

How can I find out which subsidy publishers are reputable?

Q: Are subsidy publishers listed in Children's Writer's and Illustrator's Market more reputable than those not listed?

According to the editor of Children's Writer's and Illustrator's Market, they will be taking all subsidy publishers out of the book, beginning with the 1997 edition. She said the ones that have been included in the book were those companies they had not received complaints about, but she didn't have specific knowledge about them otherwise.

My view (which she shares) is that it is better to look for a "traditional" publisher, than to contract with a subsidy or vanity publisher. Authors and illustrators have had problems with some of these presses — which can charge high rates, can publish books in a lower quality format, or can be misleading about the marketing and promotion they do. For example, I was asked by a family member to review a contract and marketing proposal from a large vanity press. The letter praised the author's book as particularly marketable and provided examples of a press release and ad that could be done for her book. She was enthusiastic until we looked at the copy more closely and I pointed out that the text was so generic that any other children's book could have been substituted for hers. It seemed possible —and even likely — that they had not read book to write the letter.

Some houses may do better than that, but I'd still recommend self-publishing and controlling what the book will look like and how it is marketed, rather than paying a subsidy publisher. There are also many small regional and specialty publishers that publish excellent books, and which are often overlooked by new authors and illustrators who hope to get books published by the New York trade houses. 10:11/96