Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Viva the E-Publishing Revolution!

Christiana Miller · Wednesday, February 12th, 2014

The cultural (and creative) revolution is here! Amazon, in its bid to upturn the publishing apple cart, has given creative artists everywhere the tools we need to rock the culture wars — to take our ideas viral, find an audience and make a living from the arts. Once frowned on and derided as a bastion of mediocrity and a trap for the gullible, self-publishing has become not only the wave of the future, but the key to creative independence. You can use these very accessible (and inexpensive) e-publishing tools to empower the creative artist inside you — to leave a lasting legacy, forge a new career path or raise funds for charity — even if you're not an author.

Corporations used to control artistic expression by controlling the money and the distribution outlets; deciding which voices would be heard and making their fortunes on the backs of (mostly) starving artists. Nothing is more depressing than hearing about a creative artist whose work is selling globally, yet they can't afford to quit their day job.

That's all changed. As soon as Jeff Bezos ascended to the corporate throne on the back of his six-million pound Amazon gorilla, he deliberately leveled the playing field by turning the relationship between creative artists and large corporations on its head. This new, restructured power system brought about the rise of self-publishing as a tool of creative and financial empowerment.

I recently had a meeting with a local artist who had created a set of wonderful books for children, filled with page after page of museum-quality artwork. But she had never published them. She didn't want to spend years chasing traditional publishing houses and she was leery of vanity presses. And rightly so. Instead, she had lovingly glued the pages to cardboard and created mock-ups of all her books.

However, she was dying of cancer. She wanted to leave behind a legacy of art and literature, but she was running out of time. Since I had written a directory for self-publishing – Self-Publishing on aShoestring: Insanely Helpful Links for Indie Authors – and I was blogging about Self-Publishing on a Shoestring for the Huffington Post, she had been pointed in my direction.

What most people don't realize is that it is absolutely possible to publish professional-quality books for very little money. I did it. I lost my job at the same time the economy tanked. Jobs literally disappeared overnight. I sent out a thousand resumes and only got two interviews – neither of which landed me a job. My unemployment ran out, my bank account was on life support and my job prospects had flat-lined. I finally understood why my parents told me to get an MBA and stop messing around in Creative Arts. I had been stubborn about "following my bliss" as a writer. But the only door my expensive college degree ever opened, was the one leading to massive quantities

of student loan debt.

What I did have going for me, was a precocious toddler and a manuscript I had been working on since before I got pregnant. So, in the summer of 2011 I took a leap of faith and published it myself. It got off to such a slow start that I was having heart palpitations, wondering if I had a big mistake. I started researching MBA programs and studying to re-take my GRE's, since my scores were outdated.

But within six months, the book's sales started snowballing. Soon, I was making a living by writing and e-publishing. I returned took those business books to the library and never looked back. Since October 2011, my books have been downloaded over 150,000 times. Since then, I've helped other authors publish and market their own books as well. And when I got hurt and was unable to work for almost a year, my books paid all the medical bills.

While the rise of self-publishing has enabled me to find my bliss, it can be used for more than that. If you're a fine artist, you can publish both print and e-books of your work. You can leave a legacy of your work while communicating with people you'd never have a chance to meet face-to-face. At the same time, you can also influence and inspire aspiring artists.

If you're a screenwriter, Hollywood's modus operandi has changed. Producers and studios want source material. Ironically, books have more cache than scripts. You can also use e-publishing as part of your transmedia portfolio. There is nothing else (other than porn) that can monetize the internet the way e-publishing does. And if you're an author looking for a traditional deal, publishing houses troll the online bestseller lists looking for indie authors to pick up.

If you want to raise money for charity, a project, or for your kid's school or scout troop, think about using self-publishing. I did that this year for my daughter's class. I combined all the stories the kids had written with their drawings and self-portraits, then published them in a book that the parents could buy. The profits from the book went to the class, for supplies – just in time, too, as the class had run out of funds. As a bonus, the kids love their book. They read it every day during recess and class breaks, passing around the classroom copies until they're dog-eared. Having those books makes them feel empowered as real-life budding young authors and artists. After all, they have the book to prove they can do it!

As for the artist I met with, unfortunately, she ran out of time in her fight with cancer before she could get her art files together. So, if you have a project that's important to you — whether it's a book of your art, your poems, your screenplays, a novel or even advice you want to leave your kids – don't put it off! Write it, publish it, and start leaving your creative mark on the culture wars.

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