

THE SUCCESSFUL SELF-PUBLISHING WORKSHOP

BY

OWEN EARLY

Some information from a talk by Owen Early, a freelance book representative, who has been in the book publishing and distribution industry since the 1980s.



Date - August 2021

Venue - Exclusive Books,
Melrose Arch, Johannesburg,
South Africa

Notes taken by - Shams Essack

Owen Early represents the following publishing / distribution companies:

- Phambili Agencies
- HPH Publishing
- Blue Weaver
- Naledi
- Cover2Cover Books
- Xavier Nagel Agencies
- New Horizon Distributors

- 1) Shams: The event was delayed by two months because of COVID-19. In 2021 we were in lockdown.
- 2) Owen Early worked at Exclusive Books in Hillbrow, Johannesburg in 1981.
- 3) He was involved in publishing a book called "Three Men Called Matthew". It sold 500 copies.
- 4) What is the procedure for getting a distributor for your self-published book?
- 5) Write an AI for your book.
- 6) An AI is an Advance Info sheet. 1 page A4. It needs to have a photo/image of your book cover. Each publisher / distributor has their own format for an AI. Also add in key info about the author, a book description, etc.
- 7) Managers / owners of book shops are under time pressure and they select books to sell in their shops by looking at the AI that the book representative gives them.
- 8) Assisted self-publishing, e.g. Reach does it. They don't do distribution. It is hard to get a distributor in SA. You send the AI to the distributor. Find a distributor before you go to print. The distributor will give you the number of copies to print.
- 9) In the AI get an endorsement from a well-known person. The endorsement goes on the front cover or back cover of the book. Also get a well-known person connected with the content of your book to write the foreword. It helps with sales.
- 10) Buyers love to know that you have a proposed marketing plan. You can hire a publicist, e.g. Helen Holyoale. She also works with Exclusive Books and is connected to magazines to get publicity for your book.
- 11) The fact that you're paying attention to the marketing re: marketing plan puts you in a good light.
- 12) ISBN – it is the ID no. of the book. You get it from the National Library in South Africa, it is free. The printer needs it – you must have a barcode (13 digits). It takes a week to get this.
- 13) Owen likes Digital Action printers – reasonably priced. Some printers can get ISBNs and bar codes for you as well.
- 14) Nielsen's – biggest data collection company.. Nielsen's produce a database of all books in print. SAPNET is SA branch of Nielsen. They offer all sorts of add-ons for extras. Nielsen will ask you who the distributor is. So sign a distribution deal first.
- 15) For registering with a new vendor. Head office Exclusive Books will allocate you a vendor number. This is how it tracks your book.
- 16) Five Exclusive Books need to say yes to get your books into this book chain. You need to get five Exclusive Books to sign up for your book. Gretten Kirk is the CEO of Exclusive Books. Owen prefers Exclusive Books for book distribution.
- 17) Owen's Rule of – 1/3 of books shop managers will like it, 1/3 will be ambivalent, 1/3 will hate it.
- 18) Author will send email to all 46 Exclusive Books managers. Once five say yes. It will become accessible to other stores.

- 19) The “Chatsworth” book by Pravasan Pillay. It sold 300+ copies. It is “micro-published”. It sells well at Exclusive Books Durban airport. They can transfer it to other Exclusive Books if someone requests it.
- 20) When Exclusive Books, etc. hear a book is self-published they are not keen on it. When Owen self-published the book, “Three Men Called Matthew” he designed a logo for the book to make it look professional. They came up with a “Red Lion Book” logo. There are no legal implications to doing this. If a book doesn’t have a publisher logos on the spine it doesn’t look professional. When designing the spine of the book – make sure that the text on the spine goes in the correct direction. Check for typos, layout, issues, etc.
- 21) “Three Men Called Matthew” book had two typos. The criticism of the book was that it was too long.
- 22) Graphic designers are important: book covers are part of the fashion industry.
- 23) Exclusive Books – they are “Exclusive”; they are fussy.
- 24) Cover design - spend money on it.
- 25) There are certain conventions and looks about books and book covers. Follow them so that your book looks professional.
- 26) Sue Nyathi, author of the “The Polygamist”. Her first cover was ok. Sue was so driven – she promoted her book. She went to book clubs and book circles – she travelled all over. She was able to approach Pan Macmillan who published it. Her social media was outstanding. It came out at the right time – there were very few black female authors when she published her book.
- 27) An author self-published a book but the font was too tiny. They got so many requests for the book that Protea Books took it on and improved the formatting and layout. It sold thousands and thousands of copies.
- 28) The cover must reflect the genre. There are two book sizes for fiction books. Trade paperback (larger size) and ordinary paperback. Hardcover become too expensive.
- 29) On the front table display of a book shop you need a trade paperback for fiction to make it look good.
- 30) Non-fiction – the size doesn’t matter that much. Exclusive Books is not fussy about the size of non-fiction books.
- 31) Some political, etc. books come out in trade paperback.
- 32) Printers seduction. Printers will try to seduce you to print as many copies as possible.
- 33) When you can print 1 book at a time with printer = Print-on-demand.
- 34) The AI is important – you need to pre-sell your book before it is published.
- 35) Print an extra 100 in case there is high demand.
- 36) Printer of the “Chatsworth” book were able to print quickly when copies sold well.
- 37) Publicity and marketing phase. Send review copies to the media.

- 38) Ask yourself why you're doing this – is it gold or glory?
- 39) You need to be thick-skinned and keep going re: rejection.
- 40) Most people didn't earn a living from being a full-time author.
- 41) In SA we buy more non-fiction than fiction. In most other countries the opposite is true. It is hard to assess if a fiction book is good or not.
- 42) If you don't have lots of resources the publish on Amazon first. Pay someone for graphic design and layout. Amazon has POD (Print on Demand). Exclusive Books in is limited to South Africa. You can't go to Exclusive Books with an eBook.
- 43) JT (Janita Thiele) Lawrence a South African author writes sci-fi and fantasy. She did an excellent cover design of her books.
- 44) Amazon KDP– book reviews on Amazon KDP can only be given by verified buyers. Janita Thiele Lawrence's books do well on Amazon especially with US buyers. They couldn't sell her hard copy books in SA. She is fantastically successful on Amazon in her genre. She is prolific. She gave lots of freebies away on Amazon. She used Audible as well.
- 45) Legal deposit. You need to send a copy of your hardcopy book published in SA the National Library. [Shams: you need to send 5 copies of your book to 5 SA National Libraries.]
- 46) Pricing – if your recommended retail price of your book is R300. The retailer takes 50%. The distributor will take commission of about 25%. R10 will go to the book rep.
- 47) Shams: Owen's rough price calculation if you want to go the book shop route vs selling it from the boot of your car / your own website, etc. Take the net cost of producing and printing your book and the profit you want to make per book, then multiply this number by x 3 to get the Exclusive Books RRP inc VAT. So, if you want your book to be R300 inc VAT at Exclusive Books then your book cover design, layout, printing, etc. and your personal profit margin must fit into R100.
- 48) The book trade calculates its pricing backwards, e.g. R300 inc VAT is the RRP to Exclusive Books; Exclusive Books will want to make 50% on the price it pays therefore they will want the book at R150.
- 49) Shams: So for "Memories of MaP" book if we want to sell it at Exclusive Books. I can't charge more than R690 inc VAT (price of a coffee table book). Divide by 3 = R230. My cover, publishing, proofreading, printing, distribution and my own royalty fee cost must fit into R230 per book! Otherwise sell your book directly to your audience.
- 50) Author royalties if you go the traditional book publishing route are about 10% to 15%.
- 51) You may supply bookshops near where you live – if distributing it yourself.
- 52) If you are you committed to a long term writing career then self-publishing and publishing could work out for you.
- 53) You can judge a book by its cover.
- 54) The 3 metre rule. You should be able to stand 3 metres away from book and be able to tell what the book is about.
- 55) Spine is NB – this is what buyers see. Make spine outstanding and stand out from other books that it's next to.

- 56) Picture books – for kids – “picture flats”. You can print them cheaply in China for R50.
- 57) White covers that are matte – it gets dirty.
- 58) You need a gloss white cover if you want to use white.
- 59) For non-fiction. You don’t need an expensive graphic designer.
- 60) The paper for fiction – cream paper – it’s called book wove. It has a soft feel. It’s more expensive.
- 61) Non-fiction – not fussy about paper.
- 62) Joe Hamilton. She is an educational psychologist and is on Radio 702 all the time who has a book. You’ve got to get this book if your child is being bullied by school.
- 63) Why so much emphasis on design? Owen has to sell your book twice. He needs to sell it to the book shop manager and the customer. Simone, the manager of Exclusive Books, Melrose Arch is looking at international books so your book needs to have the same quality. You need to get through this hurdle. Your book needs to look like it was published by a big publishing company.
- 64) Content trumps cover.
- 65) You don’t need to copyright a book. Once you publish it you have copyright.
- 66) Deep South are publishers in the Cape and they do poetry in English and indigenous languages.
- 67) AVBOB – every 2nd year they sponsor a poetry book. Naledi Publishers, publishes AVBOBs books. They are in Gaansbaai.
- 68) Once you can prove your books sell and you have a track record you can go to mainstream publishers.
- 69) You need to make an appointment with Exclusive Books manager to ask if they will take your book on.
- 70) In SA they do remainder books not pulping. In some other countries, they pulp and recycle books that don’t sell.
- 71) Owen is a freelancer. He does work for Blue Weaver.
- 72) Blue Weaver does some marketing. Bruce Fordyce hired Helen Holyoake.
- 73) If you have your book launch at Exclusive Books, they pay for 50% of snacks for launch. You need to have your book taken on by Exclusive Books.
- 74) If you don’t get enough RSVPs they may cancel your book launch.
- 75) You need to make a name for yourself to get interest in your book.
- 76) It is hard to keep interest after 6 months. You need to be doing social media and promote your book. The shelf life of most books is 6 months.
- 77) 2nd, 3rd, editions. If you reprint – if no changes then no need for new ISBN.
- 78) Koleka Putuma writes poetry. She want to schools, universities etc. to sell her book.
- 79) TNY in Singapore prints coffee table books and places in China at a cheaper price.
- 80) There are about 150 bookshops in SA, including 80 bargain book stores.

81) Van Schyk book shop sells mainly text books.

82) R690 inc VAT is a good price for a coffee table book. Exclusive Books only take three copies of each coffee table book.

83) Obie Oberholzer does coffee table books.

84) Business books sells second most copies as a genre. Self-help is no. 1.

85) Memoir in SA unless you're a household name – it is tough or It needs to be a very unique story.

86) Owen Early also works with Bookdealers book shop.

87) Owen suggests Reach Publishers and Porcupine Press for self-publishing.
