

Useful Information When Self-Publishing a High-End Photography Book by Jane Alden Stevens

While the following information is by no means a comprehensive guide to self-publishing, most of these issues are ones that I feel are most important and are based on my own experience.

Questions to Ask Yourself

The answers to the following questions will guide many of your decisions throughout the publication process. Ask yourself these questions at least once a week, if not more often, until the day of delivery. They will help keep you on target.

- **What role will the book play in your career?-** Do you see it as a one-time effort? The first in a series? Will it serve as a show catalog? A PR piece?
- **Who is your target audience?-** Identify all potential audiences for the book.
- **How large is the target audience?-** Remember that not all of them will actually buy the book. The answer to this question can help you decide how many books to have printed.
- **How will you reach your target audience(s)?-** Write down the various options for making those audiences aware of the book. Then estimate how much it will cost you to reach them. This helps you to anticipate whether or not you want to be the one to distribute and ship the book, or to get a service to do it for you.
- **How much money can I afford to spend on this?-** The original estimates will, like a home remodeling project, escalate dramatically by the time the book is done. Be prepared for this and accept it as part of the process.
- **How much time do I have to spend on this?-** You will be much more involved in the process of creating the book that you anticipate, and everything will take much longer than you think it will.
- **Is there a deadline for publication?-** If so, that will govern many of the choices you make about how to proceed.

Your Role in Self-Publishing

- Primary coordinator of all processes
- Primary decision-maker
- Primary fund-raiser
- Primary PR person
- Primary distributor (possibly)

To Do Ahead of Time

- **Raise money!!!!-** Look for grants from organizations that might have an interest in your subject matter. Forge relationships with organizations that might give you in-kind types of support (materials, supplies, advertising, etc.) Secure funding *well in advance* so that it will be there when you need it!
- **Create a book outline for the designer-** Include types of sections, how many images, how much text, and the dimensions of the book. Try to give the designer

as much information as you can about your vision for the look and layout of the book.

- **Raise more money!!!**
- **Investigate distribution options and their costs-** Will you use a fulfillment and distribution service? If not, then investigate the costs of storage & insurance options and the cost of shipping (includes boxes, packing materials, and postage charges). You may want to make your book smaller if it will cost more to ship than you can handle.
- **Raise even more money!!!**
- **Raise a lot more money!!!!** (I'm not kidding.....See "Costs of Self-Publishing" below.)

Assembling a Production Team

- **Tap into your network-** Get recommendations from friends. Research designers who have worked on books you admire. Research what printing companies have printed books you admire.
- **Free help???**- Do you know anyone who can provide their services either for free, or at a discount, or who would accept a certain number of books as payment?
- **Choose a designer-** Interview them first. Look at their prior work. Feel out their style. Is this a person who will want full control over design decisions, or will you be able to have the last word?
- **Line up writers, if needed-** Do you need someone to write an introduction or afterword?
- **Choose a copy editor-** This person, as well as the designer, should proof the book as each draft becomes available. Make sure this person is trained for the job.
- **Choose a printer-** If you have your book printed overseas, you can save money. But- you might not be able to be on press as the book is printed, and thus won't be able to make on-the-spot corrections and improvements. If you have the book printed in or near the place you live, you might end up spending more on the printing, but will have more control over the result, and will save on travel costs for an out-of-town printer.

Production Phase

- Tell the designer what kind of book you want. (include number of pages, dimensions, how many sections/ chapters, how much text, how many reproductions, etc.) This will be an ongoing discussion that helps the designer to come up with some layout ideas.
- Serve as coordinator of all design, writing, and printing efforts.
- Get an ISBN number from Bowker (www.bowker.com)
- Make ongoing decisions about: quality of printing; paper, ink color and cover materials; layout; type styles; type of binding
- Proofread book many, many times
- Be on site during press run to catch any errors

Distributing a Self-Published Book

- Think ahead! (ex. Get a vendor's license if required by your state and if you are distributing the book yourself.)

- Develop a multi-phase distribution and advertising plan
- Send review copies to targeted publications
- Get listed with Ingram or other large distributor
- Get listed on amazon.com
- Personal website
- Mailings to libraries
- Make book available at shows, lectures, conferences
- Advertise in targeted publications

Costs of Self-Publishing

Some of the costs listed below would be relevant to some projects and not to others. If you are publishing your book with a local designer and printer, for instance, then the travel costs and shipping costs for production purposes would be minimal.

- File preparation/ pre-press services- (scans, retouching, etc.)
- Writing services- (essays/ forewords/ prefaces/ afterwords, etc.)
- Translation services (if necessary)
- Copy editing services
- Design services (book & PR materials)
- ISBN number
- Printing services (press proofs & final printing; PR materials)
- Shipping (image & text files, layouts, wet proofs, delivery of books)
- Travel (transportation to and from designer and printer, food, hotel)
- Advertising (web site, postcards, print ads, etc.)
- Distribution and fulfillment services

If you are handling distribution yourself, then the following costs might apply:

- Storage & insurance
- Shipping (cost of boxes, packing materials, postage)

Total costs for the book will depend on decisions you make throughout the process. They can and will escalate fast. Almost every decision you make will affect the cost factor. Although there is no way of being accurate here because of all the variables, it is not out of line to guesstimate that a self-published photography book could easily cost anywhere from \$15,000 on up.

Advantages of Self-Publishing

- **Control over the entire process-** You get to determine the production team, printer, and quality of reproductions.
- **Control over all copies of book-** You can give away as many copies as you want, for instance.
- **Speed and timing of process-** Sometimes a self-published book can come to market faster than one from a publisher. You have the freedom to create a production schedule that fits your life.

Disadvantages of Self-Publishing

- **Need to "do it all"-** The demands on your time are great and prolonged.

- **Need to raise funds-** This means (potentially) a lot of time spent writing grant proposals prior to production.
- **No built-in distribution & fulfillment system** - Unless you hire a distribution service, whenever an order comes in, you need to fill it right away.
- **"Self-publishing" stigma-** In some quarters a self-published book is not taken as seriously as a book that has been produced by a publisher. Will this be an issue for you? (ex. Some universities specifically state that self-published books do not count towards reappointment, promotion or tenure decisions.)