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Martinis & Marshmallows: A Guide to Luxury Camping

Full Comment

I was initially up in the air about self-publishing or going through a traditional publishing house. The security, expertise, and wider distribution offered by publishers were attractive, but in the end, the loss of control over my content and brand weighed too heavily against going the traditional publisher route.

The publisher wanted to add and subtract products featured in my book based on advertising and marketing partnerships with companies. I wanted to only feature products I own, use, and recommend based on performance. This difference in content of the book was already enough to be a deal breaker. But there was another downside that moved traditional publishing into the realm of impossible - the publisher would own the content, the title, and the brand. You see, I'm not just writing a book, I'm also creating a line of luxury camping gear. The book will help promote the camping gear line and the camping gear line will promote the book. I need to own the rights to all of it.

With traditional publishing out of the picture, my path was clear. I would be a self-published author. I'm very excited, happy, and terrified to do so. To be a self-published author you need to be an entrepreneur of a small start-up company. You will do everything you are able to do yourself and will hire a talented team to do everything else while you manage the entire process.

I've written my book and I'm also the photographer. I found a very talented editor and she did an amazing job. The book is three times better due to her contribution. There have been snags along the way. I've gone through three graphic designers for the interior design and interviewed seven others. Finding the right designer is similar to finding the right editor. You need to find just the right fit and so far I haven't been lucky with designers. It is a complex project and although many designers say they are looking for a creative challenge, they quickly realize they may not have the time. Likewise, nothing is free. I have a budget I have to stay within and that limits me to designers who have a full time job and are looking to earn a bit more with free-lance projects. As I have design experience I may be designing the book myself, too. This would have all been provided by a traditional publisher, but it's part of the challenge of self-publishing.

One thing that's the same no matter if you self-publish or go the more traditional route, you will be doing your own marketing. Publishing houses say they will help market your book, but unless you are one of their top tier authors, they really won't. Getting the word out about your book is all up to you.

I may sell fewer books as a self-publisher, but I could end up netting more revenue. I've heard mixed information on this and I think it varies widely. I'll decide what I make per book sold. Balancing that out in a not so great way is how the cards are still stacked against self-published authors getting their books into libraries, bookstores, and online. It's not just that you have to jump through some very arbitrary hoops; it's that you aren't allowed to go through some hoops at all. For example, say I wanted a local library to carry my book. The process can be so difficult that even if I brought them a copy and donated it, it probably won't grace their shelves anytime soon. I'll just have to be more creative and determined. Which I am because my book is not only a business for me, it really is a labor of love.