

## **Do You Really Want To Publish through Print on Demand?**

J.A. Konrath

The following is 100% true. The names have been changed to protect the guilty, but not one word has been altered or omitted from the original messages.

On January 26, 2004, I was spammed by a large print-on-demand publisher. To avoid getting sued, I'll call this company FastPrint. Print-on-demand is a technology that allows authors to self-publish their books for a fee. Like all vanity presses (where you pay the publisher, rather than the publisher pays you), FastPrint offers the struggling author a quick fix for the difficult task of selling a book. The bottom line price is \$500, and depending on the services you opt for, it can go much higher than that (with optional marketing plans, an author could pay well over \$5000).

The problem is that POD books are more expensive than regular books, usually by several dollars. There's no distribution service for them (because they aren't returnable), so as a rule bookstores don't carry them. They also don't get reviewed. And even though you pay for the printing, the copy-editing, and the cover art, the books just don't have the same look and feel as traditionally published books. They look, well, like a vanity press.

So the unsuspecting author is stuck with an overpriced, sub-standard product that the bookstores won't carry. Trying to make the initial investment back, when FastPrint takes a liberal percentage of every sale, is difficult, if not impossible.

Since I am a smart-ass, I decided to respond to the FastPrint spam, seeing how far I could take it. I'm a published author, and I recently signed a very good deal with a well-respected NY publishing house. How long would it take FastPrint to catch on? Especially since my website and publication date are attached to the bottom of each message in my email signature?

See for yourself, as we plunge deep into the dark abyss known as:

### **THE FASTPRINT CHRONICLES**

Sent: Monday, January 26, 2004 10:40 AM  
Subject: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Dear Joe,

My name is (name omitted) and I work for FastPrint, a technology-based publishing company. I noticed your name on the Official Desk of Mystery Writer Joe Konrath website, and if you don't mind, I wanted to reach out to you to let you know about a great opportunity for publishing your work. You might find it intriguing. But if you are not interested, let me know by replying to this e-mail or clicking on the link at the bottom of this message.

As a writer, publishing your work is important to your career. You probably also know how difficult the process can be. The company I work for is trying to change all that by offering affordable self-publishing services to writers of all genres. We don't take rights and we make the publication process fast and simple so that you can get your work into the hands of your readers when you want to.

FastPrint has published over 9,000 titles since 1997 and is partially owned by Big Publishing Company, BPC, a subsidiary of Super Big Publishing Company, one of the world's largest trade book publishers. While self-publishing isn't for everyone, the number of titles we've published doesn't lie: lots of writers are self-publishing their work. FastPrint helps with editorial, design, printing, distribution, fulfillment, and marketing services. We think our services are so great that we back them up with a money-back guarantee.

We'd love to talk with you about any of your publishing projects and how FastPrint might be able to help you. Please click here to register for more information. If you'd prefer, you can call us toll free at 800.555.5555 to speak with a publishing consultant.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
(name omitted)  
Publishing Consultant

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From: Joe  
Subject: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Hi (name omitted)--

Will FastPrint be able to offer me a six figure contract and a multi city tour, like my current publisher has?

Looking forward to your reply.

Joe

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Coming in hardcover, June 2004, from Hyperion  
[www.jakonrath.com](http://www.jakonrath.com)

Sent: Wednesday, January 28, 2004 7:35 AM  
Subject: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Hi Joe,

Thanks for getting in touch with us.

We can't offer you a contract up front, but many of our authors have taken their FastPrint success and gone on to much bigger and better things.

Feel free to get in touch with me to discuss.

Best wishes,  
(name omitted)

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From: Joe  
Subject: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing  
Hi (name omitted)--

I checked out the FastPrint website. Looking it over, I got the distinct impression that FastPrint is asking for money from authors, rather than giving money to authors.

Shouldn't this be the other way around?

best,  
Joe

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Sent: Thursday, January 29, 2004 4:25 PM  
Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Hi Joe,

Yes, it would be nice if every author could get published by a traditional publishing house. But, as you know, that isn't the case. Authors publishing with FastPrint do have to pay for the service but they also receive royalty payments. Also, many of our authors have been picked up by traditional publishing houses (Bantam, St. Martin's, Kensington, etc.) once their books became available through us.

Please let me know if you have any further questions.

Best,  
(name omitted)

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From: Joe  
Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing  
Hi (name omitted)--

It's tempting, but I'm locked into this six-figure contract with Hyperion.

How would I get out of that, in order to pay for your services at FastPrint?

best,  
Joe

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Sent: Friday, January 30, 2004 3:31 PM  
Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Joe,

You'd have to check with Hyperion on this. I don't know the details of your contract so I'm unable to comment.

If you have any further questions about our services, or if you decide to submit something with us, please feel free to get in touch with me. I'll be happy to help you out in any way that I can.

Best wishes,  
(name omitted)

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From: Joe  
Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Hi (name omitted)--

I just spoke with my literary agent, and she advised against trying to break my current contract. I suppose I can understand, considering the trouble she went through to land the deal.

What is FastPrint's position on dealing with agents? Since I'd be paying you to get published, if I used an agent, would she also have to give you 15%?

best,  
Joe

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Sent: Tuesday, February 03, 2004 10:16 AM  
Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Hi Joe,

If you were to publish with us, your agent would not be required to pay us any money. We have no dealings with agents.

You were smart to speak with your agent regarding your contract. I would just advise you to investigate everything thoroughly before making a final decision.

Please let me know if you need any more assistance from me.

Best,  
(name omitted)

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From: Joe  
Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Dear (name omitted)--

So if I were to sign with FastPrint, I don't need my agent? I thought all writers needed an agent.

Joe

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Sent: Tuesday, February 03, 2004 4:46 PM  
Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Joe,

You don't need an agent to self-publish your book. Self-publishing helps a number of authors acquire agents...but you don't need one to self-publish.

(name omitted)

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From: Joe

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Dear (name omitted)--

I'm working on the first book in a new mystery series. Because quirky heroes seem to sell well, I'm making my detective a Native American who lost the use of his legs in the Gulf War. He'll solve crimes and stuff. I'm thinking of calling the first book "I Hopi I'll Walk Again." Originally, I wanted to make the hero an Indian lawyer, and I was going to call the first book "Sioux Me." Or maybe he could be a lawyer/cop, who arrests bad people and then prosecutes them. That's a good idea, isn't it? Maybe I'll do that.

What would FastPrint pay me for this book, when I finish writing it?

best,  
Joe

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Sent: Wednesday, February 04, 2004 7:54 AM  
Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Joe,

All of these ideas sound great.

We don't pay authors for their work. Authors pay us an up front cost and then receive royalty payments on all sold copies of their finished book.

(name omitted)

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From: Joe  
Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

(name omitted)--

You like it? Awesome!!!!!!

I've tweaked the idea, to make it more marketable. The new title is "Rolls With Wolves: A Paraplegic Indian Detective Mystery." (it's like a parody of Dances With Wolves, but my guy can't dance, because he's in a wheelchair.

I decided to give my hero a more colorful background, so I made him a half-breed. His name is Geronimo Liebowitz. His mother is a full-blooded Cherokee princess, and his father works in NY's garment district.

I was writing all day yesterday, and I'm almost finished. The book will be about 22,000 words (is that a good length?). Here's how it opens:

Chapter 1

"Geronimo!!!!"

Geronimo Leibowicz spun around in his wheelchair, turning in the direction of the voice that yelled at him loudly.

No one was there. Except for... A DEAD BODY!

(How's that for an opening! The dead man is his old Olympic coach, the man who pushed Geronimo too hard years ago, and is responsible for the crippling luge accident that broke his back. So he has to solve the murder of the man who made him paralyzed!)

So if I pay FastPrint to publish this book (I think I understand it now), do you guys help with the publicity and getting it into bookstores?

Joe

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Sent: Wednesday, February 04, 2004 9:30 AM

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Joe,

Yes, we have a Marketing Services Department that can assist you with publicity. As far as distribution, your book will be made available through Borders, Barnes & Noble, Amazon.com and over 25,000 other online and brick & mortar retail stores. This is not to say that your book will be *on the shelves* in these book stores, but people will be able to order your book through the stores.

Your book will need to be at least 100 pages (typically 30,000 words) in length.

Please let me know if you have any further questions.

Thanks.

(name omitted)

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From: Joe

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Hi (name omitted)--

Wow, 30,000 words is a lot. Maybe I can bump it up to 30,000 words by adding another character. I could give Gerry (only a few people in the story call him Geronimo) a girlfriend, but I don't think he can have sex because he's paralyzed.

Or (thinking out loud here), I could make Gerry gay. Then he could have a boyfriend, and there could still be sex scenes, because Gerry wouldn't really have to do anything, just lie there on the bed.

But would I be alienating readers with a gay hero?

How much does FastPrint charge, anyway? Do you take Visa?

Joe

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Sent: Wednesday, February 04, 2004 2:03 PM

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Joe,

At this point, I think it would be best for you to speak with a Publishing Consultant regarding your book. Our consultants are the best people to speak with about our publishing services. They will answer all of your questions thoroughly and help you get the publishing process started, if you're still interested in submitting with us.

Of course, you can feel free to ask me any questions that you have, also.

I will forward your message to our team of consultants and someone will be in touch with you shortly.

Best,  
(name omitted)

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As of April 22, 2004, I'm still waiting for them to get in touch.

Perhaps I should send them an email?