

What's the Difference Between Indie Publishing and Self-Publishing?

by Silvia Acevedo

This is part of a series of posts about self-publishing written by Silvia Acevedo, Indie/Self-Publishing Coordinator for the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators-Wisconsin. For more posts, visit <http://www.silviaacevedo.com/the-publishing-pen/>

As SCBWI-WI's Indie/Self-Publishing Coordinator, I often get asked, "What's the difference between indie and self-publishing? Aren't they interchangeable?"

The short answer is no, they are not interchangeable. The long answer is much more fluid as the publishing industry changes due to the pangs of financial and structural upheaval.

Once upon a time, indie publishing used to mean traditional publishing through a small, independent publisher, that is, not one of the Big Five houses. The small press would, like other traditional publishers, pay an author for rights to publish their work while assuming the financial risk of publication. Today, that form of publishing, regardless of the size of the publisher, is almost universally called traditional publishing. Very few people still use the term indie publishing this way.

So what does the term indie publishing mean today? It's now a catch-all term for the vast array of publishing options that are not traditional publishing.

Indie publishing can indeed include self-publishing, particularly for those authors who have created their own publishing houses for current and future projects. But indie publishing also encompasses the wide array of options between traditional publishing and self-publishing.

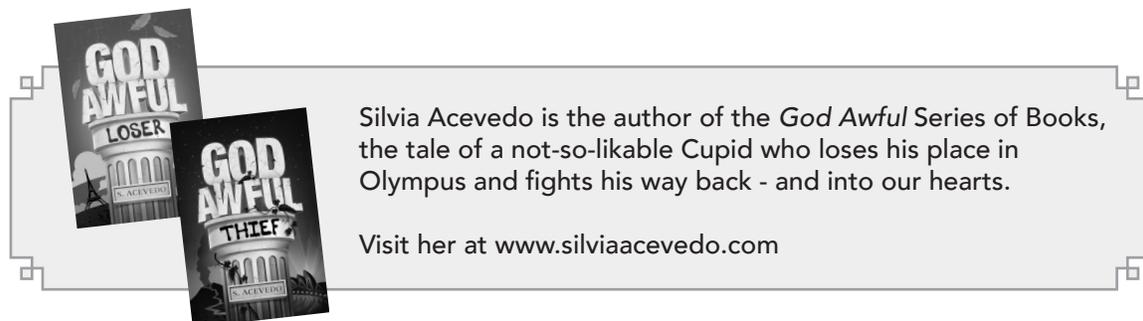
An example of indie publishing is "hybrid publishing," also called "author-assisted publishing." Hybrid publishers often look like a traditional publishing house with a formal submission process, editorial staff, and curated lists. However, hybrid publishers do not provide the payroll. They rely on creators paying for some or all of the services involved in publishing the work in exchange for higher royalties.

SCBWI strongly advises authors to research publishers. While some hybrid publishers are well regarded, others are really predatory operations masquerading as traditional publishers. To complicate matters and add to the confusion, even some well-respected traditional publishers have created hybrid-publishing imprints through which they've been brokering deals for years. And recent reports indicate that literary agents are getting in on indie publishing, too. The lines blur more each day.

Self-publishing is much easier to distinguish. It is the model in which the author maintains total creative control by taking all financial risks. Self-publishers often get creative to accomplish all this. They may create a crowd-funding campaign to garner reader support and fund the production of their works (like I did for my first book). They might create their own publishing company for current and future projects (again, like I did). They may harness the power of an established publishing platform or partner with a printer to manufacture the books themselves (I chose offset printing through a manufacturer.). They might work out distribution deals (agai- oh, never mind) and schedule book tours. No matter the means to their end, self-publishers publish the work themselves or may or may not pay others with specialized skills to help them along the way so that the final product is not attached to a publisher other than themselves.

With the myriad of options out there, I can't help but feel that we're experiencing a golden age of publishing, one in which creators are empowered as never before to get their work out into the world and into the hands of an entertainment-loving public.

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Silvia Acevedo is the author of the *God Awful Series of Books*, the tale of a not-so-likable Cupid who loses his place in Olympus and fights his way back - and into our hearts.

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