

Publish Anything: The Saga of a PublishAmerica Author

My story is that an author who'd done online writing for such dot gone as Theme stream, Written By Me, and The Vines, someone trying hard to have fiction, poetry and nonfiction in print for real, recommended PublishAmerica. She claimed it was a traditional book publisher. I was struck with their slogan, "We treat writers the old fashioned way – we pay them." Wasn't that what publishers were supposed to do?

But since my novel was just sitting on the Discus Publishing site and doing nothing but supplying me with enough money to buy a pair of skate laces every three months, I thought maybe it would have a better chance over at PublishAmerica where it would be available as a trade size paperback both on and off-line.

So this author, Ellen Du Bois, had a big thing on her Geocities site about books being available in brick & mortar bookstores & they'd have ISBN numbers and be online and all that stuff. Also had her full size book cover up so I sat there for 5 minutes waiting for the damn thing to appear. Not impressive, but she liked it. Ellen was a cheerleader for her book and sent reviews from a weekly community rag and she bulk e-mailed several pieces of correspondence during those heady days when her book was in prerelease, then release stage in the summer of '03. I broke down and bought a copy from Amazon – took almost 3 weeks to get. And I struggled to read all 176 pages. Tripe. Clichés abounded. Spelling/grammatical errors weren't there at least. But the writing was thin. The story moved too quickly. The main character was the most realistic as it was most likely based on the author. The dialogue was okay. The descriptions were minimal. Had there been a real editor, the book could've been very good. I wrote to Ellen and told her the positive things about the story, avoiding the negativities. She'd been an online correspondent for almost two years, yet after I didn't review her book on Amazon.com and Barnes & Noble she didn't contact me. Almost a year later she sent me another e-mail – to promote a book of her poetry. I was just someone to sell a book to and she was only interested in the sale and hopefully a glowing write up.

A Future PublishAmerica Author

Since I'd already signed the contract with PublishAmerica, I wanted to cancel it after reading that trash. Now my book would be affiliated with a company that put out just about any piece of writing that came its way. I wasn't expecting much what with my dealings with the extinct eNovel and RJ's eBooks, along with a tiny eBook publisher named Crafts Across America where I wasn't paid monthly as promised. And my novel and short story collection languished at Discus, home of the alleged Number One Best selling eBook author of all time, Leta Nolan Childers.

PublishAmerica sent me an author's questionnaire where they asked for basic biographical information; cover art suggestions, and a long list of people who might want to read my forthcoming novel.

"Please prepare a list (names, and addresses,) of people who know you well enough to be interested in your success as a writer: personal friends, colleagues, relatives, etc., to receive a book announcement...Please limit your list and your labels to a maximum of 100 contacts. Also, please do not include businesses or organizations of any kind, including bookstores, media contacts, or government organizations. Include friends and associates only."

The editing process of my manuscript took two weeks over the Christmas holidays. I was able to ascertain that the first few pages had been read as some minor alterations had been made, but no changes followed for other 50 or so pages. One of the errors that occurred was clearly the result of a spellchecker on the part of PublishAmerica as a question mark appeared after the end of a statement. I'd read of real authors receiving instructions to change chapters, alter endings, delete numerous pages, in other words, really struggle to rewrite a book. Why so much effort? Names. Reputation. The publisher wanted to put their name on the best quality book that they had invested in. The author wanted a book that was saleable but also well written and something they were proud of. PublishAmerica's editing comprised neither ideal as all they did was put the computer program's spelling/grammar checker into action.

My two free author's copies arrived in early March and it was nice to see my trade paperback book in print sans a cheesy cover and stapled spine.

'North of Sunset' actually had decent looking stock cover art of a few silhouetted palm trees, a noticeable font, and a spine where the book title, publisher and author's name was apparent. It would look good on bookstore shelves, I imagined.

Reviews – What Reviews?

What was Publish America doing to make sure my book was reviewed? Nothing. I decided to contact local daily and weekly newspapers by e-mailing a press release. The only responses I got were two e-mail autoresponders announcing the editors were on vacation.

I spent \$40 on copies of my book's galley and mailed them to three national newspapers and the Library Journal magazine. Then I phoned a book reviewer at the 'San Diego Union-Tribune' and asked if he'd be interested in reviewing my book but before I could even describe what it was about, he asked who my publisher was. I told him. "We don't review books by that publisher," he stated.

I called all the local bookstores and spoke to the managers and/ or community relations people about my book, including a couple of stores who were physically located on the street I'd written about. An independent bookstore owner told me that since PA didn't have a return policy she was unable to stock my novel. Another said that I could sell my book on consignment. The chain stores of Borders and Barnes & Noble said my book would be available through Ingram if anyone chose to order it.

Tried getting PublishAmerica to send review copies out and it took them weeks to do so. Had to call and make sure on two occasions that the books had been mailed. Maybe quoting one of their enthusiastic promoters on the message board, a guy with a natural genius for marketing and the budget to back it up, got three books sent to reviewers.

Then I sent my book to Piers Anthony, noted sci-fi and fantasy author of more than 100 books. I'd been in touch with him since 2000 when I alerted him to the fact that eNovel was a rip-off. Although the action in his books usually took place in alternate time periods/universes, he didn't mind reading

a mainstream Hollywood novel. He did so. "North of Sunset by Lisa Maliga. She's the one listed in my Survey as I'm a Published Novelist Ha Ha! Ha!, a pertinent warning for starry-eyed aspiring writers. Her web site www.lisamaliga.com is worth checking similarly; she tells it as it is. If you took a few decades off my age and changed my gender, the result might resemble Lisa. North of Sunset is fun, about a Hollywood producer and his temporary secretary, showing a good deal of what I presume is reality. It is written with the omniscient viewpoint, which I dislike, but it held my interest regardless. "

I'd discovered through an upset PA author on the message boards, which I read on occasion, that someone was complaining about PublishAmerica. Discovering the Absolute Write Background Check area I spent several hours reading, at the time, more than 40 pages of complaints about PublishAmerica. Authors not receiving books in time for book signings that they set up themselves. Bookstore owners/managers refusing to stock their shelves with unedited PublishAmerica titles. Writers unable to get their books reviewed.

Doing a search on LexisNexis, the reputable online legal research system, for all PublishAmerica books receiving newspaper reviews, I saw that from July 2002 to June 2004, only 24 books had been reviewed nationally. Papers in Syracuse NY, Tulsa, OK, Fort Pierce, FL, Wilmington, NC and Lakeland, FL were represented. Only Salt Lake City's 'Deseret Morning News', the 'Tulsa World', 'Pittsburgh Post-Gazette' and the suburban paper, the 'Chicago Daily Herald' were actually major newspapers. Evidently, the 'New York Times' or the 'Los Angeles Times' were not reviewing anything by PublishAmerica's authors. According to the PublishAmerica site in the Facts and Figures section, "Fact #3: Again, unparalleled among all traditional book publishing companies, each day an average 15 times a PublishAmerica author appears in the news media, in newspapers, magazines, radio or TV." Yet even mathematically challenged folks can determine that by using the LexisNexis search statistics, we learn that the average is a paltry once a month that a PublishAmerica book gets mentioned in a newspaper somewhere in the United States.

Editing – What's That?

Here's a gem of a post on the PublishAmerica message board: "When it came out in book form a month ago, my friends mentioned the editing problems in it, so a friend of mine with a masters in education went through it for me. It had close to a thousand editing errors in a 182-page book. So, have some who actually knows what literary content should be in a book, go through your book for you before you send the final draft back to PublishAmerica. Because the final draft, IS!, how the book will be when it comes out."

I discovered that through the misspellings, grammatical errors, and general bad writing that just about anyone was publishable through the 'traditional' publisher located in Frederick, Maryland. Such postings as: "I too am not the best editor LOL! I did get my finished books. And when I met with a lady that is huge in the marketing field, she told me that my book at it's length of 132 pages needs to have chapters." A couple of PublishAmerica authors discussed editing. "I felt like you did when I found errors, but then I realized, hey people read it for the story, not looking for mistakes in typo land! LOL Now I just keep on a keeping on!"

Sales Figures

Question: I'd really like to know how many copies I've sold.

Answer: Buy all of the books yourself and then count them.

No matter how naïve PublishAmerica authors appeared, they will eventually come to the realization that PublishAmerica isn't really a traditional publisher, especially when those twice-yearly royalty checks arrived. Every few months or so PublishAmerica sent them an e-mail extolling their success, bragging about a big name author they're negotiating with, or, more recently, doing a deal with the New York Times. On August 17th, an e-mail bearing the proud subject heading 'Advertising Our Top sellers in the New York Times' appeared in author's online mailboxes.

PublishAmerica was well named in that they want to publish anyone in North America who has churned out a manuscript, regardless of quality. They claim to have anywhere from 9,000 to 12,000 "happy" authors and they want more and more of them as that obviously means more money for the greedy owners, namely Willem Meiner and Larry Clopper.

The PublishAmerica name and logo is seen as a joke to those in the media, bookstores and libraries. Books can't be returned. All PublishAmerica titles lack the necessary CIP [Cataloging-in-Publication] data, which is necessary for libraries to order titles, and who wants to read unedited and overpriced tomes other than the author's cronies? Oh yeah, and while PublishAmerica claims that they're a 'traditional publisher' why on earth do they have in their main page keywords list the term 'self publishing' three times? And in their site's description, they brag: "PublishAmerica, Inc., a traditional publisher, accepting and publishing manuscripts and books at NO CHARGE to the author. Royalties paid to writers, books sold in stores.

Manuscript submissions by mail and online"

In the beginning of September I received a royalty check. To my surprise, I was not only able to afford to buy a pair of laces for my skates, I shelled out the \$12 it cost to sharpen my blades. Who knew that this company would provide extra income enabling me to continue participating in my recreational skating hobby? But it cost me more than the \$160 in author-bought books, the \$40 for galleys, which were probably plunged into a recycling bin, the \$87 color business cards, \$20 press release -- and the countless hours building and rebuilding my website so people would happen across it and buy a book that was only available online--like any other eBook.

PublishAmerica allows the myth of being a 'traditional' publisher, a term not used before the advent of the Internet, to fester. The lie is perpetrated in those HTML source codes that search engine spider robots deliver; the future authors led to the promised realm of publishing, an internet web of woven myths fanning across cyberspace. PublishAmerica resembles most other ePublishing companies promising tales of bestselling books and authors. PublishAmerica is just another scam, just another future dot gone.

About the Author

For More Free Resources visit www.onlinepublishingsite.com

Source: <http://www.article-zine.com>