



Adventures in Publishing Services

By Lawrence Darmani

Certain hard statements about life are unhelpful. An example in the world of publishing is: "Under no circumstance should an author pay for the publishing of his book." A similar taboo once forbade authors from putting out their works. Many claimed that "it is unprofessional for an author to publish his own book," as though it were unethical to do so.

Many years ago—long before I knew the definition of *publishing*—I unknowingly broke that so-called rule. With my rickety typewriter I wrote short stories, re-typed them on stencils, printed them off on an old Gestetner reproduction machine, stapled the sheets together, and sold them to friends and co-workers. I sold so many stories that people would stop me on the street and ask, "Any new story for sale?"

Recalling this now, having been in publishing for many years, I'm glad nobody inhibited me in those days with the declaration: *a writer must never publish his own story*.

Today, Writers' Digest [<http://www.writersdigest.com/>], the world-renowned publisher of everything about writing, has instituted an annual award [http://www.writersdigest.com/contests/self-published_winners06.asp] for the best self-published book of the year. This means that clearly a paradigm has shifted, and this shifting of patterns warrants renewed mindsets.

At Step Publishers we not only publish our own books but also offer a *publishing service* to authors who are willing and

capable of paying for such a service. While we fund the printing costs for our own scheduled manuscripts, the author and his or her acquaintances raise the capital for the printing of unscheduled manuscripts that the author is enthusiastic to have printed.

The Manuscript Must First Be Acceptable

Rev. Dr. Clark, a minister of a growing church, saw our signboard and visited our office to make inquiries about the nature of our "publishing services." He had a manuscript, *Called to Serve*, and wondered if we would publish it. After we read the manuscript we found it contained great material to prepare readers to do Christian work wherever they are called. The message in it was good for adults and young people. We labeled it an "acceptable" manuscript, and normally it would have awaited its turn in a long queue of other acceptable manuscripts.

Dr. Clark was eager to get the book out by a certain date because he needed it for speaking engagements he had abroad. That meant that the book couldn't wait its turn and had to jump the queue. Thus, the author would need to sponsor the printing cost, which he was prepared to do.

In offering our publishing service, therefore, the first hurdle is for the manuscript to pass our evaluation. That is why the published book is *ours* as well the author's. We would not produce a book whose contents we did not endorse, even if the author were willing to fund it. Recently a

gentleman approached us about publishing his book, which was Islamic literature. In a friendly manner we had to say, “No, sorry.”

The Distribution Links

The determination and commitment with which paying authors distribute their books gives credence to our publishing service. Within three months of publishing 1,000 copies of Dr. Clark’s *Called to Serve*, he was ready to consider a reprint. He traveled abroad with a good number and sold the rest at his preaching sessions. I know a prominent public speaker who sells hundreds of his self-sponsored books at conferences and seminars.

Last year we published *The Chemistry of Love* for two young authors whose enthusiasm was so high they quickly raised the publishing capital for us to get it off the press. The manuscript on love and relationships was excellent for youth, our target readers. The authors launched the book in a Pentecostal church in the USA, where one of them is still a student, and they sold the rest at home. The book was short-listed for a recent book award in Ghana [<http://www.christianbooksawards.com/nominees.html>] and they are already asking about reprints.

Our latest self-financed book is *The C-Factor: 22 Principles of Effective Leaders*. Upon publication, the author got his pastor to dedicate it in his church—something we cannot do for all our titles. Although we assist him with distribution through the traditional channels, this author has also recruited friends, family, and business colleagues to sell his book. He has completed his second manuscript and is enthusiastic about publishing that by the close of the year.

Book Launching Provides Resources

Ghana has a remarkable system for book launchings. I know a publisher who

launches up to five titles a year without encountering guest-fatigue. Every author invites his own circle of friends, business colleagues, family, church, heads of firms and politicians. I once attended a book launch by Africa Christian Press where the president of the nation was present. The status of guests depends on the author’s level of influence.

In Ghana a book launch is more than a public event to release a new title; it involves serious fund-raising. The pivotal moment of the event is usually the auctioning of the first 10 books. If the auctioneer is good and the guests are generous, the entire printing costs, with an appreciable margin, can be raised for the initial 1,000 copies.

The first book we launched in collaboration with the author was *The Blessed Life: Studies in the Beatitudes*, by Rev. Dr. I. K. Fokuo, a Presbyterian minister. Launched during a church service, the auction proceeds exceeded pre-press and printing cost for the first 1,000 copies. We even had the privilege of re-launching an expanded edition of the same book in another city where the minister was recently transferred.

Print on Demand

An important aspect of our publishing service is that there is no need for the authors to order more than 1,000 copies at once, since copies can be produced on a “print-on-demand” basis. While a smaller print run raises the unit cost per book, it reduces the total amount needed to manufacture the book, making the service we provide more affordable. In Ghana, printers charge in multiples of 1,000 copies, even if we request anything less, so we encourage authors who require our services to make 1,000 the minimum requirement.

The Service

But if the author is financing the cost of the book, why does he need a publisher and not go directly to a printer? Some authors do that, actually, and come out with their own book—which then becomes “self-published.”

Authors who use our publishing services are not said to have self-published their works. They benefit from the support we offer, including manuscript evaluation, suggestions for revision, editing, proofreading, quality designing, and supervision of all stages of production.

Thus, the cost to the author and his or her financiers includes the direct printing expenses and all the pre-press work and creative services. Yet the publishing service we provide is more than mere printing assistance. We bridge the gap between self-publishing and regular publishing. Although I am not opposed to self-publishing (for some self-published titles sell better than some routinely published ones), I nevertheless acknowledge the value in having a publisher’s logo and imprint on a book. It directly or indirectly endorses the content, according attendant privileges.

The Outcome

I often meet authors who express deep disappointment with publishers who keep their manuscripts for years without publishing them. Rather than send them away even more irritated, I show them how

to use the power generated by their frustration to seek funds for their works. While some of them are simply unable to raise such funds, others are surprised by finding it is within their capability to do so. Then there is a happy ending, such as 1,000 books all sold out, with a good margin, and the deep satisfaction of having become published authors.

Another outcome of the publishing service we provide for authors is that we help give birth to a book ... with all its anticipated impact on readers of Christian literature. As a Christian publishing ministry, we see this service as a legitimate mission endeavor that enhances literature evangelism. Also, the income from this service enters a pool from which our regular titles are published. This is an income-generating activity, which is a profitable means of adding value to the expertise we use in our own literature production and distribution ministry.

Christian publishing activities should be geared to the times while being anchored in Christ. This is critical. We should not stubbornly stick to old times when the Lord might be encouraging us to do a new thing—such as offering publishing services to authors to achieve multiple goals.

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