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Alliance of Independent Authors

Self-Publishing Service Directory
Autumn 2015

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WELCOME!

Welcome to the latest edition of our self-publishing services directory, our compilation of services offered by Partner Members of the Alliance of Independent Authors (**ALLi**).

When an author sets out to self-publish, they can very quickly become overwhelmed by the choices on offer. The self-publishing services sector is, on one hand exciting, innovative and fast-growing; on the other, idiosyncratic, illogical and incoherent. Some services are run by people who are knowledgeable, dedicated, helpful and fair; others are clueless, greedy, callous and manipulative.

In an unregulated marketplace, where the same service can cost \$500 against \$15,000, for pretty much the same thing, depending on where you shop; where useless services are sold at inflated prices; where one large operation with many imprints, and controversial practices, dominates the information stream and where there's so much to learn and to do, how do you find your way through? How do you know who to trust?

This directory, and **ALLi's** Partner Membership, is our association's attempt to offer a trustworthy guide to the global author services sector.

Each service listed here has been vetted by our Watchdog team, as adhering to **ALLi's** code of conduct. We have also included a range of articles, from our 'How-To For Authors' Advice Centre and blog.



The aim of the directory is to connect indie authors with the best author services available, so they can select the perfect service for the particular project they're currently working on.

This latest version of the directory is brought to you by our new Partner Member Manager Andrew Lowe, and designed by Jane Dixon-Smith, just two of the great indie authors who also work as service providers. (Andy is an editor, Jane one of the foremost book designers in the UK.)

ALLi is all about working together for each other, so we'd love to hear your feedback and suggestions. Do get in touch.

And if you're an author, or an author service, and not yet a member of our alliance, isn't it time you joined us?

ORNA ROSS
DIRECTOR
ALLIANCE OF INDEPENDENT AUTHORS

PARTNER MEMBER CODE

A MEASURE OF QUALITY

Explaining the ALLi Partner Member Code

ALLi is committed to excellence and ethics in self-publishing from all our members, including our Partner members.

Every single service provider listed in this directory is vetted by our Watchdog team in accordance with **ALLi's** code of standards.

We take every care to ensure our members access services that agree and comply with the following tenets of Partner Membership:

- Integrity**
 We recognise that Partner Membership of **ALLi** means our primary aim is to be of service to the writing and reading community. To that end, we follow through on all promised services and fully honour all advertisements and publication agreement terms. We never spam, oversell or harass authors to buy our services.
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 We add value to each publication commensurate with the fee charged, relieving authors of key publishing tasks, enhancing readability, design or discoverability.
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ALLi INSIGHT: WRITING



The first – and potentially most terrifying – stage in your self-publishing journey is to transform your ideas into words on the page. Every writer's process is unique; some need psychological and motivational guidance, others will benefit more from being steered towards certain tools or techniques. Currently, the number of **ALLi** Partners who offer Writing services are limited, but we expect this field to experience dramatic growth for future editions of the directory.

12 TOP WRITING TIPS FOR BEGINNERS

ALLi Partner member Alison Jack, who is a professional editor, shares writing advice that she wishes she'd known when she was writing her first book, *Dory's Avengers*.

Her top tips will boost the confidence of anyone at the start of the self-publishing process – and plenty who have progressed beyond novice status or who are trade-published. (Interesting to note, too, that this professional editor also hired an editor for her own work – another sound piece of advice!)

When I was writing my debut novel, I knew nothing about the publishing process and scoured the Internet for advice.

I found it by the bucketload, most of it contradictory. This obviously wasn't much help, but over the years I have managed to sort the wheat from the chaff.

I hope my experiences, both good and bad, will be of help to other new authors.

Writing Your Book

Apart from the basics: grammar rules, punctuation, spelling and sentence construction, there are no rules for writing a book. If someone tells you there are, ignore them.

Perhaps you've heard of the 'author voice'. This is unique to each individual writer. Don't worry if you make technical mistakes; a good editor will help you sort them out. The most important thing from your point of view as an author is that nothing stifles your voice. You must allow your writing to flow.

The following list will give you a few hints, especially if you're writing fiction. But I want to stress – they are guidelines, not rules. Some are things I've learnt from writing my own novel, others come from my experiences as a copy-editor.

- 1. Try to avoid irrelevant storylines**, although if a few sneak in a good editor will highlight them.
- 2. In real life you get to know the people you meet gradually, so think of introducing your characters in the same way.** A mistake I made was naming too many characters in the opening pages of my book. A lot of these characters turned out to be quite minor, and my poor readers wasted time trying to remember them all. No character, not even the lead character, benefits from a huge introduction on page one. It will leave your readers' heads whirling, and they'll forget most of the details. If your protagonist is in her twenties, pretty and called Jane, that's all you need to say to begin with. Her outgoing personality, horse riding expertise and dedication to Chelsea Football Club (or whatever) will become apparent as the story progresses.
- 3. Only you can discover whether your natural writing style is to plot each stage of the story carefully or see how it pans out.** I am a pantsler, but I have edited excellent work by plotters. Whichever style suits you is the correct style, and don't let anyone tell you it's not!
- 4. Prologue – do you really need one?** My debut novel's prologue has regularly been slated as the weakest part of the book; some critics even said they didn't think they were going to enjoy the book until they got to chapter one. Everything introduced in the prologue became apparent as the story progressed, anyway. Lesson learnt. Book number two will be free of prologue.
- 5. Epilogue – you almost certainly don't need one.** I originally included an epilogue in my book because, despite the story coming to its natural conclusion in

the final chapter, I found it very difficult to let go. Luckily a friend read the epilogue and hated it, and I scrapped it before sending the manuscript to prospective publishers. I've yet to read an epilogue that adds anything to a story, so if you feel inclined to write one please question your reasons for doing so.

- 6. Try not to be too wordy.** Question every adverb and adjective – do they enhance the sentence? Are you using complicated words when simple ones will do? Do you have a favourite word or phrase you repeat over and over again? Your editor should point these out if so, but do try to limit them. One of my favourite phrases was 'incandescent with rage'. If I'd been given free rein, my book would have been seething (literally!) with furious characters, but thanks to my editor the phrase only appeared once, thus guaranteeing it maximum impact.
- 7. In dialogue, it soon becomes evident which character is speaking at any one time.** The words spoken often show who is speaking and what mood they're in,

so there's no need to tell the reader, and if you haven't yet been told it's better to show rather than tell, you will be!

- 8. Try not to overuse certain words.** 'Just', 'only', 'again', 'back' and 'also' are favourites. Your editor will point these out.
- 9. Only use 'started to' or 'began to' if the action which follows is not going to reach its natural conclusion.**
- 10. Are you going to write in UK or American English?** Decide on one and be consistent.
- 11. Are you going to write in past or present tense?** Ditto previous point. If you're writing in the first person, beware of suddenly switching to the second person. For example: 'I was working in my shop, and it was really busy. You couldn't stop for a second or the customers would complain you were going too slow'.
- 12. The tidier your manuscript is when you send it off for editing, the quicker and cheaper the process will be.**



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A book's editorial development is rarely overlooked or handled solely by a successful author, and with good reason. There is a big difference between structural edits, beta-readings and final proofreads, and each of these is crucial for ensuring your book is in the best shape possible.

Writers are often too close to the words they have written to be 100% effective at editing and proofreading their own manuscript. This doesn't mean you can't play a role in the editing of your book, though, particularly if you are facing budget constraints.

The trick is in finding the editor or editorial service that is right for you and then developing the relationship. The ALLi Partner members in this section are proven and dedicated experts who will work with you to make your book polished and professional, before you send it out into the big wide world, where it will be exposed to industry and reader/reviewer scrutiny.

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Sarah Kolb-Williams is a science fiction editor, editorial consultant, and serial comma enthusiast from the Midwest United States. She has worked with independent authors since 2008 and currently specializes in mid-level edits for science fiction and fantasy novels, novellas, and short stories. As an independent editor herself, Sarah is proud to offer a 5% discount on all services to ALLi members.

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is synonymous with copy editing or with any kind of editing that you pay for. It's not. Payment is not the defining aspect if you happen to have a qualified person who will do it for you for free

The comprehensive nature of the editing is what makes a 'professional edit.' Many books don't make Awesome Indies approval because whoever did their editing either didn't do a line edit, or wasn't rigorous enough with it. The editing was there, it just wasn't comprehensive enough.

What Does a Comprehensive Edit Entail?

A comprehensive edit includes four different kinds of edits, and each requires a separate pass over the material.

The best results are achieved when two or more editors work on one project, as is the case with mainstream publishers. Fresh perspectives mean fewer errors and more than one opinion of subjective points.

These edits are:

The **developmental/structural edit** – this works on the big stuff: plot, pacing, character development and so on.

The **line edit** – this works with the prose: word usage, clarity of expression, sentence construction, eliminates overwriting, unnecessary repetition and so on.

Copy edit – checks grammar, punctuation and spelling;

Proofread – the final pair of eyes to pick up anything missed by the copy editor.

Structural and developmental editing can be approximated by asking beta-readers for their opinions, but the results are only as good as the readers' ability to analyse the work and suggest ways to improve it.

Few readers have the ability to do this to the degree required, so unless the beta-readers are editors or experienced reviewers or authors themselves, I advise getting the opinion of a professional. A manuscript appraisal is the cheapest way to do it.

Line and copy editing are often thought to be the same thing, probably because they can be done by the same person at the same time if the book doesn't need heavy line editing.

But authors shouldn't assume their book falls into that category. If authors have never had a book line edited by a professional, then they need to – at least once – because most authors, no matter how knowledgeable, do not recognise the flaws in their own prose.

Once you've worked with a line editor (a ruthless one who isn't afraid to chop out redundancies and tells you why they make the edits they do) you'll be a much better writer.

At the very least, work with an editor who will not let poor expression pass them by. Some editors will copy edit a book and never concern themselves with things like poor word choice and overwriting. I can't let a badly worded sentence pass me by no matter how grammatically correct it is.

Authors need to ask for a line and a copy edit, and if the editor doesn't seem to know the difference, the author should find someone who does.

Which Types of Editing Do Indie Authors Need?

Out of the four kinds of edits, the one Awesome Indies reviewers find most lacking in indie books is the line edit. We see many books with great stories that have been well copy edited and proofed, yet they still need a line edit, or a more rigorous one.

An author can do a certain amount of self-editing, but no author can do a definitive edit of their own work.

The problem is that the author knows what they're trying to say, but the reader doesn't. The line editor makes sure that the author is expressing their ideas as clearly, elegantly and succinctly as possible.

A good line editor makes sure that the prose reads well, and their edits make an author's voice stronger and clearer.

An author that neglects the line edit risks a product full of poorly written prose.

Most readers will not notice, but anyone with higher education in English literature, linguistics, journalism, editing or creative writing will, and if you want to be sure that your book is of the same standard as a mainstream published book, then all four kinds of editing are necessary.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF EDITING – DEFINITIONS FOR INDIE AUTHORS



*“What kind of edit does my manuscript need?”
“What do editors actually do?” “What’s the difference between editing and proofreading?”*

Common questions among author-publishers striving to make their books the best they can be prior to publication. Tahlia Newland, coordinator of manuscript appraisal service Awesome Indies, offers some clarity.

“But I’ve had my book professionally edited,” authors often tell the Awesome Indies submissions coordinator when he tells them that their book does not meet the same editorial standard as a mainstream-published book.

It seems that many authors are not clear on what is meant by ‘professionally edited’. A common misunderstanding is that the term

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HOW TO BUILD A GREAT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AUTHOR AND DESIGNER

Australian professional book designer **Scarlett Rugers** offers advice on the best way for self-published authors to build a great working relationship with book designers – and her top tip is pleasingly straightforward.



The one key to making the author/book designer relationship awesome is simple: **just talk it out.**

Speaking as a professional book designer, I know that authors can be hesitant to contact me for many reasons:

- They don't know what to expect.**
- They don't know what is expected of them.**
- They can't trust a creative.**
- They're unsure of the outcome.**
- They're worried how much it's going to cost.**
- They're not sure that I will listen to their ideas.**

They need not fear. My purpose is to empower you to be the best author you can be. Getting a professionally designed book cover to make you feel like a traditionally published author is the start of that.

But it doesn't just happen, it's something that both you and your designer have to work towards.



How it Should Work

The author/designer relationship can be relaxing, and easy-going, and open. Whenever I talk with an author, I tell them straight up that the most important thing about working together is communication.

This is not me dictating to you what will work best and that's that, nor is it you telling me why we have to have <insert element> on the cover and there's no leeway either way.

It is about coming together into the same place, being open to change, being outside of our comfort zones and appreciating and respecting the input of the other person.

Creativity is all about interpretation and, while I hope you will trust me to lead the project into the golden lands of high profit, I will always listen to your feedback and try it out. But it's also about making sure you know what's happening at all times.

Collaboration Is Key

Hiring a designer is about collaboration. It's a two-person effort, and it can be rewarding and really, really fun. Confusion, misunderstanding and negativity all stem from a lack of communication. So, as I said at the start: talk it out!

When you work with a creative you don't have to go in blind or confused. It's okay to ask questions, to seek clarity. It's okay to tell the designer you don't understand something. This may surprise you, but I don't expect you to know how this works. That's my job! If you don't ask me, you won't know.

The Power of Empathy

I've been writing since 1998, and it is my first love. I know how it feels to be the author, not knowing what the hell to do next or whether the money is going to be worth the investment.

You've spent months on this manuscript – maybe years – and now publishing is so close you're getting paper cuts. I get it, I really do. That's why I take my time to read your work before I start, to dig out the killer themes in your book that will translate beautifully onto the cover. Reading the book is such a vital part; a lot of the time I draw themes and concepts out of a story that the author doesn't even recognize are in there. I want to give you the best chance of success.

This design belongs to both of us. It's just as important to me as it is to you.

Let the experience of working with the designer be a give-and-take process. I approach the design in the same way I want my clients to: open to change.

It's okay to be outside your comfort zone – the only way you can improve is by having a fluid mind. Sometimes, what I originally judged to be a bad idea put forward by my client actually turns out much better than expected, and the authors I work with take the same risks.

So have faith in your designer, let them help you be a professionally published author.

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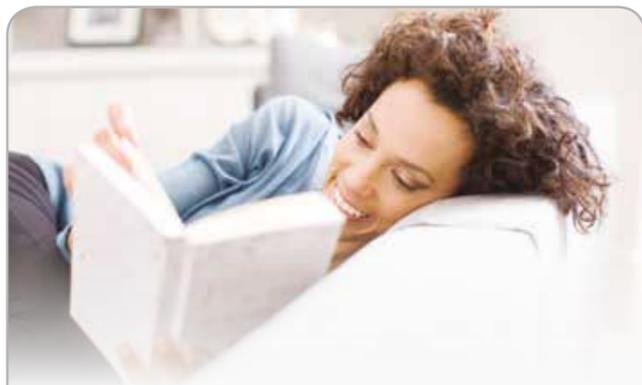
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HOW TO USE CREATSPACE AND INGRAM SPARK TOGETHER

As a response to Jim Giammatteo's invaluable ALLi Watchdog piece recommending that indie authors use both CreateSpace and Lightning Source simultaneously for effective distribution of print books (<http://www.selfpublishingadvice.org/watchdog-ingram-spark-vs-createspace-for-self-publishing-print-books/>), US novelist **Karen Myers** offers a personal case study of how this system works for her.

The following observations reflect Karen's personal understanding of the differences between the two services, based on my own and others' observations. They do not include private information received from any of the vendors involved.



Ingram

Ingram is the largest worldwide distributor of print books. When a bookstore orders a book, it probably comes from Ingram (perhaps through an intermediary). Ingram offers two services for publishers: Lightning Source International (LSI) and IngramSpark.

The former is for "real" publishers and was all they offered until a couple of years ago. Its contracts are daunting, its interface is a bit clumsy, and its communications are a bit slow and sometimes cryptic (especially to indie publishers who aren't familiar with publishing industry terms).

Indie publishers and others lamented, and Ingram offered a new service – Spark – with a friendlier front end and slightly more restricted discounting terms.

They stopped letting most indies into LSI once Spark was launched (I got into LSI just in time). Both systems, I understand, use the same back-ends and services – the only difference seems to be that there are fewer discount terms on Spark, and the front end/customer service is easier for the newbie.

Ingram will charge you for returns, an area that terrorizes new indie publishers because they don't know what to expect. (These days, it seems to be pretty harmless, now that bookstores have adopted just-in-time ordering practices instead of ordering in bulk and returning leftovers.)

CreateSpace

CreateSpace (CS) is owned by Amazon and intended for indie publishers. It's user-friendly, with good customer service. It used to charge a fee per book, like Ingram, but then dropped that altogether. It lets you use a CS ISBN if you don't have one of your own. (Ingram requires you to have your own ISBNs, like a 'real' publisher).



In fact, it requires a CS ISBN for the Library portion of its expanded distribution service, presumably due to its relationship with Baker & Taylor.

There are two basic levels of CS distribution: Amazon-related, and Expanded. The Amazon-related is closely tied to the KDP program, so linking your ebook and your CS PoD book is easy. CS also offers a webstore, for what that's worth (I've never sold a book there). The Expanded service compares directly to Ingram.

Buying a Print Book From Amazon

Here's how it works under the covers, as far as I and others can tell...

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This means that your print books now appear at online retailers – matching your ebooks – and bookstores are willing to carry them.

Except for the ISBN, the Ingram costs are trivial. Here's my thinking on why you need your own ISBNs anyway, though lots of indies just go for the short-term savings instead: <http://hollowlands.com/2014/03/why-you-should-buy-isbns-for-your-books/>

(The current best-practice recommendation is to use CreateSpace for Amazon (not the expanded services) and Ingram (LSI or Spark) for everywhere else.)

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book with that ISBN – you'll get an "already there" error if it hasn't been removed yet. You may have to nag CS customer service until that's done. The update cycles between the vendors take a while. Be persistent.

Do NOT load your book to Ingram with a different ISBN to avoid this process – having

the same edition of your book with different ISBNs will cause problems. If you used a CS ISBN, consider it to be retired after the book is removed from the Ingram database – you can only use your own ISBN there.

This means you should recreate your Amazon CS edition with your own ISBN, too, after this is done, so that your book has the same ISBN regardless of the retailer.

You can use the same PDF book interior file at both CreateSpace and Ingram, but you will probably need to adjust the PDF cover file because the paper stock used is not identical, and thus the paper thickness is not identical, making the width of the spine different for each service.

PoD Quality

The level of quality for the two services' PoD products seems to be similar, now that CS offers matte as well as glossy covers. Ingram offers more formats (for LSI, maybe not Spark) than CS, but since you will want the same formats for both services, that doesn't matter.

Both PoD vendors are of reasonable quality these days, but not quite as good as bulk printing, and errors can happen (tilted covers, defects). There is anecdotal discussion of third-party services doing the actual printing for CS and causing quality control issues, but in my experience the problem rate is low.

You can tell the difference between PoD books printed by Ingram and CS if you look closely (paper thickness, colour). Therefore I recommend that you put all the books in a series in both places, rather than have some in one place, and some in another.

A customer who orders them all will tend to do so via the same retail channel and should get perfectly matched sets. If you are going to be delayed placing all of your books with both PoD vendors, do them series by series.

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ALLi INSIGHT: MARKETING & PROMOTION



Many writers say they don't want to market their own books, because it interferes with their writing time. That split often arises from misunderstanding what marketing a book means.

Marketing is not a grubby must-do where you try to manipulate or bludgeon the reader, but an opportunity to more fully engage with what we're trying to say as writers – and a way to go out and meet our readers and carry forward our message.

Viewed this way, your social updates and marketing can become a creative opportunity – which is surely why we write?

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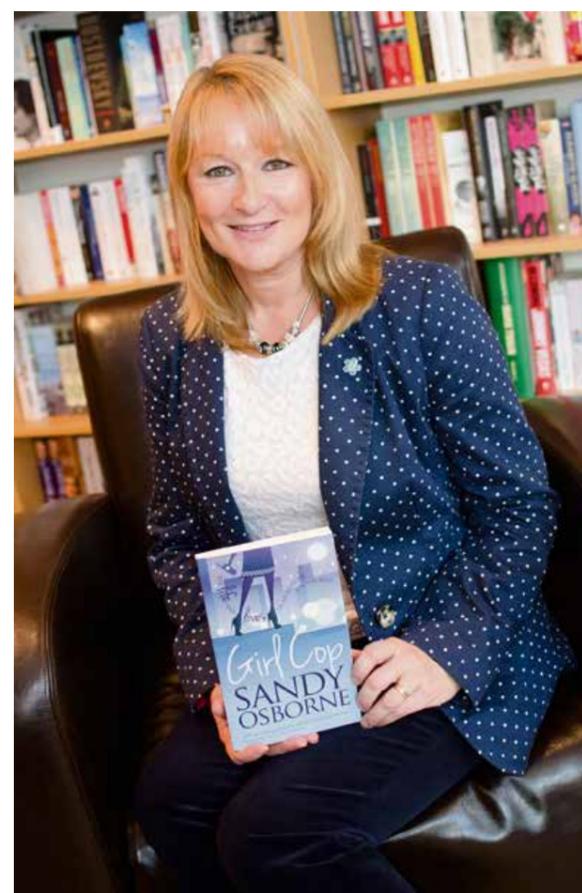
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CASE STUDY OF A SUCCESSFUL BOOK LAUNCH

British novelist Sandy Osborne, author of the highly acclaimed Girl Cop series, offers an encouraging perspective on in-store book launches, based on her experience of running two successful book launch events at one of her local bookshops.

Keep an eye out for ALLi's new #Authors4Bookstores campaign, which will include advice on how to emulate her success.



Not long before the release of my first self published novel *Girl Cop – The Life and Loves of an Officer on the Beat* in November 2012, I brazenly walked into the Bath branch of Waterstones and asked if they would host a launch for me.

The Events Organiser was a bit cool at first, saying that they were going to be busy in the run up to Christmas. But when I said I was looking at January, she seemed to warm up and sent me away to organise it.

Organising a book launch isn't dissimilar to planning a wedding. (Invitations, wine, glass hire, helium balloons (colour coded to match the cover), photographer, and flowers for a special guest.)

I managed to persuade Waterstones to let me have a window display – positioning a full-sized model of me in uniform just metres from the *Big Issue* pitch just outside the shop, along with numerous posters/copies of the cover and a small table with a few books displayed on it.

I sent invites to everyone I know. As the launch was going to be after Christmas, every card I sent included an invite! I recruited four friends to 'meet and greet' and run the bar. I handed out fliers to everyone who looked within my readership, from the checkout ladies in the supermarket to those queuing behind me. I dug out my old Dr Marten boots from the attic and organised my table display for the night.

I texted and emailed everyone in my contacts lists both before Christmas and again shortly before the event. I didn't ask for RSVP's – I just crossed my fingers! I also managed to get a piece in the local paper.



Launch Day

The day itself dawned, and the people just kept coming! “The most well attended local author launch in my 25 years as a bookseller,” said the senior seller from Waterstones. I’d been bleating on for years to all my friends that I was writing a book, and over 180 people turned out to help me celebrate its final release on a cold January evening – and I sold over 100 books!

Girl Cop in Trouble, Launch

I am writing this bit fresh from my second launch. The changes I made for this event were few.

Having spent almost the whole evening of my first launch sat at a table signing books (I’m not complaining – I was extremely flattered by the queue of people who patiently waited to have their books signed – but I wasn’t able to mingle and the evening passed in a bit of a blur), this time I prepared a stock of pre-signed books which I left clearly marked by the till and invited personal dedications prior to the event in an attempt to reduce the queue.

I didn’t want to deter those who wanted their books signed on the night so I also had a pile of

unsigned books next to the till, and an obvious signing table was set up adjacent to the counter.

The plan worked, and as a result I enjoyed the evening far more than the first launch, having more opportunity to chat to my guests.

In the months running up to the event, I kept a lookout for any wine deals and managed to get a respectable wine at a very reasonable price.

This is one of the biggest outlays for a launch, so worth shopping around for.

Also, to make this launch different in some way to the first, I hired a professional graphologist who provided free handwriting analysis throughout the event.

I also invited a young singer-songwriter to provide some music. It was intended as background – not a performance – and was perfectly balanced.

To Launch or Not to Launch?

It’s a no-brainer for me. A celebration of all that hard work! Though I’m sure JK Rowling doesn’t have to wheel her hired wine glasses back to Waitrose in a shopping trolley the day after her launches!

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY SELLING?



Novelist and **ALLi** Author member **John Lynch** has a reputation for hand-selling his books wherever he is, on his extensive travels as a professional salesman. (Once, while refuelling his car on the way to a literary festival!)

Here’s his take on one of the major sticking points for independent authors.

I’ve been a salesman most of my working life. The first book I ever published (in 1990) was *Managing the High Tech Salesforce*; last year I published *The International Sales Handbook*.

I use the word ‘salesman’ with pride. When the phone rings and the person at the other end begins with, “Let me say at the outset, I’m not trying to sell you anything,” and it’s obvious that s/he in fact *is* trying to do exactly that, my response is, “Never say that to a salesperson.”

The reason some people try that line is because they think there’s something shameful about the activity of selling. There isn’t. Everybody is selling, all the time – but some are better at it than others, and some don’t admit to themselves that that is what they are doing.

If you have ever proposed marriage, you were selling (and the product was yourself). If you manoeuvred so that some man or woman proposed marriage to you, that was an even better example of successful selling.

I remember years ago flying home from South America. The woman in the seat beside me asked what I did for a living. I told her I was a salesman. Then she asked what I had been doing in the country we had just left and I said I had negotiated and signed a contract with that country’s Ministry of Transportation. She asked what the contract had been for. I told her (about \$250 million) and she said, “Oh. You’re not a salesman at all.”

What she meant was that salespeople don’t

do \$250 million deals. Salespeople are grubby, small-time manipulators who sell things to people who don’t want them for more than they are worth.

She was, of course, English (as I am). Other nationalities don’t take such a negative approach and I suppose it is mainly to the shy, retiring English that I am addressing this piece. How did she think the Minister and his staff of knowledgeable engineers were persuaded to part with \$250 million if not as a result of someone selling the idea to them?

So what, exactly, is selling? What sort of person is good at it? And how, if at all, does it differ from marketing?

What do we Mean by Selling?

Cliché time: selling has been described as “the gentle art of giving the other guy your own way”.

And it *is* a cliché; but clichés become clichés because they are true. I’d like you to accept that definition of selling, and I’d like you to agree that what we writers want is for people to buy our books. I know, because I’ve met them, that there are writers who don’t give a toss (or say they don’t) whether anyone buys their books or not. Since you’ve got this far, I imagine you’re not one of them.

What Sort of Person is Good at Selling?

Not all clichés are true. (See? I lied to you a paragraph ago. I expect that fits much better with your idea of what salespeople do). One of the commonest ideas about selling is that you have to be extrovert to be good. Rubbish! The best salespeople (and who better than me to tell you this?) are introverts who have learned to present as extroverts. If you don’t know

what's going on inside your own head, how on earth do you expect to work out what is happening in someone else's? A cliché that is true: "The good salesperson is two ears and one mouth, in that proportion."

You have to listen more than you speak and when you listen it's important that you *HEAR*.

The general idea of conversation seems to be that one person allows the other to talk at him or her and in return the other then allows the first person to talk at her or him. No one is really listening and it's certain that no one actually hears anything.

You have to detect what the other person's needs are, what that person likes and doesn't like and the reasons they may have for being drawn to or turning away from your sort of book. You're not going to do that unless you hear what the person is saying.

There's more. In my novel *Zappa's Mam's a Slapper*, I have a character say something that I've often said myself: 'Good salespeople hear the words nobody speaks.'

You have to develop (introverts can be good at this but extroverts are hopeless) the ability to pick up how someone is reacting to you, even though they haven't put it into words – and then you have to decide what to do about it.

Writers are not, as a group, famous for being likeable and one of the things I enjoy about **ALLi** is the way the majority get on with and support each other.

I said the majority. I knew within ten seconds of meeting one member that he had conceived an immediate and visceral dislike for me. We've met twice more and those meetings simply reconfirmed my immediate feeling. So, should I have done anything about it? My answer was (and is) no.

A risk analysis says he could harm me if he chose – he could give my books poor reviews and, if he acted as a judge for any contests or evaluations of books, he could mark me down

But so what? That can happen, anyway. The universally loved book no more exists than the universally loved person. If this had been the Minister of Transportation and a \$250 million contract depended on his regard I would have worked hard to cultivate it, because the most basic fact you need to know about selling is: people buy from people. In this case, I saw no downside and I let it go.

What's the Difference Between Marketing and Selling?

If there is a difference, then for our purposes it is best ignored. When I was a sales and marketing director, I felt I had my sales hat on in face-to-face meetings with customers and prospects and my marketing hat when I was planning advertising campaigns.

To that latter I would now add social networking, which we didn't have in those days. From the point of view of the writer, selling is when you are in effect saying, "Buy my book!" (though for heaven's sake don't use those words) and if you want to, you can regard your social networking as marketing.

Ask yourself, though: does it really make any difference? I suggest the selling/marketing debate is irrelevant to indie authors. I know that some people swear by marketing plans, but I find them of limited value because the reality is: nobody really knows what works and what doesn't, and what worked for a writer starting out three years ago probably won't be so effective now.

There is one plan you should make, however, and that is the plan that says how much time you are going to allocate to writing and how much to selling.

So, How Do You Do It?

We've had a number of threads on the **ALLi** Facebook page recently on what it means to sell your books and I've contributed – indeed, I started one. More than 30 people liked it, so I suppose it must have rung some sort of bell. I'll suggest some rules:

1. Write the best book you can.

Most of my career has been spent selling a premium product at a premium price. I could never see the pleasure in selling discounted trash. There are far too many books on the market and some of them are of such high quality that is difficult to see how we can compete – but, on the other hand, some are absolute dross. (I know that no one at **ALLi** ever likes to say that but they all know that it's true). Put yourself in a position where you can be compared with the best and not with the rubbish. And while we're on that subject...

2. An original, innovative product outsells a me-too and goes on doing it.

Everyone who has ever sold a me-too (a product offering no significant new features that is introduced to compete with one already on the market) knows that it will never usurp the original's place as market leader and that the only way to sell it is by cutting the price.

If you're tempted to write another *Fifty Shades* or you want to be the new Lee Child, forget it. The market is happy with the Lee Child it already has and as for *Fifty Shades* – are you simply going to repeat whatever it was (I haven't actually read the book) those people did there?

In my view, this is one of the mistakes the big publishers make at present and indies don't need to follow them. Write the original book you want to write.

3. You're going to have to spend some money.

Make your mind up to that; if you're not prepared to spend money on cover design, editing, print-runs, business cards, bookmarks, flyers and other promotional material, you're going to fail.

I can hear now, because I've heard before, the protests that, "I'm as good an editor as any professional and I don't need to expend scarce resources in that way". Protest away; I think you're wrong.

4. Get "I need to sell my books!" into your mind and keep it there.

Successful selling doesn't come by accident. However callous it may seem, every time you meet someone, you should be assessing whether or not that person is a likely purchaser of your book(s).

If the answer is no, that's fine – but if there's any possibility that it might be yes, then you *must* do something to put the idea of buying one of your books into her/his mind. And that means telling the person that you are a published writer.

5. Don't be afraid to sing your own praises.

I'm not suggesting *braggadocio*. Just be prepared to take your space and say, "Yes, I'm a writer. Yes, people do read my books and you can order them from bookshops or buy them online if that's what you prefer to do. Am I someone you should have heard of? No – but this may help." Then hand over your promotional material (see below) and settle down to answer the questions you are asked. After a while you'll find you enjoy it.

6. Think about what it is that should make your book saleable and generate promotional material accordingly.

I'm talking here about what is usually called the USP, or unique selling proposition. You need to work out – from your own experience of writing the book and from what reviewers have said about it – what it is that should make someone buy your book rather than someone else's. Then you need to incorporate that into your promotional material and your patter. What do I mean by patter? This...

7. Attend as many book signings, launches, literary festivals et cetera as you can get yourself invited to and work out in advance what you're going to say to people who want to talk about your book.

When you're at these functions, forget what a shy introverted person you are and go for it.

Someone is walking past your table, looking at your books but not stopping? Pick up a bookmark and one of each of your flyers and press it into their hands, saying – for example – "You can never have too many bookmarks".

More than half of them will then stop and say something about one or more of the books you have on show. Launch into your patter. You will find that experience changes the patter – the more you learn from people's reactions, the better you will become.

Never hesitate to change a flyer in the light of what you learn this way – if it's important enough, change the blurb on the back of the book, too. Talk to everyone you can,



and that includes other writers. At a recent event, I was on the next table to Claire Lydon. Her books are nothing like mine and straight old men like me are not her target market, but she is an engaging, likeable person with the confidence to present herself well and I learned quite a bit from watching and listening to her. (The day you think you've learned everything you ever will is the day I suggest you check into the old people's home – and stop writing).

8. No-one else can sell your books as well as you can.

I was delighted by the number of sales I made at one recent event; but I made almost none at an event a few weeks later. The only differences that I can see were: (a) my books at the second event were right in the corner behind others where it was difficult to see them and (b) we, the writers, were not standing behind our books and talking to the punters as we had at the first event – someone else was selling them for us.

The difference was made clear at the second event, when I had just finished speaking on a panel about historical fiction. A man in the audience said, "I liked what you said. I'd like to buy one of your books. Which one do you recommend?" Make sure that you are the one making the sales pitch.

9. Carry your promotional material with you at all times and distribute it widely.

I gave an example of how I had used a bookmark and flyers in the Facebook post I mentioned earlier. Other people mentioned their wide-ranging examples of how they had done the same thing. I've given away bookmarks and flyers on trains and aircraft;

in service station car parks; in restaurants and hotels and even on a park bench. (Never in bed, but I bet there's someone in **ALLi** who can tell that story). For this to work, you have to be prepared to talk to people. I recommend, "Do you read?" as a good introduction. If the answer is yes, say something along the lines of, "Publishers don't do this any more so we have to do it ourselves" and hand over what you have with you. People *like* meeting writers and talking about their work. All you have to do is let them know that you are one and to do that I'm afraid you really must initiate the conversation. After the first three or four times, it will come naturally. Trust me; I'm a salesman.

10. Salespeople know that the person most likely to buy from them now is the person who bought from them before.

When your existing readers finish one of your books, do they find the address of your website, a list of your other books and an invitation to subscribe to your newsletter? When you're at a literary festival, do you have a form on your table they can fill in and subscribe?

11. You build a customer base one name at a time – and that's also how you lose them.

We all dream of the book that sells a million copies and makes us financially secure for life. Sadly, a dream is what it is. Better to take the time and care to cultivate a reader base that will stay with us over several titles. Pay as much attention to that one reader who emails you or stops you in the street as you would if you were addressing a hall of 1,000 people. S/he will notice if you don't.

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WHY I DON'T DIY SELF-PUBLISH



English thriller writer **Alison Morton** explains why she's sticking with the full-service option, even though she has the technical know-how to do it all herself if she wanted to.

Self-publishing and being an indie author is a state of mind, not a statement of technical ability. The decision to take control and exercise the freedom this publishing route offers is sometimes made in the blink of an eye; it fits the temperament, philosophy and pocket of many. Others, like me came along a slower route.

I'm a mixture of impulse and prudence, decisive yet a long-term planner. I'm also old enough to know what my core, secondary and tertiary competences are.

I learnt the basics of touch-typing as a young graduate civil servant; all high-flyers had to do a two-week course, much to the disgust of the male graduates! And I have never stopped using this skill from manual typewriters, golfball electronic through to my Mac keyboard.

A Writer of Many Parts

In the interim, I've been a policy drafter, underwriter, translator, editor, image editor, project manager, executive search consultant, reserve army officer and run my own translation company for 20 years, so I have the business, technical, HR and language skills for being an author entrepreneur.

So, with 90K of my first novel *Inceptio* written and polished into shape, a decision was made to self-publish – with the support of a research project that would not disgrace the UN. I considered the options.

First, whilst I admired the fiery independence of full-on DIY publishers, I knew I was not amongst them.

I'm long-term computer-literate; I started on a Viglen+ in 1989 and had one of the first

websites in Kent, England. Driving a computer on DOS commands really enhanced my memory and patience. I'd completed countless accredited courses and used a computer most of my working day; I was perfectly able to learn all this stuff.

In 2012, I self-published a history book (a reworked version of my masters' dissertation) with 200 academic references, aka hyperlinks, via KDP.

I could do it. (I did it again in 2014 with my little writing book *The 500-Word Writing Buddy*.)

Indie Horses for Indie Courses

But my first Roma Nova novel, *Inceptio*, was a different game; it had to be perfect. I'm with Adam Smith on division of labour; I did not want to spend my time learning a whole new skillset which may or may not have been up to the highest possible industry standards when others – professionals – could do it for me.

All I wanted to do was write. Well, I knew that whatever route I chose, I would also need to spend a significant chunk of time on promotion both before and after launch.

I researched designers, editors, formatters, ISBN providers, registrations, both individual services and full-service providers. It was then I came across Mick Rooney of *The Independent Publishing Magazine*, who gave me some excellent advice, and of course, **ALLi**. I weighed up all the information, advice and research and decided I wanted a complete package: a single point of contact, a coordinated service and one which had the expertise and knowledge of the publishing industry.

Shooting Down the Cowboys

Oh, boy, were there a lot of cowboys out there! Vanity and subsidy 'publishers' hovered, ready to pick the dosh from enthusiastic but innocent writers' hands; garage-loads of books of varying quality produced at horrendous prices, and writers' rights stripped away from them for all time. (Rights are extremely important and often not given the attention they need.)

However, my research and analysis system sifted out the undesirables pretty quickly and left me with three serious contenders with long track records. I grilled each of them during a two-hour phone call and scrutinised their contractual arrangements. One stood out well above the others: ethical, book-oriented, realistic as well as happy to answer all my intrusive questions in a professional and business-like way. The key thing to bear in mind is that you are the client in the same way as when you engage a lawyer or accountant. And, like any professional service, you pay the bill.



Getting My Money's Worth

Now, what do I gain from using a full-service provider? Why should I pay a fee and what do I get back?

On the practical side, I send them a copy-edited MS Word file which they turn into a beautiful paperback and ebook: formatting/typesetting and interior design, compilation of front and back matter, bespoke cover to my specification, all filing/registration fees covered, ISBN allocation, Nielsen Enhanced listing, pre-order and Look Inside on Amazon, PDF ARC, proofs, PoD set up, digital archive fee, ebook formatting for different retailers, legal deposit, bookseller information sheet, print ordering, quality control checks and project management.

Also, a lot of advice, hand-holding and 24-hour or less response, an author book promotion toolbox, author community and events, plus links into the publishing industry, e.g. representation/exhibiting at the London Book Fair.

Apart from the confidence of having a competent services provider, I also gain time – time to write. I'm sure this is one reason why I've been able to turn out a substantial series of top quality, full-length books in a relatively short space of time. I contract a publishing services provider to do the production work for me.

There is no one way better than any other. **ALLi** is there to offer information, especially via its guides – take advantage of them!

Whether you go DIY, buy in services on an 'as and when' basis or buy a full-service package, the choice really is yours. And isn't that what independent publishing is all about?

ABOUT ALLi

ALLi (The Alliance of Independent Authors) is a non-profit professional association for author-publishers.

A global organisation, we are organised across nine territories, offering connection and collaboration, advice and education, advocacy and representation to self-publishing writers around the world.

We have four member levels, three for authors (from student to professional) and a Partner membership facility for author-services who are willing to be vetted and approved.

All members, both Authors and Partners, sign up to our code of excellence and ethics in self-publishing.

People self-publish for many reasons and all who want to do it well are invited to join our diverse, supportive and friendly community.

Visit our website for more information on joining **ALLi**.

CREDITS AND LINKS

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For all enquiries related to the Self-Publishing Service Directory, please contact Partner Manager Andrew Lowe at **partnermanager@allianceindependentauthors.org**

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