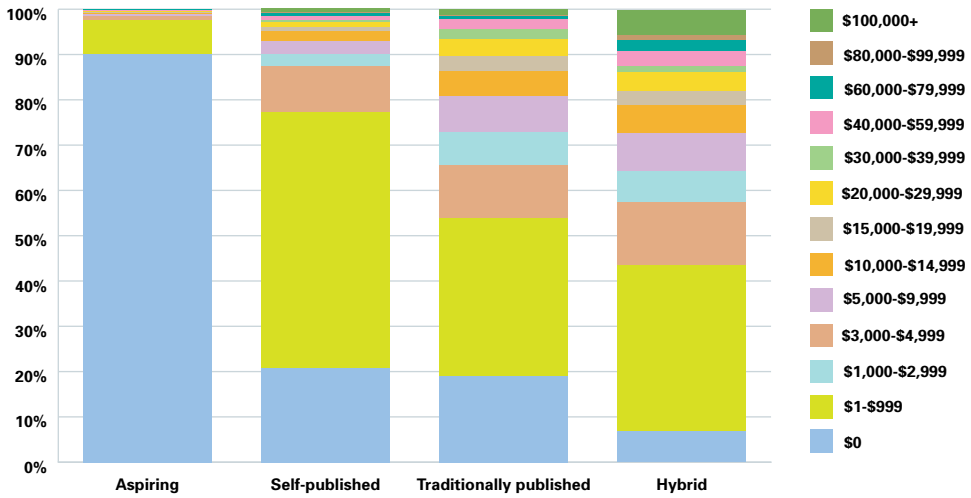
The graphs and charts selected for you below are some of the most interesting in the report. If you wish to reproduce them, please include the credit line provided.

### *“Extremely Important” Publishing-Related Priorities by Author Type*



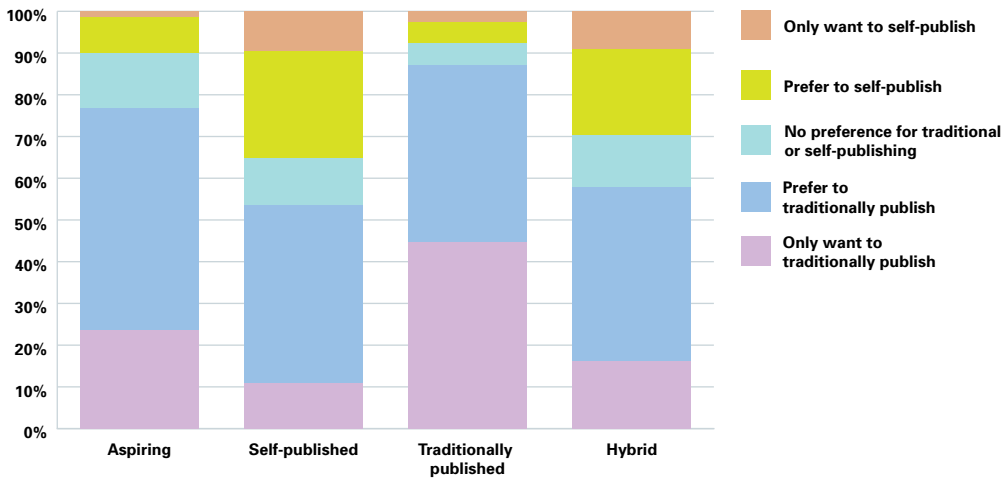
Digital Book World Author Survey 2014 [digitalbookworld.com](http://digitalbookworld.com)

### Annual Writing Income by Author Type



Digital Book World Author Survey 2014 digitalbookworld.com

### Author Preferences for Publishing Next Book



Digital Book World Author Survey 2014 digitalbookworld.com

**Percent of Authors Who Were “Very Satisfied” with Their Publishing Experiences**

	Traditional Publishing		Self-Publishing	
	Traditionally published	Hybrid	Self-published	Hybrid
Pricing of the book	24.1%	20.5%	32.1%	44.4%
Number of copies sold	8.2%	5.4%	4.6%	9.7%
Royalty rate I received	9.8%	7.9%	23.6%	35.6%
My total earnings to date on the book	4.8%	4.5%	4.5%	10.7%
Costs to me, personally	23.9%	19.0%	15.2%	17.4%
Time required of me, personally, to edit/prepare the book	21.4%	17.6%	11.2%	14.9%
Amount of help/advice I could get from publishing industry professionals	22.8%	14.3%	8.3%	13.1%
Time required of me, personally, to market/promote the book	10.3%	6.0%	6.4%	9.7%
Overall marketing/promotion of the book	10.4%	6.2%	5.0%	7.4%
Amount of creative control I had	23.1%	17.4%	61.8%	63.6%
Cover of the book	37.8%	31.4%	44.7%	49.4%
Quality of the finished product	41.1%	37.4%	38.5%	44.4%
Advance I received	8.3%	6.2%		
Relationship with my editor(s)	38.0%	32.4%		
Publisher’s efforts to market/promote the book	13.9%	7.2%		
Publisher’s commitment to me and my work	26.2%	15.5%		
Distribution of the book	16.0%	9.7%		