



## **"Self-Publishing Mistakes, Screw-ups and Disasters"**

by Joel Friedlander

Hey, it's great to see you again. Man, it's just amazing how fast things are changing in the book world these days. It can really make your head spin.

This is the second video in my free training series. The first one is **8 Keys to Self-Publishing Success Today**, and if you haven't seen it you might want to start with that one. There's a link to it in the bottom right sidebar of this page.

In the last video we talked about how it's becoming easier every day for writers like us to take control of our own books and succeed at being our own publishers.

In fact, more and more authors are moving to indie publishing because it just makes sense, and we're seeing the development of all kinds of hybrid models of publishing, with agents, writer's collectives and companies getting into self-publishing.

And by the way, I want to say "Thanks!" to all the people who left comments and questions after the last video. I got some amazing feedback and there was a ton of traffic on Twitter the last few days.

I want to mention that we've got regular comments now in addition to the Facebook comments. Your feedback is incredibly important for giving me direction, and I want to make it as easy as possible for you to participate in the discussion that's going on, so go ahead and, if this video inspires you, let me know what you think. I really appreciate it.

In that first video we also looked at how new systems for publishing and distributing your book are creating a market where lots of indie authors are getting great results in book sales, branding themselves as authors, building authority, and in good old personal satisfaction.

Now, I want to take you deeper into this world because it's also possible to get this stuff wrong. I've worked on the production of lots of books over the years, and you know what? Books are deceptively simple.

What's not so simple is getting them perfect, or close to it, because this isn't a perfect process. It's pretty common to have mistakes or errors happen while you're putting your book together, and I'm not even talking about the challenge of getting your manuscript ready to go. But these mistakes don't have to turn into absolute disasters.

Now in this video I'm going to look at three common mistakes new self-publishers make and how to avoid them, and then we'll talk about the four biggest obstacles authors run into when they think about getting into self-publishing. You don't have to get stuck there, and I'll show you why. Then, at the end, I'm going to tell you that story that I promised, so watch for that.

But first, mistakes.

What am I talking about? I mean mistakes like re-using ISBNs. Every once in a while I'll get a question from an author that runs something like this:

"Hey Joel, I published a book last year but it really didn't sell much and I didn't do anything to market it and it just kind of died, so I was thinking

instead of spending all that money again, can't I just use that ISBN number on my new book?"

Okay, that's a really bad idea and one that could wreck your book's chances in the market. You know, the ISBN is supposed to be a "unique identifier," and that's exactly what it means, unique. You can create lots of confusion for the people who are trying to sell your book if they keep running into listings for the old title--so just don't do it. Knowing how to deal with ISBNs is a basic skill for self-publishers.

Or how about this one: "Hey Joel, I'm doing a book on historic quilts of the pacific northwest, and I've got all these neat photos to put in, they look great on my screen so they'll look fine in my print book, won't they?"

Okay, that's another mistake that can potentially create a lot of problems for you down the road, for instance if you're doing a book where you're using photographs to show readers a process or as a major part of the content of the book.

That's because what you see on your screen may not have that much to do with what you're going to get when your book is printed on a digital press, or on an offset press, and that's really important. Knowing when to hire a pro designer can save you lots of grief.

Okay, how about one more, this one is incredibly common:

"Hey Joel, I just got my books from the printer, and they look great! I'm really happy with the way the design came out and the cover is fantastic. There's just one problem, I've got about 40 cartons of books in my garage, and I can't get my car in there any more, what do I do now?"

Hey, I feel your pain, I've had the storage lockers and the stacks of books. So I know that sometimes authors get really focused on the book itself. It's pretty exciting to hold that book in your hand, live out the dream of actually being published.

But you don't want to order a bunch of books with no idea how you're going to market, distribute and sell them, that story usually doesn't have a happy ending, and I don't want to see that happen to you.

Trust me, I've made most of these mistakes myself over the years. The important thing is how you recover.

For instance, take *Courage & Croissants*. I was creating the printing files for offset printing, and we were on a pretty tight schedule at the end there, when I realized on the day I was supposed to upload the files, that I had really screwed up.

The book cover was 6 x 9, as it was supposed to be. But for some reason I had created the whole interior of the book as a five and a half by eight and a half inch book. They didn't match!

Well, we did recover from this potential disaster, and *Courage & Croissants* went on to win a silver medal at the Ben Franklin book awards---as a 5.5 x 8.5 book, which perfectly suits it.

Or how about the time I was working with some new software and I was importing an author's file into my layout program. Then I spent hours carefully formatting the file, and it was only when I proofed it that I realized something looked odd: all the italic type was missing, somehow it had gotten dropped in the translation from one program to another. Yeah, that was a pretty long night, but it resulted in some workflow improvements that meant it would never happen again.

So even if you screw up, it may not be a disaster. Take a look at this little book. It's made to sell to workshop attendees, which is a really great idea, by the way. Trouble is, the designer had never worked on a book before. Yep. After the book was printed I had a look at it and discovered that all the pages were the wrong way around. In other words, the odd pages were on the left, and the even numbered pages were on the right. That's a big no-no,

and any book professional---and I'm talking here about distributors, book buyers, reviewers, people who really matter to your sales---would spot it instantly. That's kind of a disaster, don't you think?

Like many of these mistakes and disasters, this one doesn't have to be devastating. Even this little book can be fixed and reissued. It will soon pay for itself and, because its content is actually quite good, evergreen content, and it's perfectly targeted to its niche audience, it will be profitable for a long time to come. But the publisher is looking at a lot of headaches, confusion and extra expense because of this seemingly small error.

Well, book publishing is flexible enough to recover from those screw-ups, but you know what I think is the biggest mistake of all? It's authors who never even make it that far, who get stuck somewhere along the way and fall off the path.

There's nothing that bothers me more than knowing there are authors with really valuable books that would make some group of readers--and it really doesn't matter whether it's 100 readers or 100,000--but would make those people really happy or give them information they desperately want and need, but the author won't publish the book because something inside them is stopping them.

In talking to authors, I've come across four major obstacles like this, so let's see where this takes us.

The first is

**\*Rejection\***--Thinking that you're just not good enough, that people will hate your book---and you---because you're actually a no-talent hacker with no business publishing your own book. Yeah, that's a good one, isn't it? How about

**\*Worry\***--Feeling overwhelmed by how big the project is, that you will never be able to do it all. Or,

**\*Fear\***--Feeling that no one will notice your book and no one will buy your book and the people that do read it will hate it and write bad things about you on the internet. Yep. And last,

**\*Confusion\***--Becoming so totally confused about just what to do and where to start that you never end up doing anything.

Quite a lineup, eh? But all is not lost. Let's look at these beliefs one at a time, and see what we can do about them.

How about **\*Rejection\***. How do writers know whether their stuff is good enough? Some writers tell me that "If agents and editors reject me, my book isn't good enough anyway."

That's kind of crazy. They are assuming they're rejected because their books aren't good enough. They don't realize that agents and publishers are looking for books that will make them money.

Now, sometimes good writing and making money line up, and sometimes they don't have anything to do with each other. If your book appeals to a niche audience, you might be way better off publishing it yourself.

The history of publishing is full of stories about great books that were rejected by dozens of publishers and then went on to fantastic success.

Think about who matters to you the most. If it's readers, the only way you'll find out whether people like your work is to get it out into the market. Until then, it's just guesswork on your part. And the only way you'll do that is by actually publishing it.

Okay, how about **\*Worry\***: "It's a lot of work to publish your own book, I don't have the time for that. And social media, spending all that time on Twitter? Don't get me started."

Well, I'm not going to deny that publishing your own book is going to take you some time and effort. But there's a cycle to it.

Most of the work you need to do can be done in pieces, making it a great project for weekends and spare time.

In publishing, you put in all the time and energy now to create a great book that will result in a passive-income stream that you can promote on your own schedule. For instance, I was working full time when I published my first book and now, many years later, it's still selling and sending me checks--actual money--every month.

Using print on demand means you never have to find room for a huge stack of cartons, or spend time waiting in line at the post office to ship your books. You can put whatever time you have available into marketing. And if you're really pressed, think about going straight to an e-book and skipping the print book for now. Go out there and test your concept, find and engage with readers and use a simple Word file to get your book up for sale.

Another thing that stops writers is *\*Fear\** "There's so many books being published no one will notice or care about mine. Worse, they'll hate me."

This is actually a really helpful realization, because it makes writers wake up to the fact that in the new publishing world--whether you go indie or you're published by a traditional publisher--you're the one who's going to end up doing most of the promotion for the book.

And in indie publishing, we know that no one can market your book as well as you can. This is where being smart about your self-publishing can pay off big.

Smart self-publishers know that creating your book and getting it up for sale is just the beginning of the process. Building an author platform, engaging a community of readers and creating excitement around your book are all things that you can do yourself, or with with a little strategic help on the way.

Last, how about \*Confusion\*-- "I don't even know where to start, it's too confusing."

Everything you need to do to get your book into print and onto the market is something you'll be able to handle with the right direction. You can do this.

Every author finds their own way to publish, and you don't have to do it the way anyone else has done it before if you follow a few simple principles and practices.

What you need is a roadmap, a way to tell how the various things you need to do relate to the final product.

Why it's important to know how you'll distribute and market your book before you even start thinking about type fonts or retail prices. More than anything else, having a clear idea of where you're going and what it will take to get there, that's what will make the journey more profitable and more fun.

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I don't want you to get tripped up by these negative attitudes. If you listen to them, you'll never get anywhere. At a certain point you have to start concentrating on reasons why you should publish, not on reasons why you shouldn't.

Self-publishing is one of the most rewarding things you can do if you're a writer. But when you're thinking all these negative thoughts, you might miss the great things that can come from publishing your own book, stuff you couldn't even imagine.

[flip the covers, end with Body Types]

I've lost count of how many books I've worked on over the years, but I want to tell you about the one book that made the biggest difference in my life,



that really transformed me. You could say, it was the most important book of all.

A long time ago when I was living in New York City, my wife and I were studying this neat system of types. No, I don't mean typefaces. It was a system that claimed you could tell just by looking at someone what type of person they were, and it was kind of fascinating.

Anyway, there weren't any books on the subject, so every time Jill wanted to know something, she would come and ask me and I would explain it to her, since I'd been studying it a little longer than she had.

So one day Jill said, „ÄúHey Joel. Maybe you should write all this down. I bet other people would be interested.,Ä¸ So I sat down and wrote the book she asked for. Well, not just like that, it took me almost a year to get it done.

Since I was working in publishing and graphic arts, I knew who to hire to get a professional looking book. I set up a publishing company with a mailbox at the post office in Grand Central Terminal, and we started marketing the book.

Now, you have to realize, we were publishing a book about a subject that was basically unknown. That has plusses and minuses to it. But by spreading the word, doing basic book marketing and publicity, the book started to sell.

Keep in mind this was before print on demand, before the internet and social media. We just followed the plan for basic book marketing, but it took longer and cost a lot more money.

But what happened? Within a few months I could walk into almost any kind of new age bookstore in the country, and they would have the book on the shelf. It was the only one on the topic, you know? Sales weren't making us rich, but they were steady.

Now, as a writer, this was incredibly gratifying. I remember to this day walking into the East-West bookstore in lower Manhattan, just strolling in very casually and hunting down my book. There it was on the shelf, just like a real book!

Wow, that was amazing, but it was just the beginning.

Pretty soon I started to get invitations to speak to groups about this strange body type thing. As the idea spread, I started to get amazing offers. I was asked to teach a course at the New York Open Center, a popular and prestigious educational center in Soho in downtown New York, where people went to learn about stuff like that.

The course was a big hit and sold out, and I was asked to do another, longer course and that really jump-started a whole new world of teaching and doing presentations that I had never experienced before.

Then I was invited to be on the faculty of the Omega Institute in Rhinebeck New York. This is a beautiful retreat center in the Hudson River valley where, every summer top authors and experts in transformational subjects come to teach and interact with students in this beautiful residential setting.

I spent a week there teaching a workshop and sold a lot of books through the bookstore, and indirectly through the catalog mailings that went out to tens of thousands of people on their mailing lists. It was a great experience.

When we moved to California a little while later, I started running 7 week courses in Body Types. I met people who gave me lots of ideas for connecting this odd idea to other, more popular systems.

Eventually we decided to grow the publishing company I had started to publish my book, and started signing up authors, some of whom were already pretty successful. We were able to do this based on the success we had had with Body Types.

Next we got a real distributor, one who could put our books in stores all over the country, and started putting out catalogs. We even exhibited at the big BEA book show for several years.

Eventually we built up a mailing list of over 10,000 people, selling more than a hundred products through a newsletter aimed at people interested in the stuff we were publishing, that little niche. In fact, those newsletter sales were the most profitable part of the business, not the book sales, and I learned an important lesson from that.

As a publisher I wrote contracts, arranged foreign rights sales, scouted books for other publishers, hired editors and designers and all the rest. I travelled and met with authors and read piles of manuscripts.

We developed a review program that landed one of our books on the front page of the Sunday New York Times Book Review, probably the most sacred spot in the whole book world, and it was quite a thrill for me, working out of a spare bedroom in our house. What an education!

I still run into people who know me as the author of that book, who have it on their bookshelf. Although Body Types has sold over 10,000 copies, it's taken years to do that, it's a true niche book and has not, in itself, been a huge money maker.

But within a few years of publishing that book my whole life had changed. I now had speaking opportunities, connections with other authors and experts in my field, a publishing company with books in distribution everywhere, a book on the front page of the New York Times book review, and a steady flow of new manuscripts from really good authors who wanted us to publish their books.

And it all started with that question Jill had asked me: "Why don't you write it all down to help other people learn this?"

But you know what? None of it would have happened if I hadn't taken that first step, risked money, and possibly failure, and published *Body Types*. And that's why I call it the most important book of all.

What about you? If you start publishing, what will happen to you? Will you go on to become a real publisher? Will you hit the top of the Amazon charts? Find new opportunities everywhere? Get a contract from a traditional publisher? Or make your family and friends very happy? It can be life-changing for you, too.

Now, before you go, leave me a comment: What's stopping you? Is it fear, confusion, worry, or what? Where do you need help the most? I really want to know.

In the next video I'm going to lay out the whole self-publishing process. I know you're going to want to see that, so watch for that email.