

FAQS About Commercial Publishing (Publishing-House Publishing)

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December 20, 2009
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- How do I pick a publisher to publish my book?
 - How much do I pay a publisher to publish my book?
 - How much do I charge a publisher to publish my book?
 - What are rights, and which ones do I sell?
 - How do I sell to foreign countries?
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How do I pick a publisher to publish my book?

The best way to find the publisher who will be right for you is to find the books that you read that are most like the one you have written (in genre, in style, in tone) and see who publishes them. If they bought books like yours, the odds are vastly improved that they will buy yours, too.

Don't waste time sending off your book to those "publishers" who advertise in the backs of magazines. (Not even the ones who advertise in the back of *Writer's Digest*.) They'll accept your manuscript. I almost guarantee it. They'll also charge you for the privilege of being "published." This is not the way the business works.

Never send a manuscript to a publisher because you "noticed that you don't have any romance novels out there—my book will

fill a hole in your list.” Your book will fill an out-slot in the publisher’s mailbox. A key rule in publishing lists is “same, but different.” If the publisher does romance novels, then your romance novel with a new twist on a favorite theme will be right on target. Your shoot-em-up western, however, will stand out like a drunken gunslinger at a debutante ball, and will be kicked out the door just as fast. Fantasy publishers publish fantasy. Religious publishers publish spiritual tomes. Literary publishers want The Great American Novel. No publisher wants a manuscript that is completely different from anything else it has ever put out there—and there aren’t exceptions to this rule, either.

So the key to success here is to know what you write, find out who is already putting books out there like it, and from that list, pick the publisher or publishers whose books you like best to query first.

How much do I pay a publisher to publish my book?

Nothing. Not a dime, not half the expenses, not “a modest sum,” not anything. Not ever. You don’t pay to have your book published. The reason you don’t pay to have your book published is as follows: If you’re a writer, then writing is your job. People get paid to do their jobs—nurses get paid to nurse, ditchdiggers get paid to dig ditches, and writers get paid to write.

(For more on this, also see [WriterBeware](#) [offsite, opens new window])

(If you’re looking for help on Independent Publishing, the rules are different, but you still don’t go to the publishers who are scumming around trolling for noobs with manuscripts

and money)

How much should I charge a publisher to publish my book?

I love this question. It is the flip side of “how much should I pay to have my book published?” The droll answer is “you should be so lucky...”

Again, this is not the way the business works. You want to have an agent represent you in the negotiation of how much you’re going to get for your book (and how many rights you’ll keep and how many you’ll sell), but how much the publisher pays for the book is, in the end, entirely up to the publisher. Don’t expect a fortune. Don’t expect, in fact, to make more than you would have made from flipping burgers part-time for the same number of hours of work for your first novel. \$250,000 first-novel advances like the one my previous agent, Russ Galen, got for Terry Goodkind are rare indeed. Much more typical is the \$5000 I got for my first book, back before I had an agent.

What are rights? Which ones do I sell?

Rights are what you hang onto with insane, frothing-at-the-mouth determination.

Okay. I’ll be a little more specific. Rights are what publishers, movie-makers, book clubs, and so on, buy (actually lease) from you on your book. When you sell your book, you are not actually selling the book. You are selling to the

publisher his right to publish that book in a limited format for a limited amount of time, and the more you can control the limits, the better off you'll be. Standard rights sales for books permit the publisher to print the book in your country, or perhaps in the region that speaks the same language as you wrote it in. Foreign language rights are separate, and a good agent will help you hang on to them. Movie rights are separate, and again, a good agent will help you keep them. Internet publication rights, compilation rights, book club rights, all of these are rights that BELONG TO YOU from the second that you write the book. They are YOURS, they are WORTH MONEY, and there are unscrupulous publishers out there who would just love to grab them all up in one neat little "World rights, all formats, for all time" clause that essentially robs you of ever being able to resell them, while telling you that the sale of world rights is standard. It isn't. It isn't even close to standard.

Worse, there are publishers out there who will claim that their publication of your book under their copyright is a standard business practice. These people are thieves. Never sell your copyright on an original work. Never. Your copyright says that you wrote the book. If you sell that, and the publisher (or agent) puts his copyright on the book, then he in effect wrote the book. It's his, and will be his forever after. You can never get anything from that book again, you cannot fix this, you cannot get reparations for it. Legally the publisher can buy copyright, and legally you can sell it, but you'd be insane to do so.

You may at times write books for which you do not own the copyright—for these (movie novelizations, media tie-ins, series books packaged by a packager, etc.) make sure that your agent sees that you are well-compensated up-front, and that you are going to get lots of royalties, because you will never see a dime in subrights sales, and for a writer, that is a Bad Thing.

How do I sell my book in foreign countries?

I don't know. That's one of the many reasons I have an agent. She does know.

NOTE: If this article resonates with you, and you want to meet other writers who share your passion and who are working in a friendly, supportive environment, come hang out with us and make progress on your writing in my free writing community. Learn how writing fiction for a living really works.

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