

# SELF-PUBLISHING

# 101

Laetitia Sullivan

You've written a book but every publisher under the sun has turned you down. Now what? Welcome to the brave new world of self-publishing. During a workshop held at the Centre for the Book in Cape Town, Monica Bosman and Laetitia Sullivan discussed their respective roles in self-publishing the award-winning heritage cookbook *Sandveldkos: Kosnostalgie en stories van gister* and gave editors and aspiring authors useful tips on how to 'birth' their own books.



Self-publishing presenters Monica Bosman and Laetitia Sullivan with branch vice-chairperson Corné Janse van Rensburg and chef par excellence Bernard Ruthven

## TEN STEPS for the self-publishing success

The main advantage *and* disadvantage of self-publishing can be summed up in three words: *You* control everything. If you're brave enough, it can be a very rewarding experience, but only if you're willing to put in the work. Let's look at 10 steps that make it happen:



*Taste it*

*Sandveldkos* won 'Best Local Cuisine Book: Africa' at the Gourmand World Cookbook Awards 2018

### STEP 1 Do your research and assess the market

Try to establish clear motives for writing the book in the first place, especially if you want to turn a profit:

- Why am I writing this book? (Hint: I want to be rich is not the answer.)
- What is my book's USP? (Hint: Unique Selling Point is marketing-speak for why people should buy your book.) ➤





South Africa's own celebrity cover designer, Joey Hi-Fi, aka Dale Halvorsen, comments in an article on the '[acacia fatigue](#)' that some book covers suffer due to visual clichés, but also mentions how important visual shorthand is for cover design. Just remember that the cover is your elevator speech or sales pitch, and needs to convince the reader in the shortest time possible to part with their hard-earned cash.

### STEP 6 Proofreading, aka 'wrestling in a broom cupboard'

Gerard Hill, mentoring and tests director of the [Society for Editors and Proofreaders](#) (SfEP), gave the best explanation, in my opinion, of the difference between copy-editing and proofreading:

They are both editing, which is wrestling with words; but proofreading is like wrestling in a broom cupboard.

This 'wrestling' is usually the last stage in getting the text of your manuscript ready for publishing. There is an old chestnut in publishing that when an author sees their words in print for the first time, they will have the urge to rewrite everything. But the time for rewriting has now passed, as extensive changes at the proofreading stage can be very expensive.

### STEP 7 Printing and binding your masterpiece

If you have the desire to hold a physical copy of your book, you should consider the following before approaching a printer (adapted from *Publish like a pro* 2018):

- Type and size of the book eg A4 size full-colour cookbook, US trade-size text-only novel, digest-size black and white memoir with some tip-in colour photos.
- Number of pages eg litho-printed books are based on multiples of 8, 16 or 32; digitally-printed books are based on multiples of 2.
- Paper stock/weight eg inner pages: 70 gsm creamy bulky (fiction), 80 gsm bond (non-fiction), 115 gsm coated art paper (full-colour photo book); cover: 230 gsm sulphate board (paperback).
- Binding eg perfect/PUR (most common and cheapest), thread-sewing (more durable), saddle-stitching (books with low page counts).
- Quantity eg digital printing for small print runs (fewer than 750 copies); litho printing for large print runs (more than 1,000 copies).

As printing will swallow the bulk of your publishing budget, remember the golden rule: The higher the page count, the more it's going to cost. So 'kill those darlings' at the editing stage and your masterpiece will be cheaper to print.

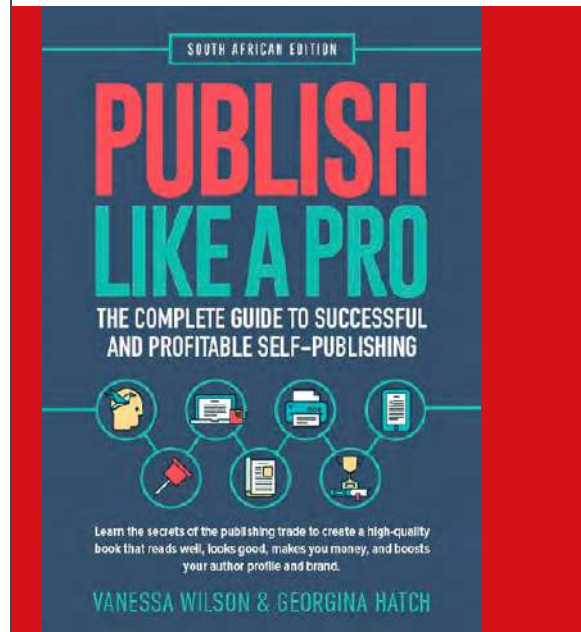
### STEP 8 E-books – the way of the future?

South Africans have been slow to join the e-book craze and many people still prefer the feel of a paper book. But this shouldn't stop you from making your book available in a more portable format.

In the e-book world, there is Amazon and then there's everyone else because Amazon controls about 70 per cent of the e-book market. So you'll have to decide if you want to make your e-book available in MOBI format, Amazon's proprietary format for Kindle, or in EPUB format for other e-readers such as Nook (Barnes & Noble), Kobo (Kobo Books), Google Play or iBooks (Apple). Keep in mind that online automatic e-book converters are only suitable for the most basic text-only fiction and narrative non-fiction books. Mark Coker's free e-book, [The Smashwords Style Guide](#), is a comprehensive guide on how to DIY your e-book conversion.

Lastly, many authors assume that PDFs and e-books are the same thing. Although a PDF preserves the integrity of your book's layout, this file format and e-readers don't play well, as adjustments can't be made according to the reader's preferences, so this file format is really only for devices with large screens. Still, it might be an easy format to use if you're only planning to sell directly from your own author website.

Proofreading is like wrestling in a broom cupboard.

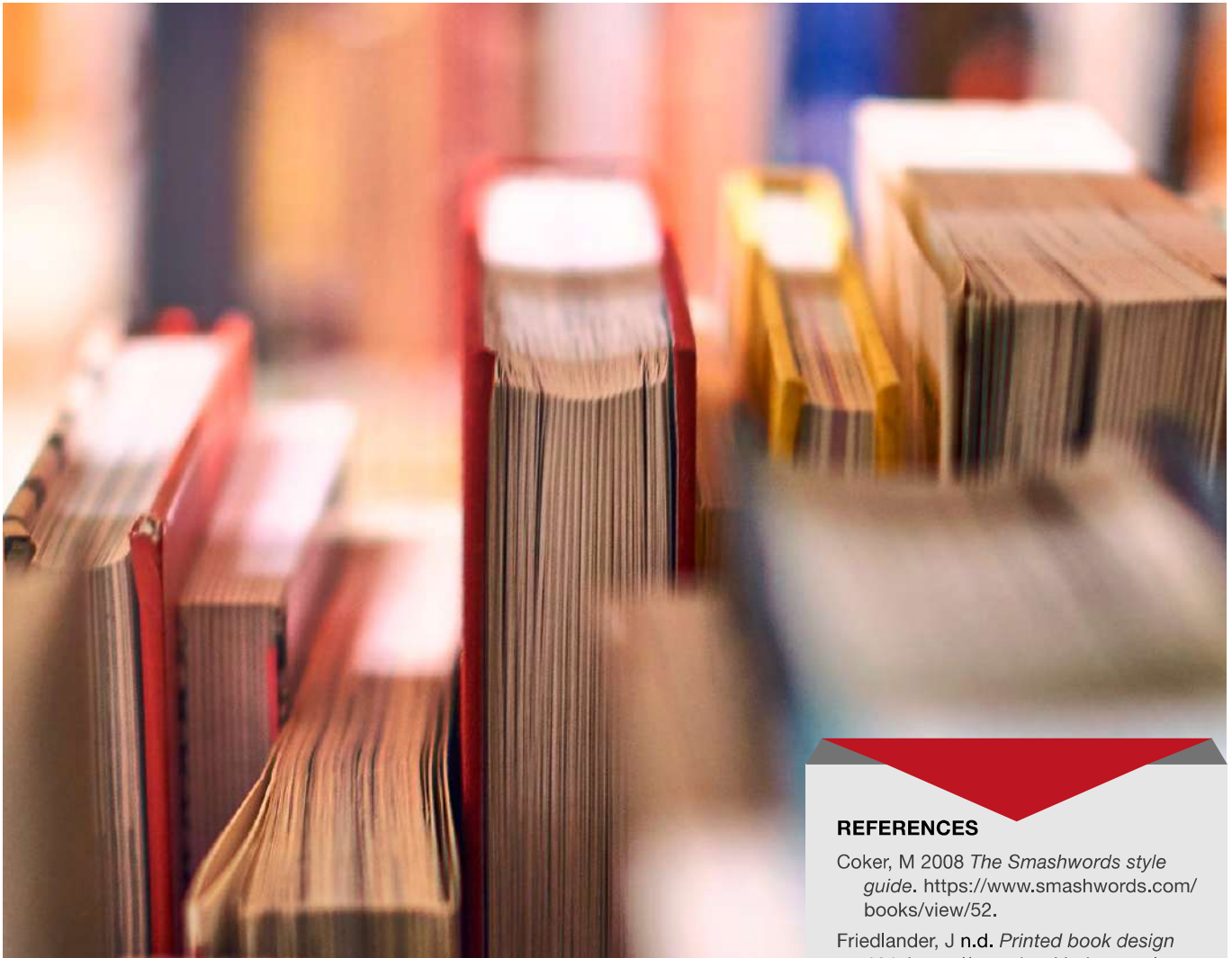


Insider advice for the self-publishing author.

### STEP 9 Work your connections, aka marketing

Now is the time to stop being a wallflower and channel your inner marketing guru. This is one area where many self-published authors don't want to do the work. There's no point in writing the definitive work on 'cooking for dogs' if nobody knows about it, so being bashful about your book will do you no favours. Here are some ways to promote your book:

- Hold a proper book launch (with snacks and drinks!).
- Send out press releases (to absolutely everyone in your network).
- Use social media (to engage with potential readers).
- Create your own author website (via Wix, Weebly or WordPress).
- Attend book fairs and expos (eg JOE Indie Pop-up Book Fair, Richmond BookBedonnerd, Open Book Festival).
- Offer free talks (to the public and special interest groups).
- Enter your book for awards or competitions (eg SA Independent Publishers Awards).
- Work your network to encourage word-of-mouth endorsements (via book champions or ambassadors and other authors).
- Offer prizes and giveaways (because everybody loves a freebie!). ➤



## STEP 10 Distributing and selling your book

Why is your book not in Exclusive Books, CNA or Bargain Books? This is the number-one question most self-published authors will be asked by the reading public. The answer is simple: major book chains don't deal with authors directly, only with book distributors. And major book distributors will take a large cut for distributing your book, leaving you with a measly 30 per cent of the retail price. You can see why getting your book into the major bookstores is a bit of a pipe dream and not the best option for maximising profits.

Independent bookstores are a much better bet as you'll be able to realise about 60 per cent of the retail price, but direct sales will be the method you want to focus on: selling directly at events (cash, SnapScan, Yoco); supplying books via your own website or through Facebook with Shopify Lite store integration; selling e-books through Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing, Smashwords, IngramSpark, Kobo Writing Life, Draft2Digital or PublishDrive; or, ultimately, driving around with copies in the boot of your car.

If the whole process of independently publishing your book simply sounds like too much work, there are various service providers (eg Porcupine Press, Staging Post, Rainbird, Naledi, Quickfox) that will take the grunt work off your hands (at a fee of course!).

### Reality check

You're unlikely to get rich from publishing a book in South Africa. Selling 3,000 copies is considered a bestseller and most self-published authors only sell a few hundred copies, with a lucky few passing the thousand mark. But if you believe your book has niche appeal and you're not afraid to market it to death, then jump in the deep end and start swimming! 🐟

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