



Independent Book Publishers Association's (IBPA's)

Hybrid Publisher Criteria

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Hybrid publishing companies behave just like traditional publishing companies in all respects, except that they publish books using an author-subsidized business model, as opposed to financing all costs themselves and, in exchange, return a higher-than-industry-standard share of sales proceeds to the author. A hybrid publisher makes income from a combination of publishing services and book sales.

Although hybrid publishing companies are author-subsidized, they are different from other author-subsidized models (i.e., self-publishing service providers) in that hybrid publishers adhere—*without exception*—to the following set of professional publishing criteria.

For the avoidance of doubt, this means organizations that do not adhere to the entirety of IBPA's Hybrid Publisher Criteria—or adhere to most, but not all of the criteria—are not hybrid publishers as IBPA would define them and should not be calling themselves “hybrid.” These organizations are better categorized as self-publishing service providers. In a self-publishing service provider/author relationship, it is the author who plays the publisher role.

Self-publishing service providers mislabeling themselves as hybrid publishers, whether knowingly or unknowingly, are contributing to the confusion and exploitation of authors and are rightly called out for doing so.

A HYBRID PUBLISHER MUST:

1. Define a mission and vision for its publishing program. A hybrid publisher has a publishing mission and a vision. In a traditional publishing company, the published work often reflects the interests and values of its publisher, whether that's a passion for poetry or a specialization in business books. Good hybrid publishers are no different.

2. Vet submissions. A hybrid publisher vets submissions, publishing only those titles that meet the mission and vision of the company, as well as a defined quality level set by the publisher. Good hybrid publishers don't publish everything that comes over the transom and often decline to publish.

3. Commit to truth and transparency in business practices. It should go without saying, but like any reputable business, a hybrid publisher must commit to transparency in its business practices. This includes being clear about the cost of services and providing an honest estimation

of each book's potential for success. A hybrid publisher is also fair and transparent in its financial dealings, writes contracts in understandable language, and resolves any disputes promptly and fairly. A hybrid publisher never misleads potential authors with false promises, inflated sales data, or manipulated reviews.

4. Provide a negotiable, easy-to-understand contract for each book published. A hybrid publisher supplies a clear, negotiable contract at the start of every negotiation which sets out—in understandable language—the exact scope of the arrangement, including term limits and compensation. All contracts should include regular reviews and updates as needed. A clear rights-reversion clause must be included in every contract. A hybrid publisher should be clear that it welcomes potential authors to discuss the proposed contract with neutral third-party advisors, such as a legal advisor or authors guild.

5. Publish under its own imprint(s) and ISBNs. A hybrid publisher is a true publishing house, with either a publisher or a publishing team developing and distributing books using the hybrid publisher's own imprint(s) and ISBNs.

6. Publish to industry standards. A hybrid publisher accepts full responsibility for the quality of the titles it publishes. Books released by a hybrid publisher should be on par with traditionally published books in terms of adherence to industry standards, which are detailed in IBPA's ["Industry Standards Checklist for a Professionally Published Book."](#)

7. Ensure editorial, design, and production quality. A hybrid publisher is responsible for producing books edited, designed, and produced to a professional degree. This includes assigning editors for developmental editing, copyediting, and proofreading, as needed, together with following traditional standards for a professionally designed book. All editors and designers must be publisher approved; they can be part of the publisher's internal staff or outsourced, or a mix of both options.

8. Pursue and manage a range of publishing rights. A hybrid publisher normally publishes in both print and digital formats, as appropriate, and perhaps pursues other rights, in order to reach the widest possible readership. As with a traditional publisher, authors may negotiate to keep their subsidiary rights, such as foreign language, audio, and other derivative rights.

9. Provide distribution services. A hybrid publisher has a strategic approach to making books available to consumers beyond the simple mechanism of uploading files to online retailers and making books available for purchase online. Depending on the hybrid publisher, this may mean partnering with a traditional distributor that has a team of sales representatives who actively market and sell books to retailers, libraries, wholesalers, etc., or it may mean publisher outreach to a network of specialty retailers, clubs, or other niche-interest organizations. At minimum, a hybrid publisher has a marketing and sales strategy for each book it publishes, inclusive of appropriate sales channels for that book, and provides assistance and/or education to the author seeking to execute or understand this strategy in order to get his or her book in front of its target audience. This is in addition to listing books with at least one industry-recognized wholesaler.

10. Demonstrate respectable sales. A hybrid publisher should have a record of producing several books that sell in respectable quantities for the book's niche with a demonstrated sales track record with like titles. This varies from niche to niche; small niches, such as poetry and literary fiction, may see sales of less than a couple thousand copies, while mass-market books require more.

11. Pay authors a higher-than-standard royalty. When compensation is based on royalties, a hybrid publisher pays its authors more than the industry-standard* royalty range** on print and digital books in exchange for the author's personal investment. Although royalties are generally negotiable, the author's share must be laid out transparently and must be commensurate with the author's investment. In most cases, the author's royalty should be greater than 50% of net on both print and digital books.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- The criteria above point to functions that a reputable hybrid publisher is expected to perform. It's up to each hybrid publisher to figure out, and to explain, how it performs each function. It is not sufficient for a hybrid publisher to say they adhere to most, but not all, of the criteria and still call itself a hybrid publisher. In cases where an organization does not meet all criteria, the organization must classify itself a self-publishing service provider. In a self-publishing service provider/author relationship, it is the author who plays the publisher role and the company that provides the publishing services.
- Regardless of who pays for editorial, design, and production fees, it is always the publisher that bears responsibility for producing, distributing, and ultimately selling professional-quality books.
- An author-subsidized business model in no way relieves a publisher of its editorial, design, marketing, sales, and distribution responsibilities.
- In comparing hybrid publishers with vanity presses, it's important to note that vanity presses are not selective in what they publish, nor are they set up to be. Therefore, it is better to think of vanity presses as self-publishing service providers, not publishers. Again, in a self-publishing service provider/author relationship, it is the author who plays the publisher role and the company that provides the publishing services.
- An author may be asked to subsidize or pay the full cost of his or her print runs. Authors who do so should own those physical copies outright, having paid the manufacturing fees, and should not be required to pay a "percent-off list price" amount arbitrated by the publisher when they need to order copies.

* "Standard" royalties in traditional publishing were once calculated based on the list price or suggested retail price of the work. Nowadays, and especially among small presses and independent publishers, it is more common to calculate royalties based on net revenues.

Some contracts offer an escalated royalty based on the number of copies sold, e.g., 8% of net receipts on the first 5,000 copies, 10% on the next 5,000 copies, and 12% on all copies in excess of 10,000. The actual royalty percentages and break points vary from publisher to publisher and are often subject to negotiation with the author.

Trade publishing contracts, and especially the contracts larger publishers use, often set different royalty rates for various other formats, territories, terms of sale, and channels of distribution.

Standard royalty rates vary among traditional publishers. Although some publishers are outliers, standard royalty rates generally range from 5% at the lower end to 15% at the higher end. Some traditional publishers offer the same royalty rate for both printed books and e-books; most now offer up to 25% of net revenues for the sale of e-books. Many independent publishers adopt a flat royalty of 10% of net receipts for all formats. However, there is no longer a “standard” royalty rate among publishers.

****Standard royalty ranges (for illustrative purposes):**

	Standard escalated royalty ranges	Standard flat royalties
Hardcover	5–10% of net on first 5,000 copies 10–12.5% on next 5,000 12–15% thereafter	10% of net
Paperback	10% of net	10% of net
E-book	25% of net	25% of net

ABOUT THE 2022 REVISIONS:

In April 2022, The Society of Authors (SoA) and The Writers' Guild of Great Britain (WGGB)—UK-based organizations advocating for the rights of writers—published [“Is it a Steal? An Investigation into ‘Hybrid’ / Paid-for Publishing Services”](#) (the “Is it a Steal?” report).

On April 29, 2022, the Independent Book Publishers Association (IBPA)—the largest publishers association in the US with over 4,100 members—published [an initial response](#) to the report that read, in part:

We believe that the intention behind the “Is It a Steal?” report is to alert authors to predatory businesses and business practices, and as such we commend The Society of Authors and The Writers Union for its efforts, as there has been a proliferation of bad-faith actors in the publishing world in recent years who indeed exploit authors’ vulnerabilities and exist to siphon aspiring authors’ money by taking advantage of their hopes and naivete.

That said, the IBPA proudly stands behind our reputable hybrid publisher members...

www.ibpa-online.org

IBPA's response went on to provide additional history and clarity to the "Is it a Steal?" report, acknowledging the overall problem the report attempts to address, but objecting to its premise that hybrid publishing, in and of itself, is the precipitator of the problem. Instead, we offered a reframe: the precipitator is not hybrid publishing in and of itself, but bad-faith and uninformed actors using the hybrid label to mislead authors intentionally or unintentionally.

Although the SoA and WGGB did not mention IBPA's Hybrid Publisher Criteria in the "Is it a Steal?" report, we understand that they reviewed the criteria prior to publishing the report. After publication, The SoA suggested in an email to IBPA that the 15 key publishing principles for publishers outlined in their report:

...are not at odds with the [IBPA] Hybrid Publisher Criteria. If anything, they strengthen them.

In August 2022, the IBPA Advocacy Committee, with support from the IBPA Board of Directors, wrote a [position paper](#) to address the above assumption point-by-point. While doing so meant providing a response to all fifteen criteria outlined by the SoA and WGGB, this effort was not the end goal of IBPA's review. Instead, the IBPA Advocacy Committee was interested in seeing how the "Is it a Steal?" report's 15 key publishing principles might inform revisions to IBPA's Hybrid Publisher Criteria. Indeed, several revisions were made as a result of the review, which are incorporated in this document and highlighted in the position paper itself.

IBPA will continue reviewing discussions around hybrid publishing and regularly revise and update the Hybrid Publisher Criteria as the publishing industry evolves.