

# How to publish your own book inexpensively

(AKA The Down and Dirty Guide to Self-Publishing )

by William McGrath, author of The Sword of Fire trilogy

Here are the steps I went through to publish my own books. Perhaps you will find some information that you can apply to your own situation.

My first novel is titled Asulon. It is part of a fantasy trilogy called The Sword of Fire, (in a nutshell, the three books tell the story of the Great Tribulation and the return of Jesus Christ, setting these events in a world that resembles Europe and the Middle East during the Crusades).

I first tried the usual route of submissions to both mainstream and Christian publishers and received the usual round of rejections that an unsolicited, unagented author usually receives. I then tried finding an agent (both mainstream and Christian), but struck out there as well. The feedback I was getting was that the book was too overtly Christian for mainstream publishers and did not fit the guidelines of the larger Christian publishers, (too violent, had characters who drank wine with their meals - a big no no with many old school evangelicals).

I then began researching the idea of publishing the book myself.

There are two types of printing technologies used by book publishers, offset and digital. Offset was the main process used for many years and is the modern version of Guttenberg's technique. It is how large publishers print most of their books. Unfortunately the startup cost is high. I found that to have my 296 page book printed at a competitive unit price using this method would require a print run of at least 1,000 copies. This would bring my unit price down under \$4.00 per book, but the \$4,000 total was more than I was willing to budget for printing.

The other method of printing is digital (much like a Xerox copy). With this process you can print just one book if you wish and very low print runs are affordable. This is sometimes referred to as Print-on-Demand (POD), but

that more accurately describes the process of sale rather than the method of printing.

If you do a Google search for POD publishers, you will find a myriad of companies offering this service. Most of these are middle men who will charge you high upfront fees to do what you can do for yourself if you deal directly with a printer. Most of these companies really make their money on their up front fees to authors, **not from books sold**. Lulu.com and CreateSpace.com are two exceptions, having no or low up front fees, but they make up for this by charging higher unit costs. More on this later. For an example of someone's experience with a high up front POD service, I know a retired NY State judge who paid \$4,000 to a POD company to publish his book. This was for their typesetting, editing and marketing help. I can't comment on the first two, but all their marketing amounted to was sending out letters to local churches soliciting speaking engagements for the judge, at which he would lecture on the subject of his book and sell the book afterwards. I saw him recently. Three years after publishing, he still has not sold enough books to break even on the deal.

When I published my own books I cut out the middleman and dealt directly with a digital printing company called Lightning Source, Inc. (LSI). LSI charged a \$40 setup fee and then charged me \$4.80 per copy for my novel Asulon in 6" x 9" trade paperback size. Asulon sells on Amazon.com for \$9.99

LSI charges Amazon (and other retailers) \$7.99 for each book and I receive \$3.20 from each sale, which LSI sends me every 90 days. I also sell my books on my own website packaged with a martial art DVD for \$20, which includes shipping to U.S. addresses. After I pay for shipping and the blank DVD, I make a profit of more than \$5.00 per book/DVD package. (Note: this book/non-book item package deal is a great selling tool. One of the first books on Frisbees was packaged inside a full sized Frisbee. Even though this package was more expensive than its book competitors it far outsold them).

LSI is a division of Ingram Group, the largest book distributor in the US. This gives me automatic inclusion on retail websites like Amazon.com, Target.com and B&N.com (Barnes & Noble). If you do a Google search for Asulon McGrath you will find all the many places online that my book is sold all over the world and, with the exception of my own websites, all this

was set up automatically by LSI through Ingram.

Here are some other items you'll need to self-publish your book.

**Copyright:** You should copyright your book with the US Copyright Office (or the equivalent if publishing outside the U.S.). You download the form from the US Copyright office and pay a small fee to file. You can even send them copies of your book on CD or file electronically.

**ISBN (International Standard Book Number).** This is the 13 digit number that identifies your book. Bowker Inc is the official U.S. broker for ISBNs. You can buy one ISBN from Bowker for \$100, but most self publishers find it more economical to buy a block of 10 numbers for \$250 (you do have more than one book in you, right?). Beware of POD publishing services that offer a single ISBN at a price lower than Bowker's. Despite what they imply in their advertising, these numbers are registered to them and are nontransferable. Therefore **they** will be listed as the official publisher, **not you**. ISBNs are not transferable, so if you leave that service you will have to get a new ISBN.

**NOTE:** If you don't plan on selling through bookstores or Amazon, B&N, etc, (on your own website, for example) then you can get by without an ISBN.

Another thing you may not need, (depending on the laws in your state) is to incorporate. I set up my own publishing company simply by filing a DBA (Doing Business As) form for \$40 at my County Clerk's office. This was to allow me to go to my bank and set up a business account so people can write their checks to my DBA rather than to my own name. It just sounds more professional to have a book published by PTI Press, rather than by the author himself. Different states have different laws regarding setting up a business, but if you sell solely through the LSI (printer) - Ingram (distributor) - Amazon.com (retailer) connection, you probably don't need a business name, corporation or often even a business license. In addition, if you print with LSI and let Amazon, B&N, etc, handle the retail sales for you, then you don't have to collect and file sales taxes. The internet retailers will do all that for you and LSI will send you your check from the wholesale profits every three months.

LSI requires that you send the text of your book to them as a PDF file using the professional version of Adobe Acrobat. I have MS Word 2003, which

won't do PDF conversions (Word 2007 does do conversions, but I've heard it is not as good as 2003 in other areas). If you do not have Acrobat or the Word 2007, you can subscribe to Adobe's online PDF creator service for \$10 a month: <https://createpdf.adobe.com/> There is no long term commitment. You can sign up for one month, convert your book docs and then not renew at the end of the month. \$10 for as many conversions you can do in a month is a pretty good deal.

While it's not economical to use most of these POD services for general sales, services which have no up front fees (such as [Lulu.com](http://Lulu.com)) are a good choice to print a few review copies for peer critiques and do a rewrite or two before offering the book for general sale. Lulu, the least expensive of the popular POD services, is still more expensive than going directly to a digital printer like LSI on unit cost. Here is a comparison of unit costs using my own novels Asulon and Eretzel as examples. Remember, LSI's set up fee of \$40 (\$75 if you factor in the required proof copy for your first printing of a title) is not factored in to the prices shown below.

Asulon 296 pages: Lulu \$10.42 per copy. LSI \$4.80 per copy.

Eretzel 448 pages: Lulu \$13.46 per copy. LSI \$7.24 per copy.

Therefore, it is best to use Lulu for print runs of 12 or less and not for full publishing. By the way, the reason Lulu is more expensive than LSI is because Lulu doesn't print the books themselves, they hire LSI to do it and then sell you the books at a mark up (your cost per copy at Lulu is actually higher than the full retail price for each book at Amazon.com if you print directly with LSI). Lulu isn't the only one. From what I've heard, LSI seems to be the printer of choice for most POD companies.

Createspace (CS), a division of Amazon.com, is another POD service that is getting a lot of attention these days. Both LSI and CS will charge about the same per copy, but since CS has an option of a lower upfront charge, it will cost you a little less per copy than LSI for your first printing in small numbers. LSI's volume discount will help bring their unit cost (even with their upfront charges factored in) under CS's if you buy enough units. However, keep in mind that Createspace/Amazon will take a much larger percentage of your profits than LSI if you use them for Amazon sales. Let's look at a book that costs \$4.80 to print and has a retail list price of \$9.99. The publisher can set the wholesale price discount that retailers pay at both LSI and at CS, however the lowest discount you can set at CS is only 40%

while the lowest discount at LSI is 20%. Using LSI at a 20% discount, the wholesale price that retailers are charged for a book with list price of \$9.99 is \$7.99. With CS's 40% discount, Amazon.com would be charged \$5.99. If you the publisher are charged \$4.80 in printing costs per copy, you would make \$3.20 if printing with LSI and only \$1.19 if you print with CS when selling on Amazon.com. Another thing to consider is that Createspace, as a division of Amazon.com, will not sell to other online booksellers such as Barnes and Noble. LSI, is a division of Ingram (the largest book wholesaler in the world) and therefore sells to all the booksellers that Ingram does (google my novel Eretzel and see all the outlets around the world that the book is sold). If you do use Createspace, just use their basic printing service (no ISBN or marketing) and set your selling option to "Private Access" so you are the only one who can buy your book from them. (Note: Reviews I've seen for Createspace are a mixed bag on quality compared to LSI, especially regarding cover art and binding).

**Covers:** I did my own book covers in PhotoShop 6 after my artist sent me the cover art. You can download a cover template from LSI to center everything correctly for your page count, page size and paper type. Take a look at the cover for Asulon: [http://www.theswordoffire.com/978-0-9801058-0-3\\_COVER%20copy.jpg](http://www.theswordoffire.com/978-0-9801058-0-3_COVER%20copy.jpg)

You'll find my first cover for Asulon here: <http://inosanto.com/?cat=21> (scroll to the bottom of the page). It's just something I put together with PhotoShop before I found an artist I could afford.

I'm no computer genius. If I can do a workable book cover, so can you.

Look at the covers of these two best sellers. These are covers anyone can do with a minimum knowledge of PhotoShop or other photo editing software:

<http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/c/susanna-clarke/jonathan-strange-and-mr-norrell.htm>

[http://z.about.com/d/bestsellers/1/0/P/7/-/-/jurassic\\_park.jpg](http://z.about.com/d/bestsellers/1/0/P/7/-/-/jurassic_park.jpg)

By the way, when you looked at the back cover for Auslon did you notice that the box for the bar code was blank? Bar codes can be a bit complex to put on your cover - the printing company requires specific fonts and the right kind of black (in the world of printing, there is more than one kind of black). The easy way to get around this, if you are using LSI as your printer,

is to leave a blank white box of the right size where the bar code should be and LSI will create one for you and place it there.

Once you have written your book, had it proofread and edited, you will still need to typeset it properly. A good typesetting program will make the text flow better on the page and handle issues such as justification, hyphenation, page numbering, etc. Adobe's [InDesign](#) is the industry standard in typesetting software, but it's a bit costly. There are alternatives such as [Scribus](#) which is an open source software product that has a good reputation among self-publishers. I tried the trial version of InDesign and then Scribus, but found both programs had too steep a learning curve for my over 40 year-old brain, so I typeset my novels in MS Word 2003. Word is not really designed for this, but you can push it a bit and get it to do a decent job with the detailed instructions you'll find in a book called [Perfect Pages](#). You can see the final results in my novel [Asulon](#) by clicking on its cover (to use Amazon's Look Inside option) and viewing some sample pages of text.

**Ebooks:** Many experts predict that ebooks will soon comprise 50% of total book sales. If you are publishing a book, you really should include an ebook version. I separated my ebook publishing into two categories, Kindle in one and all other formats in the other. A good place to start the process is at [Smashwords.com](#). Follow their style guide carefully. This will help get your Word doc ready for any ebook conversion service you use. Because you can go directly through Amazon.com for their Kindle reader (and choose to receive 70% of the retail price of the ebook), I uploaded the converted file directly to them. It took a few days for the ebook to show up on Amazon.com, then a few days after that for the ebook's page to be linked to the page for the paperback version, and finally, about three weeks after I started, for all the reviews to be copied over from the paperback to the ebook's page.

For sales through other ebook sellers (Barnes & Nobel, Sony, Kobo, Diesel), I used Smashwords.com as many of the ebook sellers require you to go through an aggregator such as Smashwords, instead of dealing directly with them. Smashwords has an excellent royalty split and pays you 85% of the list price when a customer buys your ebook directly from their website and 60 to 70% when your ebook is purchased on a site such as iBooks, Kobo, the Nookstore, etc.

If you have followed the Smashwords style guide correctly, then you can upload your Word doc to them and Smashwords will handle the ebook conversion for you. Most of the online companies selling ebooks will get your book from Smashwords without hassle. The only minor complication I had was Apple's requirement regarding ISBNs. The ISBN is the number that identifies your book. The US Copyright office requires that the ebook edition have a different ISBN than the paper version. For all the other companies that Smashwords works with, having the ISBN listed on the copyright page of your book is sufficient: however to appear on Apple's iBooks store for its popular iPad device, you will also need to register your ISBN on a separate page at Smashwords. Not a big hoop to jump through and it will take you just a minute to enter the data. Once you have registered and uploaded your book at Smashwords, go to your Dashboard and then the "Channel Manager" page to register the ISBN. You can also decide which channels you want Smashwords to sell to there. I choose not to have Smashwords distribute to Amazon since I uploaded my Kindle books directly to Amazon.

Once your own book is properly formatted and converted to Mobi for Kindle, upload to Amazon through their own service. Go to any Amazon book page (for example the page for my ebook Asulon: <http://www.amazon.com/ASULON-SWORD-FIRE-ebook/dp/Boo3YOSEWK> ) and scroll down to the bottom of the page and click "Self Publish with us". Once there the second choice will be publishing on Kindle.

**Ebook Conversions:** I used Jim Brown's service [Jim & Zetta](http://www.jimandzetta.com/) for my Kindle conversion and have received compliments from other ebook publishers on how well the books were formatted for Kindle. Jim has the best prices in the business I've seen and still manages to have excellent customer service.

<http://www.jimandzetta.com/>

The last piece of advice I have for you is to network, network, network. The professional editor I hired for Asulon was my largest expense for that book. By the time my second novel Eretzel was ready for publishing, I had made contact with another author through one of the newsgroups listed below. He edited my second novel for a fraction of the cost of my first. Both editors had similar educational backgrounds and degrees, both produced good results. The only difference was cost.

I've enclosed a list of newsgroups on the web and printed books that have helped me with writing, publishing and promoting my books.

Regards,

Bill McGrath

Author of The Sword of Fire series

PS. If you found this information helpful and would like to thank me, please buy my books.

The Amazon.com pages for my books:

<http://www.amazon.com/ASULON-William-R-McGrath/dp/0980105803>

<http://www.amazon.com/ERETZEL-WILLIAM-RAYMOND-MCGRATH/dp/0980105811>

The Smashwords pages for my books:

Asulon: <http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/743>

Eretzel: <http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/23959>

How I sell my books on my website: <http://www.pekiti.com/store/>

My YouTube channel (free advertizing for my books, DVDs and seminars)  
<http://www.youtube.com/user/TuhonBillMcg>

## **COPYRIGHT AND ISBN**

US COPYRIGHT OFFICE <http://www.copyright.gov/>

Bowker <http://www.bowker.com/>

<http://www.bowker.com/index.php/component/content/article/1/2>

## **PRINTERS**

LSI <http://lightningsource.com/>

Lulu <http://www.lulu.com/>

## **NETWORKING SOURCES**

Christian Fiction Review Blog <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/CFRB/>

Christian fic2 [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Christian\\_fic2/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Christian_fic2/)

CHRIST-SF <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ChristSF/>

SELF-PUBLISHING <http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/Self-Publishing/>

POD PUBLISHERS [http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/pod\\_publishers/](http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/pod_publishers/)

POD Blog (a good overview of digital printing can be found here)

<http://www.fonerbooks.com/pod.htm>

PUBLISHING FOR PROFIT blog (an informative blog from an publishing insider)

<http://gropenassoc.com/blog/>

The [Reference Desk](#) section of their website is also very useful.

PREDATORS AND EDITORS ( The place to learn who are the good guys and bad guys in the publishing world)

<http://www.anotherealm.com/prededitors/>

**BOOKS** (My "must have" list-they explain what you need to know about self-publishing, marketing and selling your books)

**Self-Editing for Fiction Writers** by Renni Browne and Dave King (you'll still need another set of eyes to go over your work, but this will help keep the amateur mistakes to a minimum)

<http://www.amazon.com/Self-Editing-Fiction-Writers-Renni-Browne/dp/0062720465>

**Eats, Shoots and Leaves** by Lynne Truss (the funniest book on punctuation you will ever read. You may even learn something in the process)

<http://www.amazon.com/Eats-Shoots-Leaves-Tolerance-Punctuation/dp/1592400876>

**Book Design and Production** by Pete Masterson (after you write your book, you still have to put it together)

<http://www.amazon.com/Book-Design-Production-Pete-Masterson/dp/0966981901>

The author's website ( <http://www.aeonix.com/> ) is a great place to find info on all aspects of self-publishing:

**Aiming at Amazon** (A must have if you are going to sell your book on Amazon.com and other internet retailers)

<http://www.amazon.com/Aiming-Amazon-Publishing-Marketing-Amazon-com/dp/093849743X>

**Perfect Pages** by Aaron Shepard (typesetting a book in MS Word) MS Word is not the best way to typeset a novel, but I found that I could produce

a decent product with the help of this book (besides, the real typesetting programs like InDesign, TeX or Scibus were way over my technologically challenged head anyway)

[http://www.amazon.com/Perfect-Pages-Publishing-Microsoft-Desktop/dp/0938497332/ref=pd\\_sim\\_b\\_1](http://www.amazon.com/Perfect-Pages-Publishing-Microsoft-Desktop/dp/0938497332/ref=pd_sim_b_1)

**POD For Profit** is Aaron Shepard's latest book. The subtitle explains it well.

More on the NEW Business of Self Publishing, or How to Publish Your Books With Online Book Marketing and Print on Demand by Lightning Source

[http://www.amazon.com/POD-Profit-Publishing-Marketing-Lightning/dp/0938497464/ref=pd\\_bxgy\\_b\\_text\\_b](http://www.amazon.com/POD-Profit-Publishing-Marketing-Lightning/dp/0938497464/ref=pd_bxgy_b_text_b)

<http://www.newselfpublishing.com/> is Aaron Shepard's blog. Great info here.

**PLUG YOUR BOOK** by Steve Weber (my favorite book on internet marketing)

[http://www.amazon.com/Marketing-Authors-Publicity-through-Networking/dp/0977240614/ref=pd\\_sim\\_b\\_5](http://www.amazon.com/Marketing-Authors-Publicity-through-Networking/dp/0977240614/ref=pd_sim_b_5)

**The Self-Publishing Manual** by Dan Poynter (Poynter is the dean of POD printing. A good book to start with, though not as up to date on internet marketing as Plug Your Book)

<http://www.amazon.com/Self-Publishing-Manual-Write-Print-Sell/dp/1568600887>