

Vanity publishers

Getting your name into print

Many of us dream of getting our literary efforts or names into print and as most published authors will tell you, it's not easy. However, there are people prepared to help you get your work or biographical details published – for a price. They are called vanity or self publishers. That's because the author pays for the editing, printing, marketing and distribution of the finished product. The dubious activities of some fringe operators are a cause of concern to the Office of Fair Trading and some authors.

Unethical vanity publishers

These people want you to believe that they will make considerable efforts to market your published work. Yet despite the inflated price you pay, they have no real interest in the success of the book.

Their sole concern is the money you pay to either have it published or purchase a copy of the work. They employ various methods to drum up trade.

School literary competitions

Unethical vanity publishers often target schools by promoting short story or poetry competitions. The student's parents are then contacted by the publisher and informed their child's entry will be published – provided they agree to purchase the book. The cost of a book is quite substantial, often in the \$60–\$70 price range. As these competitions attract up to 3,000 entrants, it can be a very profitable exercise for the publisher. But distribution is limited to family and friends. You won't find these works available through bookshops.

Unethical vanity publishers play upon the desire of parents to demonstrate support for their child's creative abilities by purchasing the book. However, parents are urged to treat these deals with caution. They are paying large sums for publications of dubious value.

Australian Publishing Group, Bundall, Queensland

The Office of Consumer and Business Affairs, South Australia issued a warning against this group. This vanity publisher obtains stories from students for a school short story competition offering the chance of winning a prize. The students are then notified that their story is considered worthy of publication and for \$65, they can purchase a hard bound copy. A photograph and a dedication can be included for an extra \$25.

Other approaches

It's not only students, schools and parents who are targeted by unethical vanity publishers. These publishers also approach specific groups of people with offers to include them in specialist publications.

Again, substantial amounts of money are involved and there are often significant delays before any material is published – if at all.

The International Library of Poetry

Another vanity publisher invites you to submit poems for inclusion in an anthology with prize money available for those whose poetry is to be published. You should make sure you are happy with the extent of distribution of this publication before agreeing to be included in it.

Roll of Honour

A number of public warnings have been issued regarding The Australian Roll of Honour group of publications. Recipients of royal and national honours, prominent public figures and others who have received public recognition are invited to provide their biographical details for inclusion in future publications. They are required to pay up to \$500 in advance.

To add credibility to the offer, the promoter claims the publication will be used in embassies around the world. It is also claimed copies will be forwarded to the Queen, the Prince of Wales and numerous national

libraries. Many consumers have been waiting for well over 5 years to receive their publication. The Office of Fair Trading has been successful in obtaining the Supreme Court injunction against this New Zealand based business, restraining it from engaging in misleading and deceptive conduct.

Reputable vanity publishers

Many people have a story to tell. But getting mainstream publishing houses to even read manuscripts is difficult. If rejected by traditional publishers, reputable vanity publishers can provide an alternative. Even authors as eminent as Banjo Patterson and D.H. Lawrence resorted to self publication at certain stages of their careers.

The revolution in desktop publishing over the past decade has made vanity publishing an economic proposition. Vanity publishers cater for a niche market and their good reputation is essential for their continued existence in the industry.

The Office of Fair Trading receives very few complaints about their activities. But like any other consumer purchase, aspiring authors should shop around for the best deal before signing up for their services.

Questions to ask

Always make sure you are getting true value for any costs you are asked to meet, by asking the right questions.

- Who subscribes to the publication?
- What are the distribution arrangements?
- What is the date of the publication?
- Is there any money back guarantee?
- What exactly are you getting for your money?
- How many will be printed?
- Are subscribers limited to people who pre-pay for the publication?
- Does the publisher have an agent in New South Wales?

What to watch for

Unethical vanity publishers share some common characteristics.

- Their products are expensive and of little real value.
- They will often insist that you must act immediately if you want to take advantage of their 'tremendous' deal.
- When the product is not published on schedule, consumers will be given a string of excuses for the delay.
- They will not get a review in any reputable publication.
- They will not get your story or poem into mainstream distribution.

Where to get more information

Fair Trading Centres

Tel: 13 32 20

Australian Publishers Association (APA)

Tel: 9281 9788

www.publishers.asn.au

SCAMWATCH

There are several sites on the internet where you can find information about scams.

www.ocba.sa.gov.au

www.scamwatch.gov.au

www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au
Fair Trading enquiries 13 32 20
TTY 1300 723 404
Language assistance 13 14 50

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