

Putting a Price on Self-Publishing

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Whenever I tell people my current book is self-published, someone always asks, “How much did it cost?” And I’ve learned to ask back, “Do you want the simple answer, or the realistic one?”

The simple answer is **\$2,000**; the realistic response is, “Close to **\$6,000**.” Why the difference? And does it have to be that way? This article looks at the details behind one specific self-publishing adventure. Every book will take a unique path to becoming a tangible product depending on your goals, talents and budget. There’s no single “right” way, but there are definitely steps you can take that will put your book on the path to a professional and successful life.

I hope these details give you a starting point to knowing what tasks could/should be done, why they’re important, and how much they may cost.

First, to clarify the simple answer. In late 2005, I paid a printer **\$1,984** for 500 copies of The Braces Cookbook: Recipes You (and Your Orthodontist) Will Love. The book is 6”x9”, 96 pages long, and wire-o bound (a type of stiff wire that doesn’t “unravel” the way a spiral-wire can.) The pages are coated black/white, and the cover is laminated full color; you’ll need to ask several printers about their possibilities for binding style, paper weight, cover weight, coatings, gloss finish and other parameters, as each choice impacts cost.

Truthfully I must add in the price of shipping the books to me from the printing plant in Wisconsin: cost, **\$360**. So, the simple total was really **\$2,344**.

Design and Preparation

Now, let’s back up to viewing the full realistic picture. When I had finished writing the book, I hired a designer who is an expert in both book-cover design and book-interior layout. Unless your idea of self-publishing is typing a Word file to have copied at Kinko’s, you simply must have a designer do the layout, as it requires specialized software. And the cover had better look professional – from consumers to distributors, people do judge by appearances. Cost, **\$800** (cover design) plus **\$528** (interior design, charged on a per-page basis).

I paid the designer an extra **\$40** to purchase a font we jointly selected to use on certain titles throughout the text, and I hired a professional indexer to use her specialized skills and software to create an in-depth and useful index. The latter is an expected element of a non-fiction book; cost, **\$250** (a half-price discount, as she is a friend and was just getting started).

I had a photo studio shoot the cover image per my directions: cost, **\$187** (including all rights to the image file) plus **\$65** for the various props I needed for set-up. You may find neither of these fees apply to your project.

For editing, I relied on my 20+ years of writing and editing, and thus chose not to hire that outside service. However, for peace of mind, I did pay a per-word rate to a copy-editor, who checked for typos, missing descriptions, and inconsistencies (e.g., use of “tsp” versus “teaspoon”): cost, **\$90**.

Lastly, I went online to Bowker.com and signed up for an official ISBN number. At the time, each number was only \$25; I purchased a group of ten, and added \$75 for expedited processing: cost, **\$325**. (Check for current pricing.)

Marketing and Publicity

Since it’s pretty rare for a book to sell itself strictly by word of mouth, I paid for a number of items and services to start the (never-ending) promotional phase of the project. While the book was being laid out, I registered the book title as a website domain, to easily promote the book apart from my general company website: cost, **\$90** for five years. I have since also purchased related names, and arranged for them to click through to the same site. Since this information needed to be listed in the book, it was an early-priority task.

I went online to a business-card service and designed a 2-sided, full-color card with the book-cover image on the front and pertinent sales and contact information on the back: cost, **Free**. Then I ordered 2000 cards to be printed and shipped: cost, **\$128**.

Since a large part of my promotional campaign involved mailings, I also hired a graphic designer to produce a glossy, full-color, tri-fold brochure: cost, **\$200** (design) plus **\$635** (printing 2500 copies). Again, this is optional. (Further down the road, I taught myself Microsoft Publisher software and designed my own fliers (double-sided, color, printed at the UPS store on good quality stock). I can update the information as needed, print just a few at a time, and save the expense of professionally printing the tri-fold brochure, as that was hard to justify every time shipping costs increased and needed updating.)

Miscellaneous Up-Front Expenses

For my mailings, I bought 500 colored envelopes to coordinate with the brochures: cost, **\$28**. To assemble press kits, I found a box of 25 glossy two-pocket folders: cost **\$8**. For setting up at book fairs and signings, I found clear plastic brochure stands in bundles of four: cost, **\$25**.

Lastly, registering the copyright for the book’s contents, also done online, cost **\$45**. So, when all costs are added to the original, simple book “printing” price, the “real” self-publishing expenses totaled **\$5,788**, but I don’t regret a single choice.

Into the Future

Of course, that was just the beginning. Ongoing costs include paying for postage; buying packaging materials; paying for online credit-card transaction services; and keeping up with all the general costs of doing business.

Your initial expenses will vary depending on your book's page count, page size, binding style, design complexity, number of books printed, choice of printer, and choice of shipping method. Your continuing expenses will vary depending on the type of marketing campaign you choose to pursue, and how much of all this you choose to do yourself.

As an alternative, you may decide to work with one of a number of businesses that offer à la carte and package-deals on all the relevant tasks and costs. For a certain price, you make a few decisions and they do the legwork to produce a fixed quantity of finished books with suggestions on how to market them. Examine these options carefully for what they charge, what you get, and how much they charge per printed copy. Nowadays, you can also look into creating ebooks, but you have to investigate having your content formatted for each platform, e.g., Nook versus Kindle.

Whichever route you take, I hope this summary gives you some starting points toward embarking on your own self-publishing adventure. Feel free to contact me with questions; I'm glad to share, and I'm always learning.

FOOTNOTE

RE: Print-on-Demand (POD) book fabrication

I have never used one of these services and have no connection with any of them. I have heard of some people doing okay with them; I have also heard of many cautions about how many books you actually get, the actual cost, who actually owns the ISBN, whether a distributor or bookstore will agree to carry them, etc.

There seems to be an honest comparison of many POD vendors at:

http://writersweekly.com/pod_price_comparison/006614_03232011.html

It compares BookLocker (their service) with iUniverse, CreateSpace, and four sub-companies all with the same owner (Trafford, LuLu, AuthorHouse, Xlibris). Become well-informed before making any decisions to use such services.

Pamela Waterman operates The Discovery Box publishing company in Mesa, AZ. She is an author, technical writer and speaker on orthodontic, engineering, business and parenting topics. Her **Braces Cookbooks** series has won five awards; her previous books were published by Sourcebooks and EPI/Knowledge Adventure. She is a Contributing Editor to Orthotown and Desktop Engineering magazines.

