

Why Self-Publishing is Entering a Golden Age

Whenever a discussion about self-publishing gets heated, you can be sure someone will say, “If we let just anybody publish a book, soon we’ll be buried in bad, unedited books and all the good ones will be lost in a sea of crap!”

There were over 350,000 books published in the United States last year, more than ever. And that doesn’t include the hundreds of thousands of books moved to print on demand servers and assigned ISBNs, and therefore “published.”

I don’t feel buried, do you? Where are all those books? Apparently, it’s not that easy to find them. You have to actually make an effort. You won’t get drowned in some tsunami of badness, you have to go looking and jump in.

The Real Shame of It All

Writers who are waiting for the gatekeeper to come and welcome them into the promised land behind the gates may have a long wait ahead of them, and that’s too bad.

You know why? Because we’re about to enter a real golden age of self-publishing. There is no denying the fact that a whole lot of people have something to say and are busy writing their books. They want to publish, put their thoughts, their history, their research, their story into the arena, and why not?

It might seem overblown to call it a golden age, but I think it's really happening, and here's why:

The playing field is leveling—Net neutrality ensures the internet stays equally available to all. As far as online business is concerned, each book competes on its own. In this environment it's your passion, persistence and pluck that will sell your book, and those are all within your control.

There is easy access to tools and professionals—In order to make top-quality books, you need people with top-quality skills. Part of the downsizing of the publishing industry has been the upsizing of the freelance marketplace, where every talent you need to build a superior book is available.

Social media marketing—The person-to-person communication that typifies social media can be scaled up through the intelligent use of socially-enabled websites where your readers congregate. When you get involved in social media you can begin to build a community based on your personality and your ability to communicate, not on huge advertising budgets. Social media, blogging, forums all drive traffic and can make your book a success outside normal promotional channels.

Elimination of production risk—Digital printing and print on demand distribution have eliminated almost all of the production risk of publishing. Book printing, storage and fulfillment are the biggest costs of traditional publishing and this new system makes it possible to get into print for almost nothing. It's now cheaper to publish a book than to copy one at Kinko's.

Prejudices are starting to crack—More authors are moving to ebooks, and ebooks are even easier to self-publish than print books. The attraction of 70% royalties is strong, of course, but so is the ability to control your own publication, something that's long been denied to authors. Publishers have given over more responsibility to authors to build their own platform, to do a lot of their own marketing. But this has also empowered authors to take the autonomy and exercise real choices over their own publications.

The softening definition of books—We are in the beginning of a transition to ebooks, although print books look like they have plenty of life left in them. Book traditions of hundreds of years are still strong, and this may be one of the last times most people in the world will have learned to read from books printed on paper. Books are already beginning to stretch and change, and ebook markets are as friendly to new forms and formats for text as they are to digital texts that are made to look like “books.” All kinds of writing and information products will find life electronic forms that were simply uneconomical to produce before.

The globalizing force of the internet—Ebooks and apps have opened the world market to books in electronic form without regard to national boundaries, an unprecedented development in publishing that will continue to grow with the adoption of these new forms.

Mobile technology—The spread of mobile computing technology has increased the amount of reading in the world. Now we read everywhere, and the digitization of books

into ebooks and apps has opened the whole world of smart phones, tablets, MP3 players, and other devices to books, a phenomenon that has never existed before. The average smartphone user can now carry in her pocket-book a massive library that would have dwarfed entire home libraries just a few years ago. And there are over 50 million smartphones in use around the world.

That's my list. I think we've only seen the beginning of the curve, and it's heading up.