

# THE VANITY OF AN INDUSTRY

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## What's Real?

There has been much debate in the publishing industry of late over what constitutes a “real” publisher from a “false” one, legitimate versus the pretenders. The core of the argument comes down to making distinctions between what are termed **Traditional Publishers** from **Vanity Presses** pretending to be traditional publishers.

In this debate I've heard many seemingly intelligent people make blatantly ignorant statements like, “Real publishers pay advances and Vanity Presses don't,” (*ergo* all publishers who don't pay advances must be Vanity Presses) Or, “Real publishers use Offset printing, and Vanity Presses use POD (print-on-demand),” (*ergo* any publisher who uses digital production must be a Vanity Press). If you've heard silly statements like this, then you've heard someone expressing their ignorance, specifically their ignorance in understanding the difference between manufacturing technologies and the difference between business models. And worst of all, they fail to understand what it means for any publisher, no matter how they position themselves, to exploit the vanity of unpublished authors.

The truth of the matter is, many major publishing houses, which traditionally pay authors cash advances against future royalties, often use digital Print-on-Demand (POD) printing technologies, where appropriate; and many smaller publishing houses which may or may not pay advances often use offset printing technologies, where appropriate. Whether or not a publishing house pays advances is a business model issue, not a manufacturing issue. Whether or not a publishing house uses digital or offset printing technology is a manufacturing issue, not a business issue. There is no direct correlation between either factor, and in fact, there are **several other factors of much greater importance** that should be considered when an author is looking at any publisher in terms of whether they might be able to do more than merely cause their book to exist in print, but more importantly, to give that book a good chance for success in the marketplace and the author an opportunity to develop a viable professional writing career.

This article takes a closer look at all of these key issues, and hopefully sheds some light on the darkness of a lot of ignorance and bias in the publishing industry, and most importantly, provides some insight as to where ArcheBooks Publishing in particular stands on these issues. Let's start with some of the basics.

## Digital vs. Offset

There are two primary categories of manufacturing technologies employed today for the production of books—**Offset Printing** and **Digital Printing**.

Offset Printing is the most common method and most well-known, literally starting with Gutenberg's printing press. Today, this production method consists of printing many books at a time from Printing Plates placed into a press printed out onto large multi-page sheets, which are then cut and collated and bound. The unit costs for Offset printed books are relatively low, as compared to Digital printing, while the setup costs to create the Printing Plates are relatively high and somewhat time consuming (a process measured in weeks). Offset printing technology is most appropriate for high-volume print runs (typically measured in thousands).

Conversely, Digital Printing, or what is referred to as Print-on-Demand (POD) consists of printing entire books one at a time, in any increment, even as low as one (1) copy. This technology is relatively new, one of the advents of the digital revolution spearheaded by firms like Xerox and IBM. The unit cost for Digitally Printed books are much higher than Offset Printed books, while the initial setup costs are relatively low and timely (measured in days). This technology is most appropriate for low-volume print runs, sometimes call “short runs” (typically measured in tens or hundreds).

What is especially important to note is that comparatively speaking, as Digital Production technology has improved dramatically over the last five years, both technologies produce a very high-quality product. Nevertheless, it is still *possible* to achieve a superior quality finished product with Offset Printing, due to more available production techniques and materials options. However, for the same specifications for paper stock, board thickness of the covers and spine, dust-jacket paper stock, etc., the two methods produce remarkably similar results. In fact, if you didn’t know how a book was manufactured, you probably wouldn’t be able to tell the difference between the two. And as far as the end consumer/book buyer is concerned, that’s how it should be.

Therefore, which particular printing technology a publisher uses really has nothing to do with their legitimacy as a traditional publisher, or whether they should be considered a Vanity Press. At ArcheBooks Publishing we use both methods, offset printing for high-volume runs, digital for short runs.

## **Traditional Publishing vs. POD Publishers**

This issue is arguably the most confusing of any in the publishing industry. The confusion arises, as noted at the outset of our discussion, from the failure to distinguish the difference between *Manufacturing Technologies* and *Business Models*. As we just discussed, it has little to nothing to do with the physical manufacturing process. However, from an industry or cultural perspective, the concept of a “Traditional Publisher” is more accurately contrasted in **business model** terms with respect to the many publishers who have sprung up over the last five years or so, employing Digital manufacturing technology, virtually exclusively, hence referred to as POD Publishers, to create Vanity or Subsidy Presses.

Vanity or Subsidy Presses are typically distinguished by:

- **Paying little or no Advances, rather having the Author pay for some or all of the Publication Costs**
- **Viewing Unpublished Authors as their Primary Customer Base and Revenue Source**
- **Accepting all material for publication with no screening for professional quality**
- **Little to no Formal Editing**
- **Little to no Marketing and Promotion**
- **Little to no Distribution and Sales Capability**
- **Unsold copies are Non-Returnable**
- **Poor Quality Finished Product**

Conversely, a “Traditional Publisher” is normally distinguished by the opposite of all of the items above, specifically with respect to not charging the Author *anything, ever*, and most importantly, viewing **Retail Consumer Book Buyers** as the Primary Customer Base and Revenue Source—not the author.

Frankly, a publishing house that chooses the Vanity Press business model has nothing to do with which *manufacturing process* they use to spend the Author's money and make a profit for themselves. Most of them have gravitated around the Digital methodology due to its lower setup costs and no initial substantial financial commitment to larger offset print runs, warehousing and logistics. Unfortunately, their proliferation has given the underlying *manufacturing technology* a bad reputation it doesn't deserve.

In fact, you'll find that some retailers and distributors have an irrational negative bias toward Digitally manufactured (POD) books—almost a “religious prejudice” against them—not wanting to be associated with a book produced by a particular production method, as opposed to rightly shunning certain Vanity or Subsidy publishers who turn out a truly inferior product—not an inferiorly *manufactured* book, but a poorly *published* book.

This is regrettable, because any book can be manufactured digitally, and many, many good ones are. As the saying goes, “While all axe murderers use an axe, everyone who uses an axe isn't an axe murderer.” Likewise, every publisher who employs Digital production technology isn't a Vanity Press.

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This is not to say that some Vanity or Subsidy Presses don't have a legitimate function. In the arena of self-publishing, a subsidy press is appropriate. There have been many great books that began as self-published works, e.g. *The One-Minute Manager*, *Huckleberry Finn*, etc. Many seminar speakers and business experts also offer books at their public appearances to augment their earnings, but normally don't sell enough of them to warrant a large investment in a major offset publication run. This is another good application of where a subsidy press enables to author/speaker to fulfill an exact need. Numerous non-fiction books have benefited greatly from subsidy press publishers.

What most people do not realize is that most Traditional Publishers these days, if they're smart, employ both manufacturing methodologies—both Offset and Digital—in a **Hybrid Production Strategy**, as is appropriate to the production volume they need for a particular title. For example, if an older book consistently sells a few hundred copies a year, or for one that is updated regularly, it makes no sense to print thousands of them, only to have them sit in a warehouse and have to be managed as surplus inventory. But if they can be printed Digitally, one at a time, as sales demands, that makes perfect sense. And that's why so many Traditional Publishers use digital technology today (they just try to keep it a secret!).

Conversely, if a Vanity Press had an author/customer who wanted 1,000 or more copies of a book printed, they would be very foolish to use Digital technology to fill the order. They could have those same books Offset printed and increase their profit margins dramatically, which many do in such instances. Therefore, the selection of production method has little to nothing to do with whether you are talking about a Traditional Publisher or a Vanity Press. So let's look at the rest the items on the previous list:

### **Paying little or no Advances, rather having the Author pay for some or all of the publication costs**

Traditionally, many people in the publishing industry today hold to the convention that if a book doesn't receive an Advance payment of at least \$2,000, then it doesn't qualify as a professional sale. So on one hand, all the small publishers paying advances of \$100, \$200, or \$500, believing that this automatically qualifies them as “Traditional Publishers” and not “Vanity Presses” on that basis alone are therefore mistaken—assuming they derive their sense of legitimacy purely based upon a tradition or a single business

policy. On the other hand, many well-known best-selling authors and very famous books never met that threshold. The truth is, only a small segment of the tens of thousands of publishers in existence have the financial wherewithal to pay authors, especially brand new unproven ones, at least \$2,000 per title in advance. Authors with an established track record of performance are rightfully entitled to advances as opposed to being forced to wait for payment in the protracted compensation model of the New York tradition (discussed in depth later).

Actually, if the truth be known, this *artificial* criteria of what constitutes a “professional sale” is really there to make it easier for certain organizations to discriminate against small publishing houses or new up-and-coming ones. The amount of an advance really has no bearing whatsoever on how well a book is going to do in the market place. Many other factors determine that. And for the record, if you as an author are paid *any* money for your writing, the IRS considers you a professional and wants their cut.

The topic of Advances is really only relevant in one respect to our discussion of Traditional Publishers vs. Vanity Presses: Is the author *making* money from the publisher, or is the author *paying* money to the publisher? If it’s the former, it’s a Traditional Publisher, if it’s the latter it’s a Vanity Press. As was noted, some small publishing houses simply don’t have the financial resources to pay large up-front advances. Some would prefer to use their available capital resources for marketing and promotion, which if they are small, that’s wise. What good does it do to pay an author \$2,000 up-front and then not have any money left to go out and promote the book?

Do we pay advances at ArcheBooks? Yes, we do, and will continue to do so in the future—based upon our own metrics, and where we feel it is appropriate.

There’s also a “dirty little secret” in publishing that you might want to know about with regard to the topic of advances and the financial practices of traditional publishers—which to be fair, you need to examine the *entire* author compensation model of a publisher, not just whether an advance is a part of it, to determine whether or not an author is being exploited or properly rewarded.

You see, for the most part, (and if you don’t believe this, just ask your Literary Agent) Traditional Publishers of the New York variety do their best to acquire a new book for a certain advance amount, with no great desire or intent to ever have to pay the author another cent—regardless of all the percentages and breakpoints and formulas you might read about in the contract. A calculation is made of how much they think they can sell of a particular book, then reduce that amount down to what they think the author will accept, and that’s the basis of the advance to be negotiated and finalized with the Agent. So far so good.

However, after that point, with most NY-type houses, the books themselves won’t debut in the market for at least a year, sometimes two. After the book actually comes out, the NY accounting model is measured in six month reporting periods. Actual royalty payments are only made after the entire advance is earned out, i.e. when the original advance is completely recovered, and on top of that they reserve a portion of the royalties earned for “reserves against returns.” Let’s look at the math of all that.

Let’s say a brand new author was given a \$2,000 cash advance, for a book that is going to be printed and released as a paperback original, with a 6% royalty rate, and a retail price of \$7.99. With those numbers the author would therefore earn forty-eight cents (\$0.48) per copy sold. That means over 4,000 books would have to be sold for the author to ever earn out the advance. If the book is released a year later, the author makes no more money at the time of release. If the book happens to come out in January, then the reporting period ends in June, and royalties are not paid usually until late in the subsequent reporting period—like November. If you’re keeping up with the math, virtually two years has passed in this process.

So let's say the book sells 2,000 copies in the first six month period it is available—not bad for a brand new author with typically no promotional help other than “throw ‘em on the shelves and hope for the best.” In this instance no additional royalties would be due, because less than half of the advance would have been recovered.

Let's say in the next six month period 3,000 copies are sold. Now some royalties are supposedly due, i.e. a grand total of 5,000 copies have sold. With the \$2,000 advance repaid, only another \$400 is due to the author—oh, but wait! They hold a significant percentage of those royalties as “reserves against returns,” so you're still in the hole, and again see no royalty check. Another six months goes by—we're at the end of year three now—and then you discover that the entire first printing of 5,000 copies is gone, and since there is not a huge backlog for it, your publisher isn't reprinting it, and very shortly it is “Out of Print.” Surprise, surprise, you never see another cent. Maybe at some magical point in the future they release the other \$400 to you, but that's the end of it. So over a two to three year period of your life you made a whopping \$2,400! Book the cruise! Not exactly an income you can live off of, now is it?

OK, now here's the “dirty secret” part: Meanwhile, those 5,000 books that your publisher printed (and that's all they printed) and sold generated them about \$3.00 a copy in revenue, so they made at least \$15,000 off your book, and were happy to do it. Even if they had printed 10,000 copies and still only sold 5,000, since paperbacks cost them \$1.00 or less each to print, even if the other 5,000 were destroyed, they still made \$10,000 or more off of your book and were happy to do it. But in that case, since you only had a 50% sell through, they probably don't want any more of your books, or even if they give you a second chance, will make sure to only print 5,000 the next time. The wholesalers earned approximately \$1.00 a book, so they saw around \$5,000 for just getting them shipped from the publisher's printer to their regular clientele of stores. The bookstores made around \$3.00 a copy, so they enjoyed around \$15,000 worth of income, too. But hey, you got \$2,400, and it only took you three years to see it—after that great big \$2,000 *in advance!* See who wins here, and who loses?

Pay special note to one other key element: When you thought you were going to see 50,000 copies of your first book sold in the first year, and therefore earn at least \$24,000 in royalties, i.e. \$22,000 on top of that \$2,000 advance, there was no specific intent on the publisher's part for that to ever happen. Indeed, if your book “took off” and happened to generate a big buzz in the market, and it quickly generated significant backorders (“quickly” being defined as in the first 30-90 days, and “backorders” measured in increments potentially as large as the initial print run or more), the publisher would be only too happy to commission a reprint to satisfy the demand. But short of that happening, the publisher only printed enough for him to make a tidy profit then move on to the next project. Don't misunderstand—all publishers would love for all of their titles to be bestsellers. However, their business models are constructed such that the majority of them don't have to be bestsellers for them to be profitable. In fact, few ever are, and yet they continue to make money.

Granted, in the example above, we're talking about what are termed “mid-list” books from major publishers, which is where most new authors start out—if they're lucky. Mid-List books are distinct from A-List books or Lead Titles, which is the classification for a publisher's top sellers, i.e. their “stars” or choice new books expected to sell in very large volumes. Mid-list titles are not expected to be best-sellers, just to generate a satisfactory Return on Investment (ROI) to the Publisher by putting them into a general distribution cycle, whereby they know a certain minimum quantity in certain genres will move no matter what. If a mid-list book happens to do exceptionally well, wonderful. But that's not the expectation, nor is any overt effort by the publisher to help the author develop a viable long-term audience and establish a professional career. Punchline to the Joke: They never printed any more books in the first place to allow you to earn anything more than your advance. It accomplished their business goals, not necessarily yours.

It was for this very reason we at ArcheBooks Publishing instituted our Author compensation model as one where a viable income stream could be derived for the authors, *immediately*, not years down the road. Granted, it may start humble and build up over time in accordance with actual sales results, as we work in cooperation with our authors to help them build a viable credible audience. But it's honest, and it works.

Nevertheless, be assured that in our business model generating a recurring income stream for our Authors is important to us, while artificial policies to prevent ever paying out anything else is not. That's our difference. What's absolutely certain is that we don't ever *charge* our authors a penny for anything as the Vanity Presses do, which is the topic of the next item.

## **Viewing Unpublished Authors as their Primary Customer Base and Revenue Source**

It has been dully noted many times by many parties that a particular well-known POD-based Vanity Press (who refuses to admit that it is such) boasted a while ago that it printed its millionth book, and also has 10,000 authors. The math says that this works out to an average sales history of only 100 books sold per author, which is pretty pitiful. What this also says is that any publisher that only looks to sell 100 books per author isn't making any meaningful money off the sale of books, rather in the fees charged to the author for their publication.

The topic of **fees** is the easiest Red Flag for anything in the publishing industry. Real Literary Agents don't charge Authors fees, they earn commissions from the sale of books. Real Publishers don't charge fees, they earn profits from the sale of books. As was noted before, Real Publishers **pay** authors. Vanity Presses **get paid by** authors. That's really the hardcore difference between the two.

Furthermore, another clear hallmark of a "real" publisher is their emphasis and investment commitment to marketing and promotion. Do they advertise their books? Do they initiate outbound marketing campaigns? Do they provide their authors with effective promotional materials—at the publisher's expense? Do they seek to get their books into distribution? All these things speak to the issue of whether the publisher is looking to make a profit from the sale of books, or from publication fees from desperate wannabe authors. At ArcheBooks Publishing, marketing and promotion is one of our top investment priorities—at no cost to our authors. This is covered in much greater detail in a later section.

## **Accepting all material for publication with no screening for professional quality**

This one is easy to understand. If a publisher is a Vanity Press, and makes its money off of the authors and not the actual sale of books, then it's irrelevant what is actually printed as long as the author who wants it printed pays his fees.

Real publishers reject everything but the best material they can find, eager to find the works they believe have the best potential for market success. They have to, because their business model places its success criteria on selling books, and because they don't get any money from authors.

At ArcheBooks Publishing we have a policy of primarily accepting submissions from established literary agencies, contest winners, or some other similar quality assurance mechanism whereby only material of the highest professional caliber is considered for publication.

## Little to no Formal Editing

With the aforementioned contrast in manuscript acquisition in mind, Vanity Presses don't care if books are done well or not, and don't expend any significant resources to hire or pay professional editors (which is a far cry from basic formatting). Real Publishers care a lot about professional editing, as it has everything to do with whether retail consumers ultimately like their products, will recommend them to others, and buy more of them in the future.

ArcheBooks Publishing adheres to the highest professional standards of editorial performance. We never publish any books "as is" and routinely work closely with our authors for necessary revisions, major and minor, to ensure our books are as strong and commercially viable as they can be. We publicly publish our own in-house Style Manual, which is available for free from our website ([www.archebooks.com](http://www.archebooks.com)).

## Little to no Marketing and Promotion

This item is one of the most important ones of all. Think about it: if an author gets little or no advance from a small publisher, and even if their book is initially manufactured digitally, but that publisher goes out, and at no cost to the author, pushes that book and promotes it such that thousands of copies of it sell, whereby both the publisher and author make a decent dollar off of it, who is to say that publisher isn't "real"?

On the other hand, virtually all of the major publishing houses in the nation, in New York or elsewhere, get woefully poor marks when it comes to general marketing and promotion, especially for their mid-list and backlist (i.e. older) titles. Sure they do a lot for their top stars. But what about their brand new authors?

As has been noted in many of our other published articles, some of the biggest houses in publishing do little more than "throw 'em on the shelves and hope for the best" as a basic marketing strategy. For the books that happen to "catch on," those authors may move up the food chain and get better contracts, a little more promotion, and hopefully continue to build an audience and ultimately enjoy a measure of professional success. However, for the first-time author, that trial-and-error styled approach is pretty much a "dumb luck" or nothing strategy, and highly inefficient. It is for this reason that so many major publishers have all but closed their doors to new talent, opting only to go with established names or high-visibility celebrities who bring with them a built-in audience, and therefore a more predictable sales volume.

What distinguishes ArcheBooks Publishing from many other publishers is that we are willing to take risks on new authors that many other publishers won't. Since we were founded, one of our core competencies is **Demand Creation**—first class marketing and promotion capabilities. What's important to understand is that we are not adverse to giving new publishing opportunities to new talent, because we are supremely confident in the quality of our own Demand Creation/Marketing capabilities to make our products successful. And our strong sales results and glowing reviews of our books are a testament to that fact.

With that said, this doesn't mean that we are foolhardy or take unwise business risks. It means we have developed an innovative market penetration and development model that mitigates many of the "unproven new author" risks, while giving new titles their best chance to succeed. We never guarantee success of a particular title—that would be naively arrogant on our part. The *market*, and the market alone, will always tell us who the winners and losers are. Our challenge is to give new voices the break they've been looking for, and do our best to help them exploit that opportunity.

## **Little to no Distribution and Sales Capability**

This issue is where most of the large, well-established publishers have indisputably held a clear advantage in the market. Distribution relationships don't happen overnight, and most major distributors only want to do business with publishers with high-demand products, for obvious reasons. Thus, for small presses and/or brand new publishers, there is a natural growth curve, measured in months, if not years, to build and develop those relationships. But just because a publisher is in the process of establishing those relationships doesn't diminish or nullify their legitimacy as a "real" publisher, or in any way categorize them as a Vanity Press.

When it comes to the genuine Vanity Presses, again this is an irrelevant issue for them. So if you are trying to understand if a particular publisher is for real, simply find out who distributes their books, and/or how hard they are working to improve that every day.

All ArcheBooks titles are listed in the Ingram Books and Baker & Taylor databases in the US, and in Bertram's in the UK. Our titles are sold online at Amazon.com and BarnesandNoble.com, who handle all of our online fulfillment.

## **Unsold copies are Non-Returnable**

Virtually all Vanity Presses, and even most of the traditional publishers who are small and exclusively use POD technology to keep their costs low don't allow bookstores to return unsold copies of their books. This is because the publishers are charged for the printing of a new POD book at the time of the order. So if a bookstore ordered 100 books, but only sold 10 of them, and then wanted to send the other 90 back for a credit, the publisher would still get charged for printing all 100. Chances are his entire business model is built around an expected profit margin of a guaranteed sale, above and beyond the printing costs. But if he only sells 10 books out of 100, the cost of printing those other 90 are easily going to wipe out any profit he made on the 10, and therefore he loses money. So the remedy for that is to institute a No Return policy, which equates to "All sales are final."

The No Return policy is probably the number one stumbling block that keeps POD manufactured books out of most traditional bookstores. Bookstores are used to a standard business practice of being able to return books that don't sell for a credit to make room on their finite shelf space for new arrivals to give them a chance. With publishers who use offset runs in volume, they normally factor in a certain minimum sell-through rate of a print run. As we saw in the earlier example, they don't have to sell 100% of all books printed to turn a profit. They just have to have a certain level of confidence of selling enough to hit their breakeven point. So even if some percentage of the books are unsold and end up destroyed, or remaindered to a half-price chain, they don't end up losing money. So in that situation, the books are usually returnable by the bookstores.

Therefore, the issue of whether books are returnable or not is not necessarily an absolute indicator of whether you are dealing with a traditional real publisher or a Vanity Press. But it is a significant factor that may be a profound hindrance to the distribution breadth and depth of your book.

All ArcheBooks titles are 100% returnable. See our printed Return Policy on the Booksellers page of our website for full details.

## Poor Quality Finished Product

Finally, the bottom line hallmark of distinguishing real publishers from the pretenders ultimately has to come down to the finished product. Are the books made well, or shoddy? Are they priced competitively? Or do you see paperbacks priced like hardcovers, or hardcovers priced like encyclopedias? Are the covers artistically designed and imaginative? Or are the covers simplistic and crude, like someone did it with crayons? Are the pages well-formatted and professionally laid out? Or did it look like a giant cut-and-paste from a Word Processor? Are the books well-edited, or are there ten typos on page one?

As the Good Books says, “You judge a tree by it’s fruit.” That’s true for the manufacturer of any product in any industry, publishing included.

## A Final Word

ArcheBooks Publishing is very proud, as of September 2004, to celebrate its first full year in business. We’ve come a long way from a radical new business concept on paper in just one year’s time, exceeding all of our original projections beyond our wildest dreams. While nine out of ten new start-ups don’t survive their first year, we’ve got a lot to be proud of. We’ve been cash-flow positive from our earliest months, our books are selling, thousands of book buyers are enjoying our books, we’ve got very happy investors and stock holders, we’re mailing out royalty checks, our authors are making money, new channels of distribution are opening up every day, even Hollywood is taking special notice of us, as one of our titles is soon to become a major motion picture.

But like any new business venture starting out in any industry, establishing baseline credibility, product legitimacy, and gaining a foothold in our target markets were naturally some of our core start-up business goals. In our first year of existence we fully expected to have to go out and earn our place in the industry amid a sea of formidable competition and an ocean of pretenders, to establish and build our reputation on deeds not wishes. No one was rightly going to consider us a viable business entity, not to mention a “real” publisher, just because we claimed to be one. We had to prove it, as we bear the continuing responsibility to do so every day of our existence for as long as we remain in business.

While we’ve enjoyed a great deal of welcome praise, we also know what it’s like to be disparaged or criticized due to our youth. While we’ve checked off all of our key business milestones one by one on our path toward success, we also know what it’s like to be mislabeled and maligned by ignorant parties who don’t understand the intricacies of our industry, much less appreciate the innovations and logic of our unique business model in contrast to the many arcane business practices readily found in the traditional publishing industry.

Therefore, we have a great deal of both sympathy and empathy for the many new publishers and small presses out there who daily endure the same treatment, and we applaud any entrepreneur for that matter with the courage and capital to take a risk and work earnestly to produce a first class product.

Now let me explain something that might surprise or even shock you. And this information is shared with you to give you a little better understanding of all the publishers in the industry, regardless of how you might wish to subcategorize or label them. For starters, one of the unspoken assumptions of this entire debate is that Traditional Publishers are good and Vanity Presses are evil. In reality, any kind of publisher has the ability to exploit authors for their own gain.

You see, the great **VANITY of the Publishing Industry**, long before the amazing technical innovations of digital printing and desktop publishing software and online sales and distribution, etc. were ever in-

vented, book publishers as a whole, existed purely to turn a profit. Now there's nothing inherently wrong with a business being profit motivated, as any businessman with ambition must be. If not, he'll go broke and be out of business in a hurry. What's wrong is when inherently misleading business practices are used to exploit others to gain that profit. That's the core indictment against Vanity Presses.

However, Traditional Publishers, who throw a couple of grand at an author to make that author believe that because they are finally going to be "published" that they've now therefore "arrived" and are about to become a "star," when in reality they are only being used to generate tens of thousands of dollars for the publisher, with no real intention for the author to ever see another cent beyond those first couple of grand—**that too is exploiting an author's vanity**. Sure, from the publisher's standpoint, if some small percentage of titles they throw out there take off and do well, then they make even more money. The point is, the author's long-term career potential is entirely incidental—not the publisher's problem.

Obviously, once a few of a publisher's better selling "names" develop some marketable "brand value," they then have to start paying them like "stars" to keep leveraging that brand name to generate accelerated profits at the best-seller levels. However, the few that break out and becomes "bestselling names," as opposed to the many who don't, really don't concern the publisher that much. He has plenty of titles he knows are going to generate a decent return on his investment, and if a few bomb, then the overachievers more than compensate for the loss. Either way, he's still in the plus column. That's how the media barons of old ended up living in homes that were more accurately described as castles.

True Vanity Presses prey exclusively upon the vanity of a desperate author, hence their name. Many of them work very hard to convince authors that they aren't Vanity Presses, and instead pretend to be traditional, endeavoring to make the author believe that by paying them for their services, they are officially "published" and therefore now able to become a star, or at least begin a career as a professional writer. However, it's almost axiomatic that anything printed by a Vanity Press implies that no "real" publisher would touch it, and therefore is of low quality and no consumer would ever buy it. This stigma is so strong it blemishes legitimately self-published works that have no intention of getting on the bestseller lists, but exist to meet some other need, usually an educational one.

So from the perspective of an author with the desire to write professionally, avoiding Vanity Presses is a wise move. However, ironically, this same author who has avoided Vanity Presses makes the exact same mistake naively believing that any "traditional" publisher, regardless of how big they are or respected in the industry, is going to do much of anything for him beyond causing his book to exist. And looking at the situation from that perspective means that the only substantive difference between the two, traditional vs. vanity, boils down to who paid for the printing costs—the author or the publisher.

At ArcheBooks Publishing we promise no one stardom. We only offer an opportunity for our authors to work hard with us toward the goal of success; and we only offer those opportunities to those we think have a good chance to become successful. We say no to the rest. We don't charge for that opportunity, we invest in it. We have constructed a unique proprietary business model that keeps us financially viable, even while taking risks on new authors that many other publishers are hesitant to do. We plan for each of our titles to have a long-term lifecycle, as in a minimum of a year to eighteen months, i.e. to give it a legitimate opportunity to find its audience and succeed—not a 30-90 day sales cycle to liquidate a limited mid-list print run inventory goal before moving on to the next one.

Our future success as a business is leveraged on our steadfast confidence that our world-class marketing and promotional efforts will cause some significant number of our products to enjoy broad-based commercial success, not just a few exceptions. Our author-centric model is designed to help authors become successful and build a long-term viable career out of their writing talents. And indeed, our portion of our author's success, in turn, is what makes us successful as a business. In our view that's how it's supposed

to be. All our authors know this. We don't do everything identical to the old New York business model, and our business and our Authors and Agents are the better for it. Our approach, by design, is never to appeal to an author's vanity, but to their ambition and talents, equipping and training them for success—at our expense.

So the next time you're tempted to sit in judgment of a particular publisher, any publisher, questioning their overall legitimacy, credibility or any specific business practice or policy, we'd ask you to keep this one key truth in mind:

Any publisher, deemed traditional or non-traditional, whether they be old or new, large or small, old-fashioned or high-tech—*any* publisher who has no sincere intention of cultivating the long-term success of their authors and their works, in the final analysis, is disingenuously preying upon an author's vanity for their own gain, which if you think about it, makes them no better than the Vanity Presses—regardless of any other business practice or production methodology.