

How much does it cost to self-publish? New online tools make the process relatively inexpensive

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Retiree's project: Self-published memoir

Ingez Rameau holds an image from her childhood. Photo: Matt Hollingsworth & Carrie Lederer

Are you looking to self-publish a memoir, a novel, a self-help book, or a travel guide just for the fun of it?

Or, like Ingez Rameau of Santa Monica, Calif., do you view self-publishing as a path to something else? The actress and retired legal secretary, 69, is writing a memoir recounting her early life as a victim of mental and sexual abuse, and her eventual redemption. She's already written and starred in "Burn," a one-woman show on the subject. With the book, she hopes to build an audience for a future project counseling abuse victims.

Retirees, it turns out, are often prolific writers, says Eileen Gittins, founder of Blurb, a printer and publisher serving self-published authors. Some writers even make a little cash. "This actually is a way to make that bucket-list-type money of \$2,000 to \$3,000," Gittins said.

Calling all dreamers! What's your fantasy for your later years? How much will it cost? If you'd like to have us help you with an appraisal, write us at askourmoneyexperts@cro.consumer.org. And see how others are planning for their second act through [Consumer Reports Retirement Guide](#).

Pay for quality at the outset

Rameau could pay tens of thousands to have a vanity press manage the process, or go it alone for far less.

One cost she shouldn't avoid: editing. At BiblioCrunch she can post the service she needs and her budget. Editors, designers, and other pros can bid on the work. Assuming 70 hours to edit 200 pages at a midrange \$65 per hour, Rameau would pay \$4,550. Copy editing would cost \$1,000, proofreading about \$600. She also could offer less money and see who's willing to do the work.

Another expense is ISBNs, book identification numbers. To keep control over their works, authors should obtain their own ISBNs at myidentifiers.com, says Carla King, who leads self-publishing "boot camps" and is based in San Diego. Ten ISBNs—useful for various formats—cost \$295.

Design and publish for a song

Through the e-book publisher Smashwords, we found a book designer charging \$85 for an original cover, plus unlimited revisions. A paperback cover costs an additional \$65. Rameau can design the book's interior, for print and e-book formats, using templates found at bookdesigntemplates.com, \$47.

When Rameau finishes those electronic files, her book is essentially complete. She can upload the files to Smashwords and Amazon CreateSpace, which will distribute them to online bookstores. The stores send e-books and print books as they receive orders, at no up-front cost to Rameau.

Going old-school

If Rameau wants books she can hold and give as gifts, IngramSpark can print and send 100 paperbacks with color covers for \$407; 100 hardcovers will cost \$1,003. Through IngramSpark, walk-in bookstores also can view the book and order it directly.

Or Rameau could print just one hardcover for her coffee table. Cost: \$23.

Marketing for self-publishers

Your magnum opus is written, edited, designed, and digitized. Now how do you help prospective readers find their way to it? Wendy Meg Siegel, the self-published author of "The Gratitude Habit," says that in addition to using Rameau's existing website and Facebook pages for publicity, she should create an author page on Amazon, and pages devoted to her book's themes on websites such as Pinterest and Squidoo. For more impact, she could link all of her pages to each other. Siegel has done all of that, to great effect; since November 2012, she has made \$8,500 on an initial investment of about \$40. Her next publicity project: submitting articles on other people's websites that link back to hers.

What it costs: Self-published memoir

(ESTIMATES are in current dollars)

Option 1: e-book and tablet versions		Option 2: 100 paperbacks	
Story editing	\$4,550	Cover design	\$ 65
Copy editing	1,000	Printing and shipping	407
Proofreading	600	Options 1+2 total	\$7,049
Bulk purchase of 10 ISBNs (identification numbers)	295		
Cover design (e-book only)	85		
Interior design	47		
Accounts on blogging websites (for publicity)	free	Option 3: 100 hardcovers	
Option 1 total	\$6,577	Cover design	\$ 100
		Printing and shipping	1,003
		Options 1+3 total	\$7,680

Editor's Note: This article also was published in the September 2014 issue of *Consumer Reports Money Adviser*.



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