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Authoright: personal service

[Hayley Radford](#) • 01 May 2014



Hayley Radford argues that whether authors pay for publication is no longer the point: the value of what they're paying for is key.

Undoubtedly the pace of change in publishing has accelerated in recent years. At Authoright, we're very much on the frontline, educating and supporting authors as they navigate publishing's shifting lines.

As a consultancy we speak to up to 2,500 authors every year. For a small, but fast-growing, self-funded firm, with offices in London and New York, that's quite a feat; it's a standing joke that we must be one of the most "high-touch" (the customer interacts with humans, and not just computer screens or automated voice systems) businesses in existence! But it's enormously satisfying work, as our role – the same as it's always been – is to help demystify, deconstruct and diversify publishing, enabling more writers to get published, and for more new writing to be discovered by eager readers.

Trad and self-published

Our authors are an eclectic mix of traditionally published and self-published, united by their desire to publish well (with fair royalty rates, excellent distribution, comprehensive marketing and PR services) and to be able to connect directly with readers. We help them with one, or all, of the component parts within the publishing and promotional spectrum, from structural edits to social media.

When we opened in 2007, self-publishing was still smeared with the ugly mark of the vanity press. Now there are multiple legitimate and commercially viable routes to publication, which can be tailored to meet individual needs. There is a place for both the traditional and the self-driven in publishing, as long as quality is something to which we all continue to aspire, and the lines between the two are progressively blurring. There will always be those writers who naturally crave the validation that traditional publishing affords; likewise there are those who actively reject the restrictive and sometimes slow approach that the industry can impose, preferring to manage their publishing projects themselves.

Today the unique psychology of consumerism inhabits everything we do, and as authors become more commercially aware, the more they are operating as customers, fuelled by a desire to get the best deal at the right time, rather than continuing to choose from what has always been on offer. Nowadays in order to compete, authors have to be consumers, architects and entrepreneurs, regardless of how they publish.

Publishing under pressure

There is a saying that if you have to pay to publish, it isn't the real thing. I disagree. Firstly, traditional publishing is not free to the author. It might be at the point of consumption, but the author pays significantly by giving away the equity in their book. Secondly, as the trade has its eye fixed firmly on profitability as margins are squeezed ever more tightly, full-service publishing is under pressure. Many authors are now required to invest in their own books and much-needed additional services. Is the author we're working with, who's on a three-book deal with a very big traditional, no longer really publishing because he's had to come to Authoright for a website? Of course not. We work increasingly with traditionally published authors who wish to supplement their publisher's promotional and online marketing activities.

And why shouldn't they? Yes some authors are investing more than others, but the discourse should be focused not on the conceptual validity of authors' having to pay, but rather on the ethics and the deliverables of those providing the services. And there are traditional publishers who perhaps now walk a rather fine line when it comes to credible, paid-for solutions for authors.

Authoright isn't a "trad-basher". Far from it. We actively support traditional publishers and literary agents, with our outsourced services and free advice for writers. Self-published authors can make the best business partners for agents and publishers, who are, of course, looking to enter into a joint venture with the writer. When we found ourselves working with a then 15-year-old Anna Caltabiano (an ambitious Paolo Alto wunderkind with a rather good dystopian YA novel about generational teenage malaise and self-harm), we were bowled over by her tenacity and her desire to play a key role in building her own author brand.

Having been rejected by literary agents on the grounds that she was considered to be too young to have a real voice – how astonishingly short-sighted that was – Anna came to us wanting to carve out a life-long career in publishing, and we felt a huge responsibility towards her. She also wanted to have her book translated, so that her mother could read it in her first language, Japanese. We had to deliver the most professional and competitive book we could achieve to attract an agent.

As we predicted, Anna's market was focused online but it was huge – as demonstrated by the six-figure social media numbers we were able to generate for her within the space of four weeks, and which secured the agent of Anna's dreams, one we recommended because we knew that the fit

would be interesting, but perfect. Pretty soon afterwards, Maggie Hanbury had sold Anna's next three books – the first of which, *The Seventh Miss Hatfield*, is due for release this June – to Gollancz for a very handsome, college-funding sum. We are very excited to see what's next for Anna, and feel privileged to have helped her to achieve exactly what she wanted to.

Passionate authors

Another writer we've felt fortunate to work with is Andrew Critchley, the author of a rather magical novel about love and redemption, *Dublin in the Rain*. As the mid-list declines, it is perhaps being replaced by quality self-published work, delivered by passionate authors enjoying solid sales and good reviews, who treat publishing very much like a start-up business, one in which they must invest some resources, coupled with time and dedication. Success can be a very personal definition, and authors such as Andrew can celebrate breaking the Amazon top 40, confident in the knowledge that they have written, edited, designed, published and promoted a beautiful book, that has deservedly found an audience. Andrew will publish the second novel in his Dublin trilogy at the end of 2014.

Choice in publishing should be a welcome liberation, something to be embraced. As an industry I believe we're stronger together, tackling the new, the good and the bewildering as a united front, constantly reviewing and revising what's available on behalf of those who sustain and enrich our trade, the writers themselves. There must be better, different ways of working, and we should relish the challenge of finding them.

Hayley Radford is Co-founder and Director of Marketing at Authoright (www.authoright.com), LitFactor and the International Author Fair Series.

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