Some signs that a company may be a predatory publisher

- When you go to a publisher’s website, is one of the most prominent features (sometimes the only feature) an offer to download a free brochure on how to self-publish your book? Before you can download the document or move on to other sections of the website, do you need to provide your name, e-mail address, and maybe even a phone number?
  - If you provide the information, you may be bombarded with promotional materials (for years).
- Is the publisher’s home page filled with enticements about how publishing your book through them could land you a contract with a traditional publishing company, or a sale of movie rights? Does the publisher seem to put a lot of emphasis on a few testimonials from satisfied authors? Does the publisher paint a rosy picture of how self-publishing will be financially profitable?
  - Publisher should be upfront about the realities of self-publishing.
- Does the publisher present several confusing publishing packages, without really explaining the services provided, or the difference between packages?
  - If publisher is offering publishing packages, the packages should broken down showing the services and costs for each service.
    Remember that nothing is included for free, and some services included may cost the publisher little or nothing to provide.
- Is the publisher’s website confusing, or is it difficult or impossible to find information on important subjects such as discounts to retailers?
- Does publisher expect the author to take all the financial risks (cover all pre-press, production, distribution and marketing costs) but then pay a very low royalty?
  - Traditional publisher pay low royalties but take all of the financial risks.
- Does publisher say things like, “author receives 100% of book’s net profit,” without explaining how net profit is calculated?
- Does publisher require an exclusive contract?
  - If it does, then the publisher should shoulder a considerable amount of the risk.
- Does publisher require you to buy copies of your book when it was published?
- Does publisher imply or promise to cover some of the costs related to distribution or marketing without a proven track record?
- Does publisher own the rights to the production files (such as cover art and interior layout) that you pay them to develop?
  - This should be considered a “work-for-hire” situation and those files should belong to the author.
- Can you set your own retail price for the book or does publisher set price?
  - Some publishers inflate price which means it will not be competitive in the marketplace
- Is the publisher’s contract written in legalese and hard for a layman to understand? Does it lay out specific, well-defined author responsibilities, but couches publisher’s responsibilities in vague terms?
- Some traditional publishers have established relationships with POD publishers. Does a publisher with such a relationship state or imply (or just let the author assume) that being published through them is the same as being published by a well-known traditional publisher? It is not!
Service providers, book packaging services, printer and publishers

1. Service providers. These are the people or companies that can provide services such as editing, graphic design, conversion of manuscripts to the appropriate digital format, finding printers, etc. Having work done by a service provider may or may not be less expensive than have a POD publisher do the work, but it probably gives you more control over the process and the final product
   a. Editors
   b. Graphic Designers
   c. Print Brokers
   d. Publishing consultants
   e. Manuscript conversion services

2. Book packaging services. Book packagers or book producers are services that will handle the editing, design, file conversion, and other tasks related to getting a book ready for submission.

3. Publishers. There are various types of POD publishers:
   a. Publishers that are one-stop shopping malls for book publishing and distributing. They will usually handle all aspects of publishing your book (for a price.) A few of these have reputations as being little better than the subsidy publishers of yore, only interested in milking the most money they can out of authors.
      i. Author Solutions, which owns the imprints: AuthorHouse, iUniverse, Trafford Publishing, Xlibris, Palibrio, and Booktango; has such a reputation among many self-publishing circles. Its imprints produce quality books; however, services are expensive, and profits to authors are low.
   b. Publishers, such as IngramSpark and CreateSpace, that only print and distribute books. They do not offer author services such as editing, graphic design, and book formatting. However, what they do they do very well. CreateSpace offers about the lowest printing costs and access to Amazon. IngramSpark’s printing costs are slightly higher, but it has a better distribution program.
   c. Publishers that may offer complete author services, but also allow authors to do most of the work themselves. All publishers should be evaluated on how their services and costs fit your needs and budget.
   d. Publishers that only print books. Pre-press work and distribution are let up to the author.

4. The following is a list of regional companies that may be of interest to you. A company’s listing here in no way constitutes a recommendation.
   a. University of Alaska Press
   b. Epicenter Press
   c. Aftershocks Media
   d. Publication Consultants
   e. Todd Communications
   f. Alaska Print Brokers
Questions to ask when looking for a POD publisher and/or service provider for your self-published book

I. **Book sizes and formats.** Does the publisher print the type of book you want published? Most publishers offer books with similar cut sizes, similar paper choices, color and black & white options, and different bindings. However, those choices may be offered in different combinations. The combination you want may not be available from a particular publisher.

   A. Book cut size
   B. Paper selection
   C. Color or Black and White
   D. Standard or higher quality color
   E. Binding choices
   F. Calendar format

II. **POD publishers’ services**

   A. Is there a set-up fee?
   B. Does publisher expect you to provide press-ready file? If so, you will need to do the pre-press work yourself or hire a service provider.
   C. If not, the publisher usually offers services either:
      1. Ala carte, where you buy only the services you need or want, or
      2. As “packages” of services. In this case you must purchase at least the basic package. Most publishers like this have different levels of service, with higher levels including more services (and costing more).
         a) If you will be purchasing a “package” of services, does the package include all the services you need?
         b) What extra services are available and how much do they cost?
         c) Are extra services available a la carte, or must you upgrade to a pricier package?
   D. If you can, do you want to go with in-house services or have the services done elsewhere?
      1. If having services such as manuscript formatting done elsewhere, will the job be done to publisher’s specifications?
      2. Services done elsewhere will probably be less expensive.
   E. Is there a yearly maintenance fee to keep your book in the system?
III. Submission of files to service providers and POD publishers
   A. What sorts of documents are allowed or required: printed manuscripts, CDs, computer upload of word-processing files or PFDs, e-mail attachments, Cloud retrieval?
      1. For pre-press ready files the normal method is to submit online via a PDF file
      2. If you are submitting a manuscript to be formatted, you may be able to submit the word-processing file
   B. What sort of graphics can be submitted: actual photographs or line drawings, CDs, computer scans, computer upload of JPG, TIFF, PNG files?

IV. Time constraints
   A. Service provider or publisher—How long will designing and formatting your book take?
   B. Service provider or publisher—if book needs editing, how long will that take?
      1. Does the book need extra editing for syntax, voice, content, etc.?
   C. Publisher—How long does proofing process take:
   D. Once book goes into print, how long does it take to print the book

V. International Standard Book Number (ISBN)
   A. Does publisher require an ISBN?
   B. If you want to use an ISBN, must you to use, or do you have option of using a free, publisher-supplied ISBN?
      1. If you use use a publisher supplied ISBN, that publisher will be listed in Books in Print as the publisher of your book.
         a. There is still some stigma attached to self-publishing among book stores, libraries and publishing professionals. Having a POD company listed as your publisher would be a give-away that your book was self-published.
   C. Does publisher sell ISBNS or can you provide your own ISBN?
      2. If you purchase an ISBN then you will be listed as the publisher in Books in Print.
         a. You can create your own imprint to disguise the fact that you used a POD publisher, and to lend an air of professionalism to your book.
   D. www.selfpublishedauthor.com – Bowker site to buy ISBNS
VI. Pricing
A. Does author or publisher set the retail price?
   a. If publisher normally sets the price, it may give author the right to do it for an additional fee.
B. If the author is setting the price, make sure you study the market.
   1. Remember that your book will be competing with off-set printed books that probably have a much lower printing cost than your book.
   2. Don’t over-price your book. Overpricing means people will not buy.
   3. Don’t underprice (at least by too much) Remember, your book will be discounted to distributors and stores. Underprice by too much and you won’t make a profit.

VII. Royalties
A. What is the royalty spread of different distribution channels?
B. How are royalties determined?
   1. Are royalties based on retail price or net profits?
   2. Are any fees taken out?
C. How are royalties paid?
D. How often are royalties paid?
   1. Does the amount in your royalty account have to reach a minimum amount before royalties are paid?

VIII. Ownership of files created by publisher. This has to do with the portability of your book—the ability to take it to a different publisher if you have to.
A. Are files created by publisher owned by the publisher or you?
B. If the files belong to the publisher, can you buy them when the contract is terminated or would you have to start all over again?

IX. Access to distributors and bookstores.
A. What sort of distribution program does publisher have? Most of the large POD publishers are affiliated with companies with book publishing or selling ties: Createspace and Amazon, Lulu and Barnes & Noble, Lightning Source (Ingrams park) and Ingram Book, etc. Because of this the distribution plans offered may vary.
B. Will book appear in Books In Print?
C. Does publisher allow return of unsold books?
   1. Is there an extra fee imposed to allow return of books?
X. Contract
A. Does author retain all rights? Retaining all rights is preferable. If publisher want some of those rights, what is it offering in compensation? Everything is negotiable.
B. Is the contract exclusive or nonexclusive?
   1. Can you publish elsewhere at the same time? Different publishers have different strengths. Some have excellent prices on books for authors, others have better programs for distribution. It may be best if you simultaneously publish with two publishers.
C. Can the contract be terminated at any time? If you don’t like the job the publisher is doing you probably want to take the book elsewhere.
D. What is the procedure for terminating a contract?

XI. Cost of copies to author
A. Is the cost of books sold to the author based on actual printing costs or is it a discount from the retail price?

XII. Shipping costs
A. How do shipping costs compare to other companies?

XIII. Support. What kind of support is available? Phone – email – user forum – assigned representative?

XIV. Proofing your book
A. What is the proofing process?
B. Are only on-line or downloadable digital proofs available?
C. If print proofs are available how much will they cost?

XV. Corrections to proof copy. If corrections are necessary after your book reaches the proof stage:
A. What is the process for making corrections
B. Will corrections incur additional costs?
XVI. Corrections or changes to book after printing has commenced
    A. What is the process for making changes?
    B. Will changes incur additional costs?
    C. How long will book be out of print while changes are being made?

XVII. Images. If you are going to include images, make sure you know the publishers specifications.
    A. Make sure the image is at least 300 DPI and optimized for print.
    B. If you go with the packages a publisher offers, you can usually insert a certain number of graphic images for free. After that there is a charge for each insertion.
       1. How many images can be inserted for free?
       2. What is the charge for each additional image?
E-book publishing

1. What is an e-book?
   a. E-books are self-contained websites that use the same language as web-page development, Hypertext Markup Language (HTML).
   b. Like web pages, e-books can contain hyperlinks that will direct to different sections of the book, or to web sites.
   c. Like web pages, a user can search an e-book for a word or phrase.

2. There are two basic types of e-books:
   a. Reflowable e-books in which the user can customize the reader experience, selecting fonts, font colors, size of text, and background color.
      i. Reflowable e-books are designed to look good on any e-reader, including those on small tablets and smart phones.
      ii. Graphics - any graphics should automatically resize to the width of the e-reader screen
      iii. Page numbers – since the number of pages can vary based on size of screen and size of fonts, users navigate reflowable e-books via hyperlinks rather than page numbers. A Table of Contents will list hyperlinks rather than page numbers.
      iv. Reflowable e-books work best with books that have limited graphics and no special formatting.
         1. Table and columns do not work well in reflowable e-books
         2. Images with embedded text and images with text wrapped around them will not work well
         3. Genres such as poetry are not good candidates for reflowable e-books unless the poems have simplified line structure.
            Because of this, poetry is one of most under-represented genres in e-books
            a. For many poets, the look of the poem on the page is almost as important as the words themselves.
               i. If your poems use varied indents, they will probably not look the same on an e-reader as on a printed page
               ii. Long lines may carry over to the next line in ways that are visually unacceptable.
               iii. Lines in a stanza that are usually ended with a carriage return may end up with extra space between lines
                    if the e-book conversion process interprets the carriage return as the end of a paragraph.
   b. Fixed format e-books where the layout mimics the printed page. Layout is fixed, as are the fonts and font sizes. Nothing on the page is customizable.
      i. This format is best for textbooks, books with many illustrations, tables, columns, etc.. Illustrated children’s books, cookbooks with lots of pictures, art books, and graphic novels may have to be formatted as fixed format e-books.
      ii. If the aesthetics of the page layout are important to you, if you absolutely must have certain fonts, etc., this format is for you.
      iii. Fixed format e-books are best viewed on large screens—will probably not look good on small tablets or smart phones, at the very least they will probably frustrate the user.
      iv. These e-books, with embedded fonts and graphics, will have large file sizes
         1. May take up unacceptable amount of memory on a smart phone or small tablet.
         2. Download time may be unacceptable for some buyers.
         3. Large e-book file sizes may accrue increased Amazon download fees ($.15/Mb) which will cut into your profits.
3. **E-book formats.** There have been many different e-books formats in the short history of e-books, but right now there are five commonly used formats.
   a. Portable Document Format (PDF) – format for portable documents first developed by Adobe Systems in 1993. It is fixed format—not reflovable, however, newer versions allow word searches. Newer versions can also create ‘interactive PDFs,” which support features such as videos, animations, forms that can be filled out. etc.. File sizes tends to be large.
   b. Epub Format (EPUB) - Epub is a free and open standard for formatting e-books. It is the official standard of the International Digital Publishing Forum. Epub files can be read by most e-readers, including the Barnes & Noble Nook, Kobo Reader, Sony Reader, Apple iOS and Android devices. The newest version of Epub (Epub3) can support enhanced e-books features such as audio narration, animations and video.
   c. iBooks Format (iBook) – This is a proprietary Apple format based on Epub. The newest versions of Ibooks support enhanced e-book features.
   d. Mobipocket Format (MOBI, PRC) – This format is based on the Open E-book Standard, which was the precursor of Epub. It can be read on Kindle readers, as well as with the Mobipocket app on other devices.
   e. Amazon Kindle Format (AZW, KF8) – This is Amazon’s proprietary e-book format, and is based on the Mobipocket format. The newest iteration, KF8, supports enhanced e-book features.

4. **Do you want to format and/or distribute the e-book yourself or have someone else do it?**
   a. Format yourself – Listed below are some resources for people who want to do it themselves. Note that some of these will only handle conversions of simple documents with few graphics and little complicated formatting. Some have limits on the size of the files being converted.
      i. **Computer-based software**
         2. Ibooks Author – Free Mac-based application for converting files to Ibook format
         3. InDesign – Top-of-the-line page-design and layout program that has ability to convert to both reflovable and fixed-format Epubs. Will cost you at least $19.99 per month.
         4. PagePlus – Mid-level page-design and layout program with ability to convert to Epub. Serif, the company that produced PagePlus, is developing a new layout and design program, and has discounted the latest version of PagePlus to $24.99 instead of $119.99.
         5. PressBooks – This application will convert documents to Epub, Mobi and PDF. It is free to use. However, formatted ebooks will have watermarks. You can upgrade to a paid service (per book) to remove watermarks.
         6. Scrivener – a writing application tailored to the needs of writers. It can export to Epub. Cost $45.00
         7. Vellum – Mac software for producing Epub files – costs $199.00. If you want the version that can also be used for designing print books it will cost $249.00.
ii. On-line applications
   1. Google Docs – Free online word processing application that can export to Epub format.
   2. Reedsy – Reedsy is an on-line clearinghouse for book-publishing services such as editing, design, and marketing. It also has an on-line writing tool that allows you to write your book and convert it to Epub and PDF formats. Reedsy is free and the converted files can be used anywhere.
   3. Draft2Digital – This is an e-book aggregator that will distribute your e-book. However, you can also use its on-line Epub converter without being obligated to using D2D’s distribution program

b. Have someone else format the e-book
   i. Retailers – Kobo, Barnes & Noble Nook, and Amazon Kindle allow authors to upload their manuscripts. The retailer will convert the manuscript to the appropriate format and place it in its store.
   ii. Ibooks – Authors can format their books through Ibooks Author application and then upload it to Ibooks through Itunes Connect.
   iii. Conversion services – These are individuals or companies whose business is e-book conversion. Service range from automated conversion for simple manuscripts to custom conversions for books heavy on illustrations or complex formatting. Prices range from $49 to hundreds of dollars.
   iv. POD/e-book publishers – Companies such as IngramSpark, Bookbaby and Lulu will publish and distribute both your print book and e-book
      1. Some publishers like IngramSpark require you to submit a formatted Epub file
      2. Some publishers like BookBaby will handle the e-book conversion for you.
   v. E-book aggregators – Aggregators distribute and sell you book online to retailers, libraries, lending libraries, and usually through their own on-line stores
      1. Smashwords – the oldest and largest e-book aggregator. It will convert your manuscript to e-book format and distribute to myriad markets. No upfront fees but takes a percentage of the sales.
      2. Draft2Digital – An up-and-coming e-book aggregator. Offer similar services to Smashwords. No upfront cost, and takes a percentage of the sales

5. Distribution
   a. Distribute e-book yourself to retailers such as Ibooks, Kobo, Barnes & Noble, and Amazon
      i. You keep the most profits this way but must deal with each retailer separately.
   b. Have an aggregator distribute for you.
      i. Aggregator take a small percentage of the profits but handles all distribution and accounting for you.
   c. Distribute through print/e-book publisher. Again, publisher will handle all the details for a price.
      i. Some publishers may have limited distribution channels available
   d. Combination of a and b. You could deal directly with Ibooks, Kobo, B&N and Amazon to maximize profits, and have Smashwords handle the rest of distribution. (With aggregators like Smashwords, you can select the sales channels you want the aggregator to handle.)
How to find a service provider

Contact local self-published authors and ask them about their publishing experience
At the local level – Check with nearby print shops, graphic designers, community writer’s groups, artist’s associations, and local colleges to see if they can provide the services you need, or if they can recommend service providers.
At the state level – Organizations such as the Alaska Writers Guild and 49 Writers may be able to provide assistance in finding service providers.
Some POD-publisher’s such as InDesign, and E-book publishers such as Smashwords, maintain lists of specialists such as editors and designers.
Organizations such as the Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi) have directories of service providers. Companies in ALLI’s directory are members of ALLi and have been vetted.
There are several on-line clearinghouses aimed at self-published authors, such as Reedsy and Bibliocrunch, that allow you to search for service providers.
Treat the selection process just as you might for getting a contractor to build your house
  o  If possible query several service providers and ask for bids or price list of services
  o  Get a contract and specify requirements and responsibilities of both parties, including timeline for services
Always ask for references and samples of the service providers work
  o  For editors you might ask them to edit a few pages of your manuscript, If they are not willing to do that, they should at least provide a few samples of work they have previously edited.