

## Tips for POD success—sold over 700 books first month out

I am the author of a book entitled “God is a Woman: Dating Disasters,” which sold 722 copies via Ingram at bookstores and on Amazon, not to mention a bunch more off my own website, in its first full month of release. I thought I’d share what I learned thus far authoring a book and invited WingSpan to post it on their site. Take from it what works for you, discard the rest, whatever. I’m happy to share; I hope we all find great success with our works. The more great books out there, the more thirsty readers seeking those books. If you want to get some good insight, you need to read this entirely; otherwise, you’ll just get incomplete information. (This paragraph is the first key in sending out queries to media, publisher, agents, managers, and in marketing; I call it “qualifying.” I quickly qualify why whomever I’m contacting should read what I’m sending by starting off immediately with important facts, in this case the number of copies sold. If I was contacting a great volleyball player about playing volleyball on volleyball team, I would immediately start with something like “I am the captain of a volleyball that has won 3/4 championships in the last four seasons.” Use this approach to help get your stuff read. That’s my first tip.)

The first thing I learned was do not publish under a POD imprint or self-publish. Traditional publishing didn’t give me the control I wanted over the book (the cover, the content, etc). Okay, so where the hell does that leave you? Start your own publishing company. Really, I mean it. Use POD, just don’t publish under their imprint.

I wanted to publish “God is a Woman” badly; we’ve all been there. I was at a party one night, where I met a guy who was starting a publishing company. He wanted to publish a book or books, primarily just to say he had done it. I got a copy of my book to him, he loved it and said he wanted to do it. I was nervous about his lack of experience. In the end, he and a friend joined forces with me and one of my friends to form Firefly Glow Publishing. It’s his publishing house but everything was put in my name, so I have all the control and can go with another publisher at anytime. In short, I have all the control of self-publishing or POD but I don’t have the black eye of going those routes; technically, my book is not self-published or POD.

To start a publishing house, all you need is an imprint name, logo, and to buy your own ISBN’s (International Standard Book Numbers). Google ISBN and you’ll find the site where to buy them. They are like \$28 a piece, but they sell them in groups, not individually. The smallest group is ten, so you’ll have to pay \$280 for the group. (You’ll soon find that there are more costs than just the flat setup rates listed on the main chart here on Books and Tales.) When you buy your ISBN’s, you will be able to assign one of the numbers to your book and list it with Books In Print (BIP). **IN ORDER FOR BOOKS TO BE ORDERED BY STORES, CARRIED BY ONLINE SELLERS, OR SOLD IN BOOKSTORES, THEY MUST HAVE AN ISBN AND BE LISTED IN BIP** (no cost for the listing). Why spend the extra money to become a publisher? Important people like reviewers, publishers, agents, and the media, get swamped with books. They can’t possibly read them all, so they look for reasons not to read them as they sort through them. When they come across a familiar POD imprint, chances are they will toss

the book aside without reading it. Media and reviewers assume that the book is not shelved in stores and/or readily available to their audience. Your book is not their focus; their audience is. Comparably, when they come across an unknown imprint, they will probably at least flip through the book out of curiosity. Why? Everyone loves discovering something new and possibly a talented new author. It's part of their jobs in many cases. If they like what they see, they will contact the publisher (you) to see where the book is available. At that point you have a chance to talk your way into getting a review, even if your book isn't on bookstore shelves. In short, people don't look to read your book; they look for reasons not to read it. Don't give them any! (This is one reason why you should not use any strange fonts or writing style, like SUDDENLY capitalizing or bolding CERTAIN words for no APPARENT reason. You may think you're being artistic and original, but it looks unorthodox and that makes it amateurish and that gives them a reason not to read it. Your book will most likely go into the trash very quickly.)

**A BIG DILEMMA.** My publisher quickly discovered a major problem: Ingram won't distribute books from a publisher who has less than ten books under their imprint. (Ingram is THE wholesale distributor in the industry. Baker & Taylor is used, too, but Ingram is king.) If you want to be shelved in bookstores, you have to be distributed by Ingram. So, we started to research POD publishers. We discovered that many will publish a book under your own imprint, instead of theirs, at no extra charge. You simply send them the ISBN for the book, the name of the imprint and the logo. Sweet! Because the POD publisher has more than ten books under their imprint, they will get your book distributed with Ingram (and they should get it in with Baker & Taylor, too). So, basically, we formed a coalition with a POD company, using them almost like a printer, with the added bonus of their knowledge of the industry and ability to setup the book and covers. The one we joined forces with actually charges less money to print per book than some printers charge per book for a run of 1,000 books. Of course, that POD is WingSpan Press.

**USE AN EDITOR.** Don't publish your book without having a reputable editor review it. This can be quite pricy. In my case, it cost me an elegant dinner date at a fancy steakhouse. Most POD's have in-house editing, which again costs extra.

**GET A WEBSITE.** Websites are cheap these days and it's easy to design your own with affordable software. I will be redoing mine, as it is too amateurish, I feel, but it was something when I needed it and a good start.

**YOU'LL NEED LOTS OF BOOKS FOR REVIEWS.** You'll need lots of books to send out to reviewers and the media. Lots, lots, lots. I always find myself having to send out another book to another key person, at least a couple a week. To date I've sent out 74 free copies. That's why it's important to work with a POD who charges you cost for your book. My relationship with my publisher and POD partner is that they want me to send out books, to sell a lot of them. They know I can't do that without sending free copies to key people. They make it cost effective for the publisher and me to do so. If I only got a discount on my own book, I would not have been able to afford to send out those

important copies and the publisher would not have paid for more than twenty of them, if that.

**MAKE YOUR BOOK RETURNABLE.** If you want bookstores to carry your book, it needs to be returnable. (That means that if the store doesn't sell the shelved book, they can return it within a year for a full refund.) This will cost more money through the POD place; again, we chose one with a great setup. I know, I know; bookstores probably won't stock your book, so what's the point? The point is that they now have the option of stocking your book; they didn't before. The argument "they probably won't stock your book" hints that you probably don't intend to work very hard to get your book stocked in stores and maybe even lack confidence in the book's quality.

We got all the required information into the POD publisher. Excellent. Now we had a book that could be stocked in stores and was available through all the traditional sites. We released it in Nov '06, with an official release date of Feb. 14, '07. That's right, Valentine's Day. It's a book of my funniest dating stories, which people can read simply for entertainment or also as an advice book (lessons learned and wise advice follows each story). What better time to release such a book than Valentine's Day? Publishers always use a release date and essentially a shelf date for books. This enables them to sell some books while working to gather quotes for the back cover from reviews, for the official release date. Making Valentine's Day the official release date enabled me to use built-in media to cover the book. All media covers V-Day, and living in Chicago, I was able to access some key places, including two major TV networks. The publisher sent out a press release. I bombarded—marketing is the author's job, not the publisher's, you'll learn very quickly—major bookstores' corporate small vendors departments with updates about scheduled media. In February, before the official release date, bookstores placed orders in the combined quantity of a few hundred books. There was so much media coming out, they felt they needed to. Yeah, baby! My book was now on shelves in bookstores. It was officially not a POD book, which in turn made it easier to get more media. "Where is your book sold?" "Do stores carry your book?" These are the types of questions the media asks.

I also wrote articles for different websites and papers. I got some small local monthly magazines to bring me in to write a dating advice column called, "Lunch is Not a Date," which I'm looking to syndicate. Note that I am still writing articles and looking for more media coverage and reviews. **IT IS A NEVER ENDING PROCESS.** I love writing articles, helping people with advice, entertaining them with stories, and doing interviews. Starting in June a major website for women is bringing me in as an advisor on a panel for dating advice; they get three million unique visitors each month. Two different national magazines are using me as a dating expert in upcoming articles, each with a monthly distribution of over one million copies. The point is, each thing you get leads to other things. You keep building, brick by brick. You must keep pounding the pavement. It's a lot of fun; you really get to meet some cool, friendly people.

A TV appearance and my first column sold a few books in February. In March, those readers, who loved the book, put up reviews on Amazon. Other books on dating that

came out around the same time as mine saw my book recommended on their book pages. Humorous books saw it recommended. And so on. Before I knew it, I jumped from a few sales on Amazon all the way up to #642 in sales rank. I stayed in the top thousand for almost a month, from the middle of March to the middle of April. I know April has been my biggest sales month thus far, but I won't have specific figures for April until mid-June. May has been slower on Amazon but bookstore sales have increased. Ingram handles all the orders, except the ones on my website, and Amazon stocks the book (you get paid for stocked books, whether they sell or not, when you have a return policy, at least at our POD partner). Word of mouth has been great. I'm getting dating questions from as far away as Sweden. I've been selling well on Amazon UK and just jumped way up in sales on Amazon Canada, reaching #424 in rank. I did a radio show in Spain last week (over the phone; it aired across the Mediterranean, as far away as Turkey). I have a blog and talk about the book and articles I've written at times. I invite people to write reviews of my book on the three Amazon sites. I have a Myspace page where fans of the book find me and we converse.

I received my March sales numbers and royalty check this week. (You get your checks roughly 2 ½ months after the sales. Why? The stores or Amazon order from Ingram. Ingram sends the books and bills those retailers at the end of the month. They send the money to Ingram the following month, who in turn gets it to you the month after that.) March, our first full month of being officially released, 722 copies of "God is a Woman: Dating Disasters" sold via Ingram (on Amazon and in bookstores). I know April was a higher number, because of a sustained higher ranking on Amazon. We sold lots of books off the website both those months, too.

What is important to note here? Everything. It all has to work together to be effective. If you're looking just to have a book out, that's totally cool; you don't need to go through all this and spend the extra time and money. If you want to see sales, then I recommend this process or a similar one. Remember to choose a wise time to release your book, where you can access built-in media. For example, got a ghost story? Release it near or on Halloween.

How do you find the right POD place to work with? There's lots of stats listed here on Books and Tales, a truly wonderful site for this stuff and the best one around on the subject, by far. Any places you are considering, order one of their books. Is the binding good? Durable? Is the book of good quality? Edited well? Professional? **DON'T ORDER THE BOOK OFF THEIR SITE, ORDER IT OFF AMAZON.** Why? One, it tells you the book is available on Amazon, which is key. Two, it helps out the author by increasing the book's sales rank and relationship to other books. (For example, enough people have bought my book on Amazon to make it appear on other book's pages as "people who bought this book also bought;" this only occurs when you've sold upwards of one or two thousand books, so Amazon told me.) This linking to other books is huge, so help the author get closer to it. Three, if you've never ordered off Amazon and like the book, you can give it a good review, further helping the author.

IMPORTANT AMAZON NOTE: They tend to link to books they think fit your book, all in one category. It's a marketing thing. My book is linked to pick up guides for men, even though it is categorized as humor and has lots of dating advice for women, too. When it first came out, they linked it to all religious books, until I emailed them about it. (My book wasn't linked on the other book's Amazon pages because I hadn't sold enough; but, their books were linked on mine.) Certainly my book has lots of advice for men that can be used by pick up artists but it is a broader book than that.

MARKETING FINAL NOTES: Of course, if you'd like to check out "God is a Woman: Dating Disasters," I encourage you to take a look. To date it has 33 reviews and a 5-star overall rating on Amazon, which you can see here:

[http://www.amazon.com/God-Woman-Disasters-Ian-Coburn/dp/0978797957/ref=pd\\_bbs\\_sr\\_1/002-1997600-0269628?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1179558462&sr=8-1](http://www.amazon.com/God-Woman-Disasters-Ian-Coburn/dp/0978797957/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1/002-1997600-0269628?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1179558462&sr=8-1)

You have to order a book WingSpan produced to check it out; you might as well order mine. (Never use a POD without checking out one of their books as a sample.) We used our own art for the cover; WingSpan added a nice read border, and it is a good idea to see what a POD does with original cover artwork. (You should provide your own cover artwork, to make sure your book cover stays original.) Besides, my Amazon rankings have slipped and I want to get back up again! I used high Amazon ranking numbers to get more media, demonstrating this angle: my small press book is outselling most big books in its genres, from humor to self-help dating books.

Those are the three most important, simplest marketing notes and I wanted to give you examples of them all:

- 1) Don't be afraid to ask people to check out your book. It will help you build more nerve for when you email and call the media to check it out.
- 2) Provide quick, easy access to your book.
- 3) Use angles to get media coverage for your book, like the Amazon ranking one mentioned above.

POD FINAL THOUGHTS. POD's are in business to make money, like anyone else. Ideally, they would like for you to sell lots of books and make money that way. Realistically, most authors don't market enough to sell many books. If you google my name or "God is a Woman: Dating Disasters," pages of junk comes up about me or the book, respectively. I randomly googled five POD authors. I found only a few links for each one, if that. I randomly googled five traditional authors. Again, I found only a few links for each one, if that. Authors simply don't market enough and in this day in age, while it's very time consuming, it is easier than ever with the Internet.

This is why POD's offer so many services. The services help push the books and also help supplement their financial intake, making up for some of the authors' poor marketing. This is why some POD's charge authors for their own books or only offer

discounts. Some authors buy more of their own books than other people buy and POD's know this. Personally, I'm not big on that. The POD should have confidence in the authors it works with to market hard. WingSpan does.

Market, market, market. Time your product release well. Work angles.

In the end, we found WingSpan to be the best POD publisher for our needs. Really, I don't know how anyone wouldn't. They give you books at cost, provide a quality product, and provide excellent customer service.

If you find this information helpful, I do hope you will take a moment to pick up a copy of "God is a Woman: Dating Disasters." I didn't make any money writing this, I don't get any special treatment from WingSpan for it. I did it simply to provide valuable information that I know would have helped me and saved me a lot of grief back when I was looking to get published and we began searching for a POD publisher with which to partner.

Good luck with your book! I wish you the best possible success you can achieve.

Best,

Ian