

A Review of Publishing Options

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Executive Summary

In an age flooded with publishers both traditional and independent, it is a daunting task to determine the type and specific one to pursue. Yet through the evaluation of five separate options, using six core criteria, this report aims to provide the clarity and information necessary to make an informed choice. The criteria used for the purpose of this report are as follows: Cost, Time, Marketing, Polish, Design, and Content. These criteria are weighted according to their individual importance as a part of a decision matrix, for the purpose of giving a clear, numerical visual of each option's benefits and drawbacks.

After the initial data collection through the decision matrix, these five publishers were further evaluated according to other concerns a prospective author might have. These include the additional work hours required of an author seeking to avoid the cost of additional publisher services and the reduction of creative control that comes from choosing to use these publisher services.

Based on the various analyses conducted in this report, a prospective author is advised to choose either Barnes & Noble Self-Publishing or Archway Publishing by Simon & Schuster, for their respective flexibility and extensive publishing services.

Introduction

The purpose of this report, first and foremost, is to determine the best publishing option based on the five selected companies covered in this document. Those five companies as follows: Amazon KDP, Barnes & Noble Publishing, Archway Publishing by Simon and Schuster, Clean Teen Publishing, and Greenleaf Publishing. Beyond these initial criteria, this report seeks to evaluate the selected publishers according to a decision matrix with six major categories, weighted according to the client's concerns. These categories are content, cost, design, marketing, polish, and time.

In addition to these categories, there are other concerns to be considered in the final conclusions and recommendations. While some publishers offer the option for an author to pursue publishing more independently, these options also entail a greater amount of work that the author must personally oversee to get a book to the final stage of publishing. In contrast, companies that offer services which would reduce the need for additional work hours come with the drawback of reduced creative oversight on the part of the author.

Finally, this report seeks to make a prospective author aware of possible scams and fraudulent contracts when publishing, as the consequences are not only financially devastating but can also result in the loss of creative rights to an author's work. For this reason, these concerns are identified and laid out for the prospective author's reference.

Methods

The research of this report ranged from a variety of sources. The primary sources consisted mostly of web pages and similar materials provided by publishers, detailing their services with varying levels of information specificity.

Secondary sources were derived from both published works on the process of publishing and blog postings by published authors, with educational and experience backgrounds in writing and publishing.

Using six major criteria, a decision matrix was then developed based upon the gathered information. These criteria and their corresponding weight assignments are further detailed in the results section of this report, but they can be briefly summarized as follows: Cost, Time, Marketing, Polish, Design, and Content.

Using this decision matrix as a baseline for the benefits and drawbacks of each publishing option, conclusions were drawn using this information. These conclusions were then cross-referenced against additional concerns and considerations, such as the client's personal concerns and resources. Following this, recommendations were drawn up accordingly.

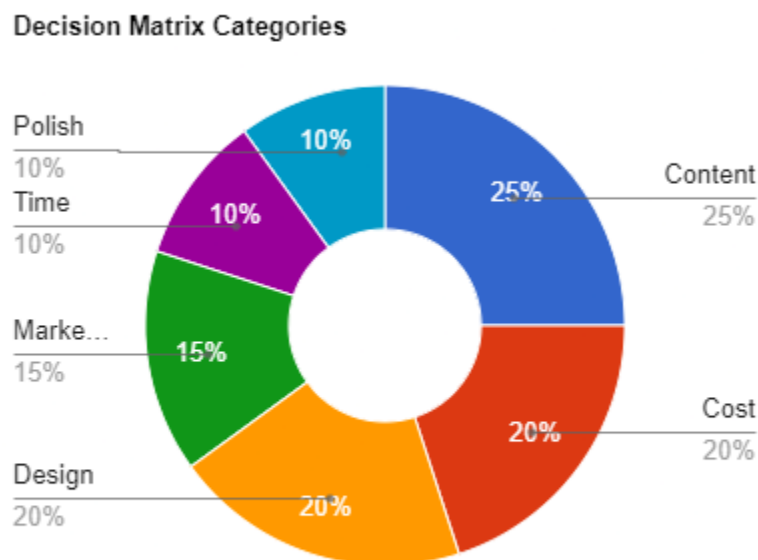
Results

As a preface to the findings of this report for individual publishers, the decision matrix categories and their respective definitions and weights are expressed below.

Decision Matrix Categories

There are a total six major categories of concern to consider in this report. These are content, cost, design, marketing, time, and polish. Content refers to any changes the publisher might push for beyond general revision and polish, such as adding more explicit content to appeal to a mature audience. Cost refers to the upfront costs associated with publishing, such as printing costs or other services. Design refers to the artistic and graphic elements of publishing, which include the cover, text formatting, and illustrations. Marketing refers to services involving advertisement, promotion, or similar. Time refers to the time it takes for an accepted manuscript to reach public release. Finally, polish refers to the available services for polishing a manuscript before publishing. All of these categories are weighted according to the figure below.

Figure 1



Self-Publishers

Of the five total selected publishers this report seeks to evaluate, four of these fall into the category of self-publishers, or publishing services that enable an author to publish with almost complete creative control over the final product. For the purposes of this report, it is important to note the distinction between “self-publishing” and “indie publishing”, when discussing self-publishers. As Joanna Penn notes in *Successful Self-Publishing*, the former is more concerned with the finished creative project, while the latter is more invested in the financial rewards of publishing.⁹ As the goal of publishing for this report involves establishing a source of income, then the term “self-publishing” will be used from here onwards with that understanding.

Amazon KDP

Amazon KDP, otherwise known as Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing, is an online service which allows an author to directly upload a manuscript electronically and subsequently publish either in digital, paperback, or hardback format. In terms of content, the rules and guidelines page detail four main restrictions⁸:

- Content that infringes on others’ intellectual property.
- Content that promotes violence, sexual abuse, terrorism, or similar offensive items.
- Content that does not match its product description or otherwise causes a poor customer experience.
- Content from the public domain, which is not distinguishably different from previously published, free content.

In terms of cost, there are no upfront costs for either electronic, paperback, or hardback copies of a manuscript; Amazon subtracts the cost of printing and shipping from the royalty amount prior to awarding it to the author.⁸

In terms of marketing, it should be noted that Amazon also offers a variety of free and paid options for marketing and promotion, such as expanded distribution, author giveaways, and targeted ads. While the cost of targeted advertisements vary, distribution costs can be subtracted from the royalty earnings, as with the costs of printing.⁸

In terms of polish and design, the state and formatting are left largely up to the author, by virtue of being a self-publisher, and Amazon provides formatting details

to allow an author to arrange various details with almost complete creative freedom, within standard electronic, paperback, or hardback formats.⁸ While this does allow for greater creative freedom, it does also mean that the author is solely responsible for the quality of a published work's design and level of polish.

Finally, in terms of time, Amazon KDP offers a quick turnaround for published works becoming available to the public. Since Amazon KDP has direct seller's access to the kindle eBook market, a published eBook can be purchased within three days of publishing, and a paperback or hardback can be purchased within three to five days.⁸

Considering these factors, the decision matrix score is listed below.

Figure 2

Amazon KDP Decision Matrix Score

| | Content | Cost | Design | Marketing | Time | Polish | Total |
|-------|---------|-------|--------|-----------|-------|--------|---------------|
| Score | 25/25 | 15/20 | 10/20 | 5/15 | 10/10 | 5/10 | 70/100 |

Barnes & Noble Self-Publishing

Similar to Amazon, Barnes & Noble's self-publishing is a largely online service, which allows an author to upload a manuscript electronically and then publish either as an eBook, paperback, or hardback. However, in contrast to Amazon's largely hands-off self-publishing, Barnes & Noble has multiple official partnerships, each of whom offer paid services, such as editing, design, and marketing.

In terms of content, Barnes & Noble holds similar policies to Amazon. However, in addition to the previously mentioned categories of material that is offensive, obscene, illegal, or misleading, Barnes & Noble also prohibits content that involves libel or consists entirely of advertisements.²

In terms of cost, Barnes & Noble follows much of the same policies that Amazon KDP does; royalties are paid to the author upon purchase of the author's book. In

the case of printed copies, all printing costs are subtracted from the royalty amount before it is paid to the author.³

As with Amazon, design, polish, and marketing are aspects of the publishing process that are left up to the author as a consequence of being a self-publisher. However, as noted earlier, Barnes & Noble holds official partnerships with multiple third-party companies, who provide services such as professional editing, cover design, and marketing campaigns. These companies are streamlined to work alongside Barnes & Noble's publishing system in terms of access to the author's manuscript, but as third parties, they do charge rates independent of Barnes & Noble's royalty system, which can present an additional cost for an author who chooses to use them.²

Finally, in terms of time constraints, Barnes & Noble matches Amazon in speed and efficiency. According to Barnes & Noble Press, this process can be as swift as three days from when a manuscript is first submitted.²

Considering these factors, the final decision matrix is listed below.

Figure 3

| | Content | Cost | Design | Marketing | Time | Polish | Total |
|-------|---------|-------|--------|-----------|-------|--------|---------------|
| Score | 25/25 | 15/20 | 15/20 | 10/15 | 10/10 | 10/10 | 85/100 |

Greenleaf Publishing

Greenleaf publishing, while another self-publisher similar to Amazon KDP or Barnes & Noble Publishing, is a Texas-based publishing group. However, in contrast to these earlier companies, Greenleaf is slightly smaller in scope with a strong emphasis on author creative oversight on publishing projects.

In terms of content, Greenleaf is largely similar to other self-publishers. Their services allow for full creative control; however, it is also important to note that

their titles are largely educational, despite publishing some fiction titles. Given that, it is unlikely that the prospective YA author's audience will be reached with this publisher.

In terms of cost, Greenleaf charges no up-front costs, similar to other self-publishers, but rather covers costs through a royalty system.⁶

In terms of design, polish, and marketing, Greenleaf offers various services. Boasting a full team of publishing experts, Greenleaf specifically offers tailored marketing campaigns, high quality printing production, and a variety of editing and polishing services.⁶ However, their emphasis seems to be mainly on marketing, with no especial care to cover design or interior design.

Finally, in terms of time, Greenleaf Publishing, at fastest, can take from six to nine months to publish. While this is not all that long in the grand scheme of publishing, it is still significantly longer compared to the publishing methods of Amazon KDP and Barnes & Noble.

Considering these elements, the final decision matrix score is listed below.

Figure 4

Greenleaf Publishing Decision Matrix Score

| | Content | Cost | Design | Marketing | Time | Polish | Total |
|-------|---------|-------|--------|-----------|------|--------|---------------|
| Score | 25/25 | 10/20 | 15/20 | 15/15 | 5/10 | 10/10 | 80/100 |

Traditional Publishers

The other main category of publisher investigated in this report are traditional publishers, which, for the sake of this document, are defined as publishers who work closely with an author to prepare a manuscript for publishing. Unlike self-publishers, traditional publishers generally have their own creative team, which aids in designing, editing, and marketing for an author's book as a part of their contract. While this method of publishing offers less creative control, it also offers a greater chance of a polished and well-designed final product.

Clean Teen Publishing

Unlike Simon and Schuster, Clean Teen Publishing (or CTP) is much smaller publisher, albeit a local one in Texas. While this publisher does not have nearly as much reach as earlier covered publishers, their emphasis on content, a major consideration for this report, merits an analysis here.

In terms of content, CTP boasts a range of maturity levels for the books that they publish⁵, meaning that a prospective author will be able to submit a manuscript without worry that more mature content will need to be added in the course of the publishing process. However, it should also be noted that CTP favors manuscripts that are a part of a planned series of at least three books⁵, and while stand alone novels will also be considered, the likelihood of being accepted will be lower if a prospective author only has one book planned. The publisher also strongly caters to a YA audience, which for the prospective author of this report is a strong interest.

In terms of cost, CTP does not establish any specific upfront costs, but they also do not establish any unique cost benefits for their publishing services.⁵

In terms of design, polish, and marketing, CTP does have an established publishing team, but they do not offer any unique benefits to their services that are not otherwise offered elsewhere.⁵

Finally, in terms of time, CTP is by far the most difficult publisher to work with. While they do promise a response time of approximately a month for submitted manuscripts⁵, this is only one part of the publishing process and will not account for the total time spent. Furthermore, the publisher only accepts manuscripts twice a year, during specific periods⁵, which can be restrictive to a prospective author seeking to publish quickly or on a more independent time schedule.

Considering all these elements, the decision matrix score is listed below.

Figure 5

Clean Teen Publishing Decision Matrix Score

| | Content | Cost | Design | Marketing | Time | Polish | Total |
|-------|---------|-------|--------|-----------|------|--------|---------------|
| Score | 25/25 | 10/20 | 10/20 | 10/15 | 0/10 | 5/10 | 60/100 |

Archway Publishing by Simon and Schuster

As of 2021, Simon and Schuster is one of the five largest and most notable publishers in the United States, with rights to the works of such legendary literary figures as Stephen King and F. Scott Fitzgerald.⁴ With such a legacy in the publishing industry, Archway presents publishing services with significant backing in the literary world, with the opportunity to reach a large audience.

In terms of content, Archway offers multiple editing and revision services in their packages to prepare a manuscript for publishing.¹ However, given the more mature audience that their published works cater to, as referenced above, there is a strong possibility that content will need to be altered at the request of the publisher. Also, by virtue of being a traditional publisher, author and publisher work much more closely together on developmental stages.

In terms of cost, Archway presents a high, up-front cost for any of their publishing packages. While this can range from \$2,199 to \$14,999, it should be noted that this cost covers anywhere from 19 to 28 separate services, including editing, printing, book sale events, and marketing services.¹

On that note, design, polish, and marketing are all individually covered in Archway publishing packages. A prospective author will have access to such design services as cover design, as well as interior design, layout, and illustrations.¹ Polish is covered by both overall author support services and editorial assessment services.¹ Finally, marketing has perhaps the heaviest emphasis, with various services

including Archway listing services, press releases, social media coaching, book promotional videos, and invitations to special bookseller events.¹

In contrast to the self-publishers discussed earlier, the time aspect of traditional publishers is much longer, with good reason. Publishing with Archway can vary over several months, depending on the level of development required to reach the final publishing stage of a manuscript.¹

Considering these elements, the final decision matrix score is listed below.

Figure 6

Archway Decision Matrix Score

| | Content | Cost | Design | Marketing | Time | Polish | Total |
|-------|---------|------|--------|-----------|------|--------|---------------|
| Score | 15/25 | 0/20 | 20/20 | 15/15 | 5/10 | 10/10 | 65/100 |

Additional Concerns

In addition to these main categories, it was necessary to evaluate the selected publishers according to “Yog’s Law”, or the rule of thumb about how money ought to generally be handled in publishing, according to writer Jim Macdonald.¹⁰ “Money flows towards the writer”¹⁰ is the exact wording of Yog’s Law, and in effect, it boils down to a simple principle: the publisher gets paid at the same time as the author, when a book is sold. Of course, as with any industry that constantly attracts new, young professionals, publishing is no stranger to scams and questionable contracts hiding under the guise of legitimate publishers. For young authors with genuine manuscript material, the threat is doubly present, as publishing scams also threaten the loss of material rights on top of financial losses.

While the scams that prey upon new authors are numerous and varied, a key concern for this report is the “vanity publisher”. According to the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, a vanity publisher is a publisher whose main

income comes not from selling copies of an author books but rather from the fees they charge the author up front.¹¹ As a consequence, the chance that an author's book will eventually get to a public market is rare. Vanity publishers are also characterized by their exclusivity¹¹—a quality that means an unsuspecting author may lose the rights to their materials altogether and lose the chance to publish again elsewhere.

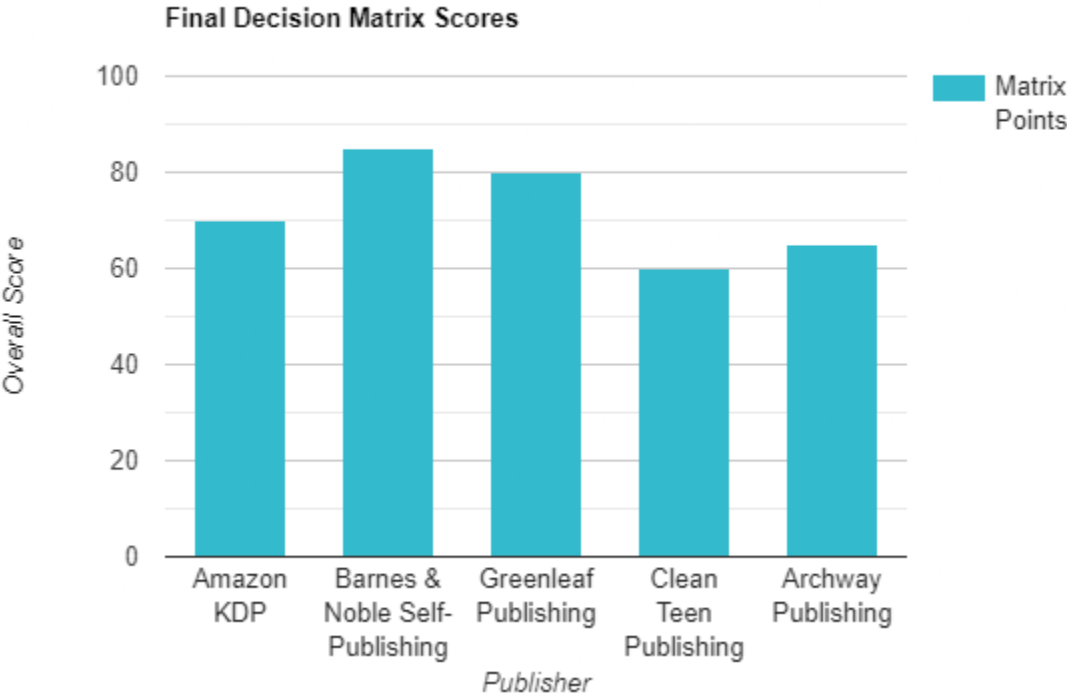
The relevance of this warning is tied to the shared features of vanity publishers and what are known as “hybrid publishers”. Similar to vanity publishers, hybrid publishers also have an exclusive nature and up front fees¹¹, though these are attributed to specific services the publisher provides, and in the case of a reputable company, these fees can be carefully chosen or excluded.¹

Another note to consider is the fact that choosing between independent self-publishers and more traditional or hybrid publishers will constitute a choice between time and cost. A prospective author will need to consider the work hours it will require to format, design, and market independently for the sake of creative control, versus allowing a publisher or third-party to handle these elements at the cost of decreased creative oversight. A prospective author who has time only for preparing the textual content of a manuscript will likely prefer the second option, while an author with more time and resources may favor the first.

Conclusions

Given the final decision matrix scores, the raw scoring generally points to Barnes & Noble and Greenleaf Publishing as the key standouts amongst publishers, as can be seen in the figure below.

Figure 7



However, while the decision matrix scores are of key importance, they are only part of what ought to be considered as a part of the final decision-making process. The decision matrix scores Barnes & Noble Self-Publishing and Greenleaf Publishing as the highest in terms of the individual categories, but this scoring is based largely on the level of creative control over or assistance with a final product that a prospective author has in each of these categories. At a glance, *figure 7* can give a quick overview of the level of control an author will have with a given company.

Greater creative control, however, must not be examined without the context of a greater workload. In the instance of Barnes & Noble Self-Publishing, an author with complete creative control over their manuscript's formatting and design will need to account for additional work hours to create and refine those design choices, in

addition to baseline work hours associated with creating the manuscript. A prospective author may wish to carefully weigh the benefits creative control against the work hours that could be reclaimed by letting a publisher step in to oversee various elements of a manuscript.

In terms of individual publishers, Barnes & Noble ranks highest on the decision matrix, but as covered before, selecting this option would require a prospective author to both produce a manuscript and perform all necessary services to prepare that manuscript for publishing, including editing, cover and interior design, and any marketing services. So while the creative control would be very great and the cost low, the work hours required for this option may be too high a cost to consider.

Greenleaf Publishing also offers a great deal of publishing services at a cost that is attractive. However, despite these services, the audience that Greenleaf reaches is not one that would be conducive to a YA author, meaning that company would likely be a poor fit.

Amazon KDP offers similar flexibility to that of Barnes & Noble, but with slightly fewer resources available to pick and choose certain publishing services. While a prospective author could look to other possible third-party services outside of Amazon's platform, this may mean additional work hours and costs to coordinate and make use of such services.

Archway publishing has a relatively high upfront cost, but it does offer significant services in terms of design, polish, and marketing. For a prospective author who does not have the work hours to spare considering other elements of manuscript preparation outside of textual content, this publisher does offer a strong candidate to get a book published within a set amount of time.

Finally, Clean Teen Publishing is another traditional publisher that is well-established with the audience a prospective YA author is trying to reach. However, the services are limited compared to other publishers, and for that reason, this publisher is not ideal for a prospective YA author.

Recommendations

Considering the findings of this report, two options are suggested for a prospective YA author.

Firstly, Barnes & Noble scored highest in the decision matrix for its level of creative freedom and control over the final product, as well as their quick turnaround time overall. The ability to choose between specific costs for third-party services, such as design, editing, and so forth, allow for a great deal of flexibility when it comes to deciding between investing additional work hours or paying another party to take care of certain elements of a book.

A second option is to go with Archway publishing, which, although expensive, does guarantee a published novel with all the appropriate editing, design, and marketing work needed to sell well. A prospective author would be able to focus on refining the original manuscript or preparing a new one to continue publishing in the future.

As an additional consideration, a prospective author might also consider further research into various aspects of the publishing process and how much each of these elements can be mastered on one's own. Cover design and interior layout, in addition to online marketing practices, are areas of emphasis that would benefit from greater research.

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Figures and Tables

Figure 1

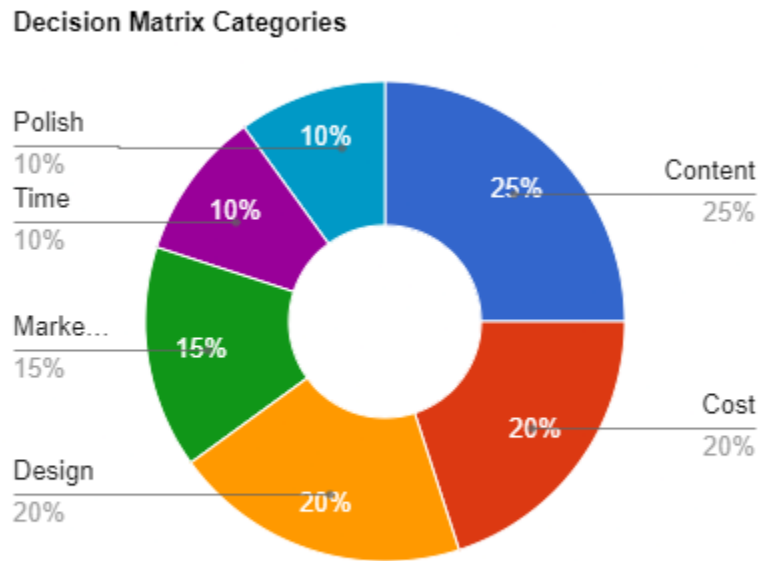


Figure 2

Amazon KDP Decision Matrix Score

| | Content | Cost | Design | Marketing | Time | Polish | Total |
|-------|---------|-------|--------|-----------|-------|--------|---------------|
| Score | 25/25 | 15/20 | 10/20 | 5/15 | 10/10 | 5/10 | 70/100 |

Figure 3

Barnes & Noble Decision Matrix Score

| | Content | Cost | Design | Marketing | Time | Polish | Total |
|-------|---------|-------|--------|-----------|-------|--------|---------------|
| Score | 25/25 | 15/20 | 15/20 | 10/15 | 10/10 | 10/10 | 85/100 |

Figure 4

Greenleaf Publishing Decision Matrix Score

| | Content | Cost | Design | Marketing | Time | Polish | Total |
|-------|---------|-------|--------|-----------|------|--------|---------------|
| Score | 25/25 | 10/20 | 15/20 | 15/15 | 5/10 | 10/10 | 80/100 |

Figure 5

Clean Teen Publishing Decision Matrix Score

| | Content | Cost | Design | Marketing | Time | Polish | Total |
|-------|---------|-------|--------|-----------|------|--------|---------------|
| Score | 25/25 | 10/20 | 10/20 | 10/15 | 0/10 | 5/10 | 60/100 |

Figure 6

Archway Decision Matrix Score

| | Content | Cost | Design | Marketing | Time | Polish | Total |
|-------|---------|------|--------|-----------|------|--------|---------------|
| Score | 15/25 | 0/20 | 20/20 | 15/15 | 5/10 | 10/10 | 65/100 |

Figure 7

