

## Publishing with Youwriteon.com

It always seemed like a mammoth task to publish 5,000 books in less than two months from October 2008 in time for Christmas – and for free, which is what the very small Youwriteon team aimed to do. Needless to say, very few books actually appeared in Christmas stockings. I submitted my PDF manuscript about a month before the deadline and I was notified that my novel *The Last Dance over the Berlin Wall* was published in mid-January 2009. In trying to hurry things, they did try to get me to choose one of the standard book covers saying that mine didn't meet the requirements, but having already published a draft of it for myself with Lulu (who use the same printers in the UK), I knew there was nothing wrong with the specs. They did eventually publish it how I wanted and the quality of the book was good. However, there soon appeared other problems.

Firstly, there was no easy way to order the book and orders took a long time to be dispatched.

Secondly, the title was wrong. It was only a missing definitive article but *The Last Dance over the Berlin Wall* became on Amazon *The Last Dance over Berlin Wall*. That annoyed me. I was able to change it on Amazon but because the publishing details had been wrong in the first place, it was being picked up by other online booksellers with the erroneous title.

Thirdly, it was only after publishing that I was told how much the book would retail for. The very low retail price meant very low profits for the author. I could buy the book for the high price of £5.72 and that also meant that there was no way I would be able to sell in shops and compete with the online retail price of £6.99 as shops require a minimum of 30%-50% discount. The 60% net royalty 'after printing costs' is negligible on £1.27.

Fourthly, even by the time I'd changed the title on Amazon, there was no synopsis which meant that potential readers didn't have a clue what the novel was about – except, judging by the title, that it was badly written.

Finally, the Youwriteon team rarely responded to emails and despite my requesting them to get the title right and add the synopsis (which I had sent to them) they still hadn't after two months so that's when I decided that it was time to part company.

I was attracted to the deal partly because it was free (except for the £39.99 distribution fee) and partly because it was funded by the British Arts Council – at least, that's what I thought. However, I have since discovered that the British Arts Council funded the website rather than the publishing venture. It would be easy to scream that it was a scam as they would have made almost £200,000 on the distribution packages alone but I don't think that was their intention. Self-publishing one book can be a nightmare so the idea of 5,000 is very very frightening. They probably hadn't realised what it all entailed.

If you are thinking of publishing a manuscript just to have a few copies for your friends and family, then it is a perfectly fine way of doing it. But it is still cheaper and more user-friendly on Lulu.

Lisa Selvidge, 31 March 2009

