

## **Notes on Publishing**

### **After the Ubud Writers and Readers Festival in Indonesia**

**by Ricker Winsor**

The main dilemma for developing authors is how to find people to read what they write. At the Ubud Festival an author named David Vann, who is now a star, spent 12 years trying to get a literary agent to take on his first book. Finally it happened. The question from the moderator was, “If you had to do it over would you just go ahead and publish it yourself ?” Basically he said no because: 1. Self-publishing hurts you in the eyes of the establishment press, and 2. Nobody will read it anyway except your friends. So, his feeling was that you should spend the 12 years and get published by a “legitimate” publisher which will give you credibility and maybe a teaching job at a university.

I took two, three/four hour workshops on publishing and self-publishing subsequent to that discussion and I brought up his points at each. And although the credibility issue surrounding the “Vanity Press” still exists it is changing fast. For one thing the quality of the self-published books is getting higher and higher as editors and designers get involved in this expanding market. Another aspect is the exponential growth of digital books/eBooks. My book is available on Amazon either as a real book sent to you by mail or as a book for your Kindle. The statistic I heard suggests that eBooks will overtake “real” books in the marketplace by 2017 in the USA with other countries following right along afterwards.

Another interesting fact is that even conventional publishers are now expecting the author to do a great deal of the marketing. In fact if you float your book out there to agents you need to tell them about the 400 people on your email list, your 500 followers on Twitter and Facebook. That is very important to them. Something not so nice about the conventional publishers are the kinds of contracts they make you sign or try to make you sign. They can be a form of modern slavery which is why many “legitimate” authors are turning to self-publishing. Even people with a popular book out in the bookstores are publishing their second book themselves.

The bottom line to it all is marketing. A lot of what I learned has to do with the opportunities available to market your book through social media. We are in a global world and through the internet we have access to the world. If your book is on Amazon as mine is, it is available in multiple countries at the same time. But people have to know about the book.

How do we do this? Well, I will just bring up a few points. You need a strategy before you publish your book. My book is called “Pakuwon City, Letters from the East”. In terms of Google searches that might be about as ineffective a title as a person could find. Maybe some of the other key words or metadata like “whorehouses” or “adventure” could do something but not much. You have to identify your audience. I think my book is a good book. The people who read it thought so and more than one said he “couldn’t put it down”. But, I don’t know what my book is about or who my audience is or might be. And those facts, from a marketing perspective, are dire problems.

One of the bright digital teachers leading the first workshop asked me what my book was about and I said it was “creative nonfiction” which meant nothing to him so I said, “Sex around the world” trying to be outrageous which is more and more difficult. “No” he said, “It has to be some kind of niche sex, something specific.” This is all about Google and how search engines work. Your title, your chapter headings, and so forth have to relate to a person, your audience, somewhere in the world. Someone out there might want to know about a “youthful quest” or a “motorcycle adventure in Morocco” or “living in Madrid with beatniks”. This is not something I have spent much time thinking about. But there are people out there who are very good at thinking about these things. I also learned is that in the world of self-publishing it is a team effort more and more and that you have to spend some money to get the help you need.

My book was published with the help of Alec Clayton of Mud Flat Press. He is a fine writer and also a fine painter. He helped me as a friend and did a great job and maybe made about \$15 for his trouble. Once it was published I ordered some books, maybe 50, passed them out to my friends, told people on my email list and retired, I guess hoping that some humanoid in a post-apocalyptic dystopia might be sifting through the rubble and find MY BOOK.

We want readers to read what we write and I learned a lot about how to use the social media effectively and not in an annoying way. There is an art to it which I already suspected. You don't want to wear out your people but, at the same time, you want them to know what you are doing. You have to know that the average Facebook post lasts about 30 minutes unless somebody likes it or shares it and if you post at six o'clock in the morning people won't see it or your tweets either. People mostly are online from 9-11 and night and on weekends. We have to know these things. At the same time you don't want your life taken up with social media beyond what is useful. Discipline is required; a schedule is required. There is actually software that will post things you have written and saved and post them on a schedule, like something new every three days. I won't be going there, doing that but I could decide when the best times are for my communications to be seen and spend a half hour twice a week posting them.

I listened and talked to a lot of very fine writers. It was humbling actually but I was happy to be so impressed by them. Many referred to their condition before they were popular and looked back to that as a better state. A woman author from the former East Germany said, "It is good to be not so interesting." Can you imagine Emily Dickenson going around to literary festivals? Overwhelmingly authors considered writing "its own reward" and very much "worth doing". I believe that.

Ricker Winsor in Bali

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