

# What Small Presses Can Do for You

By Katie Rose Guest Pryal

Say you have an idea for a trade book, that is, smart nonfiction for a popular audience. You might even have some chapters written or an entire manuscript. What are you going to do with it?

You have three choices. You can find an agent to help you place it with a major publisher. You can self-publish it. Or you can submit it without an agent to a traditional small press. I'm here to talk to you about the third option.

## Trade Publishing Basics

Let's break down the phrase "traditional small press." A small press is any press that isn't one of the "Big Five," which are Random House/Penguin (sometimes called "Random Penguin" because that sounds hilarious), Simon and Schuster, HarperCollins, Hachette and MacMillan. These days, in the publishing world, we sometimes say there are six because Amazon Publishing has grown to such a degree that it rivals the others.

Knowing whether a press is small or not can be confusing, because the large publishers have many imprints. If you pick a book up off the bookshelf and it doesn't have one of those big names on the spine, open it up to the copyright page. Often you will see language like this: "Bubbles Books is an imprint of Large House," where "Bubbles Books" is an imprint I just made up and "Large House" is one of the major publishers.

The main takeaway here is that you cannot approach any of the big six publishers without an agent. But, you can approach traditional small presses.

But what about that other word, "traditional?" "Traditional," in the context of publishing, means the publisher pays all costs of publication. You, the author, do not have to pay any fees to get your book published.

With the rise of self-publishing (which I think is great!), there has also been a rise in something called "predatory publishers." A predatory publisher requires you to pay money to publish your book. In fact, predatory publishers are becoming common.

It should cost you *nothing* to publish a book with a publisher. If you have to pay money, you should self-publish. Self-publishing costs money, but at least you'll be in control of your book and your rights and your career, and you won't be tied to a predatory company that takes a cut of your earnings.

*The most important thing you can do before you ever submit a book or proposal is to figure out the needs and personality of a press.*

Authors, especially beginning authors, deserve transparency and respect and to have their rights protected. Publishers should never abuse authors' trust. But they will, so you must be careful.

Now, let's talk about why a small press might be right for you.

## Benefits of a Small Press

What are the benefits of publishing with a small press? I am very honest with our authors at our press. You will not get rich publishing books with us. We cannot pay advances. Instead, we give a strong royalty split (usually somewhere around 30% or 40%).

What we do for our authors is this: We will edit your book, and we're very good editors. We will design covers for your book (paperback and front covers), and we're very good cover designers. We produce your book (interior production), and we're good at that too. All of the large and small things many authors do not consider, we do: we assign ISBNs for your ebook and paperback (those cost money), we acquire Library of Congress (LOC) numbers (and mail your book to the LOC—which means your book is in the LOC, and how cool is that?), and we handle book distribution via multiple channels, so that your book can be stocked in bookstores around the world.

And after your book is published, the hard part starts: marketing and advertising. We ask our authors to be our partners in marketing—but so do all publishers, including the big ones. In fact, the only publisher that's doing any kind of good job with marketing its authors' books is Amazon. What a (good) small press brings is marketing and advertising wisdom. We know how to place ads, and we pay for them, and we help our authors make bestseller lists. We help them win awards.

Our authors bust their butts with marketing, but we make sure they're not wasting their energy doing things that don't work. We're easy to reach on the phone, by text and by email. We support our authors all the way. If you are published with a traditional press and what I've described has not been your experience, then your press, and your editors, are doing it wrong. (Or maybe you are an insufferable jerk, but if that's the case, then your editor

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## Thank You, WIHE Team!

This is my 36th issue as editor of *WIHE*. (How did that happen so quickly?) I've now been the editor of this fabulous feminist newsletter for three years. I hope to be the editor for many more years to come. *WIHE* would not be the publication it is without the many folks who work alongside me, including our writers, copy editor, production manager, social media manager and publishing editor. They include:

- Lois Elfman
- Mary Lou Santovec
- Katie Rose Guest Pryal
- Karen Costa
- Amma Marfo
- Doris Green
- Amanda Rutstein
- James Sigman
- Richard Reicherter
- Lora Templeton
- Joan Hope

Thank you all for everything you do! I couldn't do it without you. 📖

—KJB

## **Women on the Move,** *continued from page 10*

- **Dr. Diana Rogers-Adkinson** moves from dean of the College of Education, Health, and Human Studies at Southeast Missouri State University to provost and senior VP of academic affairs at Bloomsburg University PA.
- **Dr. Stephanie J. Rowley** moves from associate VP for research at the University of Michigan to provost, dean of the college and VP for academic affairs at Columbia University's Teachers College NY.
- **Dr. Bonnie Rush** moves from interim to dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine at Kansas State University.
- **Dr. Lepaine Sharp-McHenry** moves from dean of the College of Nursing at Oklahoma Baptist University to dean of the College of Natural, Behavioral and Health Sciences at Simmons University MA.
- **Dr. Kerry Anne Simon** moves from associate director of bands to director of university bands at Mississippi Valley State University.
- **Dr. Elizabeth Skomp** moves from associate dean for faculty development and inclusion at the University of the South TN to dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Stetson University FL.
- **Betsy Cannon Smith** moves from executive director of alumni and parent programs to chief advancement officer at Amherst College MA.
- **Paula Smith** moves from interim to director of intercollegiate athletics at the University of California, Irvine.
- **Dr. Tonya Smith-Jackson** has been named senior vice provost for academic affairs at North Carolina A&T State University.
- **Dr. Laura Stephenson** becomes associate dean and director of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service in the College of Agriculture, Food and Environment.
- **Claire Stewart** moves from associate university librarian for research and learning at the University of Minnesota Libraries to dean of University Libraries at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.
- **Kelly Terry, JD**, becomes associate dean for experiential learning and clinical programs at the William H. Bowen School of Law at the University of Arkansas Little Rock.
- **Dr. Laura Vosejka** moves from dean of the College of Sciences and Liberal Arts at Kettering University MI to dean and CEO of Helena College MT.
- **Rita L. Walters** becomes VP of development at Union Theological Seminary NY.
- **Dr. Farrah Jackson Ward** moves from interim provost to provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs at Elizabeth City State University NC.
- **Dr. Karin Gwinn Wilkins** moves from associate dean of faculty advancement and strategic initiatives at the Moody College of Communication at the University of Texas at Austin to dean of the School of Communication at the University of Miami FL.
- **Dr. Joy Williamson-Lott** moves from associate dean in the College of Education to dean of the Graduate School at the University of Washington.
- **Dr. Daria J. Willis** moves from provost and senior VP for academic affairs at Onondaga Community College NY

to president of Everett Community College WA.

- **Dr. Assata Zerai** moves from associate provost for faculty excellence at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign to VP for equity and inclusion at the University of New Mexico. 

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## **What Small Presses Can Do for You,** *continued from page 6*

should have the courtesy to tell you that too.)

We hope our authors will get rich publishing their books with us. And most of our authors have published multiple books with us. Which brings me to the best reason to publish with a traditional small press, or at least with ours: Unlike big publishers, who cut authors loose right and left, making authors feel like publishing is a game of roulette, many, if not most, small presses feel loyalty to our authors. And that's the best reason of all.

### **Selecting the Best Press for You**

The most important thing you can do before you ever submit a book or proposal is to figure out the needs and personality of a press.

How do you figure out what a press wants to publish? Check out the books the press has already published. What books do they feature on their homepage? What books have they published most recently? Check out their social media—what books of theirs are they talking about most? Chances are if they've published a book they love very much, they want more books like that book.

"You mean you want me to send them the exact same kind of book? Like a copycat?"

No, that's not what I mean. I mean that if a press has a book that is, for example, a literary memoir about growing up as a first-generation Cuban American woman and navigating your life as a lesbian rights activist and reconciling that identity with your family's Catholic values and eventually bridging those two worlds, then chances are the press would want another literary memoir from an author from a marginalized group.

Next, you absolutely must read a press's submission guidelines. My press receives so many submissions from authors whose work we would never consider because we simply do not publish books like theirs. When we receive submissions of this sort, we can tell that these authors didn't read our posted guidelines. These submissions waste your time and ours.

Take your time and carefully select presses that will be a good fit for your work. Beware any press that requests money from you and ask questions about how the press will support you. You and your press are partners, and you deserve nothing less. 

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## **PROFILE: Award-Winning Scholar Shines a Light on Her Homeland,** *continued from page 10*

musical genres. She even created a Facebook page for the political science program where faculty members interact with students by posting discussion topics as well as articles related to courses.

This fall, she'll be teaching a course on black women and hip hop. One of the end goals is to produce a 12-song