

Protecting Wisconsin Consumers for 75 Years

Vanity publishing

If dreams of poetic grandeur are leading you up the steps of a vanity publishing house, stop and make sure you know what is inside.

Vanity, or subsidy, publishers catch unsuspecting authors off guard with glorified ads in newspapers and magazines that promise huge profits. These companies publish almost anything they receive because they know their profit is assured. The authors take all the monetary risks.

Vanity, thy name is expensive

Vanity publishers solicit original manuscripts from writers through direct mailings or classified advertising. After writers contact them, however, they find they have to pay all the costs of production and promotion, which can involve thousands of dollars. Subsidy publishing contracts do not give writers any control over expense management, so authors have no say in how their money is spent.

Starry-eyed amateur writers keep the vanity publishing business flourishing even though sales of books they produce are very low. Rarely does a subsidy publisher

put out a commercially successful book. The few exceptional success stories are often repeated to potential authors. Authors do not usually recover even a fourth of their original investment. Writers are often promised royalties of 30 to 40 percent, but they never see these profits because the publishers have already been paid by the authors. This removes the incentive for the company to sell and the writer is stuck trying to generate sales.

Unfortunately, writers and their families are usually the biggest customers, so the authors often end up paying for books twice – once to publish and once more to purchase.

Some vanity publishers contact young writers claiming they were nominated by school personnel to be nationally recognized as talented young authors. These claims are usually false. The companies offer to place the student's poems or short stories in books if they agree, in advance, to purchase a certain number of books. Often family members purchase several books because they believe the publication involves a special honor. However, the only reason these books are published is

because authors are willing to pay for the placement of their material.

Vanity book publishers and their operating procedures are well-known to those who buy books for resale to the public. Books published by the so-called vanity press are recognized as such. News releases and other publicity or advertising reflect the vanity status of the books, which are reviewed in this light. Vanity publishers have developed such a poor reputation in the trade that most book periodicals read by libraries and retailers will not even review their titles.

Who's who?

Another common contact involves vanity publishers that contact individuals claiming they have been selected to be featured in a "Who's Who" book – Who's Who Among Female Executives, Who's Who of College Students, Who's Who of American Engineers, and many others.

The publishers always claim they received an anonymous nomination to include your name in the publication and want you to pay a "membership fee" to join this exclusive listing. They also offer to sell volumes of the "Who's Who" book and count on people

being willing to pay to see their name in print.

If someone wants to include you in this type of publication, first ask questions like these:

- What is the selection process? How were you nominated, and for what specific accomplishments? If the answer is vague, suspect the publisher may have bought your name on a mailing list or found it elsewhere.
- Who else made the grade? Sorry, but can you really be considered among the nation's top executives for running a small store when Fortune 500 CEOs are ignored?
- Who writes your bio? Legit registries may ask for background and do their own write-up; vanity books turn the pen over to you.
- Find out who they are and who is going to pay the costs. When you think about it, it is not really much of an honor when you have to pay for the recognition.

Genealogy books

Many families receive contacts to purchase family histories or genealogy listings. Often you are told that the book is a one-time offer – never to be available again. Do not count on these publications containing extensive background on your family tree.

Publishing is competitive

Conventional publishers pay all the costs of publishing and promoting a manuscript, so they are very selective about what they publish. A typical publishing house does not advertise for manuscripts, nor does it ask authors for any type of advance payment.

If you do decide to have your work published by a vanity publisher, read the contract's fine print carefully and make sure that all conditions, including production, promotion, and other expenses, are clearly spelled out.

Be wary of claims such as:

- None of their books have resulted in failure.
- Sales will result in more than one edition of the book, so more copies will be produced.
- Only those manuscripts which have literary merit and sales appeal are published.
- The publisher supplies authors with the same promotional services that the largest book publishers give to their big-name, best-selling authors.
- The publisher has salaried traveling salespeople who spend all their time selling only clients' books.
- Leading libraries generally purchase large numbers of books from the vanity publishers.
- The promotion of a book always results in its

placement in stores located in the author's vicinity.

- The book will be nationally advertised.

If you are hesitant about vanity publishing, but would still like to see your manuscript published, consider self-publishing your work through a local printer.

If you think your book is the next best seller, mail a letter of intent, also known as a query letter, and a copy of a chapter to an established publishing house. Your local library will be able to assist you in locating information about how to contact major publishing companies. Libraries can also assist you in obtaining information on how to conduct legitimate genealogy research or locate established "Who's Who" directories.

For more information or to file a complaint, visit our website or contact us at:

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