

his article? You can get more great content, tips and resources [by clicking here](#)

## [The Book Designer](#)

Practical Advice to Help Self-Publishers Build Better Books

- [Home](#)
- [About](#)
- [Articles](#)
- [Advertise](#)
- [Hire Joel](#)
- [Companion](#)
  - [Media Kit](#)
  - [About the Author](#)
  - [Testimonials](#)
  - [Purchase Info](#)
  - [Reviews](#)
- [Subscribe](#)

# 8 Keys to Self-Publishing Success

by Joel Friedlander on March 11, 2011



by Larry Jacobson

As his [book designer](#), I was really impressed by the way Larry Jacobson pursued his aim of getting his book into print. [The Boy Behind the Gate](#) tells the incredible story of how Larry sailed around the world along with the companions who shared the journey with him. It's a generous and moving book,

and I asked Larry to share what he had learned along the way. Here's his story.

---

## 8 Keys to Self-Publishing Success



Six years sailing around the world. Three years writing about it.

Sometimes I wonder which was more difficult. About a third of the way into my trip, I decided to write a book. Fortunately for me, I had been and continued keeping my ship's logs and personal logs. I also had hundreds of emails back and forth with friends and family. All of this documentation left with me nearly 2,000 pages to work from, and I was truly overwhelmed.

Like leaving the dock not knowing the destination, you still have to untie the lines and go. So I started writing my book. It was an enormous task that frustrated me, nearly drove me crazy, and cost me nearly \$40,000 by the time I had a product in hand. The result is an absolutely stunning new book called, *The Boy Behind the Gate* and I'm proud to say it's being received by readers beyond my expectations. Now it's time to share my experience with other future authors.

There are many aspects to publishing that authors and future authors will want to consider before, during, and after their writing. I break these down into different categories.

1. **Purpose of your book**—Why did I decide to write a book? Why do you want to write a book? Have specific reasons. Is it for your own ego and to see your name in print? There are much cheaper and easier ways to do that. You could just buy a newspaper ad. I had clear reasons for writing:
  - To recount my adventures and summarize six years into a readable format to share with others.
  - To inspire others to make their own dreams come true.
  - To use as a stepping stone to my motivational speaking career
  - Because I knew my mother would like it
2. **Vision of what your book will look like**—What was my vision? Originally, I had visions of four-color pages throughout, gorgeous varnished pages, hundreds of photos in a coffee table size book. I ended up with a standard 6 x 9 book with two 16-page inserts of four-color

photos. Why? Not because of printing costs. My quotes from China were inexpensive enough, but because, after my research and reviewing of many books, I realized that coffee table books are in general, not read. They tend to sit on coffee tables and occasionally people pick them up to look at the photos. I wanted my story to be read because I wanted to inspire people. I knew my words were worth reading.

I went with a traditional book adding the spice of a custom map showing our route around the world, mini maps at the beginning of each chapter, and inserted color photo pages.

I always wanted a hard cover book from the beginning. Why? To me, that just seems like a book. I'm probably old-fashion in that sense, and plenty of people advised me to go paperback, but I had to stick to my guns with some things and this was something I felt strongly about.

On the other hand, I'm happy to have my book on Kindle and the iPad, so I'm getting with the high-tech wave too. After all, a sale is a sale, and if someone reads my book...in any format, and gets any inspiration or joy from it, then I'm happy.

What vision do you have of your book? What parts are you willing to be flexible with if budget or other factors test that vision?

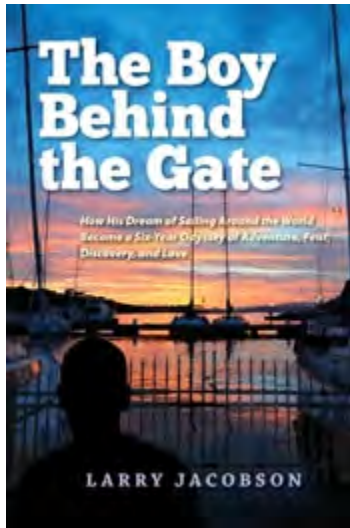
3. **Editing of the manuscript**—I have always enjoyed writing but knew I had limitations. Be smart enough to know what you don't know. I hired a professional editor and we worked together for almost two years on three very intense edits/revises/re-writes. By the time we were though, and \$8,000 later, I considered my book done.

At this point in the writing and editing process, friends began telling me that I should join writing groups and share my manuscript with others. While I didn't join any writing groups, I did send a few pieces here and there to colleagues and so began one of the most frustrating periods of the writing experience. I sent the same chapter to three friends one day. I received back three completely different critiques telling me emphatically to go three different directions. None of them said it was good. So much for my first editor's work. (name withheld)

One day I sent a few excerpts to a friend of mine who is also an editor. "Hey Larry, why don't you let me have a quick look at it. Perhaps I can add something to the project." While hesitant because I really wanted to be through with the book, and I was tired of the project, I sent him a few chapters for his flight back east. He called me from mid-flight to say, "Larry, we have to talk." (John van Duyl)

He was right. The manuscript was in dire need of help: from grammar, repeated words, unclear sections, and lack of consistency in number usage, capitals, italics...the list went on. Another year and another \$8,000 and we had a winner. The writing is clean, tight, concise, and moves the reader forward with suspense, humor, and emotion. The descriptions of places and characters are short and delightful, and the book is getting rave reviews. I was too close to the manuscript after those first two years to have the ability to distinguish the good from the bad. Additionally, my manuscript was too long and because I felt so personal about each and every story that was in it, I had a hard time being able to see the interesting from the mundane. My editor saved me from producing a boring book.

Don't confuse editing with proofreading. A good [professional proofreader](#) is worth every penny, although their rates vary dramatically. I was fortunate enough to find a really good one (Marla Markman).



Click for more info  
(Amazon)

4. **Book Design**—I know how to use Word on the computer and I have iPhoto, so why couldn't I just do the design and layout myself? (Laugh Out Loud) Not a chance-I tried a couple of pages-and knew I needed a professional. I interviewed three different book designers. They had various levels of experience with prices accordingly. I chose the one I felt comfortable working with and who I liked as a person. He (Joel Friedlander) was worth his weight in gold. I couldn't create a page layout if my life depended on it and Word is not the program commonly accepted by printers. Everything is done these days in Adobe InDesign, a program far beyond my simple capabilities. From photo layout to page design, the book designer is critical if you want a beautiful product. The book is a masterpiece. However, I still needed to create the world map for the book. I was fortunate enough to find a local artist who produced the map and helped with other things that needed designing-including my new company logo. (Rachel Arends)
5. **Finding a publisher**—New company? At this time, I was getting pressure from friends to start looking for an agent to take my work to “a real publishing house.” I began looking into the process and didn't like what I found. My background is 20 years in sales and marketing, and servicing customers. I couldn't believe what I found in the publishing business. First of all, I was supposed to find an agent so I joined sites like Firstwriter and Agent Query. To navigate my way through all of that and find an agent interested in my work was going to be an entire project in itself. The timing supposedly goes like this:
  - Find an agent. Should take about 3 to 6 months.
  - The agent will review your “Query Letter” (another entire project). Shouldn't take them more than three months to get back to you to let you know if they even want a book proposal. I'm sorry, but if I had run my previous business like that, I wouldn't be sitting here writing about my past successes.

- If you're lucky enough to get an agent, they estimate a year to find a publisher willing to take your project...if they find you one.

While I do know that publishers supposedly have the distribution down, in a world where distribution of books is no longer set in its ways, I decided to go alone and start my own publishing company. I didn't have the time or patience to deal with a publishing house...even if they were interested.

Let me be clear. I started my own publishing company, which is very different from having a book printed on demand (POD). Why? My book is hard cover and has color photo pages; both are very difficult for a POD company to produce price effectively. Buoy Press was born.

6. **Printing**—One of the things a publisher does for you is print your book. Now I had to find a printer on my own. I got four quotes including one from China and was pleased to see the best quote and services I could find was right here in America. (BookMasters) While I wanted a local company, it seems that the Midwest is where books are printed, so the Midwest it is. My book designer helped with specifying size, paper, color, page layout, etc. because the printer speaks a different language that I do.
7. **Distribution**—What good does it do to print a couple thousand books if you don't know how to distribute them? Who is going to distribute them? How are they going to be circulated and to where? Online? Amazon? Barnes & Noble, others? Bookstores? Where will your books be stored, in your garage? Will you mail them out yourself?

Remember your original purpose in writing the book. If it's just a few hundred books that you want your friends and relatives to see, then you may want a garage full and spend time at the post office. I was looking for something much bigger because I want my name out there in the limelight in order to get known as a motivational speaker. Therefore, I wanted my book available in bookstores even though most books are bought online. I wanted to spend my time promoting, not shipping. I had to find a distributor who would handle a small publishing house such as my new company, [Buoy Press](#). I found only a few distributors who would work with small publishers and settled on mine. (Atlas Books is a division of BookMasters) They store the books, ship the books, handle the Amazon account, distribute to Ingram, etc., and they allow me to have my own shopping cart with a direct link to their distribution.

8. **Promotion**—Promotion used to be handled by the big publishing houses, but that has changed even if you get a contract. Why would they spend big bucks on an unheard of author? If you're John Grisham or Tom Clancy, they know they have a sure thing, but spending promotion money and time on unproven authors is a thing of the past. Whether you go with a publishing house or publish the book yourself through either a printer or POD, you are the one responsible for promoting your book to the world. Be prepared to learn SEO (search engine optimization), have a website you can drive traffic to, get involved with Social Media such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.

I was fully prepared to do all of my own P.R. but then decided it was too much to handle. I interviewed multiple literary P.R. firms and got quotes from \$2500 to \$10,000 per month. I was back to doing it on my own and had just signed up for a "How to do your own P.R." course

(Sandra Beckwith). Then I discovered pay for performance P.R. companies and because I felt they were a much higher value than traditional P.R. firms, I hired one. (EMSIInc)

I've been in newspaper articles, online blogs, and they've only just begun to scratch the surface of my guaranteed 10,000,000 views of something with my name in it. My book, [The Boy Behind the Gate](#), has been a number one ranked book on Amazon.com for multiple days and the publicity is building. I'd call this a success.

Next step is to figure out the speaking industry so I can get my inspirational message to those who want to make their dreams come true.

[The Boy Behind the Gate](#) on Amazon

Larry Jacobson's terrific [Author Website](#) with movies and hundreds of photos from his journey. Take a look.

Watch for a Case Study featuring the many interesting design elements in Larry's book.

Amazon links are affiliate links. Photo Copyright © 2011 Larry Jacobson. All rights reserved.

•

44

44

Like

0

Tagged as: [book design](#), [book distribution](#), [book marketing](#), [Book Printing](#), [BookMasters](#), [Larry Jacobson](#), [Marla Markman](#), [promotion](#), [Rachel Arends](#), [sales](#), [self publishing](#), [The Boy Behind the Gate](#)



Article by [Joel Friedlander](#)

Joel Friedlander is a self-published author and book designer who blogs about book design, self-publishing and the indie publishing life at TheBookDesigner.com. He's also the proprietor of Marin Bookworks, where he helps publishers and authors who decide to publish get to market on time and on budget with books that are both properly constructed and beautiful to read.

Like this post? Subscribe via [RSS](#) or [E-Mail](#) to get updated with all of the latest content from **The Book Designer**.