Publishing Nonfiction Books on Spirituality
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MODULE 4
SELF (OR INDEPENDENT) PUBLISHING

Publishing Tarot and Oracle Decks

The following document is part of a five module series on publishing nonfiction books in the category of spirituality, metaphysics, occult, and New Age. Module 4 is on self-publishing. The previous module instructions were audio lectures, downloadable MP4 files you can listen to. However, prior to putting together Module 4, my laptop broke, and to record those audio lectures, I was using a recorder app on that laptop. I don't know how to record audio files with my desktop computer. Thus, in lieu of audio MP4 files, Module 4 instruction will be provided by the script or transcript I would have read off of to produce said audio files.

Since the following text was intended to be notes I read off of to create audio lectures, the tone may be informal and the sentence structure imperfect. Please forgive and acknowledge that you are reading what should have been transcript notes for an audio lecture.

BEGIN AUDIO LECTURE TRANSCRIPT:

So this is awkward. If you're taking the course because this is supposed to be about writing and publishing a nonfiction book, then this audio lecture totally does not apply to you, which is kind of a goofy situation if the course is *called* writing and publishing nonfiction. If you're looking to publish a tarot or oracle deck, then the chances of you finding this little audio file is, well, slim to none, so does it even make sense for me to create this? Oh well. Here we go anyway.

Publishing tarot and oracle decks. You can go the route of print-on-demand services for decks, such as through makeplayingcards.com. If you want to go legit and place a bulk order from a manufacturer in China and then package and mail out orders of your deck from your home, then you may want to check out Alibaba. Reach out to self-published tarot deck authors. Most of them are friendly and would be happy to share their contacts with printing presses, or at the very least, offer you valuable firsthand insights into the self-publishing process for tarot and oracle decks.

So if you're publishing a tarot or oracle deck, here are the steps to take. First, you need high-resolution digital files of the art and the final design for each card, with any accompanying text, keywords, or card titles at your option. As a rule of thumb, they need to have a resolution of 300 dpi (dots per inch) or ppi (pixels per inch) to ensure good print quality. Each card also needs to have allotted bleed margins. I'll get to trim and bleed in a moment. Trim and bleed just means you can't have any critical imagery at the very edges of your card or else there is a risk that imagery will get cut off. Going the route of bordered cards means no risk, and you just need to fiddle around with the thickness of the borders. Borderless cards will require a bit more tinkering.

If you want to go legit, then there are a couple of considerations, all at your option. The first is registering your copyright with the U.S. Library of Congress. You may want to register a copyright for your card deck. If you're quite partial to the clever card deck name you've come up with and you want to make sure no one else can use it or use any names similar to yours that might cause confusion, then apply for a trademark for your deck name, which can be done through the U.S. Trademarks and Patents Office, or USPTO. I'm of the opinion that as long as you do your due diligence and educate yourself, you can register your own copyrights and trademarks quite inexpensively. It's true, there's no law or statue requiring you to register intellectual property, but if you do and infringement happens, you'll have access to all sorts of wonderful claims of statutory damages you can sue the infringer for, whereas if you don't have a registered copyright or trademark, you'll have to prove your damages, which can sometimes be tough. Right now, at the time of this recording, registering a copyright with the US Library of Congress is just $35 and to file a trademark application is $275.

You'll also need an ISBN and bar code for your tarot or oracle deck. This is how you can get your deck sold in bookstores. How you register for an ISBN and obtain a bar code for a deck is the same as the process for a book, so be sure to check out the next audio clip on Understanding ISBNs, Bar Codes, and LOC or Library of Congress Listings.

If you sell a companion guidebook for your deck and the deck itself separately, then each will need its own ISBN, its own bar code, and copyright registration. If you sell them as a set and no one can buy them separately; it comes together, book and deck, always, then you only need to register one ISBN, bar code, and copyright for the whole package. You *can* register two, separately one each, if you'd *like*, but it isn't *necessary*.

By the way, if you're publishing a tarot or oracle deck and will be writing a guidebook to go along with it, you can use the Template for Self Published Manuscript, one of the handouts you can download with this module.

Then after you have a publishable product, it's all about marketing and promotions.

If you haven't already, consider listening to the preceding audio file "Why Self-Publish Your Book" and every time you hear the word "Book," replace it with "Deck." Also, in my opinion, especially when it comes to tarot and oracle decks, I would go the route of self-publishing over traditional publishing. Many of the well-known deck publishers will ask authors to grant their copyrights, which I generally think is a bad idea. Also, deck publishing is even riskier business than book publishing, and most traditional publishers will dump all risk of loss on the author, and if you read the publishing contract carefully, you'll see that I'm right. Finally, traditional publishers don't always give the deck creators a lot of say when it comes to the quality of the cardstock or packaging design. And if you've read even one deck review before, you'll know deck enthusiasts are all going to pin you hard for poor cardstock and shitty packaging. And how much would that suck to hear as an author when you had no control over those points.

So really, when it comes to tarot and oracle decks, self-publishing is the smarter route. Here's the process in a nutshell.

You need to get scans or professional photographs of the art in as high resolution as you can get, and definitely nothing below 300 dpi. For digital art, if you can get vector over raster, even better. You then need to design the actual tarot or oracle cards, with any borders, titles, captions, text, or stylistic embellishments you want. You must design the cards with lines for trim, bleed, and margin. Typically, the borderline you delineate around each card for trim, also known as cut, is a thin black border. The borderline you delineate for bleed is red. Bleed is what is outside the "safe zone" for what the trim can be. Standard bleed is about 3 millimeters.

Now, when it comes to where to place text, keep it 8 millimeters or more inward, from the edge of the bleed margin. If there are any straight vertical or horizontal lines in your art, these lines should be 8 millimeters or more inward as well, and avoid having straight lines close to the edge of the deck art, because any minor mishap with trimming and your straight lines will suddenly look skewed. But if there is an 8 millimeter buffer, the human eye won't be the wiser.

It's worth emphasizing that these trim and bleed margins I'm talking about, the black border for trim and the red for bleed, are visible on the card designs *only* while you are *working* on the card design. Before you send the card image files to the printers, you have to remove the black and red lines. I hope that makes sense. You have those lines on your art only as guidelines during the process of formatting the deck art and preparing the deck for printing. Before they actually head

to the printers, both lines need to be removed. These are, in a sense, invisible lines that are for your eyes only. The black trim and red bleed borders are guidelines for you only, so you get a clear vision of what the final printed cards will look like.

When you work with a printing press for self-publishing a tarot or oracle deck, the printing press will probably send you guidelines and specifications for the card images, so always follow those specifications to the letter. With these printing presses, there is probably a 20% down payment up front, sometimes 50%, depending on the order quantity, contract price, and other factors, when you sign the contract and the final payment after delivery of your order.

Don't go with any printing press that asks for more than 50% up front. 20% is better, but if you're a first-time no-name nobody approaching that printing press, think about this situation from the press's perspective. Why take the risk? Of course 50% down payment would make more sense. It's 50/50—the two of you are splitting the cost of risk.

Also make sure you understand payment terms. Is it COD? That means cash on demand. That means as soon as the goods are produced, you pay. Or are there net terms? Net 20 or net 30 payment terms means payment within 20 days or payment within 30 days. I'm sure you can figure out which is why. "Net" any number means you need to remit payment within that number of days of delivery of goods.

Oh—one side note, and I can't even really guarantee if this little test is effective, but it's what I would do—when vetting a printing press for self-publishing your tarot or oracle deck, at some point during friendly communications with that company, casually and as innocently as you can muster, ask whether they also sell decks. You can even fake-justify your curiosity by mentioning that you're interested in also selling tarot and oracle decks. You're also looking for a wholesaler who sells and distributes tarot, oracle decks. If they say yes, I would probably run the other way, because it means chances are high they might knock off your deck and sell it to others. Let's get into some stereotypes here. This happens with notable frequency about the Chinese and Eastern European printing press companies. Of course not all, but there is a notable frequency.

Here's how I think of it. If you're a printing press in the business of taking orders to print stuff, it's quite the extra headache to also become a seller and distributor of decks. One reason you might expand and branch off to do that is if you're not making enough money with your print orders, and if you're not making enough money with your print orders, as a customer you have to ask the question why would you go with a company who isn't successful at print orders? Being a wholesale seller and distributor of decks is a beast of a business on its own, so a really successful printing press that specializes and is renowned for being a successful printing press is not likely to expand out of their niche. So under my theory, if a printing press eagerly says yes, they sell decks too would you like to take a look at their catalog, what's stopping them from knocking off your deck and having your deck be illegitimately published in such a catalog? That's why I'd run the other way. Try to go with a printing press that only specializes in printing, and not also selling. It's only little way to possibly avoid getting your deck knocked off.

Is my theory faulty? It could be. I don't really know. I'm sure there are perfectly wonderful and honest printing presses that also happen to sell and distribute decks. But I'm just sharing my thoughts here.

Packaging is also important. When you self-publish, you have a lot of control over packaging, so maximize that control. Don't cut corners with packaging. You have to know by now that most buyers of tarot and oracle decks care about packaging. If your cardstock is shit, no matter how beautiful and brilliant your deck is, you will get a significant number of disgruntled customers. Your cardstock needs to be wonderful. A legitimate printing press will be happy to mail you samples of the different cardstock options they provide. Get samples. Personally feel out the different cardstock quality options.

When the printed orders are finally piled up all around your home in stacks, the real work begins. You may want to open a FedEx account for easier and more convenient shipping. That way you're not in line at the post office every other day with a small wagon of boxes to mail out. No one in line behind you at the post office likes seeing someone with a small wagon full of boxes. Why expose yourself to such evil eye? Get a FedEx account.

END AUDIO LECTURE TRANSCRIPT.
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