

What Publishing Path Is Right For You?



Hey there!

The First-Time Author's Guide to Publishing with Purpose: Navigate the publishing world like a pro.

We believe every bold voice deserves a platform. And, we're sharing exactly how to make that happen.

Here's what we're going to cover:

- How the publishing landscape has changed—and what that means for you.
- What traditional publishing does well (and where it falls short).
- The pros (and cons) of self-publishing or going with an “indie” press.
- How collaborative, cost-sharing models combine the best of both worlds.
- Your step-by-step plan to publish your book with creative freedom AND professional results.
- By the end, you'll have a clear path forward—one that serves your book and respects your vision.

Let's get started!

Here's to publishing with purpose,

Kristen

Kristen Gilligan

Founder & CEO

kristen@left-field-publishing.com

www.Left-Field-Publishing.com

[Instagram](#) [Facebook](#) [BookTok](#) [YouTube](#) [LinkedIn](#)

What Publishing Path Is Right For You?



Publishing Has Evolved—Here's What That Means for You

Let's tackle the big question:

How has the publishing landscape changed, and what does that mean for your book?

Specifically:

- The reasons why publishing is different today than it was ten years ago.
- What these changes mean for first-time authors.
- And how to navigate this new landscape like an industry expert.

The Publishing World Has Been Rewritten. Right now, it's easier than ever to get published. But publishing well—with purpose, quality, and reach? That requires strategy.

Here's what's driving these latest changes:

- Technology for self-publishing has exploded: Between easy-to-use design programs like Canva and DIY publishing platforms like Amazon KDP and IngramSpark, advances in technology have removed many of the traditional barriers to publishing. You can literally publish a book yourself today.
- The Big 5 publishers have adopted a “proven author” bias: Traditional publishers increasingly favor celebrity authors and writers with existing platforms, making it tougher for debut voices to break into the industry.
- Advances have gotten smaller: Traditional publishing offers less upfront financial support than it used to, making it a less viable option for many.
- Book formats have multiplied: Readers want print, ebook, AND audiobook options. Going it alone means juggling all three.
- Social media has changed the game: The flourishing “bookfluencer” scene means authors are now expected to build audiences before they publish, not after.

The Real Impact? **Opportunity Disguised as Chaos.** Yes, the publishing world feels overwhelming right now. But here's what we see: More paths to readers than ever before. The key is choosing the best path for your book and your goals.

What Publishing with Purpose Actually Looks Like

We believe successful publishing comes down to three things:

- **Creative control.** Your book should reflect your vision, not someone else's idea of what “sells”.
- **Professional quality you're proud of.** Free publishing tools exist, but the hidden costs include poor design and formatting errors. Your book deserves better.
- **Reaching your ideal readers.** Publication is just the beginning. Your book has to find the people who want—or who need—to read it.

The good news is: all three are possible in this new publishing landscape—you just have to know where to look.

What Publishing Path Is Right For You?



The Truth About Traditional Publishing

The publishing path most authors still dream about: **traditional publishing**.

To be clear, we're not here to bash the traditional route. It genuinely works for some authors and some books. But we believe you deserve the full picture before making any decisions.

That's why we're exploring:

- The reasons why some authors still prefer traditional publishing.
- Why others are opting for a different path.
- And how you can take what works best from traditional publishing (and leave the rest).

Let's break it down.

The Enduring Allure of Traditional Publishing

There's a reason so many authors still chase traditional book deals. For decades, it's been the gold standard for legitimacy and mainstream success. And for some authors, it's still the best bet. But it's important to understand what traditional publishing actually delivers—and what it doesn't.

Here's what traditional publishing gets right:

- **Industry credibility:** A traditional deal opens doors to major media outlets, literary festivals, and award consideration that can be harder to access independently.
- **Built-in distribution:** Publishers have existing relationships with bookstores, and other retail outlets, giving your book a real shot at landing on shelves nationwide.
- **High-quality production:** You receive professional editing, design, and layout services without paying upfront costs.
- Marketing reach. When publishers do invest in promotion, they have connections you'd struggle to build alone.

Where Traditional Publishing Falls Short (Especially for First-Timers)

While landing a traditional publishing deal might feel like a golden ticket, here's what many authors discover after signing: Traditional publishing isn't built to nurture every book. It's built to bet big on a few. The reality for most traditionally published authors looks more like this:

- Minimal marketing support: Unless you're a celebrity, publishers expect you to drive most of the promotion. And after your book launches, marketing support often disappears entirely.
- Glacial timelines: Expect 18-24 months from contract to bookshelf—sometimes longer.
- Limited creative control: Editors, not authors, have the final say over cover design, title, and sometimes even content.
- Shrinking advances: First-time authors typically receive advances that don't cover the time invested in promotion.
- Minimal royalties: For a \$10 book, the author receives \$0.65. Then 15% of that goes to the literary agent.

How to Take the Best and Leave the Rest

Here's where it gets interesting: You don't have to choose between creative control and professional quality. Today's abundance of publishing models offers more flexibility than ever before...which means you can take the best parts of traditional publishing—credibility, reach, and quality production—while still preserving what matters most to YOU.

Consider this:

- What if you could achieve industry recognition without surrendering your rights?
- What if you could secure bookstore distribution without needing a massive platform first?
- What if you could maintain creative control AND produce a book worthy of major shelf space?

This is what it means to publish with purpose—and it's absolutely achievable.

What Publishing Path Is Right For You?



The Hidden Costs of Going Solo or Independent (And Why "Free" Publishing...Isn't Free)

The **alternative routes** authors consider when traditional publishing feels out of reach: going solo or independent.

Specifically:

- The real costs of self-publishing that nobody talks about.
- Why many self-pub and indie authors quietly wish they'd chosen a different path.
- And how to spot the difference between legitimate small presses and expensive vanity operations.

The Seductive Promise of "Free" Publishing

Self-publishing platforms market themselves as fast, free, and empowering. And technically, you can upload a manuscript to Amazon today without spending a dollar. But there's a catch: "free" publishing often leads to expensive problems later. Here are some areas where authors typically overspend or compromise quality:

- Professional editing: Many skip this entirely or pay for inadequate services, then regret it when reviews mention confusing passages or typos.
- Cover design: Amateur covers kill discoverability and credibility. A great book with a poor cover gets lost in the crowd.
- Formatting and layout: Nothing frustrates readers more than books that are difficult to read in print or on their preferred device.
- Marketing and promotion: Building awareness from zero requires either significant time investment or substantial advertising spend.

Independent Publishing: The Good, The Bad, and The Expensive

"Indie" presses can offer the support that self-publishing lacks—with more personalized attention than traditional houses provide. When they're legitimate, they contribute valuable expertise and collaboration. But many operate more like expensive vanity publishers, charging high fees for basic services and even retaining rights or demanding ongoing royalty shares. So it's crucial to do your homework before you sign—and to watch for red flags like:

- High upfront costs without clear, professional deliverables
- Vague contracts around rights, royalties, and responsibilities
- Fees for planning, production, marketing, and distribution
- Minimal marketing support despite charging "marketing fees"
- Pressure to purchase your own books for distribution

What Quality Publishing Truly Requires

You deserve to publish with pride—without emptying your savings or surrendering your vision. This means finding a path that combines shared investment, shared expertise, and shared commitment to quality outcomes. And yes, that path exists. Here's what it looks like:

- Transparent partnerships where costs, responsibilities, and benefits are clearly defined upfront.
- Industry professionals who are genuinely invested in your book's long-term success, not just an upfront payment.
- Collaborative approaches that respect both your creative vision and your financial reality.
- Ongoing support that extends beyond launch day to help your book find its audience over time.

In other words, it isn't about finding the cheapest option or the most prestigious imprint. It's about **finding partners who align with your goals and values.**

What Publishing Path Is Right For You?



The Publishing Model that Breaks All the Right Rules

We believe you shouldn't have to choose between creative control and professional quality. And increasingly, you don't have to. Yet, there's an approach that's changing everything: **collaborative publishing**.

Specifically:

- Why author-first publishers are taking the lead.
- How collaborative models give you professional quality AND creative control.
- And why Left Field might just be the right publisher for your book.

You Shouldn't Have to Choose Between Control and Quality

In the past, publishing came down to one question: Do I want control or credibility? But today, there's a better question to ask: How do I publish a book I'm genuinely proud of while maintaining ownership, professional standards, AND my creative vision? This shift in thinking has created space for something powerful: publishing partnerships that actually serve authors. That's where a collaborative, cost-sharing model comes in, offering:

- **Professional production without the price gouging:** Your book receives the same editorial, design, and distribution treatment as traditionally published books.
- **Creative control with expert guidance:** Your vision remains center stage, supported by industry professionals who help it reach the right readers.
- **Shared investment, shared success:** When costs arise, they're shared equally. When your book succeeds, everyone benefits.

This model works perfectly for authors who don't want to navigate publishing alone but refuse to surrender their vision in the process. It's for authors who want to protect their voice, reach real readers, AND publish with integrity. In other words, it's designed for people who care deeply about their work—and the way it reaches the world. In the simplest terms, working with an author-first publisher means:

- You retain rights, considerably higher royalties, and creative control.
- You get help where it matters (editing, design, distribution).
- You're treated like a partner, not a product.

How We Do Things Differently at Left Field

We've spent years in the book industry, and during that time, we've seen what does and doesn't serve authors. Our approach combines the best elements while fixing what's broken:

- **Transparent cost-sharing:** You invest in your book alongside us. No hidden fees, no surprise charges, no predatory contracts.
- **Full-service collaboration:** From editing to design to distribution to marketing, you never have to figure it out alone.
- **Author-first everything:** You retain rights, considerably higher royalties, and creative control. Your book reflects your vision, not ours.
- **Long-term partnership:** We're invested in your book's success for years, not just through launch day.

What Publishing Path Is Right For You?



Ready to Publish Your Book? Here's Your Next Step

Here's a **clear roadmap to move forward**. Your book deserves a thoughtful, professional publication.

Specifically:

- Your next right step based on where you are in the process.
- A simple framework to take your book from manuscript to launch and beyond.
- How to move forward with clarity, confidence, and creative freedom.

You've Got the Vision—Now Here's the Roadmap

Whether your goal is changing lives, building authority, or simply sharing your story with the world, your book deserves a thoughtful, professional approach.

Your 5-Step Publishing Plan:

- **Step 1 - Clarify Your Vision:** What do you want your book to accomplish? Educate readers? Build your platform? Reach a specific community? Hit a bestseller list? Establish yourself as an author? Your publishing path should serve your unique goals.
- **Step 2 - Assess Where You Are:** Are you still writing, ready for professional editing, or putting finishing touches on a polished manuscript? Knowing your starting point helps you choose the right next steps.
- **Step 3 - Decide Your Support Level:** Do you want to handle everything yourself, work with a full-service team, or find something in between? Be honest about your time, skills, and energy.
- **Step 4 - Evaluate Your Options:** Once you've determined your ideal support level, you can use what you've learned in this course to choose the publishing path that fits your needs.
- **Step 5 - Start the Conversation:** You don't need to commit to anything today. But if collaborative publishing resonates with you, the next step is simple: talk to someone who can help you explore what's possible.

Ready to Explore What's Next?

At Left Field Publishing, we specialize in helping authors navigate this process with professionalism, transparency, and genuine partnership.

You don't need:

- A perfect pitch
- A literary agent
- A massive social media following
- Years of publishing experience

You DO need:

- A vision for your book
- Willingness to collaborate with publishing professionals
- Commitment to producing quality work
- Openness to exploring what's possible

Your book matters. Your voice deserves to be heard. And you deserve a publishing experience that honors both your creative vision and your professional goals.

Remember: The best publishing path is the one that serves your book and respects your vision. Whether that's with us or another route entirely, we're cheering you on.

If the collaborative model we've described sounds like it might fit your goals, we'd love to learn more about your project!

What Publishing Path Is Right For You?



The Authors Who Broke the Rules—and The Team that Had Their Backs

Meet authors who took the collaborative path—and the team that made it possible.

Authors Who Took the Leap

Left Field is helping authors across genres bring their books into the world with creative freedom AND professional support.

Here's what they're saying about the experience:

"I've known Kristen and Len across different professional contexts—starting in real estate and now as an author—and in each instance they've shown integrity, vision, and reliable execution. Left Field Publishing isn't just a good idea—it's the right idea, built by people who know how to make things happen."

– Walker Thrash, Managing Partner, Vertikal; author at Left Field Publishing

"Left Field Publishing's guidance and professionalism was a turning point in my career. With their help, I've achieved literary goals that once seemed unreachable."

– Matt Strollo, author at Left Field Publishing

These authors didn't settle for the "traditional or nothing" mindset. They found a third path—one that honored their vision while delivering professional results.

Why We Built Left Field Publishing

Left Field exists because we believe every bold voice deserves a platform—because we know the industry inside and out and care deeply about books that matter.

Meet your potential partners:

- I spent my career championing readers, authors, and booksellers. At the American Booksellers Association, I advocated for First Amendment rights and helped launch national education programs. As co-owner of Denver's iconic Tattered Cover Bookstores, I created teen literacy programs and author partnerships that connected thousands of readers with books that mattered.
- LEN VLAHOS, my husband and co-founder, brings both author and industry expertise to everything we do. He's the acclaimed author of six traditionally published novels—including *The Scar Boys*, a William C. Morris Award finalist. Before Left Field, he served as COO of the American Booksellers Association and Executive Director of the Book Industry Study Group. His writing has earned praise from *The New York Times* and readers worldwide. His first book with Left Field is *The Story of Oog*.
- **Together**, we founded Left Field to give more authors the chance to publish with purpose—without sacrificing their voice, rights, or vision.

What This Could Look Like for You

We'd love to learn about your project and help you determine the next right step. Whether your manuscript is polished and ready or still taking shape, the conversation starts simple: tell us about your vision, and we'll explore what's possible.

We hope this course has given you the clarity, confidence, and inspiration you need to publish your book on your terms.