

5 Misconceptions About Book Publishers

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By Ken Lizotte CMC

Contrary to popular conception, signing a deal with even a big-name commercial business book publisher typically does not spell Nirvana. To expect that your new publisher will set you up with a fat advance, a multi-city promotional tour, a personal PR rep and even so much as keep your book on the bookstore shelves is, well, an expectation that is totally off the wall.

To understand how book publishers really work, here's a list of 5 misconceptions people carry around with them concerning what the think a publisher is likely to do. Mercifully, I have also provided some explanations:

Misconception #1

A book publisher will aggressively promote me and my book, thus ensuring my book the widest possible visibility.

In an ideal world, publishers would like to provide this but in the real world, the scarcity of their own resources typically prevents it. Usually whatever advertising money, PR personnel, direct-mail campaign capability, and so on that a commercial publisher has available is likely to be directed toward those books that the publisher considers most likely to succeed, such as a

book by a celebrity author, a book on a subject that is currently hot in the news, or a book by an author whose previous books have sold very well. As a result, your publisher will have little, or nothing, left over to help with your book's promotion needs.

Misconception #2

A publisher will ensure my book gets on the shelves of the nation's bookstores, especially the largest ones.

With thousands upon thousands of books coming out each year and with hundreds upon hundreds of publishers out there pushing them, the best a commercial publisher can do is try. Even the biggest publishing houses with the largest sales forces can only get a bookstore or bookstore chain (read: Barnes & Noble) to agree to shelve a percentage of their new books, so you just can't be certain if one of those will be yours.

Misconception #3

A publisher will endorse, print, and communicate my ideas in my book the way I conceive them and arrange them.

Maybe, maybe not. If a publisher chooses to invest in you, it will also want in how the book will look physically (title, cover design,



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interior format, size, number of pages, hardcover vs. softcover, price) as well as what's actually said between its covers. Those most publishers do see you the author as

the expert, they may nonetheless assign an editor to you who wants to partner with you in decisions about content. So despite potential misgivings on your part, the final product could end up looking very different from the way you originally conceived it.

Misconception #4

A publisher will provide me with a sizable monetary advance, allowing me to take time off from my regular work so that I can focus exclusively on the book.

We've all read about mega-million-dollar advances to celebrities and politicians and of course it makes us salivate! But after all that largesse,

there's not much left over for the 95 percent of authors remaining on a publisher's book list. Besides, commercial publishers have got you pegged, realizing that as a first-time author you'll accept little or no advance in return for the opportunity to be published as well as that your book represents a marvelous marketing tool for expanding the visibility of your career or business. Thus be happy with an advance of 5K or less, then move on.

Misconception #5

A publisher will keep my book in circulation long enough for it to find its audience and build a following.

Calvin Trillin, a popular New Yorker writer who has written many bestselling books over the last few decades, once described the typical shelf life of a book as "somewhere between milk and yogurt." Trillin made this comment to Johnny Carson on the Tonight show back in the 1970s, but, if anything, book shelf lives have shrunk even tighter in the years since. Like movies and TV programs, books don't last long if they don't start selling right away. So get hopping and promote and sell your own book but fast! If you don't, your book will quickly be history.