

The World of Publishing

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Date

13 March, 2024

Collection

[Village Reporter](#)

[VR 2024](#)

I am occasionally asked about publishing by someone who would like to publish a manuscript they authored. Since I now have published 60 books, sales totaling 80,000 copies, I have some experience in the process. It is often assumed that authors send manuscripts to potential publishers, then wait for an answer. Few publishers even bother to answer these inquiries. The fact is, less than one percent of all submitted manuscripts are ever published. Publishers today are swamped with submissions, so have become very selective. Many good manuscripts are rejected purely because they do not meet a particular publisher's interests. Even if the publisher agrees to review a manuscript, over 80 percent are rejected because they are not considered high enough quality. If published, the average book today sells less than 250 copies a year.

A writer must write for his/her audience. Women account for nearly 80 percent of all fiction sales in the U.S., and now author over half of all books published. Women read primary fiction-thriller, romance, and historical fiction. The best-selling genre is romance, and inspirational books are the most popular non-fiction genre, all areas in which I do not publish. I select topics to write about that have little or no competition. In evaluating books, publishers ask you to list the competition. In most cases I have none. I write on specific topics that are original, such as my book on C.S. Lewis's effective critique of scientism and evolution.

My main market in the past was Christian bookstores. As church attendance has plummeted (over 4,600 churches in a recent year closed) most all U. S. Christian bookstores have closed. Family Christian Stores, founded in 1931, in 2017 closed all 356 stores in 39 states. Southern Baptist Convention's LifeWay Christian Stores began in 1891. In 2018, they closed all 170 brick-and-mortar stores after losing nearly 50 million dollars. The Methodist-run chain, Cokesbury, closed its 57 stores in 2012. The end of most Christian bookstores met the collapse of the Christian Booksellers Association. Even the secular bookstore that carried Christian books, Borders, failed in 2011, closing 399 stores and laying off its 10,700 employees.

Of the 18 billion dollars annual book sales in the U. S., 71 percent are now sold online. The annual book-selling revenue of Amazon, the largest book-selling company in the world, is 28 billion dollars globally. In the United States, the company reportedly controls over 40 percent of all printed book sales. I sell very few books on Amazon, partly because of the enormous competition. Thousands of books are available in my general genre, apologetics / creation, and 100 times this many on evolution.

Of the over 1,000,000 books published every year in the U.S. over 700,000 are self-published, and 300,000 are published by commercial publishers. Over 90 percent of self-published books sell under 100 copies during their lifetime. They are sold mostly to friends and family and rarely enjoy a market beyond this. I have never taken this approach.

My Experience

I have been fortunate and have published non-creation academic books with Houghton Mifflin. Founded in 1832, they published Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, and Adolf Hitler. I was also published by Garland Science, Greenwood Press, Columbia University Press, and Syracuse University Press. I published three books by Master Books on apologetics and creation. One sold about 10,000 copies, but it took a decade. To obtain another Master Book contract, they must sell three to four thousand copies a year. Consequently, I have been unable to publish another book with them.

My books are available online at Walmart, Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Goodreads and other stores, but I am in competition with millions of other books and sell relatively few books in this market. My costs are also now increasing. Many

publishers now require the author to pay for typesetting which can cost 2-to-3 thousand dollars. Furthermore, to get the author's discount requires I order 400 to 1,000 copies which may take several years to sell. I also must pay both taxes and postage on my order, which can be several hundreds of dollars.

I will be speaking in Seattle in a week, and it cost me almost 200 dollars to ship five boxes of books there. The last time I was there, though, I sold almost every book I shipped. This allows parishioners to read at home the research that reinforces my sermon. I thus rely mainly on churches to support my ministry, and in the past have been blessed in this area. Fortunately, several small publishers now support my ministry, enabling four new titles to be published this year alone. If the current decline of Christianity continues, though, this may change. Nonetheless, with the continued help of supporters, I will continue to move forward to get out my message.

- 2 views

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