Self-Publishing and Libraries

By Brian R. Johnston
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About Me

- Adult Services Librarian at Lincoln Township Public Library
- Have worked there since 2012
My background as a writer

- Writer and book reviewer for several publications and websites
- Author of three self-published books:
  - *The Art of Being a Baseball Fan* (2016)
  - *Quiet Faith* (2018)
  - *It’s Okay to Fail* (2018)
My survey on self-publishing

• Surveys took place in Spring of 2018.
• Librarian survey received 145 responses.
  • Asked for submissions through Michlib-L.
• Author survey received 51 responses.
  • Asked for submissions through Chicago Writers Association and Self-Publishing Yahoo! Groups.
Additional methods

- I have interviewed librarians around the country about things they are doing to help aspiring authors
- I have interviewed authors about what is successful getting into libraries
- I have read articles from library publications on self-publishing
CONCLUSION #1:

The relationship between library professionals and self-published authors is not good.
My survey on self-publishing

“On a scale of 1 to 10 stars, with 1 being Poor and 10 being Great, how would you rate the current relationship between library professionals and self-published authors?”
Librarians (Average: 4.72)
Authors (Average: 4.61)
Authors had both positive and negative comments about their experiences with libraries.

Librarians in general tended to have more negative responses.

This could be because it is more of a personal issue for authors.
CONCLUSION #2:

There still is a stigma in the library profession against self-published books.
100 (69%) of librarians said that they hesitate to buy self-published books because they are generally of poorer quality than traditionally published books are (most common answer).

Only 11 (7.59%) said that they do not hesitate to buy self-published books.
Poorer Quality?

- Not entirely without merit
  - More rigorous editing/marketing process
  - Writing didn’t catch attention of agents (if they tried this route, which some don’t)
- It’s not reasonable to expect librarians to refuse to view self-published works in the same light as those that are traditionally published...
Yet it’s also unfair to categorize all self-published books as poor.

I believe my writing is good. Yet breaking into the industry is still difficult.

About half of the authors (25) said that they have published through the traditional route.

Fewer than half of the authors (22, 43%) said that they could not get published through the traditional route.
Question for authors

Why did you self-publish?

More control over content: 35
I wasn’t able to get my book published through the traditional route: 20
More control over marketing: 15
More cost effective: 10
Other: 5
Some of the other reasons

- Don’t want to have to wait a long time to get it published
- Complex/difficult contracts
- “Incompetent agents”
- Publishers drop authors
- Wanting to try something new
Preferred method for those who have done both kinds of publishing
Authors still have a lot to learn about the library process.
Authors need to learn more

- Many authors admitted that they don’t know how to get into libraries. One even suggested a how-to manual.
- Some don’t understand there’s more to it than just writing (what is, at least in their opinion) a good book.
Reasons libraries hesitate

- Having a good title, quality writing, and professional looking cover are still important to make a good first impression. Yet there’s more to it than that.
Other reasons libraries hesitate

- Limited budgets and space
- Books aren’t available through main vendors that libraries use
- Authors are too pushy
- Too much time to catalog
- Trouble locating quality self-published materials
- Worry that patrons won’t take them
CONCLUSION #4:

Libraries need to make an effort to tap into the self-published market.
Is it even important?

- Hint: Yes it is.
- Several authors commented that they don’t see libraries as an important market for them.
- We should convince them that it is!
Why is this important?

- For authors
  - Libraries can help authors with book sales
  - Authors can reach new readers
  - Authors can build credibility by being on a library shelf
  - Authors can contribute to the well-being of the community
Why is this important?

- For libraries
  - More people are self-publishing
  - Having these books will build goodwill with some of the library’s strongest supporters
  - Libraries can help more people have a voice – especially minorities
  - The library can create buzz in the community
Why is this important?

- Plus, aren’t libraries supposed to be about more than just meeting simple patron demand?
- We have a responsibility to guide readers towards good books!
There is reason to be optimistic!
Being Optimistic

- There is at least a willingness among both library professionals and authors to make this relationship work.
Some authors reported success getting into libraries and also participating in library programming.

Many libraries are willing to host author and/or writing programs.
So, what can we do?
For authors

- Produce a quality book
- Explain why there is a demand for it (not just that it’s good)
- Get a review (librarians don’t have time to read every book)
- Build yourself up as a writer
For authors

- Start locally
- Rally patrons to request your book
- Form a relationship with your library (available for programs)
- Know how libraries work
  - Who does what
  - Collection development policies
For authors

- Know what libraries need from you
  - Objective reviews from credible sources
  - Availability from vendors
  - Make it easy to catalog
  - Be sure it’s suitable for circulation
For authors

- Accept rejections gracefully
  - Assume it isn’t out of malice.
  - You don’t want to build a bad reputation in the library community.
  - Libraries simply can’t carry everything. Don’t take it personally.
For librarians

- Have a policy ahead of time
  - To be clear and consistent
  - Something you can point to
  - Authors will know in advance what is expected of them
- Decide whether it will be purchase or donation-based
For librarians

- Start a local author collection
  - Books?
  - E-Books?
  - Music?
- Have a policy in place ahead of time
For librarians

- Seek out book review sources
  - Blue Ink Review
    - BlueInkReview.com
  - Kirkus Indie Reviews
    - kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/indie/
  - Foreword Magazine
    - ForewordReviews.com
For librarians

- These sources are free to librarians, yet can be expensive for authors.
  - Look for local, less expensive sources
  - Example: Windy City Reviews (windycityreviews.org)
- Consider being a book reviewer
For librarians

- Have compassion for authors. Many are trying to make it in a brutal industry, so at least give them credit for that.
- (That being said, you don’t have to tolerate those that are too pushy.)
For librarians – ways to help

- Host writing programs
- Self-publishing or writing webpage on your website
- Publishing services (larger libraries)
Thank you for listening!
Some sources to consider


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