

GIVING AUTHORS OPTIONS

Sandra Brannan spent years trying to connect with agents and traditional publishers.

With a series of thrillers waiting to be shared with readers, and a desire for a self-fulfilling career as a writer, Brannan knew that self-publishing wouldn't meet her needs. "So I pursued only a traditional publishing path, which requires securing an agent to present to a publishing house," she says. After two years of submitting queries, all she acquired was "a foot-high pile of rejection letters" and no book deal.

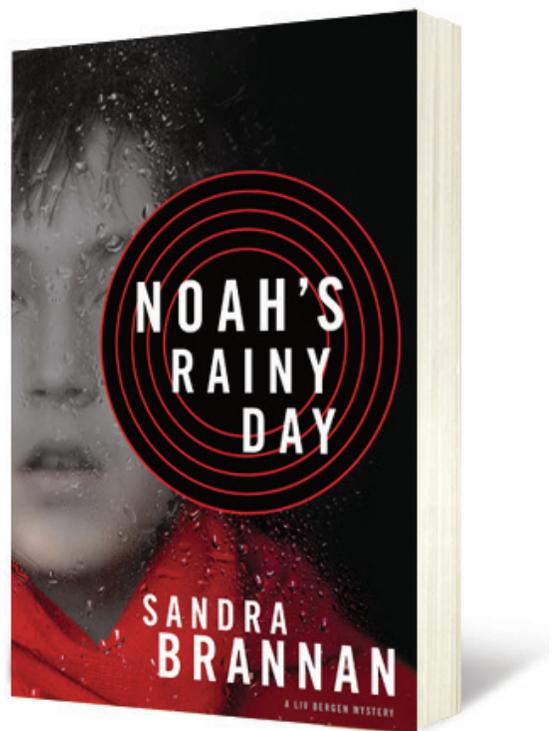
Brannan remained confident that the rejections were "from bad market timing and inadequate queries, not my ability to write novels." So she pulled back from submitting and focused instead on honing her craft.

Then, in the summer of 2009, Brannan came across an *Inc.* magazine article featuring Clint Greenleaf, CEO of Greenleaf Book Group. "If it wasn't enough to see Clint Greenleaf's wide smile, barefoot and sitting amongst a stack [of] books like he was in heaven on earth . . . the story he tells of his unique business model for publishing ignited an enthusiasm that I thought I had extinguished years earlier."

Much of the resistance Brannan faced echoes experiences common among budding authors. Advances and marketing cost money, and to take a chance on an unknown author is a considerable risk for the publisher. With 93 percent of books published selling less than 2,000 copies, traditional publishers have become more reluctant than ever to take a chance on new authors.

How the Current Model Works

Under the traditional publishing model, an author does not go directly to a publishing house and say, "Here is my book." First, an author must submit a brief query letter pitching the book idea to an agent. Often the queries are submitted through email, but some are still sent through traditional mail.



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On average, it takes the agent four to six weeks to read and respond to a query. If the project sounds interesting, the agent will then ask for a “partial,” usually the first fifty pages of the book manuscript.

Once the partial is received, the agent can then take anywhere from one to six months to respond, depending on the agent, the volume of submissions they receive, and the volume of existing clients they handle. If they like the partial, the agent will then ask for a full manuscript. It will take an agent anywhere from one to six months to read the manuscript and make an evaluation.

Should an agent decide to take on a client, they usually take 10 to 15 percent of all royalties and advances generated by the author. It is important to note that less than 2 percent of aspiring writers ever receive agent representation. Even then, publication is not guaranteed. Once the agent enters into a contract with the writer, the agent must then send queries to appropriate publishing houses. At this point the process of querying, submitting, and waiting begins again. Once the book is acquired, it must go through a series of edits, formatting, and design development. This can take anywhere from six months to two years to complete.

Advances and royalties for traditionally published books tend to be low. Debut authors generally receive advances of \$2,000 to \$20,000, with the majority receiving the lower end. Royalties for paperback books are usually 5 to 7 percent of the cover price, while hardcover royalties average 10 to 15 percent of the cover price. However, before royalties can be paid, the author must first earn back the advance paid out by the publisher prior to publication.

Also, the author has little to no say in the creative process. Design, formatting, and placement in retailers are all determined by the publishing house. If for any reason the author is dissatisfied, he or she must either buy back the rights from the publisher or wait for the book to go out of print before taking it elsewhere.

Understanding the Needs of Both Author and Publisher

“As a businesswoman, I empathized with the publishing houses for not taking a risk on a new and unknown author such as myself,” says Brannan. To help ease the burden and hopefully improve her chances of acceptance, she tried to “convince agents all along to waive the advance in lieu of higher royalties, so that publishing houses could lower their up-front investment costs along with their risk, only to be told I was quite mad.”

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Brannan recognized the need for options, but between traditional publishers—with limited print runs, short author rosters, high risk, and low royalties—and self-publishing—with its bad reputation for quality and weak distribution model—she didn't know how she could get her book in front of the public in a profitable and credible way.

“The level of professionalism, enthusiasm, and personal touch they use in guiding a neophyte like myself through the world for publishing is outstanding.”

“Knowing that in the traditional model of publishing, only the famous, the notorious, and the established authors have a loud enough voice to be heard over the deafening overhead required to publish a single book endeavor, I struggled with the concept of how new voices could be heard,” says Brannan.

All too aware of the many stigmas perpetuated by the publishing industry, Brannan weighed her options. “Many book lovers, whether agents, publishers, reviewers, bloggers, or book enthusiasts, have mentioned a distrust for any system where money flows any other way than from publisher to author. I understand the reluctance to trust a system where authors can ‘buy’ their way into a published book by paying the expenses, such as in self-publishing, having shied away from that option as too self-indulgent myself,” she says.

Given the poor quality of self-publishers and the fact that traditional publishers are increasingly closed off to newcomers, Brannan needed another choice. “When I read about Mr. Greenleaf’s clever concept, morphing the traditional publishing model of selectivity, professionalism, expertise in marketing, and distribution with self-publishing’s model where the author takes the burden of financial risk while keeping the rights, I was ecstatic!”

Finally, a Real Choice

Exhausted with traditional publishing and unwilling to take the self-publishing route, Brannan met with Greenleaf Book Group and was pleasantly surprised by what she learned:

“At Greenleaf, a writer cannot buy his or her way into becoming a published author.” Greenleaf stresses quality above all else. They receive hundreds of submissions every month, but only a select

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few are deemed worthy of publication. “Greenleaf has an established set of standards a writer must meet to be accepted a client,” says Brannan.

Beyond the quality of the content, Greenleaf is known as a competitive national distributor, counting several *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* bestsellers among its titles. The publisher’s flexibility and “With a reputation that continues to build and flourish, Greenleaf is a formidable presence in the industry. With mind-boggling, supersonic changes occurring in the world of publishing on a daily basis—such as social networking, electronic media, blog reviews, Skyping, and virtual book tours—who better to entrust with my work than an open-minded publishing house such as Greenleaf, which hires only the best and brightest and which refuses to be whipped into ‘traditional publishing’ submission with a buggy whip?”

For Brannan, the choice was clear. She submitted her manuscript and hoped for the best. The many years she spent cultivating her writing skills and learning her craft paid off. In less time than it took for her to receive a query response from a traditional agent or publisher, her manuscript joined the ranks of Greenleaf’s selective title list, and she couldn’t be happier.

From Idea to Finished Book: The Birth of the Liv Bergen Mystery/Thriller Series

Brannan signed on with Greenleaf Book Group in November of 2009. Immediately, the team began working on her novel—editing the text, crafting a quality design for the cover, developing a strong marketing plan, and pairing Brannan with a qualified publicist to help her build her platform. Her consultant, Hobbs Allison, walked her throughout the entire process so that Brannan not only received a quality product, but one that truly reflected her artistic needs and career goals.

“The level of professionalism, enthusiasm, and personal touch they use in guiding a neophyte like myself through the world for publishing is outstanding,” says Brannan. She worked with many people from the Greenleaf team, from editors and consultants to designers and marketers. “I have yet to meet someone at Greenleaf who I wouldn’t hire myself . . . Thorough while visionary, creative while grounded, exacting while compassionate, the team of professionals is an amazing tribute to the dedication and persistence in achieving the goal of the new model of publishing. And the editors? Simply amazing!”

A Publishing Case Study

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In the *Belly of Jonah*, book one of the Liv Bergen mystery/ thriller series, debuts in September of 2010. When asked about her success, Brannan says, “I believe I’ve succeeded thus far because of my patience and my love for writing, not by focusing on becoming a published author.

Greenleaf will allow me to continue with my love for writing without having to worry about the world of publishing. My future is very squarely and comfortably placed in their competent hands. My success in the future will definitely be attributed to these experts!”

[Greenleaf Book Group](#) is a publisher and distributor best known for its innovative business model, distribution power, and award-winning designs. Named one of Inc. magazine’s 500 fastest growing companies in the United States, they have represented more than 1,000 titles, including four that hit the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today* bestseller lists.