

## SELF-PUBLISHING IN MEXICO

Rodrigo Lichtle Ventosa

[rodrigo.lichtleva@udlap.mx](mailto:rodrigo.lichtleva@udlap.mx)

Hello everyone, my name is Rodrigo Lichtle Ventosa and I'm going to talk about "Self-publishing in Mexico." I decided to speak about this topic because I'm an author, and since I finished my book I found it necessary to research for the best publication method. Also, there are just a few articles about self-publishing in Spanish and I think this method needs to be studied more.

Since the public was able to use the internet, many human activities have changed. From human interaction to how we read, the internet has presented new ways to do and to explore things. One of the revolutionized areas was publishing. Before the internet, self-publishing was almost impossible and used to need a lot of resources that most authors didn't have. **(SLIDE)** Nowadays a writer can create a free online blog and there publish his/her works so people can read them. However, well-known self-publishing and blog platforms were not designed in Mexico, this means that authors don't reach their desired levels of success due to the fact that such websites target audiences with different tastes and culture. That's why the purpose of this research is to determine whether promoting online self-publishing in Mexico would benefit both authors and readers.

Before starting, I want to be clear using Alison Baverstock with Jackie Steinitz words **(SLIDE)**: "Self-publishing is not just for those who cannot find a publisher; it is undertaken by publishing novices and veterans alike for many reasons, and with a high level of repeat business." So, this is not the way of publishing for the unsuccessful people, but this method could help more young writers. This doesn't mean that some people that don't find a publishing house will use self-publishing.

Also, it is important to establish and describe some keywords of the research. Self-publishing was defined as a method where authors don't rely on other people or institutions for the publication of their books. At the same time, the writer is able to decide every aspect of the published work. And in this presentation we will refer specifically to online self-publishing because it is cheaper and more versatile than the print method. At the same time, right now with smartphones, phablets, tablets and all kinds of electronic devices people can read with an internet connection and the self-publishing work can be read by more people.

In comparison, what pulls apart Self-publishing from the traditional publishing method is the author enrollment in the edition process. In publishing houses the author is removed so specialized people can work to develop the edition of the book and then start selling it. As Christopher Kular said: "... Compared to the user-friendly self-publishing workflow, the traditional publishing marketplace exists as a highly structured environment with strict requirements for publishing protocol (Kular in Carolan & Evain)." And Baverstock with Steinitz commented too: "The transition of book content from author to reader has traditionally been seen as a standardized process, relying on established intermediaries fulfilling specific roles such as agent (...), publisher, printer, distributor, retailer..." Nowadays some publishing houses are trying to integrate the author in this process but the writer does not decide all aspects (Bacerstock and Steinitz).

On the other hand, in self-publishing the author is free to decide what he/she can do, how to do it, and if it is necessary to pay for help. This could be a controversial point, it's true that the author has the decision and is able to pay for something but in the face of a specialized group of people there is a huge disadvantage. Furthermore, self-publishing authors usually pay for something, a clear example is the print version of the book. **(SLIDE)** The paper "Who are the self-publishers" shows that most authors pay under £500 (pounds); however, many others pay more than £2000 for self-publishing a book.

Beside this, most of self-publishing authors may do it again (4.6/5). But, if we just consider self-publishing online, there are resources that allow authors to sell print versions of the book without paying, as in Amazon's CreateSpace. But, with tablets and e-readers, now writers can have more options and just sell their books in an electronic format in Amazon, iBooks, and other platforms.

**(SLIDE)** If we pay attention to all the examples I have given, none of them are from Mexico or Spanish speaking countries. Amazon, Apple, Google, or famous self-publishing pages as Wattpad and others, were not made in Spanish speaking countries, so the majority of readers are from their focus language, generally English. If a Spanish speaking writer decides to publish in these online platforms they will not have the same impact as English speaking authors. As Leylha Ahuile commented in a 2016 paper **(SLIDE)**: "Self-publishing is a well-established part of the English language book trade, but Spanish-language self-publishing is just starting to take off".

A clear example of an enterprise that has many book stores all over Mexico and is trying to apply what is missing in our country is Gandhi, **(SLIDE)** which has undertaken two projects that allow self-publishing authors to print their books and sell them in their book stores. This could break the barrier and Mexican writers can be read by Mexican readers; however, Gandhi's efforts haven't achieved a clear success.

**(SLIDE)** On the other hand, Mexico has other problems that make our journey to achieve a self-publishing infrastructure more complicated. As the Encuesta Nacional de Lectura y Escritura 2015 (ENLE) points out, on average the typical Mexican reads 3.5 books for pleasure per year. This, compared to other countries reading per capita rates, makes difficult the possibility of having an easy success when making reading platforms. Also, according to the Asociación Mexicana de Internet 2015 only 14% of Mexican internet users create, read or write a blog.

At the same time, as in most countries, people prefer to read best-sellers that usually don't bring innovation to the literary world. According to Amazon, Forbes Mexico made a list of the most sold Spanish language print books in Mexico last year. As this article points out, four out of ten are from Mexican authors, and the top selling one, *Fifty Shades of Gray*, started as a self-published book from another country that already has the necessary infrastructure. This should make us think whether self-publishing can do the same in Mexico.

**(SLIDE)** To show you another example of an author who self-publishes his works and gets a lot of success, we can see the story of *The Martian* by Andy Weir. I don't know if you've seen the movie, but the book was published initially in Weir's blog. When he finished the work some people asked him to send them a copy. There was a format problem, so he decided to publish the book on Amazon using the cheapest price possible, \$0.99 USD. As he was self-publishing, he was able to put the price he wanted for the book. In not much time, the book became really successful and later on a traditional publishing house asked to represent him. After that, producers asked him for the rights to do the famous movie of 2015.

With this example I don't just want you to see that self-publishing has changed unknown authors to best-sellers, no. What makes this case really important is how it's possible to combine self-publishing with the traditional method. At the same time, if Amazon didn't exist, *The Martian* wouldn't have that spectacular and impressive success. As Jen Pecoskie commented on the article "Beyond traditional publishing models" where she investigates the success of *Fifty shades of Gray* **(SLIDE)**:

This [self-publishing] infrastructure allows for authors to produce, disseminate, and/or sell their own works using channels established through such examples

as fanfiction web sites and self-publishing portals, as both allow for the production and dissemination of the cultural product.

The problem in Mexico is that we don't have this well-established infrastructure.

As with *The Martian*, *Fifty shades of Gray* was first published online and with the recommendation of readers the author perfected the book and then a traditional publishing house started to represent her. So self-publishing doesn't just allow us to have an easy way to publish our works, but it can help the author with the feedback of readers. When a writer is thinking about sending his/her manuscript, the author may rely only on the opinions of relatives and friends. Sometimes these aren't true or good opinions that benefit the writing. If an author decides to publish on a public blog, everyone can comment, share, read, recommend the author to change or modify parts of the work. In a perfect case, this will help authors to perfect their books, and if many readers start to follow that book, it will become more likely to be accepted in a traditional publishing house as happened with Andy Weir or E.L. James. As Pecoskie commented in the same article **(SLIDE)**:

But it also becomes clear that for fanfiction and self-published works both authors and readers are creators; they work as a collective to form the text. Authors and readers communicate and use the feedback from early readership communities and their reception. This communication, even at the early stages, acts as clout or publicity for the work to other readers.

At this point, it's important to speak about the most common criticism of self-publishing, that there are no barriers or filters as in publishing houses. But we can contradict this with the success of *The Martian* and *Fifty shades of Gray*. There may be no barriers to build your blog and publish your work, but if you don't give enough effort, your writing isn't good, or it doesn't attract readers, who will read your posts? So what self-

publishing is giving to the writers and readers is the power to choose, and to complement each other working to perfect the writing not by a publishing house, but instead by the consumers, the people that will read those books.

However, I'm not just seeking the formation of best-sellers like the two examples before. What Mexico, and every country, needs is to encourage writers to innovate and truly change the way they write. What we should be searching for in these days of technological advancement is innovation in every area, and not just in technology. What sometimes makes publishing houses think when publishing an innovating work is whether the book will or won't sell. Big publishing houses are businesses and, as every business, they need to sell their product in order to continue working. What self-publishing can bring us is the ability to present and perfect new and innovative authors. If a writer self-publishes his work, is read and becomes known, he will stop being a selling threat and start being an opportunity for publishing houses.

In order to combine all these benefits, apart from implanting the idea of reading blogs, we need to encourage Mexican companies like Gandhi to help authors with self-publishing projects. At the same time, we could use other examples of pages that allow creators to publish their works and gain money from them. The best one is YouTube.

If we are able to create well-known Spanish based websites where people can create blogs (like channels in YouTube), publish their works, and readers can subscribe to help these authors and, at the same time, find contemporary literature; we could create a community that constantly writes and reads making a self-publishing ecosystem that works for authors and readers, helping both of them.

This last part is just an idea that was born from this investigation and the moto of the symposium, and I can say that it is the next step for this work. Mexico is now lacking many things including innovation and, as we said before, we don't read enough. What

self-publishing can bring us is a way to help writers by giving readers the opportunity to support, involve and taste emerging authors; in the process facilitate the publishing house selection of works, and try to make Mexicans to read more. All of this is what using self-publishing in Mexico promises us **(SLIDE)**.