The Author Ownership Blueprint

12 Decisions to Make Before You Professionally Self-Publish

Laura Andrews

Build.
Own.
Repeat.

Professional self-publishing is a sequence, not a stack of unrelated tasks.

Every book is part of a larger publishing system: editing, rights and permissions, publishing identity, ISBNs, production specifications, files, distribution accounts, websites, direct sales, fulfillment, and timing.

The individual pieces are not hard to learn. The challenge is that each piece is interconnected with the others. A decision made too late can mean reformatting a book, redesigning a cover, changing an ISBN, rebuilding a website, reopening an account, or discovering that someone else controls an asset you thought belonged to you.

The Author Ownership Blueprint is designed to help you see those connections before you start building. You do not need every technical answer today. You do need to know which decisions must be made, what each one affects, and what has to happen before something else can begin.

TWO QUESTIONS RUN THROUGH THE ENTIRE BLUEPRINT:

WHO OWNS IT?

WHAT HAS TO HAPPEN BEFORE THE NEXT STEP BEGINS?

PART 1: DEFINE THE BOOK — readiness, purpose, and identity
PART 2: BUILD THE PUBLISHING FOUNDATION — publisher, ISBN and account ownership, and online home
PART 3: DESIGN THE PRODUCT — formats, specifications, interior, and cover
PART 4: BUILD THE SALES SYSTEM — distribution, direct sales, and the realistic publication timeline

>>> **IMPORTANT: This is a decision map, not a step-by-step publishing manual. Its job is to help you see the system clearly enough to make deliberate choices.**

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PHASE ONE

Define the book.

Before you choose platforms or start production, make sure you know what you are publishing, what it needs to accomplish and whether the manuscript is actually ready to become a product.

Decisions 1-3

DECISION 1 OF 12

Is Your Manuscript Really Ready for Production?

Finishing the writing is not necessarily the same thing as finishing the manuscript. Before production begins, determine whether the book needs further editorial work appropriate for the project: developmental or substantive editing when needed, copyediting, proofreading, fact-checking, source documentation, and final author revisions.

Editors and copyeditors will have to work you into their schedules. Each may need several weeks to complete your edits. Then you'll have to approve or reject the changes and revise as needed. You may also need fact-checking or sensitivity readers.

This is also the time to identify material you did not create. Photographs, illustrations, charts, screenshots, letters, excerpts, quotations, and song lyrics can raise copyright, licensing, privacy, publicity, or permission questions. Obtaining releases for copyrighted material can take weeks of diligent persistence.

> Imagine your formatter has finalized your interior, and your cover is underway when it occurs to you that you included three images you "saved as picture" from the internet without verifying the rights attached to them—and one rights holder never responds. The production schedule doesn't care that everything else is ready. You must hold everything up and may have to pay the formatter to revise the finalized files after you either obtain permission or remove the material.

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Resolve the rights and documentation appropriate to your use before those materials become embedded in finished files.

Once formatting begins, continuing to rewrite, make substantial corrections, or add material can create a cascade: altered page numbers, changed page count, shifted references, revised interior files and eventually a different spine width for the cover.

WHAT THIS AFFECTS: Formatting • Page count • Cover dimensions • Permissions • Production schedule • Publication date

SEQUENCE CHECK: Resolve manuscript changes and rights questions before final formatting and cover production begin.

Questions to ask yourself

- Have the appropriate levels of editing for my manuscript been completed?
- Are facts, citations, names, and sources verified?
- Does the book contain photographs, lyrics, illustrations, excerpts or other third-party material?
- Have I determined what permissions, licenses, releases, or documentation may be needed?
- Am I genuinely ready to stop revising and begin production?

YOUR DECISION: What must be completed before this manuscript moves into production?



DECISION 2 OF 12

What Does Success Look Like for This Book?

Before choosing formats, platforms, or sales channels, decide the purpose your book is serving. For one author, success may mean book revenue from a wide readership. For another,

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the book may establish authority, support speaking or consulting, serve an organization, extend a methodology, reach a particular community, or become part of a larger body of work. There is no single correct publishing system for every book because not every book has the same job.

WHAT THIS AFFECTS: Distribution • Pricing • Formats • Website • Direct sales • Bulk/event sales

Questions to ask yourself

- What do I want this book to accomplish?
- Who do I want to buy it?
- Where are those readers most likely to encounter it?
- Will I sell books through speaking, events, organizations, or my business?
- Twelve months after publication, what would make me say: this book is doing what I created it to do?

YOUR DECISION: What does success look like for this book?



DECISION 3 OF 12

What Will You Title Your Book—And How Will the Author be Identified?

For nonfiction, a subtitle often defines the subject matter. A strong title can attract attention; the subtitle should tell a prospective reader what the book is about, whom it is for, what problem it addresses or what result it promises.

The title and author identity must also work beyond the front cover. They appear in metadata, retailer listings, ISBN records, websites, sales pages, media materials, and search results. Now is the time to research your own name to see if there are other authors with the same name. If the subject material is very different, it may not matter much. But if both of you write on financial matters, you may want to differentiate yourself with a middle name or first or middle initial.

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> If you are writing about a subject you don't want associated with your “real life” name in search results, now is the time to consider a pen name. There are plenty of legitimate professional and personal reasons for making that choice—no judgment! My own name is very common. For fiction, I chose another that would stand out and make me easier to find online.

WHAT THIS AFFECTS: Cover • Metadata • ISBN records • Website • Retail listings • Discoverability

Questions to ask yourself

- Does the title attract interest without requiring a long explanation?
- Does the subtitle, if any, clearly communicate the book's subject, audience, or promise?
- Does the title/subtitle combination support the purpose identified in Decision 2?
- How will the author's name appear, and is that presentation consistent across the professional platform?

YOUR DECISION: Working title, subtitle and author name as they should appear in publication records:

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PHASE TWO

BUILD THE PUBLISHING FOUNDATION

Now establish the identity and ownership structure behind the book. These decisions can be difficult to unwind after ISBNs, accounts, and distribution records are already in place.

Decisions 4-6

DECISION 4 OF 12

Who is Publishing the Book?

Self-publishing does not mean you need to use your personal name as the “publisher” name. Many independent authors establish an imprint or publishing name under which their books are published.

That publishing identity connects directly to ISBN records and distribution setup. The publisher name associated with an ISBN needs to be handled consistently with the information required by the platforms receiving the book. A mismatch can create delays and troubleshooting at exactly the point you want production moving forward.

Choose a name that still makes sense if this book is followed by another.

WHAT THIS AFFECTS: ISBN registration • Distribution setup • Copyright page • Website • Future books • Business identity

>>> **SEQUENCE CHECK**: Choose the publishing identity before registering author-owned ISBNs and building platform records around it.

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Questions to ask yourself

- Will I publish under my personal/business name or create an imprint?
- Is the name appropriate for future books as well as this one?
- Have I checked the name before building assets around it?
- How will I use the publishing name consistently across ISBN and distribution records?

OWNERSHIP CHECK: Do you know exactly what name will appear as publisher—and where?

YOUR DECISION: What publishing name or imprint will appear on this book?

DECISION 5 OF 12

Who Will Own Your ISBNs and Publishing Accounts?

An ISBN (International Standard Book Number) is more than a number entered during upload. Before accepting a free ISBN or allowing a service provider to assign one, understand who controls it and which publishing identity is attached to that edition.

If you control your own ISBNs, you have options a platform-owned ISBN may not provide. This matters especially when reclaiming a previously published book. Depending on the original setup, you may be able to have an author-owned ISBN released or transferred where the issuing arrangement permits it; in other situations, the clean solution may be a new edition with a new author-controlled ISBN.

> This is often the case with my clients migrating from pay-to-publish or hybrid publishers to self-publishing. In many of those cases, the publisher controls the ISBNs, cover files, and publishing account. Authors often pay close to retail to purchase author copies, which can make in-person and direct sales financially impractical. To regain control of their work and improve their margins, they may be forced to spend yet more money to create their own publishing system.

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A free ISBN supplied by a publishing platform is generally tied to that platform or its publishing arrangement. An ISBN you obtain as the publisher can generally be used for the same edition across distribution platforms, provided the book and publisher information remain consistent. Amazon also assigns its own ASIN for identifying products within Amazon's system; an ASIN is not a substitute for an ISBN across the wider book trade.

Hybrid publishers, publishing professionals, and freelancers can help manage your accounts or guide you through the publishing process without needing to own your ISBNs or accounts themselves.

The ISBN is separate from your copyright, although you may wish to list it on your copyright registration.

WHAT THIS AFFECTS: Publisher of record • Distribution • Future editions • Vendor relationships • Independent access

Questions to ask yourself

- If you have published before, who owns each ISBN? If not, who will own the ISBNs?
- Who will be identified as publisher on my book?
- Whose name and email address controls each distribution account?
- If I stop working with a vendor tomorrow, what happens to my book?
- Can I access and change my book without asking someone else's permission?

OWNERSHIP CHECK: If the professional helping you disappeared tomorrow, could you still access your publishing operation?

YOUR DECISION: List the ISBN and account ownership decisions that need to be made:

DECISION 6 OF 12

WHERE WILL YOUR PUBLISHING BUSINESS LIVE ONLINE?

An author website, publishing-imprint site, and individual book page do different jobs.

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Sometimes one site is enough. Sometimes an author site plus a separate publishing presence makes sense.

Your author site may become the long-term home for your professional identity, books, speaking, email list, and reader relationships. Your publishing name may have its own domain or web presence and can also be used to brand direct-sale product pages on services such as Payhip.

Think beyond Book #1. A site designed entirely around one title can become awkward the moment Book #2 arrives.

WHAT THIS AFFECTS: Domains • Email • Direct sales • Author brand • Imprint identity • Future books

Questions to ask yourself

- Am I building a home for this book on my business website or a long-term author platform?
- Should the domain be based on my name, publishing imprint, book—or more than one of these?
- Where will readers go when I publish the next book? Here or somewhere else?
- Where will direct-sale product pages live or link to?
- Will I own the domains and primary accounts?

YOUR DECISION: What online assets need to exist before publication?



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PHASE THREE

DESIGN THE PRODUCT

A book is both intellectual property and a physical/digital product. Formats and specifications have to be decided before the production files can be built correctly.

Decisions 7-9

DECISION 7 OF 12

Which Formats Will You Publish?

Paperback is only one possible edition. Depending on the book and audience, you may consider paperback, hardcover, ebook, and eventually audiobook.

Authors sometimes skip hardcover or ebook because they assume demand will be low. But an unfilled format can also leave room for unauthorized or misleading editions to appear in marketplaces. It's often practical to publish ebook and print formats at or near the same time, but audiobook production adds meaningful cost and complexity and deserves careful consideration before leaping in.

Different platforms offer different advantages across formats and sales channels. Depending on your book's trim size, interior, and purpose, using more than one platform may be beneficial. For example, an author selling direct, at in-person events, and through global retail distribution may ultimately use several platforms plus an independent printer to get the right combination of reach, format options, fulfillment, and cost.

Each format also has its own production requirements and, where applicable, its own ISBN.

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WHAT THIS AFFECTS: ISBNs • Interior files • Cover files • Production cost • Pricing • Distribution

Questions to ask yourself

- Which formats does my intended reader expect?
- Does premium hardcover with dustjacket make sense for the book's purpose, audience or perceived value?
- Should the ebook launch with the print editions?
- Is there a strategic reason to launch one format before the others?
- Is audiobook production justified now, later, or not at all?
- Which formats do I intentionally want to control with which distributors?

YOUR DECISION: Formats planned at launch and formats intentionally deferred:

DECISION 8 OF 12

What Size and Specifications Will the Book Be?

Trim size sounds like a small production detail. It is not. It is one of the most consequential early production decisions because it affects page count, spine width, printing cost, readability, interior design, and cover specifications.

Paper choice, color versus black-and-white interiors, bleed requirements, and binding choices can also change what the final files require. A beautifully formatted manuscript built to the wrong specifications is not finished—it needs to be rebuilt.

> A formatter can't make the production decisions for you. I recently spoke with an established expert who had a firm books-in-hand deadline. His children's book—written in his area of expertise—was already with a formatter, but he didn't know what size the finished book would be.

That's not a minor detail. Children's books, image-heavy books, textbooks, workbooks, and

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spiral-bound workshop materials can have more limited printing and distribution options depending on trim size, paper type, binding, and interior specifications. These production decisions should be made before the book is formatted, especially when the author is also working toward a firm books-in-hand date.

WHAT THIS AFFECTS: Formatting • Page count • Printing cost • Cover • Spine width • Reader experience

SEQUENCE CHECK: Lock trim size and key print specifications before final interior formatting begins.

Questions to ask yourself

- What trim sizes are appropriate for books like mine?
- How will size affect page count, printing cost and perceived value?
- Will the interior be black and white or color?
- What paper and binding options make sense?
- Are my chosen specifications supported by the distribution channels I plan to use?

YOUR DECISION: What physical product are you actually creating?

DECISION 9 OF 12

How Will the Interior and Cover be Produced?

Formatting and cover design are not isolated creative tasks. The interior must be formatted to the correct trim size and specifications. Only when the interior is final enough to establish the exact page count can the full print cover be finalized to the correct spine width.

> With clients coming from pay-to-publish or hybrid publishers, I can't count the number of times I've asked for the book's editable Word file and been sent a PDF instead—because the PDF was all the author received after editing and copyediting. They may be able to see

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corrections that need to be made, but they don't have the editable source file needed to make them easily.

Whether you build the files yourself or hire professionals, know what files should exist when the project is complete—and who will possess the editable source files as well as the final production exports. Hint: for your interior files, that should be you. And I'd argue it should be you for your cover source files, too—even if you have to pay the designer or artist extra to receive them. If the designer or artist cannot be reached later, the files you own will allow you to make or have changes made to the cover without having to start over.

WHAT THIS AFFECTS: Print quality • Ebook quality • Cover dimensions • Future revisions • Vendor independence

SEQUENCE CHECK: Specifications → interior formatting → exact page count → final print-cover dimensions. Sequence matters.

Questions to ask yourself

- Will I create these files myself or delegate some/all of production?
- What software or professional tools will be used?
- Who will have the editable source files?
- Will I receive the final print-ready and digital files?
- How will revisions be made later?
- Has the cover designer received the final specifications and exact page count?

OWNERSHIP CHECK: Do you own the finished files and have a workable plan for future changes?

YOUR DECISION: Who will produce each file, and which source/final files will I own?

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PHASE FOUR

Build the Sales System

Publishing the files is not the same thing as building the routes through which books will reach readers. Distribution, fulfillment, direct sales, and inventory can require different tools.

Decisions 10-12

DECISION 10 OF 12

Where Will the Book Be Distributed—And How Will Orders Be Fulfilled

“Put it on Amazon” is not a distribution strategy. Where the book should be available depends on what success looks like for this particular book.

Amazon may be important. So may broader book-trade distribution, libraries, independent bookstores, international channels, your own website, speaking events, book events, organizational sales, or bulk orders.

Sometimes multiple services are needed because distribution, printing, and fulfillment are different jobs. A service that makes a title available to retailers may not be the best choice for fulfilling direct website orders. An author who sells at events may also need inventory and short-run ordering choices that do not matter to an author selling only online.

WHAT THIS AFFECTS: Platform setup • ISBNs • Pricing • Discounts • Fulfillment • Direct sales • Inventory

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Questions to ask yourself

- Where does my book actually need to be available?
- Do I need Amazon only, wide distribution, or a combination?
- Will bookstores or libraries matter to this book's goals?
- Will I maintain inventory for events or speaking engagements?
- Who will print and fulfill orders from each sales channel?

YOUR DECISION: Map the places the book needs to be purchasable and the service that will support each route:

DECISION 11 OF 12

Will You Sell Directly to Readers?

Selling through retailers and selling directly are different systems. Direct sales can support signed books, bundles, event sales, special editions, bulk quantities, and a direct relationship with readers.

But a BUY button is only the visible part. Behind it is payment processing, tax setup, order notifications, inventory, shipping, fulfillment, customer service, and email integrations.

Direct sales don't just mean selling from your website. In-person events allow you to meet readers—and actual fans!—but they bring their own infrastructure requirements. Depending on where you sell, you may need to plan for inventory, payment processing, sales-tax registration and reporting, and the logistics of getting books to the event on time. Requirements can differ by state and even by type of event, so this is something to investigate before you arrive with boxes of books and a card reader.

Direct sales can be valuable—but they need infrastructure.

WHAT THIS AFFECTS: Website • Payments • Email • Fulfillment • Shipping • Customer data • Margins

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Questions to ask yourself

- Do direct sales support the purpose of this book?
- What will I sell directly: individual books, signed copies, bundles, or bulk quantities?
- Who will fulfill the orders?
- Will I carry inventory or use print/fulfillment partners?
- What should happen automatically after someone buys?

OWNERSHIP CHECK: Who owns the customer relationship and the systems supporting the sale?

YOUR DECISION: What role will direct sales play in this book's publishing system?



DECISION 12 OF 12

What is Your Realistic Publication Timeline?

Now you are ready to choose a date—because now you know what the date has to contain. Your timeline has to account for manuscript readiness, permissions, publishing identity, ISBNs, specifications, formatting, cover design, proofs, distribution setup, website development, direct-sales infrastructure, and the time required to correct problems discovered along the way.

For standard print ordering and shipping, a practical plan should allow roughly a month from uploading production-ready files through platform review, proofing, printing, shipping, and receiving books safely in hand. Faster routes can sometimes put books in your hands in roughly 5–10 days after upload, but speed can significantly reduce margins and leave far less room for proofing, corrections, or shipping surprises.

> If the book supports a speaking engagement, conference, award, anniversary, organizational event, or business launch, work backward from the date the books must physically be in hand—not merely the date you hope to click “Publish.” Authors trying to make fundamental publishing decisions while rushing a book through production—because they began six weeks before they need books in hand—are a dime a dozen. The compressed timeline limits

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their options and often forces compromises that lower the quality of the final product no matter how excellent the writing.

When you start from knowledge—with Decision 1 completed and a publishing system already in place—you can sometimes make remarkable timelines work. More importantly, you aren't relying on a miracle. You know which decisions must be made, what depends on what, and how much time each part of the system actually needs.

That is how you protect both the deadline and the quality of the book.

WHAT THIS AFFECTS: Every previous decision • Proofing • Printing • Shipping • Events • Launch commitments

>>> **SEQUENCE CHECK**: Work backward from BOOKS IN HAND. Build in normal printing and shipping time first; treat rush production as a contingency, not the plan.

Questions to ask yourself

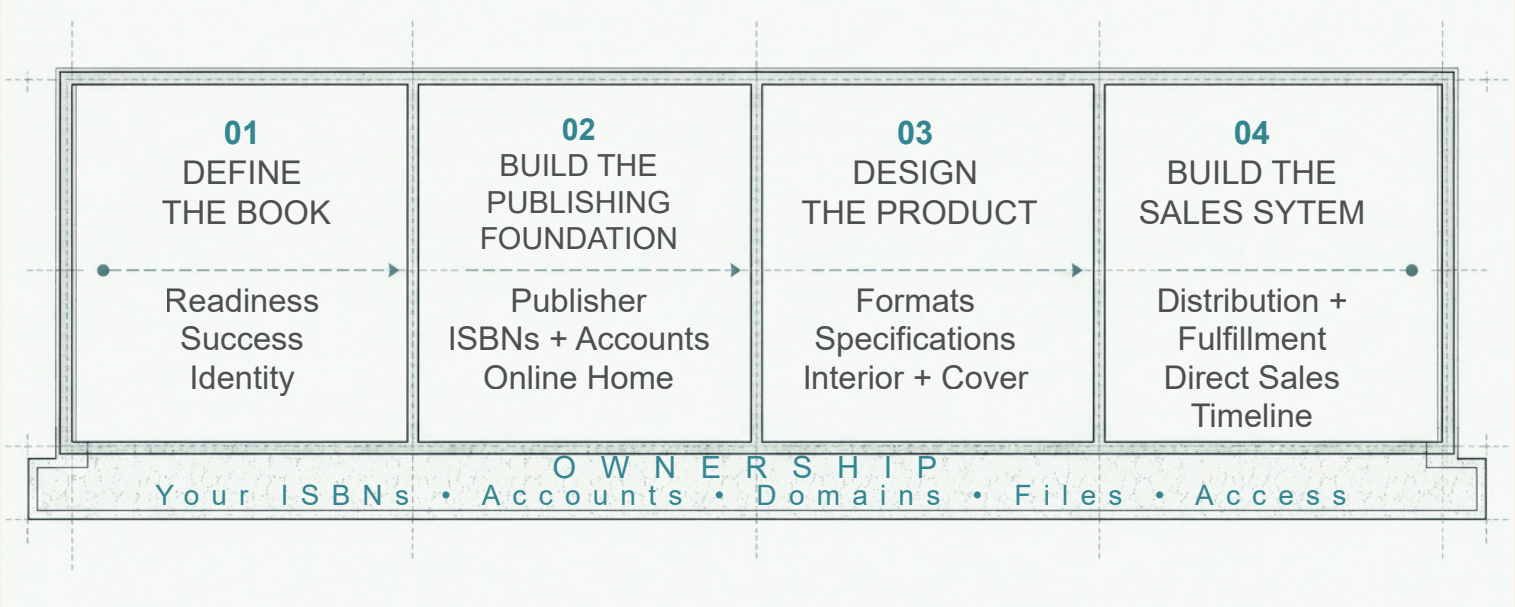
- Is there a meaningful date driving publication?
- When do finished books physically need to be in hand?
- Which steps depend on another step being completed first?
- Where have I allowed time for proofs, corrections and shipping?
- Am I paying a profit-margin penalty simply because I waited too long?

YOUR DECISION: Target publication date / books-in-hand date / production-ready deadline:

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The decisions are connected.

At the beginning, these may have looked like twelve separate publishing decisions. They are not. The goal is not to make you your own full-time publishing technician. It is to understand the system well enough to decide what you want to own, what you want to manage, and what you can confidently delegate.



Ownership is the foundation. Sequence is the path.

Build it. Own it. Repeat it.

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YOUR NEXT STEP

Want Help Building the System Behind Your Book?

If working through this Blueprint revealed decisions you have not made—or connections you had not realized were there—that is exactly what Build. Own. Repeat. is designed to address.

Build. Own. Repeat. is Laura Andrews's nine-week, build-with-you publishing system for established experts and serious authors who want to professionally self-publish while understanding and owning the infrastructure behind their books. We work through the decisions, build the publishing system around your actual book, and get the pieces working together—so you leave with more than a published book.

You leave knowing how your publishing operation works. And with the ability to confidently delegate tasks because you know what you are expecting to receive and where each piece fits into your system.

>>> **PUBLISHING FIT CONVERSATION**: A conversation about your book, what already exists, what you want to own and control, and whether Build. Own. Repeat. is the right fit. No high-pressure sales call.

Date:

Time:

Schedule a Publishing Fit Conversation

go.publishing.sweetbeechmedia.com/book-call



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