

The World Wide Web – So what are the most useful online websites for Self Publishing Writers?

By Samantha Pearce

It is amazing what you can find on the internet nowadays; instructions on how to download music to an ipod, on-line cookery lessons and mouth-watering recipes, broad-sheet newspapers and the history of European art, everything you have ever wanted to know about Elvis Presley , Cat Stevens or S Club 7 – the list is endless – literally. So when you are thinking about self-publishing and are looking for advice, resource or guidance, the Internet should really be your first port of call. But where do you start looking for information? And how can it help you?

There are four principle ways that the Internet can help ease the self publishing process;

- 1- Getting your text right in the first place and generating ideas
- 2- Providing you with a forum to learn from and talk to other writers
- 3- Listing literary agents, editors and designers who can help you improve your manuscript prior to publication
- 4- Walking you through the entire self publishing process

Let's look at each of these in turn.

Getting your text right in the first place and generating ideas

Nowadays there really is no need to purchase a multitude of text books on “How to use Words”, “Grammar”, “Generating creative ideas” or “Using Language”. Whilst one or two reference guides are always handy to keep on the bookshelf, the Internet can now supply you with all the information and practical guidance you should need on these subject matters. For help and assistance with spelling, word meanings and pronunciation, take a look at **Dictionary.com** (<http://dictionary.reference.com>) or **Your Dictionary** (www.yourdictionary.com). If its language usage or grammar that you are interested in, try www.usingenglish.com and www.englishforums.com, where you can find answers to almost all of your word usage and grammar queries. You will also find a wide variety of grammar and spell checker software programmes and packages that you can purchase and load onto your computer – ‘White Smoke’ is one of the more popular software packages recommended.

Both fiction and non-fiction writers find that they need to research their subject matter and look up various dates, facts, places and names when writing their manuscript. The internet is fantastic in its ability to support this “fact-finding” process! Google’s answer to scholarly research is a search engine called **Google Scholar** (<http://scholar.google.co.uk>) which searches through a wide range of scholarly literature to answer the question or subject matter you pose in its search tool bar. If it’s an easier, straight forward encyclopaedia search you need, navigate your way to **Wikipedia** (<http://en.wikipedia.org>), which is the most comprehensive on-line encyclopaedia I’ve ever come across. And most importantly, it is very easy to use.

Two websites that are particularly handy for generating poetry or story ideas are ‘**Instant Muse: Poetry Generator and Story Starter**’ (www.thestorystarter.com) and ‘**Story A Day Writer’s Kit**’ (<http://westwood.fortunecity.com/smith/406/StoryaDay>), both of which help you get your creative juices flowing with free, fun exercises or writing prompts.

Providing you with a forum to learn from and talk to other writers

Learning from other writers, self publishing or commercial publishing, is an invaluable tool. Other writers can empathise with your experiences and frustrations, they can offer advice and enable you to learn from their successes and mistakes, and they can provide you with a safe haven to bounce ideas around and request constructive feedback from those within the industry. The internet has revolutionised the way that we interact with others, and has significantly broadened our capacity to communicate with other likeminded individuals across the world. Through the introduction of user forums, online communities and networks, self publishing writers can now talk to other writers, editors and publishers across the world. A fantastic resource of knowledge and information can now be accessed, and accessed for free, from the comfort of your own home.

Good examples of forums and networking communities to take a look at are www.writing.com, www.publicityhound.com, <http://wordsworthreading.blogspot.com>, www.writewords.org.uk, www.absolutewrite.com and www.writerswrite.com. The last two sites mentioned have specific forums dedicated to Self Publishing authors.

When it comes to on-line forums and networking communities, it is important to remember that each forum is generally created with a specific purpose or discussion topic in mind – be that self publishing, marketing your book, or generating ideas. So you may find that you need to try out a few different forums before you find the one that best suits your needs.

Listing literary agencies and editors who can help you improve your manuscript prior to publication

As a self publishing writer, you can sometimes feel that you'd like a second, informed opinion on the manuscript you have produced or the poetry that you have written. You may want an editorial critique of your use of characterisation, language, structure, style and storyline. Or you may simply require a second pair of eyes to check your use of spelling, punctuation or grammar. There are several editorial agencies that provide these services for self publishing authors. **Words Worth Reading** (www.wordsworthreading.co.uk) provides comprehensive editorial packages for manuscripts of all genres and sizes – providing tailor-made services where necessary to cater for all our clients' needs. As with most contemporary literary agencies or editors, **Words Worth Reading** can be found on the Internet, via online search engine tools or by typing in the website index into your tool bar.

The internet is also a very useful tool for researching and locating self publishing companies, printers, illustrators and designers – all of which are crucial contacts for a Self Publishing author. Most self publishing companies and printers offer a design service, giving you the opportunity to work with professionals when choosing your book cover design, typesetting style and paper type. However, you may want to work with an independent illustrator or designer, or at least investigate a range of designers and illustrators to compare cost and quality. www.contactacreative.com can put you in touch with various illustrators and designers and provide examples of their work through on-line portfolios. Similarly, www.ukchildrensbooks.co.uk lists a vast number of children's books' illustrators, and www.writersservices.com has a particularly strong book cover service.

Website search engines such as Google and Yahoo have made the searching process for literary agencies, editors or designers extremely easy. All you need to do is type in your requirements, and a list of suitable companies or websites will appear!

Walking you through the entire self publishing process

So, you've got the idea, you've spoken to others in the writing community to glean their advice, you've written the manuscript and you've submitted it to an editorial agency to ensure its squeaky clean. You're now ready for publication, which for many self publishers is perhaps the scariest stage! Where do you start? Who do you approach? How much should it cost? What about printing? Distribution? Marketing and selling? It can be a minefield. Fortunately there are some excellent websites that can provide you with the advice and guidance you need to make the self publishing process as pain-free as possible.

Take a look at **Parapublishing (www.parapublishing.com)**, a website which contains numerous articles, resources and signposts to books and links that will get you started. The website is built up of comprehensive, informative articles that really dive into the detail. For example, in the 'Book Design' section of this website, everything from book covers, printers, audio publication and the benefits of Hard Copies are discussed. Furthermore, each information page includes additional downloadable resources that can be saved onto your computer, or printed.

Another great website to browse through is **www.bookmarket.com** which covers everything you'd ever want to know about marketing your own, self published book. Whilst it is an American website, it is still very relevant to the English reader, providing downloadable seminar sessions on marketing that you can watch or listen to. This website also contains free marketing reports on both bookstore and internet marketing, and a free online magazine (an "Ezine") that you can subscribe to.

Don't forget to take a look at the broadsheet paper's online book supplements too, as they can help you understand bookseller trends. Most popular are **The Guardian** (www.guardian.co.uk/books), **The Times** (<http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk>) and **The Mail** (www.dailymail.co.uk).

Two further important websites to look at as a Self Publishing writer are www.isbn.nielsenbookdata.co.uk and www.booksellers.org.uk. The ISBN website explains how to use ISBN numbers, and their importance if you want to sell your book through book stores. It also provides the pricing list for purchasing ISBN numbers, allowing you to purchase your required numbers directly through the website. The Booksellers Association is a wonderful website for anyone interested or involved in the book publishing and sales process. As well as being a great forum for obtaining an insight into the book trade, this website also allows you to search for local book stores in a given town or postcode area, which is very useful when it comes to drawing up your marketing contact list! The website also provides the names and contact details of all the librarians in your area, so that you can address them personally when writing to encourage stocks of your latest book in their library environments.

There is a wealth of online information, support and guidance available to self publishing writers, so don't forget to tap into the internet when you need some help or advice. You'll be amazed at what you can find.

Samantha Pearce is a published novelist and article writer. She owns Words Worth Reading, an editorial service for writers. Words Worth Reading provides comprehensive editorial services to writers, as well as running informative workshops. It is predominately run by expert volunteers and donates part of all submission fees to Oxfam. For more information visit www.wordsworthreading.co.uk or email Sam at sam@wordsworthreading.co.uk