

Vanity Publishers

Publishing is a highly competitive industry, with literally tens of thousands of Australians who either have written or are thinking of writing a book they would like to see in print. However, wherever there is great want, (think of the amount of people who squander money on dubious weight loss programs), there are people who will take advantage of that want for financial gain.

Vanity publishers fall into this category. Not to be confused with other legitimate types of self-publishing, vanity publishers exist on the fees paid to them by authors to publish their books, and have no interest in the quality of the book or in helping an author market and distribute their work.

Here's what the Australian Society of Authors had to say about vanity publishers in their October 2010 newsletter:

Members are reminded that vanity publishing, defined in the Macquarie Dictionary as "the publishing of unprofitable books with the financial backing of the author", is not recommended by the ASA.

Vanity publishers tend not to call themselves vanity publishers. Instead, they describe their services as "joint venture publishing" or "partnership publishing".

As mentioned in the June newsletter, there are some quite legitimate forms of joint venture publishing. University presses may ask for a "subvention" from academic authors – a grant from their institution to cover permission fees and/or production costs for important scholarly work that meets the publisher's requirements but is unlikely to sell in sufficient numbers. Typically, the subvention will be no more than \$5,000 or \$6,000.

Poetry, as everyone knows, is not lucrative. Even reputable small poetry publishers sometimes ask the author to share printing costs (half of \$1,500 for 250 copies of a 64-page book, or \$3,300 for 750 copies), but often pay higher royalties in return.

Vanity publishers, on the other hand, exist on the fees paid by authors. And such fees are often wildly overstated – \$12,000 as 50% of the total budget for 2,000-3,000 copies of a book. Or the author may be required to buy hundreds of copies of the book. Or pay over \$5,000 for 5-20 "galleys" to be sent for "review".

NSW Fair Trading lists vanity publishers under "Scams" on its website, along with travelling con men, Internet offers and lottery scams.

Using NSW Fair Trading's "things to watch out for" as a starting point, the ASA has put together a list of warning signs that should alert you to the presence of a vanity publisher:

- *They may require you to pay for "submission guidelines"*

- They may require you to use – and pay for – their manuscript assessment service before submitting your manuscript
- They insist that they will only publish work that has “merit”
- They praise your work (this one can be hard to ignore)
- They charge inflated prices to publish and “market” your book
- They require you to sign a “non-disclosure agreement” (which means you can’t get advice about the contract)
- They offer you a 50% share of net profits (and 50% of nothing is still nothing)
- When the book is not published on schedule, they will give you a string of excuses for the delay
- They are unlikely to get your book reviewed in any literary journal or major newspaper
- They will not get your book into bookshops, and online sales will prove elusive

If you are in any doubt as to whether you’re dealing with is a vanity publisher, contact the ASA.

For more information, see the ASA’s Frequently Asked Question on [Types of Publishers](#).

The Australian Society of Authors website “Types of Publishers” article has this to add about vanity publishers:

A vanity publisher is one who takes money from someone else - usually the author – in order for a book to be published. This transfers the cost or financial risk from the publisher to the payee. Such publishers exist from the fees that they receive from the payees, not from proceeds from sales of the book. They therefore have no motivation to market and sell copies of the book. Vanity publishers offer limited or no marketing service and transfer responsibility for the sales of the published book to the payee. They are merely an expensive production facility. If you are contemplating using a vanity publisher you should first consider [self-publishing](#), which is likely to be both less expensive and more fruitful. But don’t take our word – go into your local bookshop and ask if the shop has any stock on hand from the vanity publisher you’re contemplating using. You’ll quickly find these publishers have almost no exposure in the book trade. The ASA does not recommend the use of vanity publishers.

You should note that vanity publishers do not call themselves this. In fact they deny they are vanity publishers. They call themselves “partnership” or “subsidy” publishers and tout themselves as alternative means for aspiring authors to gain public attention. Unfortunately, this is extremely unlikely to happen because vanity publishers do not invest in any marketing or distribution, both of which are essential to successful publishing.

For the full article, click [here](#). To read what the NSW Department of Fair Trading has to say on the subject of vanity publishers, click [here](#).

NSWWC Books

[Self-Publishing Made Simple](#) by Euan Mitchell

[The Self-Publisher's Marketing Guide](#) by Debbie Higgs

Further Resources

Australian Society of Authors <www.asauthors.org>

Department of Fair Trading in NSW <www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au>