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How to get from story to book—a sit-down with the Founders of Authoright

Sitting down with the co-founders at [Authoright](#)—Hayley Radford, Director of Marketing, and Gareth Howard, CEO—makes it easy to understand why their services have become popular with new and experienced authors alike. They have a way about them, a combination of passion and confidence that must be very encouraging to their clients—aspiring authors considering penning a book



Their offices—located in both London and New York—feature a group of happy and hungry employees who seem to be at work on books of all kinds. Their offices physically see 400 authors a year—and those are just the ones they work in depth with. Authoright also consults with 2,000 to 2,500 authors a year—a telltale sign that they’re committed to the self-publishing industry and want to help educate those just entering into it. That approach benefits everyone in the long run.

Despite the increased demand for their services—which include editing, cover design, building an author’s social media profile, book reviews, and bespoke book publicity—their process remains consistent: Education first, service second. Hayley notes, “When we work with authors, regardless of what they’re trying to do, the first thing we’re trying to figure out is what they can do themselves, and then isolate the areas where they could use a little bit of help.”

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Some new author “dos” and “don’ts”

Aside from writing the pages, authors are usually best at creating their own social persona. A book tour is another opportunity for the author to take control. And there are other relatively easy opportunities for authors to build a following, both in-person and via social media. Authoright cites a few examples: Cozy up with local radio, work with schools as a local author, and build a social media network with those in the industry. This includes simple things like setting up a Twitter profile, following like-minded authors, and finding interested readers through hash tag searches.

So there are loads of things authors can and should be doing, but are there any risks to the do-it-yourself approach? Most definitely, according to the team at Authoright, and most involve rushing. It’s tempting to want to get your book into the hands of eager readers around the globe the moment you’ve completed it, but that’s a mistake—and often one that can’t be repaired. The digital age has made publishing almost too easy and immediate, so the minute you’re pleased with the perfect manuscripts, your instinct is to press publish. Not so fast. Timing is critical when releasing a new book into the market. Aside from the perfect story, you’ll want to have a beautiful and relevant cover, a launch strategy, and a marketing strategy.

Many authors approach friends and family for early (and final) feedback, but that can also be a mistake according to Radford and Howard. It’s easy to put a lot of stock in the opinions of loved ones—but family and friends may not be the target audience, or properly experienced to give helpful feedback. If your sister’s an

editor, by all means approach her for final story feedback. But if she's not, wait a while; there will be a time for show and tell.

"Benevolence marketing" seems to be an easy way for garnering some eyeballs, and spreading the word about your new book. Once the book has launched, making a chapter available for free or giving away some free copies can help. Abbi Glines, bestselling American self-pub novelist, has had success with crowdsourcing a cover. She posted different cover options, asked her followers for feedback, and went with the cover they liked best. That's a smart strategy not only for sales, but for establishing goodwill and a rapport with a fanbase.

Self-pub: Redefining success

When asked about the supposed "gut feeling" that traditional publishers have on which books will succeed, Gareth feels strongly. "There is no such thing as an editor or agent having the perfect gut to know which books will and won't succeed. If that was the case, there wouldn't be books that didn't sell." And on failure, "Being turned down is part of the process, of the possibilities, the misfires." Think of J.K. Rowling, who had the original Harry Potter manuscripts rejected a dozen times, yet went from poverty to being a multi-millionaire within five years. The exception to the rule, but a lesson nonetheless. Even those who go on to experience extreme fame and critical acclaim were also told at one time that they weren't good enough. Hayley's quick to point out, "You need to be the number one believer in your own work. If you're not, how are others to get on board and believe in what you can do?"

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As self-published authors continue to rise in the ranks, niche categories and markets continue to expand. These are books that some readers have likely always been interested in, but couldn't find, because traditional publishers didn't see the economics of publishing them. "The distinguishing factor between the self-publishing arena and the traditional is largely that self-pub is starting to boom because people could not get published what they wanted published previously. Self-pub started because people can publish what was being rejected by the traditional. There are niche genres that catch fire in self pub because they were

actively excluded in the traditional market.” Suddenly, science fiction, graphic novels, fairy fiction, vampire tales, sweeping romances, werewolf horrors, and erotica are all everyone wants to read, and self-pub authors can find a space for themselves in these genres, among others. According to Hayley, “The amount of women who’ve written supernatural werewolf fiction, I’ve lost count of them. But they sell in the hundreds of thousands—it would never have occurred to them to go traditional because what they write is ostracized by the traditional publishing industry.”



“The people who want to read those books want to read two or three a week, and those authors are churning out material that caters to that market.” Writing at that speed might be too much for some. But if a self-pub author can write quickly, they have an opportunity to gain the attention and commitment of the rabid fans and fill a void not met by authors who publish every couple of years or more.

Getting real about sales

When asked further about success, both Hayley and Gareth acknowledge that it does—and should—look different to each author. Authors are often misled about sales figures in the media. We never hear about authors who can't subsist on meager earnings. When Authoright takes on new authors, expectations—including those about sales—are always discussed. "What we always say is success is different from author to author, and what we strive to do is to meet the individual expectations of each individual author," says Hayley.

"While we can't guarantee figures, we can tell new authors that a traditional publisher would be thrilled if your first book sold 5,000 copies, so let's set some realistic goals about what success looks like to you." Some authors use books as a platform, which then helps them create an income stream from speaking or events. For some, books lead to consistent work writing for magazines. It all depends on where you start and what you set out to accomplish. "For Anna Caltabiano, the goal was to get a literary agent and a traditional book deal, which is what she managed to get through successful brand development and social media activity," says Hayley.

Whatever the goal, the reason for writing should be the same: You have something to say and you want to share it. Gareth's confident that, "For the average author, when you start off, your reason for writing is because you want to share something with other people, and you want them to read it, that is your one single drive." The biggest buzz he ever got was when "someone sent me an email saying I was in a remote bar in Mexico, and I came across a copy of your book and I sat in this bar and read it cover to cover. That they took the time to write me an email to tell me that story. That you can't put a price on. That is why people write."

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Planning is everything

Getting your book out into the world requires a plan and a solid commitment. Authors need to think like journalists and get in step with the way the industry works. Think lead times and editorial calendars. For example, most monthly

magazines plan their Christmas issue in August. So if you're planning to launch your book around the holidays, sending out a press release in October probably won't get the traction you desire. Gareth's analogy is perfect: "You're building a house, so you wouldn't address plugs and sockets after you've already painted. You would do it at the outset, step by step, and in the right order. For your book, do the same, you should be thinking of the cover and marketing plan before you've completed your last chapter." Authoright's experience really helps in this area. "That is where our real value comes in; we enable authors to take that step back. We don't expect them to know all these things," says Gareth.

So what to do if you completed a book, launched it with no plan, and nothing happened? "If an author hasn't invested heavily in the book, then we would ask them to consider it and start from scratch as it's much harder to jump start something that's been started badly," says Hayley.

The democratic nature of self-pub

Self-pub has made it possible for everyone to produce books and to share them, but professionalism should still be of the utmost importance. The key here is that consumers are rarely aware of whether a book is self-published or not. "Nobody buys a book because it was published by Random House. People buy because of the writer; they do not buy because of the publisher. So ultimately so long as you've put in the same quality checks, the consumer won't have an issue with that," says Hayley. Readers are not loyal to publishers, but to authors and genres, so maintaining quality in writing and packaging will make all the difference for your book's success. This democratic model of self-publishing is freeing for both authors and readers. Produce something strong and worthy and readers will respond.

When asked what it takes to succeed as a self-pub author, the team at Authoright are in agreement: In addition to writing well, you need both an overwhelming passion about your writing and the ability to be cold and objective about it. You need to be able to see the difference between what you love and what your potential readers will love. An objective, critical eye will serve you well as you make the journey from writer to self-pub author.

Traditional publishers often pay an author a decent advance before a book goes to

market. But the world of self-publishing is more in line with the rest of the creative world. Most musicians invest in music lessons, instruments, and self-promotion—and often perform for free—before anyone else takes a chance in investing in them. The same goes for self-pub.

Authoright hopes to continue to grow (“To survive, thrive, to find better ways of working,” says Hayley) so they can offer more services for free and do more pro-bono work. They also hope self-pub pushes the industry to be fairer and more transparent, and to include authors more deeply in the publishing process. Authoright envisions a day when authors can be armed with everything they need to be successful writers, authors, and self-publishers.

Over coffee, Hayley and Gareth muse on what they’d be doing if their Authoright baby hadn’t taken off. “I suppose I’d be back in journalism,” says Hayley. And Gareth, who penned a book before leading the helm at Authoright, would be writing again. He’s three years into a new book, but often lacks the time to keep writing. “It’s like being a chef,” he says, “They have famously terrible diets.”



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