

## Summary Report on MiPA General Meeting—February 9, 2021 51 Participating on Zoom

### How to publish: Which route to publication is right for you?

Speaker: [Katherine Pickett](#)

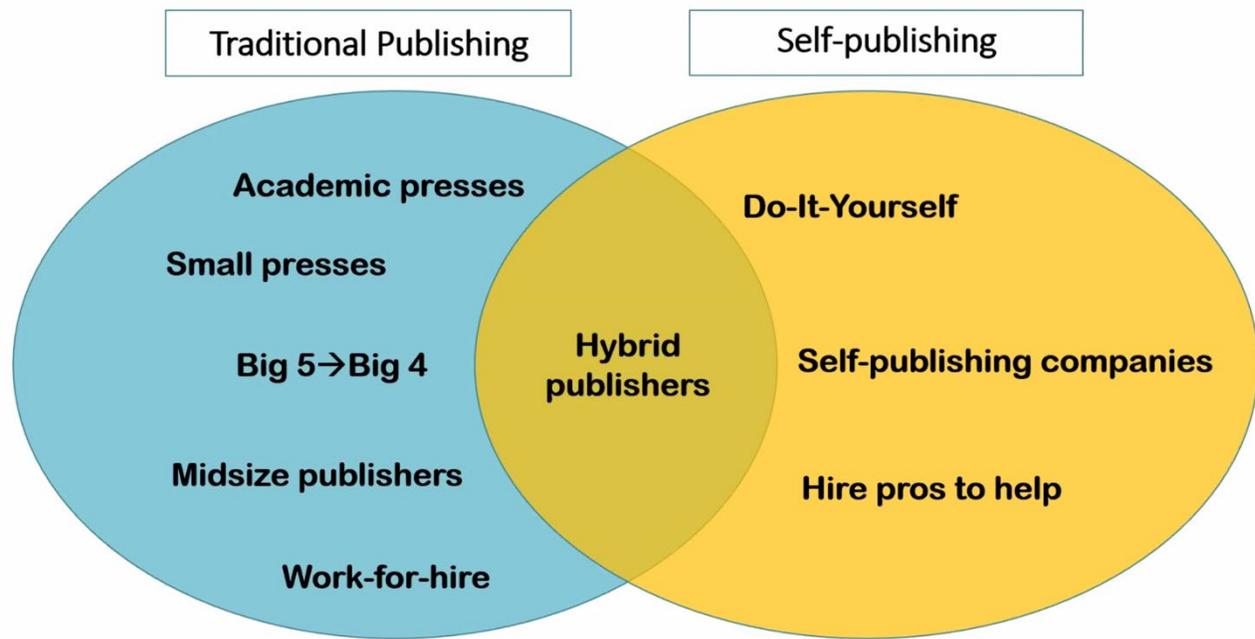


Katherine is the owner of POP Editorial Services LLC, has edited over 300 titles, and is the author of the award-winning *Perfect Bound: How to Navigate the Book Publishing Process Like a Pro* and the e-book *Freelancing as a Business: 7 Steps to Take Before Launch Day*. A native of St. Louis, MO, she has been part of nearly every type of publishing in her 20 years in the publishing industry. She is also President of the Maryland Writer Association.

After 30 minutes of getting to know one another, President Suzanne Kelly introduced the MiPA Board and Vice President Paul Nylander then introduced the speaker.

#### Overview:

Katherine began with a snapshot of all the ways to get your book out to the world. A lot depends on establishing appropriate goals for yourself, which can be widely varied. Her slide captured all the options:



She then covered each option in detail.

### **Traditional Publishing—Biggies:**

The Big Five, Penguin Random House, Simon & Schuster, Macmillan, Hachette, and HarperCollins, may become the big four if a merger between Penguin Random House and Simon & Schuster goes forward. Penguin publishes about 15,000 books per year and Simon & Schuster about 2,000. With the Big 5 you get prestige, top book quality and production, and money (an advance). You also get global distribution, into all the book stores, etc. What you don't get is creative control. You will have only limited influence on the cover, title, and even content of the book, and never the final say. You need an agent to get through to these companies.

### **Traditional Publishing—Midsize:**

Examples Katherine cited as midsize publishers were Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Wiley, U. of Chicago Press. With a midsize publisher you get an advance (albeit smaller), global distribution, into all bookstores.

You may not need an agent for these presses. You will have more rapport and interaction with the acquisition editor.

### **Traditional Publishing—Small Presses:**

Katherine mentioned 11:11 Press, Bethany House, Graywolf Press, MN Historical Society Press as MN examples of the huge number of small presses. These presses are often regional. They may publish just 30 books per year but the members of this category are highly variable. You get generally less money and less editing experience (a big factor). You should have a well edited book going in. The distribution to bookstores is likely to be regional, or sometimes just local. Of course you can always have global e-book distribution and for the book through Ingram Spark. A key question is, “Does the press have a distributor that will get the book into bookstores?” Another key question is, “How much advantage does the small press have over doing it yourself?” They will have a team, but it might not be great—do your due diligence.

### **Traditional Publishing—The Money:**

The advance is money paid against royalties. Usually 1/2 is paid upon signing the contract, and the second 1/2 upon acceptance of the manuscript. The size of the advance and the royalty depends on the publisher, type of book, its quality, and the agent’s reputation.

Royalties, a percentage of sales, are paid to the author once the advance is earned back. Royalties are figured on the list price (the cover price of your book), or the wholesale price (a 55% discount on the list price). An agent helps to negotiate higher royalties and tracking them as they come in. Sometimes the royalty percentage increases as the number of sales increases. The agent him or herself gets a percentage of the royalties (about 15%). Typical royalties are around \$1 per book.

### **Some Questions and Answers about Traditional Publishing:**

Q1. Can you be your own editor?

A1. I don't think an author should be their own editor. You can learn to be a really good writer or a really good editor, but you should never edit your own work. Some non-fiction books don't need an editor, but narrative non-fiction or fiction require a mostly finished manuscript. Some top agents require an almost perfect manuscript.

Q2. Please describe the different types of editing.

A2. Developmental editing is the big-picture. It addresses issues of content, consistent characterization, structure, narrative arc, timeline, etc. This can sometimes be done with a group of beta-readers and you might not have to hire an editor for this. Copy-editing looks at grammar, punctuation, style consistency, etc. Proofreaders catch details the copy editor misses.

### **Self-Publishing, Do it all Yourself**

Pros for this approach include lower cost to fit any budget, full creative control, and, in the end, you can keep all the money. This is good for smaller books, niche books, books that are mostly text, or pulp fiction where the quality niceties are not as important to the readers.

Cons include learning all aspects of what is needed for a book—a big learning curve. The cost is paid in time rather than money which can be difficult if you have family or job responsibilities. Limited acceptance is also a big problem. Getting into a bookstore will be very difficult. They want to work with book with a logo on the spine.

### **Self-Publishing—Hire Pros to Help You**

Advantages of this approach include a more professional appearance, a higher quality product, and wider sales acceptance. Several types of people might need to be hired: editors, a book designer, someone to format the e-book, a cover designer, printers and binding people. Who you hire depends on your own skills, but you would rely on professionals throughout the process. Self-publishing still carries a stigma, so getting into book stores, important reviews, etc. is more difficult. But

this the self-publishing method that will get you the widest acceptance. Forming a publishing company and creating a logo is not too difficult, or expensive.

Some of the people you hire may be expensive. This is a con, especially for a long book. This approach can take longer and requires building your own production team. It's like planning a wedding. Which is most important for your funds: is it the hall, the food, or the photography. For the book you need to think through all the steps. You can use an inexpensive design template, but it's better to plan the specifics that your book really needs. It can take 6 to 9 months after you have a final manuscript.

### **Self-Publishing—Hiring a Self-Publishing Company**

Advantages for this approach include not having to worry about all the details of publishing. You also get to keep more (or all) of the profits. By working with a company you can choose a package that is right for you. This is most attractive to people with limited time but enough money to proceed. You buy the package that is right for you. One good option is to take care of the editing yourself and leave the rest to the company.

Cons include the cost, which can be thousands of dollars. Some companies can be scams and do a poor job of editing and production. These are called Vanity Presses. You may be harassed about extra marketing options—so be careful. Customer service is highly variable. For some of these companies, getting into bookstores is impossible. On the other hand, some of these companies turn out very high-quality books.

A self-publishing company to avoid is Authors Solutions, and all of its subsidiaries.

### **Self-Publishing—The Money:**

In self-publishing you pay for everything: editing, design/formatting, printing, e-book conversion, and marketing. But you earn 100% of the

sale price for any direct sales through you and 35 to 70% of the list price for sales through other retailers like Amazon or Barnes and Noble.

Consider all these factors when setting the price of the book.

### **Hybrid Publishing:**

A Hybrid Publisher takes care of the production, provides marketing support, and provides a logo for the spine of your book. They have selective gate-keepers, so you still have to sell your book to them and they charge for their service without your being able to control the production. The price can be quite high, between 5 and 10 thousand dollars. You may still be treated as self-published by the bookstores. However, some can be very good. For example: [She Writes Press](#) (for women), [Greenleaf](#) (for business books), and [Page Two](#). The biggest problem is telling a good hybrid publisher from the scammers.

### **Collaboration with a Nonprofit or Business:**

This is really good for people with a mission for your book. You could split the production costs with the partner (either a nonprofit or a business). The partner can help the author reach the appropriate audience although it could be limited. You have to do research to find an ideal partner.

### **Work for Hire:**

This option can lead to a reliable income and it helps build your resume. The downsides are that you have limited creative control, don't gain much prestige, and the final copyright is in the publishers name, not yours. For example, Katherine worked on the book: *Freelancing as a Business: 7 Steps to Take Before Launch Day*. Published by the editorial Freelancer organization, who sent a check to Katherine. She doesn't see any royalties. Another example is the "Dummy Book" series."

The [Author's Guild](#) has a wealth of resources (for example a model contract for traditional publishers).

## Katherine's Book and Contact Information:

Much more detailed and comprehensive information can be found in Katherine's book or by contacting her directly.

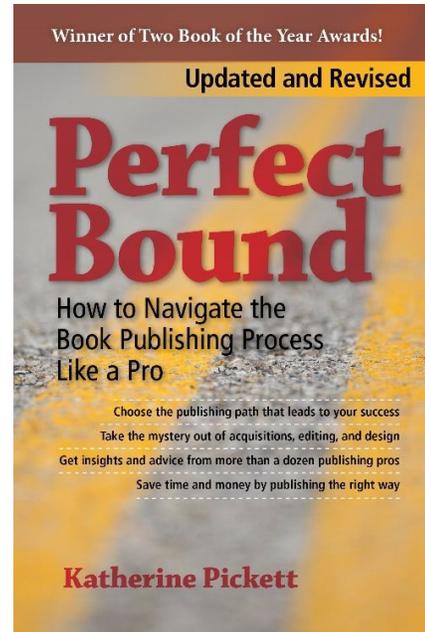
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## Question and Answer Session:

Q3. Does it cost to join the Author's Guild?

A3. It does cost money (about \$100) but you don't have to be a published author.

Q4. Are there people who can guide an author as to the best publishing option?

A4. Look for titles like: Editor, Book Coach, Publishing Consultant, or Book Shepherd, etc.

Q5. Do you have all this information in your book? How does one get all the time and information needed to publish a book?

A5. The book has the information needed, but it will require personal sacrifice to get the job done.

Q6. What must you do to be considered a self-publisher, does it have to be DIY?

A6. If you use your money in to publish, then you are a self-publisher.

Q7. Octavia Butler had a growing success, is that a way to do it?

A7. Yes, everyone should have role-models that they respect and model.

Q8. If someone self-published several successful books, will the traditional publisher consider publishing one of those previous novels?

A8. If you are making big waves, they will approach you. Going to them will be less successful. For example, *The Martian* and *50 Shades of Gray*, were picked up. Most of the time they would be more interested if you approach with a new related book in a successful series. There is a website called [Wattpad](http://Wattpad), where younger writers hang out and some have been picked up by bigger publishers.

Q9. How much do you consider the audience as an editor?

Q9. Absolutely, its essential. For example, for a technical book or a sci-fi book, you need to stay within their conventions. Find an editor that works in your genre. Once an editor changed Babe Ruth's called shot, while pointing to the deep fence, to his so-called shot, which made no sense.

Q10. How much do agents cost, how useful are they, are they required?

A10. Never pay an agent up front, they take a percentage of the advance and a percentage of the royalties. Mid-size publishers may take you without an agent, but the big ones never. They help a lot

on the contract negotiations. They can be found at [Agent Query](#) or [Query Tracker](#), but look for one familiar with your genre. Katherine loaded a file with the names of many resources for authors which is attached below.

Q11. How realistic is it to be picked up by a traditional publisher for a first-time author?

A11. It's hard to say. In general, the chances are slim. There is too much competition, thousands of books. If you have some following or it's on a topic that is really selling, go for it. In general, go for it, you can only lose time.

Q12. How do you tell what type of editor is needed?

A12. Katherine asks authors to send a sample and she can determine what type of editing is needed.

Q13. If I am really interested in creative control, why should I go to a traditional publisher?

A13. You would get experience, into bookstores, name recognition, no learning curve, and a little marketing help.

Q14. How much do you charge?

A14. I charge different amounts which are listed in the website. I'm transparent.

Q15. Is it a good idea to go to writers conferences?

A15. Be selective, they cost money. With covid it is more difficult, but generally very useful. Get out there.

Q16. What do you think of Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing?

A16. It is huge, it is good. They have improved their customer-service, they will actually call you back now. Setting up an account is free. My default answer is to use KDP and Ingram Spark for your

print-on-demand printing. KDP reaches Amazon which is 70% of all books sold. If you only use Ingram Spark for printing, Amazon may say your book is out of stock.

Q17. Are there experts to help with picking a title?

A17. Editors can help. Doing focus groups is a good way. You need to ask people who would read the book. And look at the competition. Scott Norton's *Developmental Editing* has a table in his book with 20 ways to find the book title. It's a great book in general.

Q18. Does your book have resources for Cover and Internal designers.

A18. Yes, of course, a whole chapter.

Q19. Does becoming a great writer depend on luck or persistence?

A19. Luck is when opportunity meets preparation. Luck does matter on getting picked up. Great writers have a magic that others have trouble imitating, like Dr. Seuss.

Suzanne thanked Katherine for a great and valuable presentation. She mentioned that we meet every second Tuesday of the month during the spring. On March 9<sup>th</sup> at 7 p.m. Brian Cohen will speak on Effecting Marketing on Amazon. Get on our newsletter!

## **Katherine's List of Resources**

### **Style and Writing Guides**

- *Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed. (book or online subscription)
- *AP Stylebook and Briefing of Media Law* (book or online subscription)
- *Gregg Reference Manual: A Manual of Style, Grammar, Usage, and Formatting*

- *The Sense of Style*, by Steven Pinker
- *The Emotional Craft of Fiction*, by Donald Maass

## Dictionaries

- *American Heritage Dictionary*, 5th ed.
- *Merriam-Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed.

## Finding Agents and Publishers

- AgentQuery.com
- Duotrope (<https://duotrope.com/>)
- Manuscript Wish List (<https://mswishlist.com/>)
- Publishers Marketplace ([www.publishersmarketplace.com](http://www.publishersmarketplace.com))
- [QueryTracker.net](http://QueryTracker.net)
- *Writer's Digest* ([www.writersdigest.com](http://www.writersdigest.com))

## Finding Professional Editors and designers

- Editorial Freelancers Association ([www.the-efa.org](http://www.the-efa.org))
- Northwest Independent Editors Guild ([www.edsguild.org](http://www.edsguild.org))
- [Reedsy.com](http://Reedsy.com)
- [Fiverr.com](http://Fiverr.com)

## Other Recommended Sources

- The Authors Guild ([www.authorsguild.org](http://www.authorsguild.org))
- Deltina Hay ([www.deltina.com](http://www.deltina.com))
- Independent Book Publishers Association ([www.ibpa-online.org](http://www.ibpa-online.org))
- Jane Friedman ([www.janefriedman.com](http://www.janefriedman.com)) and her book *Publishing 101* Joel Friedlander ([www.thebookdesigner.com](http://www.thebookdesigner.com))
- Penny Sansevieri ([www.amarketingexpert.com](http://www.amarketingexpert.com))
- Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, particularly the *Writer Beware* blog ([www.sfwaweb.org](http://www.sfwaweb.org))
- The POP Newsletter ([www.thepopnewsletter.com](http://www.thepopnewsletter.com))
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