



So, you've self-published your book. Now what?

Your book just arrived from the printer. Having them published was the easy part. Now your greatest challenge is upon you - you need to get your work out of those boxes and into the hands of appreciative readers.

It's difficult enough for publishers to sell poetry books (poetry sells slowly & people are especially hesitant to buy books by unknown poets), so marketing your own is a big challenge. Here are my suggestions for selling your book either online or off.

What are the qualities of poetry books which sell well?

I've found, through experience in selling poetry books (especially self-published books, or those by little-known poets) both on the Empty Mirror site & in brick-and-mortar bookstores, that they really only sell if 4 conditions are met:

- The work must be of high quality.
- The price must be low and the book must be nicely produced.
- If selling online, sample poems must be provided.
- The poet works actively at self-promotion (online & off), getting into the letting people know where the books can be purchased.

The unfortunate fact is that if any of these conditions are not met, the books will likely sit unsold.

A note on expectations

Remember, even in mainstream publishing there's a small market for poetry books. Even established poets don't sell thousands of books - maybe not even hundreds.

For example, I know of one very well-known poet whose collections have been published by major publishers & literary presses for decades; a recent collection was published in an edition of just 600 copies.

Another highly-regarded poet's work was published in a chapbook in an edition of 300 copies in 1999, and a couple dozen copies still remain unsold nearly 8 years later, in 2007. And, he'd had books published - by both small & major presses - for over 40 years.

That's not unusual. Many poetry books - even by famous poets - are published in limited editions of as little as 26 lettered copies, with numbered editions 100 or 200 being fairly common.

While some books by high-profile poets do sell many thousands, that's quite a rare exception in the poetry world, and one reserved for an elite few who have built a reputation over many years (such as Maya Angelou, Allen Ginsberg, or perhaps U.S. Poet Laureate Donald Hall).

So, please keep your expectations reasonable. Even if your book is terrific & you do everything right, you may not sell thousands - or even hundreds - of books make a lot of money. That's OK, it's just the reality of the current market for poetry in this country.

Where to sell your poetry books

OK! So, you've got your book ready to sell & you've got energy to promote it. Great! You can market your book either online or offline (in the real world)....

Offline:

It's *much* easier to sell your books offline than online, because folks will have an opportunity to leaf through the book and read as many poems as they like before purchasing.

- Try local independent bookstores to see if they will buy a few, or (most likely) take a few copies on consignment.
- If there are local gift shops or other retail establishments you regularly frequent, ask them if they would be willing to take a few.
- If you participate in local poetry readings, take a few books along to sell after your reading.

Online:

- Why not have your own website? Put the address on your business cards, trade links with other poets, promote yourself online. (A good web designer can do this for you.) Publish lots of poetry on your website.
- If your book is published by a self-publishing or print-on-demand type of publisher, they may sell the book on their website, or market it for you.
- Try Amazon.com. They do sell self-published books, complete their online application to get started.

Ideas for promoting your poetry book

Regardless of where you sell your books - online or off - you're going to have to tirelessly promote yourself. Poetry doesn't sell unless you really make some noise & bring attention to yourself. Even then, it's tough. So get ready....

Promote your book (offline):

- See if the local newspaper will write an article about you. (The little local weeklies that are distributed for free are a good bet.)
- Put up flyers on bulletin boards at your school, church, grocery store, work, etc. Leave business cards everywhere.
- Send out press releases to local newspapers, newsletters & bookshops. (Don't send free review copies unless you are certain they will review it. Most reviewers/booksellers disregard unsolicited review copies.)
- Set up a poetry reading at a local cafe, bookshop, gallery, school, college, church, fraternal organization, library, or other local gathering place. Do it alone, or recruit some other local poets (or musicians) for a bigger crowd & more sales opportunities. Create an event!
- Get published in literary magazines & other publications.
- Tell all your publishers where your books can be purchased (& your web address, if you have one); send them a free copy. They may publish information about how your book can be purchased. If not, consider placing a small advertisement in their publication. Since they published you, their readers may be your best bet for sales.
- Participate in open mike poetry reading nights.
- Is there a local radio show that would like to interview you?
- Does the local library have regular readings or programs in which you can participate?
- Keep a copy or two of your book with you at all times in case you run into someone who's interested.
- Have business cards made & give them out to everyone, put them on bulletin boards, have them available at poetry readings.

Promote your book online:

- Once your books are available online, promote the website by submitting it to literary & general web directories. (This works best if you have your own website.) Closely follow each directory's rules.
- Put your web address (or, the web addresses of websites that sell your work) in your email signature.
- If you participate in online forums, newsgroups, or blogs, use your web address in your signature (if permitted).
- Get links from related websites (other writers, publishers, literary websites, and sites about your topic). Link to high-quality related websites as well.
- Keep your website current - add new information at least once a month. This will keep your readers (& the search engines) coming back. Add a poem, essay, review, some news or reading dates, etc...
- If you don't have your own website, learn about getting one. (It doesn't have to be expensive!)

- Purchase advertising on search engines, directories, & sites relating to your topic. Options are available for any budget.

What are some helpful websites on the topic of marketing self-published books?

- [Publish-L](#) Self-publishing mailing list.
- [Self-Pub.net's Self Publishing Guides, Tools and Resources](#)
- [Book marketing resources](#) A gold mine of information!
- [101 Book marketing websites](#)
- [Advice on getting self-published books reviewed.](#)

I hope this information is helpful & not discouraging. It certainly takes a lot of work to market a self-published book - but once you've gotten your poems out into the world you'll undoubtedly find that it's worthwhile!

cheers ~

Denise

<http://www.emptymirrorbooks.com>