

WHITE PAPER

Five Crucial Mistakes Libraries Should Avoid With Self-Publishing

A SELF-E WHITE PAPER



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With the number of [indie authors in the book market expected to increase](#) and a [steady demand for independently published books](#), many libraries are interested in how their programming serves their communities' desires to take up their pens. Hugh Howey, Andy Weir, L. Penelope and other popular traditionally published authors who started their literary careers as self-publishers spark readers' imaginations not only for their fictional stories, but also for their personal stories of success.

Libraries inhabit a space uniquely suited to self-published books — one where stories can be both created and circulated. However, incorporating self-publishing can seem like a daunting task for many libraries. It poses challenges associated with acquisition, of course, but also with curation and potentially even with outreach. This white paper outlines five mistakes libraries should avoid when incorporating self-published books into their services and programs:

- Ignoring the facts about self-published books
- Overcomplicating the process
- Making choices for indie authors
- Being too inclusive or exclusive
- Letting self-published books exist in a vacuum

This paper then demonstrates that with the right tools and programs, libraries can feasibly and seamlessly support community members at any stage of their writing journeys, and help connect their stories to the rest of the community.

Mistake 1

Ignoring reading and publishing trends

In addition to serving their patrons' literary appetites, libraries pride themselves on keeping up with the latest trends in technology. eReading has been on the rise for years, a fact that over 90% of libraries respond to by offering ebook lending services. Despite indie authors choosing [ebooks as their format of choice](#), only 20% of libraries carry self-published ebooks.¹ Consider this in conjunction with the rise in

publishing trends and the availability of self-published ebooks in the library.

By leaving self-published ebooks out of their collections, libraries risk not reaching a crucial component of their patronage: those that engage in eReading and are willing to explore books regardless of who publishes them.



20% of libraries carry self-published ebooks

Source: Library Journal Self-Published Book Survey Report 2016

In order to reconcile both reading trends – that is, the increase in eReading and the increase in the reading of independently published books – with publishing trends – that is, the increase of ebooks by indie authors in the book market – libraries must include self-published ebooks among their collections.

popularity of books by indie authors and the rise in the number of indie books in the book market, and you soon realize the dissonance between reading and

¹ Library Journal Self-Published Book Survey Report

Mistake 2

Spending more time or money than necessary

Libraries that decide to acquire self-published ebooks find that they are faced with two sets of challenges related to time and resources. One set of obstacles that librarians are familiar with is adding the books to their catalogs and collections, both of which are often time-consuming tasks.

In a time when [consumers are increasingly turning to locally produced goods](#), it's not surprising that libraries that choose to add self-published books to their collections would prefer to include those written by authors in their region. While many local authors are willing to donate print copies of their books, the cost associated with producing a print book could limit the number of books and authors that can be included in libraries' collections. What's more, because these books sometimes require extra effort to be acquired, some libraries must also charge authors a specialty handling fee, further limiting the number of books and authors available. Ebooks

seem to require less time and energy to process, but even with popular self-publishing services and distributors like Smashwords and FastPencil, libraries are forced to sift through titles to find those relevant to their location.

Yet another set of challenges posed is related to funding.



17% of public libraries state that they do not include self-published ebooks due to budget concerns.²

While these books are certainly much cheaper than traditionally published print books and ebooks, circulation constraints that limit how much an indie eBook can be read often discourages libraries from considering the addition worth the monetary investment. Buying ebooks individually through established vendors is always going to be more expensive than subscribing to a growing collection.

Instead of expending too much energy to maintain and grow their collections of self-published ebooks, libraries should maximize their efforts by turning to tools that simplify acquisition and curation scalably and economically.

² *Library Journal* Self-Published Book Survey Report

Mistake 3

Being too inclusive or exclusive of self-published materials

Another set of challenges that is unique to self-published writing is perhaps the most prevalent concern for librarians who want only the best for their readers: quality. Indeed, 21% of public libraries state that they do not include self-published books due to concerns over poor content quality.³ The problems with being too inclusive are obvious. Even the most good-intentioned, big-hearted librarians who want to feature as many local authors as possible among their collections are deterred by the risk of offering an abundance of low quality books to their patrons.

Naturally, libraries want to provide the best literature for their patrons. When it comes to self-published work, third party recognition, such as reviews from reputable sources, is the easiest way for librarians to distinguish books of higher quality.

Unfortunately, obtaining third party recognition once again superficially limits the number of titles that can be included in a library's collection, as most indie authors, even those with very positive reviews, must pay to be reviewed in the first place.

As with having to pay to produce a print book, this excludes authors that cannot afford these review services regardless of the merit of their books. It also hinders patrons who seek locally written books from having a larger selection from which to choose.

If libraries want to include locally-written books based purely on their merit rather than their authors' financial assets, the harsh reality seems to be that librarians must vet them for quality. With 26% of public libraries stating that they do not have time to read and evaluate self-published books, it comes as no

³ *Library Journal* Self-Published Book Survey Report

surprise that the idea of creating and implementing a formal submission process for these special cases is enough to deter libraries from including self-published ebooks among their collections altogether.⁴

Libraries should find a balance of inclusivity and exclusivity by using a model that will allow as many of their communities' self-published authors as possible to participate while highlighting the best locally-written books.

Mistake 4

Referring authors to third party publishing and distributing companies

In an attempt to help self-published authors, libraries sometimes refer them to publishers. One downfall to this is that it creates more work for librarians. Because there are numerous reasons that authors self-publish their books and numerous commercial publishing options available to them to meet their needs, librarians end up playing the role of advisor to local authors

by researching publisher options and considering which is best for each author on a case-by-case basis.

Another downfall to referring independent authors to publishers is that it puts librarians at risk of straining relationships between themselves and local authors who may become dissatisfied with which self-publishing services and ebook distributors to which librarians refer them. Rather than risk extending their roles and creating strained relationships, librarians are safest when they are impartial to external publishing and distribution services.

Instead of referring independent authors to third party publisher and distributors, the role of the library should be to provide services and tools to easily let books into the library and simultaneously empower authors to make their own decisions as to commercially publishing the book.

⁴ *Library Journal Self-Published Book Survey Report*

Mistake 5

Letting programs for indie authors stop at indie authors

Libraries that serve their local indie authors by including their books among their collections may also wish to extend their services to their local writing community by incorporating programming. One of the most popular methods is to create writing groups and circles.

- 4 Historians, researchers and subject matter experts
- 5 Speech coaches

This will help round out programming and allow librarians to reach a wider range of authors at different points in their publication processes. Plus, it broadens indie authors' support network and connects more community members.

How SELF-e Helps Libraries Avoid All Five Mistakes

SELF-e, a partnership between *Library Journal* and BiblioBoard, strategically solves each mistake, making it easy for libraries to be at the center of the indie book movement and serve both local authors and their patrons, while simultaneously connecting community members.

It nurtures a modern reading culture that recognizes current trends in reading and publishing. Because ebooks submitted to the SELF-e program by local authors are displayed on BiblioBoard's mobile, digital library, patrons can read them on

But libraries shouldn't hesitate to think bigger. After all, writing a book is only one part of publishing a book.

Librarians should reach out to others in their communities who have expertise or experience in elements beyond writing, such as those listed below.

- 1 Artists and designers
- 2 Marketing experts
- 3 Financial advisors

Android and iOS devices in addition to on computers. This reflects not only the growing trends of eReading and local reading, it also reflects the increasing number of ebooks by indie authors available in the book market.

The SELF-e program allows authors to

SELF-e also liberates librarians from having to undergo traditional processes of acquisition, curation and vetting, while also helping libraries find a balance between inclusivity and exclusivity.

access the online submission portal outside of libraries. Each ebook that is submitted to SELF-e by an author is automatically included in a [statewide collection](#) that features other books from indie authors in the same state, meaning that there are no steps that librarians have to take to expand their collections. Every ebook also has the chance to receive a *Library Journal*

stamp of approval by being selected as a “highlight,” which marks it as being of exceptional quality, and makes it available to be read by library patrons nationally. Besides discoverability, authors also have the chance to earn royalties, since SELF-e books can have [buy buttons](#) next to them for library patrons to purchase them instantly.

Because BiblioBoard partners with Pressbooks’ e-publishing software for [Pressbooks Public](#), libraries can provide in-house publishing for their local writing community. This lets libraries take a neutral and self-sufficient stance to publishers, and provides yet another service for authors in their area.

Finally, since community engagement is a key component of SELF-e, it encourages libraries to serve as a hub for community connections. It provides support for authors to attend and facilitate events like Indie Author Day, local book festivals and more, and helps local writers be discovered beyond their immediate communities.

References: *Library Journal* Self-Published Book Survey Report 2016

About SELF-e

Connecting Indie Books, Libraries and Readers

Libraries are driving a new era of ebook discovery for indie authors and small presses. SELF-e helps develop robust local writing communities and keeps libraries at the center of the indie book movement.

With SELF-e and Pressbooks Public, libraries can support their local author communities from the first words they type to worldwide circulation, all while feeling confident in *Library Journal's*

ability to identify the best indie books through their trusted curation process.

With SELF-e's statewide collections, national SELF-e Select genre-based collections, the SELF-e Ambassador program and ongoing contests, there are many ways for libraries to help authors achieve recognition in their local communities and beyond.

WE LOVE HEARING FROM YOU!

