

Hello, Renegades! This is a final accounting on the work and expenses that went into writing and publishing my book, *How to Do It All: The Revolutionary Plan to Create a Full, Meaningful Life — While Only Occasionally Wanting to Poke Your Eyes Out With a Sharpie.*

In short, the book cover designer, interior layout designer, and proofreader were all 100% worth the cost. They all delivered on what they promised in their contracts.

The launch team that constituted the bulk of my expenses (\$6,500 of the \$10,000 spent)? That's another story. I learned a lot of hard lessons from this, and hope you will, too, as I'm passionate about helping writers and want to make sure no other self-publisher has to go through what I experienced.

Some key information to remember as you read this: *How to Do It All* is a nonfiction self-help title aimed at a female audience between the ages of 20-60.

## Hiring the Team

I hired Insurgent Publishing to launch my new book. I had interviewed the owner, Tom Morkes, in the past and liked him.

When I contacted Tom Morkes in November 2015 about doing a book launch for me, he created a short video outlining the services he would provide. He mentioned in an email that “I only work with people who intend to sell more than 10,000 books in the first year alone.” Of course I intended to sell over 10,000 copies — who wouldn't? — so that was a go! He put together a page of testimonials, and those included some very big names. Finally, Tom was very charismatic and reassuring, for example telling me (since I'm no longer on social media) that “social media is overrated” and “you do not need to blast on all channels to make this happen.”

I had originally considered hiring Insurgent Publishing for a test run to re-launch my book *Commit: How to Blast Through Problems & Reach Your Goals Through Massive Action*, which I had never properly launched beyond sending a few emails (for reasons I explain in the book). I assured Tom that I wasn't expecting him to duplicate my “failed” launch and he replied, “Linda, I don't duplicate anything and so far have had no failures :)” All the right words...I was excited to get started!

I ended up scrapping the idea of a re-launch for *Commit*, and decided to hire Tom Morkes for a full launch of *How to Do It All*, which I was about to start writing. After a bit of haggling from the initial quote of \$10,000 that included a “rebranding” of Renegade Writer Press, Tom drafted a contract where I would pay \$7,500 over the time leading up to the launch of *How to Do It All*, plus “15% net receipt of all book sales” for the next 12 months.

### **A NOTE FROM DIANA, CO-FOUNDER OF RENEGADE WRITER PRESS:**

Up until this point, I was peripherally involved with the project, as Tom was trying to convince us we needed “platform development” for Renegade Writer Press (RWP) before he could launch Linda's book. In Tom's words in an e-mail to both me and Linda: “You can't have an effective

launch if you don't have the platform for it" and "I only say all this to let you know that there is a lot of work to do with Renegade Writers (sic), but we've barely scratched the surface...you have huge potential with your platform, but if you half-step it you may get equivalent results."

I thought this was b.s. Linda and I talked quite a bit during this time and my feeling was (and is) that Linda was the platform, not RWP, which is an administrative umbrella covering a variety of our past and future projects. Tom Morkes was really putting the screws to Linda on the additional expenditure, and his e-mails contained sales jargon and non-specifics that didn't impress me. The one positive that I could see was that he was a West Point grad who had served in Iraq; I come from a military family myself, and with two brothers who served in Iraq and Afghanistan as U.S. Marines, I hoped that Tom was shaped by the same sense of duty and honor my brothers have carried into their civilian lives.

I never spoke with Tom Morkes directly because spending that kind of money on RWP wasn't going to happen on my watch and I didn't want to waste anyone's time. Although Linda was willing to pay for "platform development," I said no. It pains me to write, but I also cautioned Linda against spending so much money on her book launch, but she was optimistic that Tom was going to help her sell 10,000+ copies. I felt if I fought harder, I would appear to be unsupportive or "too negative." After all, I'd already shot down the "platform development," plus it was her money and her business. I shut my mouth and hoped that I would be proven wrong. At this point I bowed out of the negotiations, and only became involved again around the time of the launch. Today, I feel enormous guilt that I didn't voice my initial misgivings more vociferously or ask some pointed questions that could have swayed Linda away from Insurgent Publishing.

### **BACK TO LINDA:**

Some of the particulars of the contract included:

- "Active promotion and outreach during launch sequence (30 days prior to campaign start through the completion of the campaign, and post launch to facilitate ongoing sales of book)."
- "Insurgent Publishing will manage an ambassador group/launch team for the Client, with input and feedback from the Client. (b) Insurgent Publishing will provide feedback and direction on marketing collaterals and develop alternative marketing channels for promotional efforts."
- "Create an ambassador group/launch team."
- "Finalize outreach timeline and materials. For example: how we need to approach influencers and mainstream media, how we'll track and follow up with them, and all the organization and tracking that goes along with this process."
- "Conduct promotional outreach 30 – 60 days out from launch. Arrange podcasts, blogs, and other promotional opportunities with the help of the Client."

Tom Morkes set me up with Jamie [not her real name] as my account manager.

## Red Flags

Jamie and I spoke once a week, and I started to notice that every week we would come up with a list of tasks that Jamie would promise to do or follow-up on, but by the next week's call, many of items were not completed and the list would remain much the same for the following week. But I liked Jamie and trusted that things were moving along on their end.

As the book launch date approached, I started noticing that more and more was left undone. For example, the contract stated that Insurgent Publishing would identify and reach out to 200 "mainstream media, blogs, podcasts, listing sites, forums, FB groups / social media groups." A few weeks before the launch I saw that the team had reached out to about 30 outlets — and those were mostly business podcasts and writing blogs, *not* women's and moms' podcasts/blogs (which is the obvious audience for this book), and certainly not the "mainstream media." Moreover, the writing blogs were all ones I had written for multiple times before, and I'm friends with the owners; even if their readers were an appropriate audience for my book, I wouldn't need any help placing guest posts with them.

I had sent Insurgent Publishing a list of women's/health magazine editors and journalists that a PR professional had developed for me, yet they contacted no one on this list. I mentioned to the team, several times, the importance of connecting with outlets aimed toward women and moms, but received no response.

I started to worry, so I sent an email to Tom asking what was being done for the launch. As per the schedule we had agreed upon, I had been updating my early notification list at least weekly, managing the Facebook group, writing guest posts I landed, reaching out to my own contacts, and building a website. I had also made plans to contact every website, author, and business I mentioned in *How to Do It All*. But I wanted to know: What had Insurgent Publishing done? Tom responded with, "We do what we do on our end" and that I should "trust the process." He also said, "We also have plenty of stuff up our sleeve for launch day, from a Reddit promo, to ProductHunt, etc."

At the time I didn't see this as a bullying tactic, and I'm very non-confrontational, so I just put my head down and kept working, hoping that on launch day I'd see the results of the \$7,500.

## My Major Mishap

At one point, I accidentally sent an Advance Reading Copy (the not-quite-finished draft) of the book to all 8,000 members of my email list instead of just my 20 beta readers. At first I thought, "Holy \$%^&!" But then I realized this could be good marketing: after all, the people who did end up downloading and reading the book — I have an average 25% open rate on my emails, so that would be 2,000 people — could spread the word and also leave reviews when the book was

officially published. Also, since I had spent so much money on this launch company, I was certainly expecting I would sell way, way more than 2,000 copies, and that the reach would go far beyond my own mailing list!

And it was true: I got only the nicest responses to my snafu. Many readers wrote to say they would buy the book when it came out even though they got a free copy, and I also received a ton of positive comments about the book. A few readers posted pre-reviews on their blogs and sent info on the book to their friends and contacts in the media. Even my account manager, Jamie, said this “snafu” ended up being a good thing for the launch. (You’ll see later why I included this detail.)

## The Missing Employee

On April 13 (remember, the launch was scheduled for April 18), I noticed that Jamie had not been responding to the emails I had been CCing her on. We had a phone meeting scheduled in 15 minutes, so I went to ding her in the Facebook Group for the book. I was surprised to see that she was no longer a member of the group. I emailed Tom, and he replied that Jamie was no longer with the company and the call would be with him.

The fact that I hadn’t been told that my main contact at the company had left goodness-knows how long ago — I noticed the last time she’d responded to one of my emails was April 4 — and that I had been emailing her all that time with questions and comments, freaked me out. But again, I tamped down my worries and kept a smile on my face.

In the week leading up to the launch, the communication from the company became even more scarce. The Friday before Monday’s launch, I sent a pleading note to Tom for information and support. He didn’t respond.

I kept telling myself to wait until Monday for the *real* magic to happen, and kept my fingers crossed.

## The Big Day That Wasn’t So Big

The launch was scheduled for Monday, April 18. After all that work and expense, along with the promises from Insurgent Publishing, I was expecting congratulations, updates on what they were doing, and updates on results. Or at the very least, the promised Reddit, ProductHunt, etc. Instead: silence. No promised Reddit posts, no ProductHunt listing, no emails from the team — nothing.

I was stunned. Even when I sent a note asking for an update, I heard nothing from Tom Morkes or Insurgent Publishing on launch day. And even more troubling was that they were doing nothing that I could see to launch my book.

I went into the book's Amazon dashboard to see if Insurgent Publishing had at least done something with the SEO (search engine optimization) terms, which they had said they would do. I discovered that they had changed the keywords to "Leadership in Management," "Communication in Management," "Inner Child," "Study Aid," and "Consulting and Psychology," keywords that were irrelevant for *How to Do It All* — which is, if you'll recall, a self-help book for women.

I later contacted book marketing coach Sandra Beckwith of [BuildBookBuzz.com](http://BuildBookBuzz.com). Sandra is an award-winning former publicist I've known for a long time, who now teaches authors how to promote their own books.

Sandra told me that boilerplate packages used by launch companies often include software to generate keywords in order to save the company time from reading the actual book. If anyone working on my behalf at Insurgent Publishing had read the book, they would have known that those keywords were *completely* inappropriate for my audience.

The evening of the launch, I called a business consultant I've worked with in the past, who also happens to know Tom. He agreed that I received terrible service, but that maybe something was going on in Tom's life that was making it difficult to focus on the project. He suggested I write a note expressing concern and saying that I wanted to cancel the contract. (There was a cancellation clause in the contract.)

## Canceling the Contract

The next day, I took some important screenshots and sent an email to Insurgent Publishing. I said I feared Tom had some issue that was preventing him from working on the project, so I would need to cancel the contract. I requested, at the very least, a partial refund. To this point, I'd already paid him \$6,500 of the \$7,500 fee.

This e-mail finally got his attention: Tom responded just *17 minutes* later with a lengthy missive that questioned my character, and that said he didn't respond to my emails on launch day because was too busy doing tasks that would have happened later that week. He also blamed the fact that I had sent an Advance Reading Copy to my list for the extremely slow sales (just over 30 sales on launch day) — which seemed pretty strange to me, considering I had paid Insurgent Publishing \$6,500 so far to reach out to the media, bloggers, websites, podcasters, and more. If I was expected to rely solely on my subscriber list for sales, why hire someone to help? (Not to mention that Jamie agreed the "mistake" had worked out in our favor, and at the time Tom had never weighed in either way.)

After all this, he wondered if I had fired off the email in haste, and if so, he would be happy to take me back — but that if I cancelled, not only would I not get a refund, but I would owe the hourly rate on work done over the \$6,500 I had already paid, as per the cancellation clause in the contract.

## Strange Doings

While I was reading this e-mail, I happened to have Basecamp, our project management program, open — and I could see that Tom was going through our to-do list *right then* and checking off all the to-dos that hadn't been completed, including low-priority tasks on *my own list* that I hadn't yet done. Luckily, I had a “before” screen shot, so I took an “after” one that included the time stamp. Now I had proof that something fishy was indeed going on.

I responded with a very simple note requesting that Insurgent Publishing stop work immediately, and asked for a full accounting of not only the extra time they spent over the \$6,500, but also for the *entire* \$6,500 — including what they did, when, and proof that they'd done what they were contracted to do.

Tom wrote back immediately and said, “Let's consider the contract cancelled.” To me, that was a big red flag that he didn't want to show me an accounting. I emailed back, requesting the numbers I had asked for.

On April 23, I received an email from Insurgent Publishing with eight attachments meant to serve as proof of hours worked. Lo and behold, the final tally of what I owed was \$7,600 — \$100 more than the total worth of the original contract.

Insurgent Publishing was contracted to do work beyond the launch date to keep sales going, so if they had already gone over budget by launch day, and Tom's later emails promised that the real action was to take place later that week...that's not only fishy, it's unprofessional. Typically, a service business like this keeps on top of hours and will let a client know when they're getting within 10% of the budget ceiling.

Also: How were they going to perform the bulk of the work later if the budget was already exceeded? Were they working for free at that point, hoping they would earn it back with the 15% of net receipts I would owe them on sales? That doesn't sound like good business.

The “proof” Tom attached was mostly questionable. One timesheet, for example, didn't specify the activities worked on, just the number of hours worked. I also looked up the name of the accounting system Insurgent Publishing was using and learned that one can fill in tasks and hours worked after the fact; the system didn't actually track time as a task was being accomplished. Therefore, I had no way of knowing if the tasks and times were accurate or not. Normally my mind wouldn't go there, but after I had witnessed, in real time, Tom checking off

to-dos in the task management system after I cancelled the contract — including tasks of my own that I hadn't yet completed — I had fully lost faith in the trustworthiness of Insurgent Publishing.

The more I inspected the documents, the more of the company's incompetence I uncovered. If it was not incompetence, it was simple neglect and lack of care for my project, and for me as a client.

For example, in one document Tom had sent as proof, one of the tasks he claimed Insurgent Publishing had completed was to “hit about 50 FB groups.”

I checked through the list of Facebook groups Tom claimed to have posted in, and indeed: Just after midnight on the day after the launch, April 19, someone from Insurgent Publishing had pasted a blurb about the book (which I had written myself) to 50 Facebook groups with titles like “Pimp My Books” and “Ebooks Gone Viral.”

Sandra Beckwith of BuildBookBuzz.com later told me that posting on these sites is a completely ineffective marketing strategy, as they're used by self-published authors to simply drop in their links and leave, not by real marketing agencies, or by actual readers looking for a new book. And I could see this was true: These Facebook groups consisted of page after page of book ads posted by self-published authors (mostly in the romance genre), with no comments other than the occasional spam, and very few “likes.”

The final blow: On April 21, I spoke with someone who was closely involved in Insurgent Publishing, and he told me that a lot of tasks and projects had been falling through the cracks because Tom Morkes had, and I quote, “shiny object syndrome” — he would take on projects and then become excited about the “next big thing,” then foist the old projects onto his overworked staff. This person also said, “You won't be the only person complaining.”

## Was I Being Gaslighted?

Meanwhile, Tom and I had a couple more back-and-forths via email, and I started suspecting he was confused about my project — or maybe he was thinking of another book entirely. After all, he did have the inappropriate SEO keywords, and the reach-outs to writing blogs and business podcasts that were completely irrelevant to my audience.

For example, Tom told me he had proof that he had started my ambassador (i.e., Facebook) group, and that he and Jamie had been posting in there consistently for the past few months. However, I had started the group under my own name in February, and was in there every day. Tom had not even responded to the group invites I sent him until April 6, when he joined and posted once. Jamie, on the other hand, contributed one post and one comment (but several “likes”) the entire time the group had been in existence.

This lack of involvement was contrary to what was promised to me in the contract, which was, as mentioned earlier, “Insurgent Publishing will manage an ambassador group/launch team for the Client, with input and feedback from the Client.”

That wasn't the only instance of blatant lying: As another example, I pulled out an actual quote from the note Tom had sent me saying “We have lots of things in the works for launch day, including Reddit and ProductHunt,” and pasted this quote directly into an email to Tom, asking why this promise had never been fulfilled. He responded that they never do those things on the first day of launch.

I started to feel like I was being gaslighted: *I had copied and pasted Tom's own words out of the contract and his emails, and he insisted he never said these things.* Then to claim that he had started, and been active in, a group that I had created and ran daily — and knew for a fact he had never been involved in? I suspected Tom Morkes was playing mind-games at this point, hoping I would be too confused or scared to call him on it.

More fuel on the fire: I later discovered that even if Insurgent Publishing had followed through on the promise to post on ProductHunt and Reddit on the day of launch, it was a bad business move for my particular project. I've since learned that these sites are frequented mainly by men; in fact, Reddit users are 80% men, and much of their content is very female-unfriendly. This strategy calls into question how competent Insurgent Publishing was to promote a book about women doing it all.

Sandra Beckwith pointed out that Insurgent Publishing is clearly geared toward business authors who write books as lead magnets to sell expensive courses and coaching. I had told Tom Morkes and the team up front that my goal was *not* to write a book in order to generate income on the back end (meaning by up-selling workbooks and courses to my readers), but to sell the book itself. Tom said that he could work with that. And yet, I ended up with the same boilerplate package that would have been used for these business-related lead magnets, from the Amazon keywords used, to the podcasts and blogs reached out to, to the websites Insurgent Publishing promised to post on.

## Another Red Flag I Missed

Sandra also asked whether I could contact my credit card company and fight to get my money back. I told her I had sent checks, because Insurgent Publishing's contract states that if the client wants to pay via PayPal or credit card, the company would charge the client the merchant fee (which is around 3%). That would be over \$200 on a \$7,500 project, so I decided to mail checks instead.

Sandra was horrified, and told me this practice is bad business and a red flag for scams because it leaves the client without recourse should a dispute arise. My business partner, Diana, added that charging clients the merchant fee is also against PayPal's terms of service.

During all this, I started getting invoices from Insurgent Publishing for \$1,100. I thought that not only did I not owe the company any more money, but that I deserved a refund. I had spent \$6,500 and received practically nothing. And I'm not even talking about results, which I know no one can ever guarantee — I'm talking about actions taken to promote my book, and a basic level of care and service in exchange for money paid.

I wrote up and mailed a certified letter outlining the lack of care and competence displayed by Insurgent Publishing on my project, and demanded a 50% refund, which seemed very fair considering the level of service I had received.

The letter was signed for on May 6, 2016, but to date I've heard nothing back. If Insurgent Publishing is still sending me invoices, I don't know because they're being filtered into the trash.

I don't think Insurgent Publishing set out to scam me, but I am 100% certain they dropped the ball on this project in a big way. The lack of service, lack of communication, and downright incompetence was shocking and unacceptable — and I'm now out \$6,500.

## Lessons Learned

I learned many lessons throughout this process:

- Trust needs to be earned, and that I shouldn't offer someone my trust just because they're "an entrepreneur like me."
- Not everyone adheres to the same level of standards and ethics that I do in my own business — and I can't sign contracts and pay out money based on the assumption that others operate with the same standards that I do when it comes to hard work, honesty, client care, and competence.
- I need to look out for red flags and respond to them immediately instead of trusting it will all work out in the end.
- I shouldn't let myself be bullied. A real pro will welcome questions, share milestones and results, alert the client when the budget ceiling is about to be hit, and let the client know exactly what the company is doing on the clients' behalf — and not become offended when the client asks for a progress report.
- Finally, I also learned what makes a good book launcher. Sandra took a look at Insurgent Publishing's site and told me (I'm paraphrasing here), "There is nothing on this site that would make me want to trust this company with my book. The owner isn't a book lover, he didn't work in publishing. He just saw a way to make money and went for it." [Edited 6/27 to add: I checked and his "about me" page does say he loves books.]

But what about those big-name authors whose books Insurgent Publishing had launched? In fact, Tom Morkes had most recently bragged that Insurgent Publishing had done a \$450,000 launch for a well-known business writer. Sandra pointed out that that author had a huge platform already, with tons of readers and mailing list subscribers. Insurgent Publishing would probably be able to garner sales like that only for a client who brings to the table a mailing list with hundreds of thousands of subscribers. (At the time, my mailing list consisted of 8,000 subscribers...and the reason I hired Insurgent Publishing was to go beyond my own current audience, otherwise why bother?)

## The Present

So what's happened since I had this experience and learned a lesson in placing too much trust in a business without proof that they deserved that trust?

I ended up hiring Cake Creative Collective to help salvage the launch. The founder, Kim, explained exactly what they would do, how they would do it, and when. I agreed to pay a reasonable hourly fee, and hired the company for 10 hours as a test.

Kim read my book, then drafted an amazing email about me and the book and started sending it to big media outlets, mom blogs, women's podcasts, and more. She studied each outlet in order to tweak the email to make it as relevant as possible for the outlet and its readers/viewers. She would listen to podcasts, read blog posts, read submission guidelines, and analyze each outlet's website.

If she ran across an outlet that didn't have an email address listed, Kim would call and pitch my book over the phone (which, as it turns out, actually works!). And she kept in touch with me daily to let me know what was happening and to get my input on the outlets she wanted to reach out to.

Kim quickly got a positive response from an Emmy award-winning TV news reporter and big-time vlogger, who is reading my book right now while on a beach vacation. She landed me guest posts and interviews on blogs like The Work at Home Wife and Honest Mum. And a local TV station is now interested in having me on a morning or afternoon segment.

Because we had to basically re-start the launch, it's been slow going. For example, I sent a copy of the book to the vlogger/news reporter in late April, and she's just reading it now. And I'm just now working on some of the guest posts that Kim landed for me, so it will be a while before many of them are actually posted.

So that's the final accounting of the work and money that's gone into writing and publishing *How to Do It All: The Revolutionary Plan to Create a Full, Meaningful Life — While Only Occasionally Wanting to Poke Your Eyes Out With a Sharpie*. Some successes, some setbacks, and lots of eye-opening lessons.

I hope other self-publishers will learn from my successes — and mistakes. I'd hate to see other authors lose as much money and time as I did.

Use these lessons to garner the writing success you deserve!

*Have you ever been scammed, or just disappointed, by a company or person you hired to help with your self-published book? Do you have any advice to share for other writers who may be considering hiring someone? Please share in the Comments below!*

## UPDATE 6/27:

Tom has a comment in moderation that doesn't answer my main points, implies that my complaints are about the results and not the process, and attempts to throw his former employee under the bus...when the problems I experienced went far beyond a single individual.

And most important, it didn't end with, "I'm sorry. I have just mailed you a full refund for this project that doesn't reflect the overall quality of our work."

I don't feel Tom Morkes deserves free air-time on my blog, and am not interested in a he-said-she-said here. He can use his own platform to post his message.

I just compiled a packet of 26 screen shots, as proof of the lack of care and service I experienced, for a Preditors & Editors listing, and am waiting to hear back from them.

## UPDATE 6/28:

I spoke with legal counsel, and he suggested I let Tom's comment go live and let readers come to their own conclusions. So do check below to see the comment, as well as further comments coming from his IP address.

## UPDATE 6/28:

There are many incorrect statements in Tom's rebuttal and comments. Let's go over them now, and I'll end it by sharing my cancellation letter.

**Tom didn't "consult on the book cover," unless this counts:** "These covers look great. I love the top right one. The bottom right is also pretty eye catching." I hired the book cover designer, did research on other self-help book covers, selected colors, ran the final four options by my FB readers, and worked with the designer to tweak the one I liked best.

**Tom also didn't consult on the book copy.** I sent drafts as I finished them, but never heard a word from him about them. All the feedback I received was from my own beta testers, writer husband, business partner, and proofreader.

**"I knew this would affect sales and I let you know this."** Never happened. I didn't hear from Tom about it one way or the other, and Jamie thought it was a positive because it would get some word of mouth going about the book. He only mentioned my mistake was a problem *after* I cancelled the contract. And I agree with the poster here who said that if he knew, halfway in, that my snafu would have made it difficult for the book to gain traction, he should have said so — and either figured out how to fix it, or dropped the project.

**"Linda looked like a great fit and was satisfied with our work up through launch day,** as can be seen in our records of email and basecamp correspondence, literally up to the second day after launch (the day she cancelled our contract)." Incorrect. I'm not sure, in retrospect, how he could know I'd be a great fit since I had no written book for him to look at at that point. And it's clear, now, I was *not* a good fit for Insurgent Publishing.

As for my being satisfied: On March 29, I noticed that work wasn't being done that I could see. When I asked for an update, I got the brusque response, "We do what we're going to do on our end" and that I should "trust the process." So basically, he refused to tell me what work they were accomplishing on my behalf. Starting from when I realized that not much seemed to be happening (March 29, when I sent the note and got the condescending reply) through launch day (when communication became scarcer and scarcer until the total radio silence on launch day) — I was VERY unhappy.

**I cancelled on Day 2 of the launch not because of slow sales,** but because other than extremely brief answers to technical questions (about, say, how to reset the book price in Amazon), I heard nothing from Insurgent Publishing the week before launch. And on the day of launch, I heard nothing at all from the company — what they were doing, what I needed to be doing, how the launch was going, etc.

If the week leading up to launch, including the actual first day, were like that...I didn't want to see more.

**Tom Morkes keeps bringing up his "\$450k launch."** I asked him what the author did to have that kind of launch because I wanted to do it, too. He told me that this author contacted 1,000 influencers he knew and convinced a percentage of them to email their lists about the author's book. Not sure how much credit Tom can take for that...the author already had a huge audience, and it seems the author also emailed all the people himself.

**“There’s nothing scammy about our company.”** Up until last night, I was always careful to say, here and to colleagues (even Diana), that I don’t think Insurgent Publishing is an outright scam, but that Tom dropped the ball on my project. And he admits as much when he says the company was overwhelmed when an employee quit. But now, the fact that someone from Tom’s IP address (remember each computer has a unique IP address) came on last night to make fun of my “measly” platform and blog and say the quality of my book was to blame for a slow launch — that shows what kind of business this is. If a company takes you on and takes your money, thinking the whole time that you have a “measly” platform and a bad product...well, I’m not sure what other word describes it.

**Tom continually brings up the results of launch day.** As I mentioned, my beef was not about the results...no one can guarantee that, though of course I was hoping to see a lot of sales. My beef was about the way I was treated, the lack of communication, the bullying and condescension, and the lack of care for me or my project that was displayed. Tom Morke may have had seven magical elves working all hours in the background, but all I know is that when I asked for a progress report he shut me down in the rudest way. That was strike #1, followed by more strikes when communication dropped off to nothing on launch day. When I cancelled the contract because I wanted nothing more to do with the company, he responded by calling my character into question, and then jumping into Basecamp and clicking off to-dos one by one down the line...as I mentioned, including ones I know weren’t done because they were on MY list.

I know it can take a while for sales to take off...that was the least of my concerns.

**“[... W]hen you give the book away FREE to your MAIN audience, what is the incentive for them to pay for it?** You could say “well, my fans love me and that’s why” – which would be a fair point...except that the 30 sales on launch day clearly indicate that only .37% of your fans / audience (assuming 8000 email readers) felt strongly enough to put money down for something they had for free.” Incorrect. I had about a 25% open rate, and as one commenter mentioned (and proved), the book was attached to an email on another topic entirely. So only those readers out of the 2,000 who happened to see, download, and read the book apply here.

**“[...] the only thing that could have actually DETRACTED from sales in the first week is giving the book away free.”** Well, except for the fact that Tom seemed to be relying solely on my current fan base for these early sales, reviews, etc. he mentions. My mailing list subscribers are aspiring and professional writers, so the fact that a self-help book for women may not be super interesting to them is no surprise. There is a lot of overlap — for example, a majority of my readers are women, and we writers tend to be introspective sorts — but if we were to rely only on my current readers to kick off the launch, I didn’t need Insurgent Publishing’s services.

**“It’s also possible you don’t have the full story.”** Seeing as how communication from Insurgent Publishing dropped off to nonexistent right before launch, it could be very true that I don’t have the full story. If Tom had responded to my polite request for a status update instead of shutting me down, this may not be happening right now. But all I know is what I experienced

personally on my end from Insurgent Publishing. And speaking of “the full story,” I notice Tom never responded to my points about the inappropriate Amazon keywords, the dubious Facebook Groups the company posted to, the way he denied words I copied and pasted out of his own emails and the contract, and the company’s practice of charging the client an extra fee to pay via PayPal or a credit card.

**“I can show you my strategies for how we do these launches** – the first day is always the soft launch to early adopters, the second day to your main audience...the rest of the week pushing podcasters and bloggers to share.” Well, actually...Tom had instructed me earlier to reach out to the bloggers/podcasters/etc. whose platforms I had appeared on to ask them to spread the word to their mailing lists. So I had actually done all that before the first day of launch.

**Beyond that, I think my cancellation letter says it all:**

Hi, Tom,

I am canceling my contract with Insurgent Publishing.

I didn’t receive the level of service I expected (and was promised) throughout the process: Insurgent Publishing been very uncommunicative for weeks...but the final blow was yesterday’s launch day, which was pretty much the biggest day of my career, and the culmination of four months of non-stop work and over \$10,000 spent.

I was on the edge of my seat all day, and had completed every marketing task you set and many more. I didn’t hear a word from you (even when I reached out); almost none of the launch-day actions were completed by you or your team; and the result was under 50 books sold. I see you did change the keywords on Amazon to, as you said, “make it a bestseller in certain categories” — to terms like “study aid” and “management and leadership,” which have absolutely nothing to do with the topic of the book. That doesn’t really seem like it’s on the up-and-up, even if it would be effective.

I know no one can guarantee results, but I did expect some communication, and for your team to fulfill their promises. I had been trying to “trust the process,” as you said, even when I had doubts (which I expressed in an email in March)...but yesterday sealed the deal for me.

I’m concerned that something is going on in your life or business that has made it difficult for you to fulfill the promises of the contract, our email conversations, and our phone calls — and that has made it a challenge for you to focus on this project. The fact that the person in charge of my account left without notice and no one told me, and I continued to email her with no response for a couple weeks before having to ask about it, tells me as much. I can also tell my project was not a priority based on the unfinished to-dos in Basecamp, the complete lack of communication

on the critical day of launch (and the few days before), the fact that my posts and book were not socialized on the IP website or social media, and more.

If something is going on with you, I'm truly sorry. However, I need to take care of my family and my business.

I will not be paying the final \$1,000 or 15% royalties of books sold. In fact, I would appreciate at least a partial refund. Can you say in all fairness that I received \$6,500 worth of service and support from Insurgent Publishing? (I'm not even asking about results...just service and support.)

If you would like more details and explanations, I have copious notes taken during phone calls, records of Basecamp conversations, emails, and screenshots. But in short, I hope you'll look honestly at the level of service I've received and refund at least some of my investment.

Regards,

Linda

## UPDATE 6/29

Sandra Beckwith of BuildBookBuzz.com wrote up a spot-on post-mortem of what went wrong with this book project — and how other authors can avoid a similar fate. [Read it here](#). Thanks, Sandra!

Anyone else writing articles on this situation (or on how self-published authors can avoid hiring mishaps) that might help other writers? Let us know in the comments and we'll post them here!

## UPDATE 7/1/16

Tom reached out to me on June 29 with an email saying, "I'd like to talk to you about refunding your money." He asked for my number to chat. I responded that he could tell me what he had in mind via email. He hasn't responded. I will keep you updated!

In the meantime, Tom Morkes posted on his Facebook page asking how to deal with a "hit piece," which he didn't want to link to because the author (me) was after his traffic. However, someone later included a link to my post in their comment, which was quickly deleted. When another person asked why the comment had been deleted, Tom responded that he didn't want to give publicity to our blog.

Last night, another person left a comment that included the link to my post, and as of this morning the entire thread is down. Luckily a friend captured screen shots.

In other news, this post was picked up by the Alliance of Independent Authors blog. Again, I'll keep you updated. Thanks for everyone support here, on other posts and forums, and via email. It means a lot to me.

## Update 7/7/16

The Alliance of Independent Authors covered this situation on their blog. Thanks to the AIA for their balanced coverage!

One correction and a couple updates:

Correction: Diana actually discovered that comments from “Sarah” and “Tom” were coming from the same IP address. Diana not only has screen shots of our moderator panel with IP addresses, but the server-side entries that show both Tom and “Sarah” were not only coming from the same IP address but from a computer (or possibly computers) with the same operating system(s) and browser(s).

Update: Tom Morkes emailed me on June 29 saying he wanted to chat on the phone about a refund. I responded that I preferred to keep the conversation to email, and what did he have in mind? No response.

Update: Tom Morkes has deleted the Insurgent Publishing Twitter account, and deleted the Facebook thread where he started asking what to do about a “hit piece.” Perhaps this is because people kept posting the link to my blog post in the comments to that thread, which he deleted each time. [Diana’s comment: Want to remind everyone yet again that while we’re moderating comments, we’re approving every one, no matter whose side they’re on. Seriously, I would love to hear a defense of Tom from one of his clients, but so far nothing. If we do get one of these comments, I have no motivation NOT to publish it.]

## Update March 2017

Wow, people are continuing to email me to ask how it’s going, point out posts and comments about the situation on other sites, and more. In fact, I *just* received a screen shot of a Twitter comment someone in Slovakia posted about the situation in February 2017. So here’s an update.

The “situation” officially lasted until October 2016. All I can say is that a refund did not happen and this post is remaining live. Which is a good thing, because it still attracts — or should I say

warns — lots of writers each week. Of course, it also means I wasted \$6,500 and loads of time by hiring this launch company.

As for Insurgent Publishing, looks like they're still at it: A friend who was instrumental in writing this report was recently approached by Insurgent Publishing's new "launch coordinator" plugging another author they're repping. Of course my friend — who they *knew* was involved in the report — said, "Um, remember what happened with your project for Linda?"

What's interesting to think about is that if Insurgent Publishing had just offered a refund and apologized for a job poorly done, since the evidence in this report is pretty overwhelming — I had an attorney examine the report before I published it, and provided back-up for every assertion — they'd be sitting pretty right now. Instead, the comments, reports, and emails from my readers and others in the industry are still flying.

As for me, though I kept the report "just-the-facts-ma'am," I was totally thrown for an emotional loop by the situation; you just never expect someone you hire in good faith to treat you that way, and even if you truly believe it's better to just forget it and move on, sometimes it's hard to forget.

But I'm back in the saddle in 2017! I have lots of new coaching clients (plus a private free group I started for them on Slack); Diana and I just published the third edition of *The Renegade Writer* and are working on another writing book right now; I'm speaking at the ASJA conference; I have 45 students in my Volume Marketing class and many of them are having exciting wins; I'm teaching a new Boot Camp with Carol Tice; I produce an article and a podcast for my readers every week; and I just received an assignment from *Today's Parenting* magazine. Not to mention we just got back from France and are soon heading to Tokyo!

So there you have it: A HUGE warning to do your due diligence before hiring anyone to help you with your self-published books, and not just operate on faith that other businesses are as ethical as you are.

Thanks for the continuing support via email, and out there on the internet! I appreciate every show of support, every story you share, and all of your advice. It all helps other writers avoid what happened to me.

Onward!



- **Margaret Mills** \_

I appreciate the way you've taken a bad experience and used it to educate and help others. Sorry this happened to you! Looks like you are well on your way to salvaging the situation., though.



- **Eliana Osborn** \_

This was so hard to read as a long time blog and book reader—if this can happen to you, what about the rest of us with less experience? I do appreciate your openness in sharing your story. I hope you'll keep us updated when you get all your money back. Right? That has to happen? I'm crossing my fingers.



- **Elizabeth Whalen** \_

I am so sorry to hear about your experience with the original launch agency. I have read and enjoyed your books and blog for years and firmly believe that, once the right audience discovers your book, it will fly off the shelves. Thank you for sharing your experience with us.



- **LESLEY FLETCHER** \_

I have been following your story since I am familiar with the parties. I think what has happened here is shameful and I am glad you have found another avenue you trust. Best of luck with your book sales. Not an easy business at all!



- **Cat Michaels** \_

Ouch! Bless your heart. Glad you connected with Sandy to get things right and hope your next effort soars without a hitch or fleece.



- **Joan Price**

I'm aghast at the way you were manipulated and mistreated, Linda. I'm also grateful that you shared this in such detail. Only one thing I would disagree with: "I don't think Insurgent Publishing set out to scam me." I do. May you have great success from this point forward.



- **Lorraine Reguly**

Linda, it's unfortunate that you suffered such a nightmare. Kudos to you for having the foresight to take screen captures with time stamps!

I wish you continued success in your writing and publishing endeavours!



- **Susan**

What a nightmare! I was horrified to read this. I haven't hired someone to promote a book, but I entered into a business agreement that completely backfired on me because, like you, I ignored red flags, let someone else manipulate me and then got shafted when they didn't follow through on their end of the bargain (lesson learned the hard way). Have you considered filing a complaint with the Better Business Bureau? My understanding is that they will investigate even if the business in question is not a member.



- o **Diana Burrell**

Susan, that's a great suggestion. I'll pass it on to Linda, who is not moderating comments this week.



- **Q. Zayne**

I enjoyed your book, *The Renegade Writer*. I'm so sorry you went through this. The Alliance for Independent Authors has a Watchdog project. I'm not sure what your policy is about links, so here it is without the (www) [allianceindependentauthors.org/alli-watchdog/](http://allianceindependentauthors.org/alli-watchdog/)

“Our goal at the Alliance is to not only promote ethics and excellence among authors but to help ensure that writers can produce the best possible product, without being exploited or misled, and without being charged inflated prices or offered under-performing services.”

They want reports of bad experiences. I'm not connected with them aside from having taken the Ethical Author pledge. Hoping this is a good resource for you as you deal with the aftermath.

Kindleboards is another resource for reaching out to independent authors and publishers about problems, and for information on good and bad services. I run a search there before using a new promoter.

I'm glad you saved as much evidence as you did in writing and screen shots. You did a good job of outlining what you've learned from this. As I read it, the phrase 'toxic niceness' went through my mind, that socialization to go along and be pleasant, even when things are wrong. Not a judgement; I was raised that way. Your story will help others identify problems. Thank you for posting this. Great news that you found a good promoter who is a fit for your new book!



- **Diana Burrell**

Thank you for letting Linda know about the Alliance ... I will pass this resource on to her. Someone must have posted Linda's story on kboards because we're getting a ton of traffic from there, as well as Reddit.



- **Q. Zayne**

You're welcome. I'm glad to see her update that the Alliance for Independent Authors linked to this post. She's wise to keep everything in writing.

I found out about this via a link posted on Reddit: Self-Publishing and I saw it posted on Kboards, too.

[www] ripoffreport.com is another resource. I check there for scam reports and other complaints about businesses I'm researching. The Better Business Bureau is a valuable ally.

I hope there's a fast and fair resolution, and that the book soars!



- **Diana Burrell** \_

Thank you, I hope the book continues to do well, too. AIA is doing a watchdog report on this company; I think it'll go live sometime this week.



- **Karen** \_

Thanks so much for sharing this Linda. Scams and rip-offs are rife in the self-publishing industry. It's a minefield for authors. This is so helpful for any of us looking to use outside agencies to help launch our books. We need to know the red flags from the moment we start researching companies.



- **Thomas Pellechia** \_

Linda:

I'll never forget how kind you were to me many years ago, when you didn't even know me personally but recommended me to author an Idiot Guide. That's why it pains me to read what you have had to go through.

So sorry.

For all your readers, I would like to add one thing to your list of lessons:  
It's not a good idea to pay a lump sum up front to an outfit that is supposed to follow dated milestones. After an agreed upon deposit, split the payments up so that the money is tied to tasks completed.



- **Heather** \_  
Linda—so sorry this happened to you! I had a so-called academic publisher who tried to scam me, but I was lucky to have a lawyer look at the contract and warn me not to sign it. (Of course, I had to tell everyone I had opened my mouth to that I wasn't going to be published after all. Embarrassing!) Later I learned that the guy I was dealing with had scammed other authors. I self-published the book to the tune of about \$2,000, which I can't say I made on sales. Thanks for sharing. Most authors who have a disappointment of some kind think that they're alone.



- **Quinn** \_  
Linda, I am SO sorry to hear this, and thank you for sharing your costly experience in such detail. You may have saved many others from the frustration of similar decisions. I hope you'll get some level of reimbursement (and no more grief) from IP. Hug from a long-ago Way Norther!



- **Sarah** \_  
Thank you for your openness about this situation. I'm sorry to hear this happened, but am glad you're sharing to help others who are entering the self-publishing world and don't know best practices for working with PR and launch agencies.



- **K. Kris Loomis** \_  
What a horror. I have been struggling with putting my own books out because I don't have the money to hire anyone. Maybe that is a blessing.



- **Dot La Motta**

Linda,

So sorry for your terrible experience, but thank you so much for your very detailed notes in sharing what is a valuable lesson for all of us who desire to self-publish. We are all much smarter because of you and know how to identify potential problems sooner rather than later. Looks like good times are ahead for you. God Bless.



- **Gabrielle**

I am so sorry this happened to you. Have you thought about filing a lawsuit? Unfortunately the self publishing industry has few regulations (from what I understand) and it makes it easy for predators to prey on writers. I think you were generous saying that Tom didn't intend to take advantage of you, but he had multiple opportunities to redeem himself along the way and didn't do it. Writers should avoid him and his company like the plague.



- **Scott**

Thanks for such a detailed post – this was useful for a few reasons: I'm trying to help promote my books and some friend's books to help them reach people who would benefit from them, and not sure how to do that. Also I've been scammed before and want to know how to prevent that from happening. Have to agree with the other person – the way he was behaving doesn't sound like an innocent mistake, sounds like more malicious behavior on the other party's part. No clue if it would be possible to legally get some of that back – sounds like you would have a case depending on contract particulars.



- **Mary Beth Temple**

I groaned aloud while reading your post. This doesn't only happen with self-published authors though – I had a situation where a traditional publisher I worked with hired a publicist for a book launch with a similar goal to yours – get some PR outside of my regular stomping grounds where I was already well connected and could guarantee coverage. Not only did that highly paid publicist not generate any new outlets, I found out later that when preparing their client report they took credit for all of the reviews/mentions I had organized on my own! At least it wasn't my money they wasted, but that money could have been more wisely spent elsewhere.

I have come to the conclusion that by and large, I am responsible for my own PR. For good or ill, at least I know the basics are covered!



- **Chris Backe**

As someone that's followed some of Insurgent's stuff, I can't say I'm overly surprised. At this point I'd follow up with some research on small-claims court and begin the process of getting more of your money back. Threatening to blow this up publicity for him wide open might be a good inducement (say what you will about Huffington Post et al, but they \*do\* get a lot of eyeballs).

P.S. Good on you for getting someone that gets your book!



- **Tom Morkes**

Didn't you apply to Insurgent Publishing for a job just a couple months ago?



- **Bobby**

You're really going to equate someone trying to find a job with the unethical crap you've pulled here? That is weak sauce.

I was looking for a job, too. Hell, I might even have applied to your company if I'd have seen an ad. I'm a qualified PR pro and a former journalist. But seeing your behavior here tells me that I couldn't have stood working for you for long.



- **Neil Rochford**

That read like a horror story. I was actually getting anxious as it continued!

There are so many sharks out there, whether their aims are to intentionally rip self-published authors off or just mishandle affairs for them. I err on the side of caution and try to research as much as I can, but when everyone promises results and waves expertise under your nose it's hard not to go along with it. They actively seek out new authors too, playing on their desire to succeed.

Even low-budget options need to be taken with care. I fell for one of those people promising book blasts to Facebook groups that might have actually ended up damaging my/the book's reputation, which is another risk when this stuff happens.

Thanks for the in-depth look, and I'll check out the CCC. Looks like they know what they're doing! Best of luck in the future



- o **Tom Morkes**

We don't seek out new authors. In fact, we always push them elsewhere (either to free training courses or books to help them grow their platform before they invest in a big launch).

We only work with established authors who are either traditionally published, or have solid platforms that we can actually amplify. You can see our track record on our website.

Based on our free consulting call, and the questions Linda answered that allow us to vet the right clients, Linda looked like a great fit and was satisfied with our work up through launch day, as can be seen in our records of email and basecamp correspondence, literally up to the second day after launch (the day she cancelled our contract).



- **Neil Rochford**

In regards to these types of companies reaching out to new authors, I was speaking in generalities and my own experience with PR and marketing companies, not about Insurgent in particular.

However, according to Linda herself, she was in fact quite dissatisfied with the work that you and/or your team did (or didn't do), because of either the lack of communication, the unprofessional demeanor or the slightly shady practices (e.g. the Basecamp tasks).

Your apology and offer to speak about a refund count in your favor, if they are indeed honest, but it seems there's still some distance to go.



- **Linda Formichelli**

Thanks, Neil! FYI, the offer to talk about a refund was over a week ago and I haven't heard back since.



- **Saima Zaidi**

Oh no! What a terrible situation! Really shocking how unscrupulous and greedy people can be. I'm feeling quite indignant for you! But thanks for sharing this unfortunate experience with your readers, Linda. Serves as a warning for the the rest of us, esp people like me who tend to take people at face value more often than not. I sincerely hope you are able to get your money back.



- **Joanne Mallon**

Oh no, what a saga! I hope this doesn't overshadow your book (which sounds great by the way).

I think people like this take advantage of the fact that so many authors don't want to do their own marketing and PR and would rather just concentrate on the writing. But the truth is that spreading the word and connecting with your audience (which is what marketing is at the end of the day) is part of the job of the professional writer just as much as the writing. All jobs have parts to them we may not like so much, and this is ours. So the challenge then is to find the form of marketing that you can put up with enough to want to keep doing it without feeling like you've punched yourself in the face every time. And what that is will be different for everybody – some people like social media, others prefer giving talks. It's not so much what you do as how regularly you do it that matters.

I wish you every success with this book and hope that it now finds its way to the people who can benefit from it most.



o **Diana Burrell** \_

Joanne, your thoughts here are spot-on. Thank you!



• **Cindy Amrhein** \_

I'm so sorry you got taken in. The first red flag should have been the \$10k price tag. I find too many new authors have unrealistic expectations. You would have to sell an awful lot of books just to break even.

You should check out [absolutewrite.com](http://absolutewrite.com) forums. There is a board called Bewares, recommendations & background checks. It's been my first stop for over 10 years. Always check out these places first. AW has a thread on every publisher, agent, vanity press you can think of. If there isn't a thread on a particular company you can start a new thread and ask. Another one is Predators & Editors. There are a lot of companies out there whose only goal is to take money from unsuspecting authors.



o **Tom Morkes** \_

First, her price tag wasn't \$10k, it was \$7.5k. And we spent 5 months consulting on this project, from the book cover, title, design, and concept, and would have been marketing and promoting over the next 12 months as per our contract. There's nothing extraordinary about these price points for what the client is getting. In fact, many companies that do a quarter of what we do charge 3 to 5x more. I don't do that because I strive to create 10x the value that we personally capture, and a year of long tail marketing on a book can generally hit that goal....which we'll never know on this one because the contract was cancelled on day two after the book went live, cancelling all subsequent promotion and marketing on our end (that was produced and ready to go live on our end) that would have ideally led to 10,000 book sales or more in the first year.



• **Diana Burrell** \_

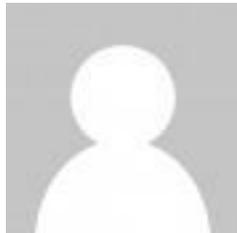
Tom is correct. Linda's contract with him was for \$7,500. The \$10K Linda mentions is the total amount she spent on her book, of which \$6,500 was spent with Insurgent Publishing. Tom/Insurgent billed her \$1,100 after the contract

was cancelled, which Linda did not pay. I hope that clears the confusion.



• **Monica Bhide** \_

I am just really stunned and mortified. I am so very sorry this happened. You are an amazing and talented writer and I wish you much success as you move forward. I hope there is a way for you to get your money back from this scam artist.



• **Thomas Knight** \_

I'm terribly sorry that anyone had to go through with this. As a vet and a West Point grad it infuriates me that this Tom character would use his past associations to circumvent the natural trust-building that is required in any business venture. I wish you all the best in the future.



- **Beverly** \_  
What a terrible experience! I am so sorry this happened to you. I am sure you've learned a lot in the process, and I have shared this with my clients. (I am a publicist, but not for non-fiction.) Finally though: very pleased for you that your new agency is doing what it is supposed to do for you. Best of luck!



- **Kathleen Allen** \_  
My advice: hire a lawyer to get your money back. Good luck with your new launch company!



- **Tom Morkes** \_  
Linda, I'd just like to say I'm sorry you had a bad experience with your launch and that you felt our company didn't live up to our promises. Out of the dozens of launches we've done, many in the 5 and 6 figure level, we've never had an unsatisfied client. It hurts me to read this for a lot of reasons, not least of which is knowing that had we the 30 to 90 days post launch to drive publicity, awareness, and traffic to your book, sales would have increased substantially over time as they statistically do for all our launches, and I have no doubt we could have done over 10,000 sales with this book – but we'll never know for sure at this point.

That said, I'd like to set the record straight on a few points, if you would be kind enough to allow this comment to go live, so people can see things from our side. I appreciate you being kind and transparent in doing so: thank you.

For one, I'm sorry you felt communication was lacking. It seems like this is the one thing that led to all the other grievances, if I could pick a root cause. I am sorry for that – it's my failure as CEO. At the time, we were a fast growing company, and I put a new project manager on your project. I thought this would increase and improve communication, not decrease and hurt it. The latter is the unfortunate truth. When she quit abruptly, it left a lot of tasks and timeline

management items to be updated and checked off as completed. I did my best to go in directly to deal with that, but you're right – many of the tasks, while completed, were only checked off by me after the fact (when I realized they were overdue but complete). This was poor communication on our part, and I take 100% of the responsibility on that. I am sorry it left you with a negative impression of our company.

As far as the job we did, as outlined in our contract and conversations, we are in the business of amplifying book and digital product launches by getting press through niche publications, podcasts, blogs, mainstream media, etc. This is long tail marketing, promotion, and sales at its core. We do the kind of work that builds and compounds over time, where each backlink, each interview, each blog review, each email sent by an influencer sends more and more people to your book, leading to increasing awareness and interest in the book over time, which leads to compounding sales.

That's how we do big launches, when we define a "launch" as the 90 days preceding the "book available date" and 90 days post launch when we start to scale back the promotion and outreach a little at a time. This is the strategy we've used to hit USA Today bestseller, Wall Street Journal bestseller, Amazon best seller (in numerous categories), do close to \$500,000 on Kickstarter and more.

There's as much art as there is science to this, but no matter how good we are, there will be a lot of "no thank you" from outlets we approach about any said book or product.

For your launch, we had at least 7 people working on it in various capacities, and spent literally dozens of hours researching outlets, listening to podcasts, reading blogs, and then taking that information to craft unique, individual messages for each outlet that seemed like a good fit. Not only that, but we crafted unique follow up sequences for each outlet and tracked our progress one outlet at a time. Overall, we averaged over 30% success rate (more below).

Out of the 491 outlets we researched and curated for your launch (from 30 to 90 days out, through 30 to 90 days past launch), we connected with 87 directly weeks before launch to set up blog reviews, podcast interviews, guest posts, and more. This was phase 1 of our outreach – to plant the seed of the book. We had another 113 in the chute for launch week (when we could leverage early success to media platforms that would need proof the book was a legitimate hit to proceed), and another 292 to engage with the following weeks (these are the more "mainstream" lists that need other platforms to write about a book or product before they mention them).

As with any type of promotion, not everyone will say "yes" to sharing something, but we averaged over 30% success rate for your launch, which is incredibly high if you're familiar with industry standard outreach success rates.

As far as strategies like leveraging ProductHunt, reddit, etc. – I could go into a lot of detail here about why these platforms matter individually...for example, why ProductHunt, with a lower percentage of female users (as you pointed out), but a HUGE audience of OVERALL users that are specifically interested in books + technology is a GREAT fit for your book if leveraged the right way (because looking at the % of women on the platform is an irrelevant figure when you can reach tens of thousands of tech savvy women who ARE active on the platform); or why reddit would allow similar targeting to the best potential influencers for your book, etc....but I won't go into it. I am sorry you don't see the value in these platforms, but I encourage you to try them out in the near future to see how well your book performs on them.

Last thing I want to highlight is this comment in reference to you giving your book away for free right before launch, when we were intending to sell the digital edition at a “discount price” of \$3.99 – to \$5.99 to this same audience, before raising the price the following week:

“He also blamed the fact that I had sent an Advance Reading Copy to my list for the extremely slow sales (just over 30 sales on launch day)...”

What upsets me about this comment is that with our business model, we make a profit when a client's book is a success and sells a LOT over the next 12 months. That's why we do so much long tail marketing...it's more effective in the long term and leads to consistent, healthy results.

However, when the major purpose of a launch is to generate revenue through book sales from day 1 (meaning, not a “free book launch” which is a technique we've used many times before to good effect), when you give the book away FREE to your MAIN audience, what is the incentive for them to pay for it?

You could say “well, my fans love me and that's why” – which would be a fair point...except that the 30 sales on launch day clearly indicate that only .37% of your fans / audience (assuming 8000 email readers) felt strongly enough to put money down for something they had for free.

The reality is “free book launches” work when you give a book away free so you can (1) increase total reach with the book and increase word of mouth + (2) generate dozens of positive reviews in the first week.

By accidentally giving a book away free before it goes live, when you'll be charging for it when you do hit publish, means you get the WORST of both worlds; you aren't able to leverage the free reviews, word of mouth, and good will... and you aren't able to generate serious revenue.

This incident was a HUGE fumble.

I knew this would affect sales and I let you know this. It wasn't to blame you – it was just to let you know: “hey, we just gave our book to everyone for free, so be aware that we'll try to recover from this, but sales might be slow.”

We did try to recover the fumble, and I believe we would have over time...but now we will never know.

I want to finish by saying I do appreciate your sincerity and the fact that you've brought these criticisms to life. I am always looking to improve at what I do, and make our company even better so our clients can have even more success. You brought to life some concerns that I plan to address immediately (communication standards w/ clients; clear standards and timelines for clients to abide by, etc.) that I hope will lead to greater success across the board for everyone, especially from our clients.

Again, I'm sorry this didn't pan out the way you wanted it to. As I mentioned in our last email correspondence, I would have loved to have had at least another 30 to 90 days with the book to get it the traction I believe it deserves. Regardless, I wish you the best of luck with the book and your platform going forward.



o **Beverly** \_

I am glad you came to offer your thoughts. Still — even after reading your side of things — think the best customer service move on your part would have been to offer a partial refund. It would have prevented a lot of ill will, and it would have been in the best interest of your professional reputation and your relationship with this author. That's still my main sticking point in following this.



• **Kundan** \_

I don't even know what to think of this because the internet is full of people who get their emotions riled up without fact-checking.

Could you please include the screen-shots you speak of in the comments or blog posts?

Including screen-shots of your emails to and from Tom?

And Tom said he placed a comment on this blog post. Has that been approved yet?

Will this comment be approved?

It's hard for me to believe you if you don't approve of his or my comment because at this point it's just a case of he-said, she-said.



o **Beverly** \_

She really doesn't have to do that. She doesn't owe you anything. She's written a personal blog post—not a legal brief. You don't get to tell her what to do. When she's writing a legal document, then she can worry about all that other stuff. Hey... maybe Tom is a great guy who just got overwhelmed. Who knows? But if that is the case he handled this 100% wrong.



▪ **Tom Morkes** \_

Thanks for the comment Beverly. It's also possible you don't have the full story.

I consulted with linda since december – that's 5 months to help her craft the messaging around the book, from cover and title / subtitle, to how we want that to improve her personal brand and beyond. We used this messaging for outreach (see comment above)...

5 months is a long time to live with a project and i take each one personally. i hate failure of myself or my work, and i work my butt off to make sure everything we do is flawless.

i recognize linda is upset by the results, but the work we do is amplification. sometimes it works great, sometimes it's a smash success (the book we launched two weeks ago hit the Wall Street Journal bestseller list; earlier this year we did \$450k on Kickstarter), and sometimes they don't pan out how we want.

the crucial point here is that the only thing that could have actually DETRACTED from sales in the first week is giving the book away free. This isn't some sort of blame game; it's a reality check (see my comment above). We

did everything in our power to fix that and kick some life into the book going into launch week. However, Linda cancelled the contract the morning of day two as we were prepping reddit, producthunt, social media pushes through our channels, email through my email list (10,000 readers), and another 100+ blog and podcaster outreach.

I can show you my strategies for how we do these launches – the first day is always the soft launch to early adopters, the second day to your main audience...the rest of the week pushing podcasters and bloggers to share.

The reason for a “soft launch” is for reviews. there’s a reason not much went live from us on day one – it wasn’t supposed to go live day one, but to go live launch week. i outline my process on my blog and teach a course on this process, which i won’t link to because it seems sporting.

If you saw the 5 months of marketing work that went into this book and its launch, just to have our legs cut out from under us on day two of the book being live (after trying to recover from a massive fumble by giving the book away for free on accident), you might think we handled this situation as best as anyone possibly could.



▪ **Beverly** –

Sure! I would be glad to see your strategies if you want to share them.

And I read your full comment above, and I really do hear what you are saying. It’s incredibly difficult for me when a client is unhappy even after I have done lots of work. I sympathize completely. That said, if any part of that is my fault (and you acknowledge that there were problems on your end) then I do what I can to make sure they are happy—or at least can agree to support the conclusion. Often this is a partial refund, though usually we can come to other means of satisfaction. All I am saying is that despite all that, despite reading what you’ve said (at length) I think that even if you are given full benefit of the doubt, that you could have handled things better from a customer experience perspective. It is my opinion. You are completely free to disagree with it, but please do know that what i am saying today is after reading your words and hearing your story.



- **Tom Morkes** \_

Thanks for the kind words Beverly.

You can read all my strategies here: [Ed: deleted the link; search “Tom Morkes” and “publishing course” if you’re interested]



- **Kundan Chhabra** \_

Of course she doesn’t have to do that. She doesn’t owe me anything.

And I in turn don’t owe her any faith in her just because she posted a blog post.

She is free to do what she wants to do. And I am free to believe her or NOT. Fair and square, right?



- **Lydia Sherrer** \_

Thanks so much for writing this post! I know it must be very painful to think about this event and all the blood sweat and tears it cost you (not to mention money!). I have been tempted in the past to hire publicists or book launch businesses, but have always stopped short because I am, by nature, a very paranoid person and hold onto my money like it’s my first born child. I did a kickstarter to fund my debut books and was very close to paying multiple hundreds of dollars to companies promising to promote my product to various outlets and get me thousands of dollars in backers. I spent time sending emails back and forth. But something always just felt wrong, and when I looked up reviews on the companies I either found zip, or very negative reviews. Anytime someone avoids answering questions, gives general non-answers, or is delayed in responding to an email asking for assurances, that should make one hesitate. In any case, thanks for this post, and I’d be interested to hear how your book does down the road. You know what they say, failure is the path to success! Keep on keeping on.



- **RB Wood** \_

I'm terrified—I was in process of researching them for my future launch and came across your article. I'm so sorry you went through this nightmare. It's one of the pitfalls of being an Indie writer...it's a discipline that requires so many skills that no one person has that expertise. That makes us ripe for abuses, unfortunately. Thank you for posting...

RB



- **Bob Mueller** \_

Adding my thanks for sharing this story to educate, and my sympathy for the financial loss. I can imagine the feeling in your stomach when you realized what was happening.

Grace and peace.



- **Anara Guard** \_

Another good resource is Writer Beware, originated by the Science Fiction Writers of America. Gives both advice and info on specific agents, publishers, etc. <http://www.sfwaweb.org/other-resources/for-authors/writer-beware/>



- **Adam Dreece** \_

Just wanted to say thanks for sharing this. I narrowly avoided a scammer recently.



- **Leigh Shulman** \_

Thank you for sharing this! Thank you so much!

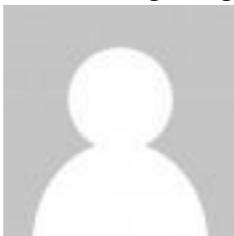
I've been looking for someone to market the book I'm about to launch, and Tom was recommended to me highly. He has a consulting website also where you can chat with him for something like 3 dollars a minute. I was considering whether or not to make the leap and do it, even though most of the marketing people I've met with until now did not charge for a first chat.

I am sorry you had to go through this, but I very much appreciate your sharing it. You're saving plenty others the worry, time and money that you lost. I hope you gain it back tenfold.



- **Lupe** \_

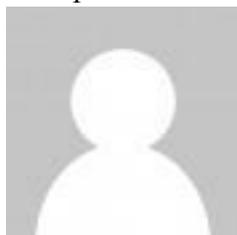
Linda, terrific post. Thank you so much for outlining your experience with such detail. As a professional freelance editor, I can suggest that self-publishing authors that need any work to be done on their books should only pay after the work has been done. I am paid only after I have submitted files that have been reviewed and approved. Of course, in my situation, sometimes it's difficult getting paid on time (or sometimes at all). Continued success!



- **John Doe** \_

Insurgent Publishing is a real useless company by the sound of things. I'm thankful that I found this post, as I'd just looked over their website the other day.

Hopefully, they're exposed as frauds.



- **Victoria Hay** \_

That was a harrowing read. I'm horrified and saddened to learn you had to go through such an unproductive, frustrating, and expensive nightmare. You're much calmer than I am: in your place, I'd have been talking to lawyers — one of whom surely would be the attorney general of whatever state the guy does business in. Matter of fact, since he's doing business across state lines, I probably would have been in touch with the US Attorney General's office.

Your saga makes me feel I got off light with my own fiasco. I hired a woman who came highly recommended (by her friend, it develops) as a "social media marketing consultant" to publicize and help sell a science fiction novel. I explained that a) I don't enjoy spending time on social media, and that even if I loved it and could do it successfully, b) my hands are pretty full riding herd on several editors, a graphic designer, an ebook formatter, and five contract writers; editing and indexing clients' copy; wrangling ISBNs; and publishing four e-bookoids a month. The deal was that she would create and run a Facebook Ads campaign, establishing a FB site for our trade-book publishing arm and operating it.

Fortunately, her charge was nothing like what Insurgent Publishing ripped off from you — only several hundred bucks. And counting. At the end of two months, the vaunted FB Ads campaign had sold exactly 0 books. She insisted that could not be true. I sent her all of the sales reports from Amazon. She could not believe it: she said they couldn't possibly be right.

The few random readers who stumbled across the book — not during the campaign — gave the thing four- and five-star reviews. If it was that good, you'd think at least ONE Facebook reader would have been impressed enough to...well, you know: buy it?

Elsewhere, I ran my own ad campaign for the romantic erotica we produce under a different imprint. It didn't make us rich, but we did sell books. What that seems to suggest is that advertising can sell books. But evidently Facebook Ads do not. At least, not when the campaign is run by this particular "expert."

Good luck to you. I hope you find success in this endeavor.



- **Tom Morkes**

This is a complete hit piece and you won't even let my other comment go live.

You realize this is libel and defamation, right? I'll be in touch soon.



- **Anon\_**

Oh the irony, an Author publishing a book called How to do it all Paying a company to do work she could quite easily have done by herself.



- **Sarah\_**

Hi Linda,

I am sorry to hear about your experience, but this post seems a bit one sided.

I found this article in a forum where your post was being discussed and that forum seemed to have much more back and forth with many people who commented that their comments to your post weren't accepted by you. (Makes me wonder if this post is a waste of my time. I guess I will soon know.)

Second, you have a choice when you sign a contract. The commenters who supported Tom in the forum I found were happy customers all who seem to go back to the point that you GAVE YOUR BOOK AWAY FOR FREE. I am not sure how you can expect good results when that happens.

I wish you luck in the future, but you article to me seems like an angry case of buyers remorse and unfortunately you are trying to take a war veteran who probably works very hard down with you.



- o **Beverly\_**

Nope. She is entirely credible. Just because Tom has SOME happy customers, doesn't mean he didn't screw up here. Many businesses get overwhelmed even if they mean well, but he didn't handle that well if that was the case.

And also, as a publicist, I can say that yes — she likely hurt her sales a bit with the accidentally giveaway, but it would still have helped with word-of-mouth and Amazon reviews and stuff, so it wasn't a big deal.



- **Sarah** \_  
Well if this is the case and giving the book away for free would have helped with Amazon reviews then she should be doing great.

I guess her lack of success speaks for the book itself.

Sounds like Tom had a hard sell.



- **Diana Burrell** \_  
You bring up a good point, Sarah. One thing that I'm curious about that maybe Tom can answer on his own forum: Linda had not yet written her book when Tom took this project on. She didn't have a proposal or outline written, only a bare-boned idea. It seems rather odd for Tom to take something like that on, and even odder to throw out sales numbers at that point without seeing the finished product. It's unheard of for anyone in the literary world to take on an "idea" without some meat behind it. This is one thing that raised a red flag for me, and something I mentioned to Linda at the get-go. At any rate, thanks for commenting.



- **Diana Burrell** \_  
"Sarah" didn't do such a great job covering her tracks:

<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:WYhqRqGrdA4J:soularpoweredyoga.org.w3snoop.com/+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>



▪ **heidi \_**

Oh my gosh i don't know you Tom/Sarah but please don't embarrass yourself further. Step away from the comments thread. And probably reconsider your business practices.



▪ **Bobby \_**

You are about as dumb as a brick, Tompuppet.



▪ **Victoria Hay \_**

So, Ms. Formichelli seems to have given a draft of the book to something like 8,000 people (somewhere, here or on FB, I believe she mentioned that's the size of her mailing list). Quite possibly the MS went out in some easily reproducible format, such as a PDF or .docx file.

Maybe she can parlay it into word-of-mouth sales. But...would you, as a potential reader, buy the book when the person telling you about it can email you a copy? Or better yet, post it on DropBox or GoogleDocs for all his friends to access! Our author has made a very serious mistake with substantial potentially negative consequences.

Given that fact, the ethical thing for Mr. Morkes to have done was to put on the brakes.

He should have pointed out that it was going to be difficult or impossible for him to sell a book that she just GAVE away, for free and in reproducible form, to 8,000 customers. This is where he should have said "Let's stop this campaign

right now. I'll refund the amount that would have covered the rest of the project. Alternatively, maybe we can come up with a service or ancillary product that we can sell in conjunction with the book, using the book as a give-away from now into perpetuity.”

Whether or not his services objectively were lacking after the accidental giveaway occurred, clearly things went downhill from that point. He could have avoided the bad feelings and he could have avoided the impression that he was ripping off the client by bringing a halt to the campaign as soon as it was clear the campaign was in any way compromised.

The impression of wrongdoing is as damaging as real wrong-doing. Even as he was as innocent as the Angel Gabriel, he needed to do the right thing at the right juncture. It appears he missed his chance.



- **Beverly** \_

True. I suppose it depends in part on the network itself. People who have it and can share it might do so, but some people would suggest it to others. All that said: I agree—whether or not it was intentional on his part, Tom just didn't do the ethical (or smart) thing here. And if he really had the author's interest at heart, he'd have done just what you suggested here, Victoria.



- o **Jim** \_

This comment is so wildly off-target it makes me suspect you're one of Tom/Insurgent's friends.

She had a choice to sign a contract, correct. This means she was entitled to a certain amount of services. The contract was breached but he kept the money. That's what this is about.



- **Diana Burrell** \_

Bingo, Jim. Thanks for giving me the idea.

<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:WYhqRqGrdA4J:soularpoweredyoga.org.w3snoop.com/+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>



- o **Diana Burrell** \_

Now that I know who you really are, Sarah, I want to say something. I think it's utterly shameful to pull out the "war veteran" card. It speaks volumes about your character that you'd use this to gain some kind of sympathy. As I said above, I come from a military family with a father, stepfather, grandfather, two brothers, and cousins who proudly served our country from WWII to present in every branch of service except the Air Force. Their service isn't something they pull out and wave around when they've stepped in a pile of it. Just something to think about next time you try to use that. Thank you for your service, but it doesn't excuse you from screwing up as a civilian.



- **Elizabeth Whalen** \_

As someone who also comes from a family with a long history of military service, I really appreciate your response to "Sarah," Diana.



- **Diana Burrell** \_

Thank you, Elizabeth. I should have also mentioned I live about a mile away from an Air Force base in a town that includes a large VA hospital. I'm pretty sensitive to anyone using and abusing their military service

for sympathy points, while using a sockpuppet, no less. I wonder what his commanding officers or classmates at West Point would think?



- **Diana Burrell**

Hey folks, Diana here. I've been moderating comments on this post and I have approved every comment that has landed in our queue, positive or negative. There is some lag time because I check the queue in between my other obligations. When Tom's response came through, I advised Linda and asked her to make the decision to post it or not post it. She decided not to for reasons she explained above.

I am closing comments tomorrow morning, so if you have something to say, say it now. And thank you for taking the time to comment!



- **Kundan Chhabra**

What reasons, Diane? I don't see that post from Linda.



- o **Diana Burrell**

I assume you mean Diana, not Diane. Linda added to her post above.



- **Sarah**

Not showing Tom's comment shows this is truly a hit piece and can't be trusted. Let his words speak for themselves. I can only assume he set the record straight.



o **Diana Burrell** \_

Tom is certainly free to respond to Linda’s post on his own forum. Thank you for commenting!



▪ **Sarah** \_

From the look of your measly platform and seeing his, I hope he doesn’t give you or Linda the publicity.



▪ **Diana Burrell** \_

Looks like you missed yoga practice today. So sorry. Hope tomorrow goes better for you.



▪ **Diana Burrell** \_

It’s interesting, “Sarah,” that your e-mail address is linked to Insurgent Publishing. To wit: <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:WYhqRqGrdA4J:soularpoweredyoga.org.w3snoop.com/+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>  
That’s really ... sad.

Well, our platform may be “measly” but we are schooled in basic journalism. Perhaps cover your tracks better?



- **Sarah** \_  
Yes I know Tom. I don't deny that at all. I know him from work he did to help me market and launch a successful yoga retreat in Thailand.



- **Diana Burrell** \_  
You're Tom's wife or her business partner. Do you really want to go down this path? I've got more ...



- **Beverly** \_  
You know, I almost called "Sarah" "Tom". It looks like I wasn't too far off the mark.



- **Sarah** \_  
The fact that you won't allow his own comments speaks volumes.



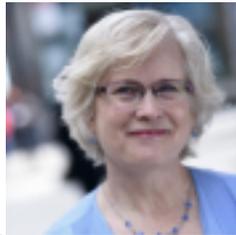
- o **Diana Burrell** \_  
Tom is absolutely free to share his side of the story on his own forum(s).



- **Diana Burrell** \_

Good morning! I shut down comments last night because I didn't want to wake up to a mailbox full of "Sarah" (see above comments/weblink to learn the identity of "Sarah.") Linda is not moderating comments; I am. I'm approving all comments, supportive or critical of Linda's actions with one exception. Linda does not want to give Tom the bandwidth on her blog, so we've held his two comments in the queue; their "hold" status is clearly visible above. He is free to speak his mind elsewhere.

Thank you all for your comments. Please keep them coming ... although I could do without the sock puppet show. On the other hand, it was rather entertaining.



- **Sandra Beckwith** \_

Sarah, aka Tom, noted that sales were low because of the giveaway mistake. But Linda hired Tom, aka Sarah, to expand her reach beyond her network. When you know that, you realize that the giveaway mistake wouldn't have mattered that much. Marketing to Linda's email list wasn't Tom's job. His job was to help people who don't know her already discover her book.



- **Pk Hrezo** \_

Ugh this is the pits. Thanks for sharing. The lessons are so valuable. I went thru something quite similar with someone who partnered with me to write a memoir for them then started changing their tune in the middle. Long story but I missed the red flags of manipulation and while I was able to pull out of the project, will never recoup my losses in time and money.

Your contract was not fulfilled therefore you are due a full refund. Run fast from any service that does not offer a satisfaction guaranteed clause. At least within 30 days. If they don't then they don't care.



- **Linda Thorne** \_

What a nightmare for you. I don't have the funds for a publicist now, but I do look at them from time to time in case I can one day go that route. This was valuable information.



- **Denise Pattison** \_

I want to address this to Sarah.

Believing Linda's comment on this forum wasn't even a difficult decision. I've been hearing about "Tom" and his "publishing" business for quite some time. Not one single comment I've read described him or the company as anything but a money-grabbing scheme. Many of the comments were funny—at Tom's expense.

Another thing you might want to consider. You are trying tear Linda down with that wonderful little thing used against women everywhere. Victim blaming.

You might want to remember this very famous line. "Methinks you doth protest too much."

If Linda decides to obtain an attorney each comment made by you, Sarah, will be considered evidence. Right now, Tom, you, and his company are trying to use intimidating tactics. Good Luck with that approach. The judge will get a kick out of your ignorance. If Tom hires a good and ethical attorney his first suggestion to Tom will be to settle. This kind of thing has far reaching repercussions. If Tom and you want it to stop Linda then you need to be the ones leaving the battlefield. However, that apparently goes against your need to blame Linda and call her a liar.

Just admit it. An apology and refunded money will go a long way to making you look better and even reasonable. What you are trying to do here and everywhere else is victim blaming.

Remember most of us are writers and readers. We can and do read between the lines. We don't need you to tell us that we are idiots for believing Linda.



- **Tanya \_**

I just wanted to thank you for sharing your experience. Very well written, and I appreciate the contrasting info of what good service looks like. It is important that things like this get publicized so other writers can learn the warning signs in general (because there are certainly more scammers out there doing the same things to writers) and be warned from specific scammers like Tom and his company.

And I'm sorry you're now dealing with harassment from Insurgent Publishing and their sock puppets. Shameful on their part! Stay strong. You are in the right.

And good luck with your book!



- **Tom Morkes \_**

There's nothing scammy about our company. There's a difference between scamming and not getting the results you want. Our company has launched dozens of books and digital products. We've helped books hit USA Today bestseller, Wall Street Journal bestseller, and we worked on the most crowdfunded non-fiction book in Kickstarter history.

I elaborated in another comment why the launch DAY performed so poorly (accidentally giving a book away free and then charging people on day one will affect initial sales no matter how you cut this)...we'll never know whether we could have hit 10,000 sales over the next 12 months because the contract was cancelled the second day after launch, which is when we subsequently stopped the marketing and promotion of the book (which was prepped and ready to go out on dozens of platforms and we had over 100 outlets ready to engage with to leverage early positive reviews into more exposure....again – never had a chance to see what results that could have played in the first month of sales, let alone the first year).



- **Victoria Hay**

“There’s nothing scammy about our company.” Apparently not, Tom, because there seem to be no explicit complaints elsewhere. A deep enough search through Google and other search engines would pull something up, no matter how great one’s SEO. There may be something out there, but if there is, I’m not finding it.

But you know, my friend...engaging in a sh!t-slinging contest isn’t helping your business plan. Believe me: I’ve been around long enough to have seen this kind of thing before.

Sometimes discretion is the better part of valor. And in an engagement like this, “discretion” often translates to “silence.” You’ve made your response. It’s a pretty good response. Now stop. Don’t threaten. Don’t reply to BS. Let it drop. I think your lawyer will explain the benefits of this strategy.

You may be well served to give the unhappy client a refund. Calculate how much time you’ve put in and how much you’ve had to pay employees or subcontractors for this specific project. Subtract from the contracted-upon figure and offer her the difference. If you’re in the red, WGAS: give her a respectable refund anyway. It’s annoying and painful, but if it oils the waters it will be a good investment.

Do what’s good for the business, even when it’s not necessarily what feels good for you personally.



- **Diana Burrell**

I mentioned in a comment to fake “Sarah” that I had more. It’s this and it’s simple. Both Tom’s and Sarah’s comments had the same IP address attached to them, which shows up in my moderation panel. Every computer connected to the Internet has a unique IP address with, perhaps, a few exceptions. I doubt highly that Tom/”Sarah” are exceptions.

It's no surprise that Insurgent Publishing would stoop that low. On the other hand, "Sarah" mocked us for our "measly platform" and implied that Tom had a much greater one. It's fascinating to me that we haven't been deluged with protestations from his fanbase, nor have I seen much, if any, indignation on his behalf elsewhere. Crickets.

Mine is bigger than yours is the strategy of someone on weak footing...or the bully on a elementary school playground.



- o **heidi \_**  
too bad they didn't put all this effort into marketing books.



- **Bobby \_**  
#BOOM



- o **Marcia Layton Turner \_**  
I was just going to comment on that fact that so far, the only person who has had positive things to say about Insurgent is Tom/Sarah. If the company has been doing great work, where are those supporters? If I had people questioning my motives in a public thread, I would ask past clients to chime in on my behalf. And yet, we've heard nothing from satisfied clients thus far.



- **Tom Morkes \_**  
Nope – this hit piece will not go out to any of my list or clients.

And as I scanned through the comments, it looks like there are at least 4 people here giving a dissenting opinion of what is otherwise a group of Linda fans who unfortunately don't have the full story.



- **Diana Burrell**

Are you counting your sockpuppet comments from last night in those four “dissenting opinions”? Because saying things like:

\*”From the look of your measly platform and seeing his, I hope he doesn't give you or Linda the publicity.”

and

\*”I guess her lack of success speaks for the book itself.”

... are not exactly the opinions prospective and current clients want to hear from a company hired to represent their work.

In this, we may agree: I wouldn't want my customers to see that, either.

By the way, I'm happy to take screen shots of the moderation panel so our readers can see that your comments and your sockpuppet comments came from the same IP address i.e. the same computer. Just let me

know.



- **Diana Burrell**

(Not meant for you specifically, Marcia! ) I want to reiterate that I've approved all comments, whether supportive or critical, and will continue to do so. Linda and I have decided to keep comments open for now. If a comment is being held in the queue, on your end you can actually see the name of the person

trying to post prior to my moderating the comment. I hope this is some kind of assurance that I'm not deleting anyone's comments.

And back to Marcia, thank you for chiming in. Odd, isn't it?



- **Linda Formichelli**

Thank you, Marcia. I also noticed that none of these satisfied clients or impressive platform have jumped in in Tom's defense. I don't think it's because he doesn't \*have\* satisfied customers or readers — I think it's because none of them are willing to soil their names by chiming in on this example of terrible customer care and poor business practices.

I think many businesspeople don't understand the difference between "platform" and "reputation." You can have the most gigantic email list of people who subscribed to get your latest free incentive, but that doesn't hold a candle to 20 years of ethical business practices, genuine client care, and relationship building.

The people you have business relationships with over the years, and to whom you've proven yourself to be trustworthy and caring through actions, not just words — those are the people who have your back and will do anything to defend you. The people who join your mailing list because of a giant pop-up or enticing free goodie, and who know you only via marketing emails for a couple months or years? Or your recent clients? The numbers may be impressive compared to my "measly" platform (as the comment from Tom's IP address states), but when it comes down to it, they don't know you well enough to want to jump into a shit-storm for you.



- **Elana Johnson**

This was such a great post — though I am sorry this happened. As a self-publisher, I appreciate knowing which flags to watch for in businesses, and I am thankful you took the time to share your experiences, as painful as they may have been. I'm glad you have someone better working on your behalf now, and I wish you all the best with your book!



- **Diana Burrell** \_ \_

If you're following the comments, Linda consulted with legal counsel who has advised her to post Tom's comments, which you can read above. You may also want to read the posts from

“Sarah,” which came from the same IP address as Tom's to compare.



- **Elizabeth Whalen** \_ \_

I'd like to add one more point about the giveaway. I (like many other readers of this blog) am on Linda's email list, and I received the attachment.

Here is the subject of the email:

Freelance Writers Den is open to new members!

And the body:

Hi, Renegade Writer!

I just discovered that the Freelance Writers Den—a community of 1,200+ writers that boasts a forum, free courses and teleseminars, a junk-free job board, and more—is open to new members until Thursday!

If you're interested in joining, here's where you can do that:

Join the Freelance Writers Den [The email contains a link to join, which I've not included here because it has expired. The Den is only open at certain times.]

If you join, tell Carol I sent you. Enjoy!

Linda

Renegade Writer Press

[Then the PDF is attached.]

So, it's not as if she announced the book was attached. People who didn't open the email (75% of the recipients, according to Linda) would have known something was attached, but otherwise they never would have realized that attachment was the book.

The follow-up email, which came the next day, has the following subject:

New On The Renegade Writer: You Don't Write As Well As You Think

The body is long enough that I'm not going to post it here, but it's about the post referenced in the subject. She does mention in that email that she accidentally sent out the book, and she asks readers not to share it.

Yes, I suppose some people might have anyway, but I also believe that a lot of Linda's subscribers are writers or aspiring writers who respect the amount of work a book requires, even if they've never written one themselves. Maybe they didn't buy the book because they got a free copy, but I doubt they'd go around posting it for others; that's piracy and not OK.

And, as Linda and other commenters have noted, Linda specifically said she hired an outside firm to reach people who are not on her list.



- o **Tom Morkes** \_  
Elizabeth, thanks for the comment.

You said this:

“And, as Linda and other commenters have noted, Linda specifically said she hired an outside firm to reach people who are not on her list.”

That's not true. She hired us to consult on the production of her book, from book title and cover to the marketing and launch of her book. Nowhere in her contract did it stipulate that we were hired solely to reach people “not on her list.” A big factor in every launch is leveraging an authors audience the RIGHT way by getting them to review, share, and promote week one, so you can leverage that into bigger, more mainstream press.

No outlet wants to cover a book with no reviews; leveraging one's audience / list is key for launch in order to get it to the top of charts where inbound marketing channels can push the book sales even higher.

We did outreach outside of her list as well, getting her in contact with 37 outlets, with another 100+ on deck for launch week outreach, and another 200+ for ongoing marketing and promo. This didn't happen because the contract was cancelled the second day after launch, so we'll never know how well it could have done.



- **Bobby** \_  
Oh, SarahTom. TomSarah? I'm not really sure what to call you, other than 'PuppetMaster' ... but that wouldn't work either, since you apparently use sockpuppets as badly as you do product launches.

You need to pack it in, son. You're full of shit, and everyone here can see that. You're a fraud. You've been caught. You need to refund the client's money and go on to your next victim, er, "client."

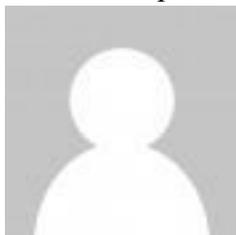


- **Elizabeth Whalen** \_  
"Linda said she specifically hired ..." as in she said it in her post and that it was clearly important to her and relevant to her expectations with respect to the service she was paying for.

I thought context around the accidental giveaway was missing and wanted to add it. In my opinion, its potential impact was being exaggerated.



- **Linda Formichelli** \_  
See the post above for a new update!



- o **Beverly** \_

Thanks, Linda. Sounds about right! And again — I am glad you have a better team working for you now.



- **Sarah Barbour** \_

Ugghh...Linda, I'm so sorry this happened to you and I really hope you're able to get at least some of your \$ back. That said, I'm grateful that you've chosen to share this story publically. There are so many services geared toward authors that, if not actual scams, are half-baked at best. If it's okay, I'd love to share your post with my own list/readers. Many of them are new to publishing, and your story is very instructive.

Sounds like things are going better with Cake Creative—best of luck on the re-booted launch!



- o **Linda Formichelli** \_

Please do! And yes, Cake Creative has garnered interest from some big-name mom/women's media...but of course, since we're starting from scratch it may take a while to see results.



- **Blaise van Hecke** \_

As a business that helps people to self-publish, I am ashamed with how you've been treated. It gives my industry a bad name. I do hope that you plan to take this further in legal terms because he shouldn't get away with it. There are people who think that their bully tactics will mean that people won't fight back.



- **Bec** \_

I'm hoping that you're going to pursue them for breach of contract. You paid for a promise that they did not deliver. Each instance of a specific action that wasn't carried out in the contract could be actioned as a breach and you deserve compensation.

Tom appears to contradict himself even in comments on this forum thus it would be likely that he would find it difficult to keep his story straight in the court of petty sessions. For example, if he consulted personally for 5 months, then the loss of Jamie from the company is a moot issue. Similarly, if he believes that the pre-launch 90 days are vitally important, but they did very little, then there's a problem.

I really hope you get your money back and thank you for being brave enough to share your experience. It's a great cautionary tale for all authors whether experienced or aspiring.



- **Misha Burnett**

It seems that "self-publishing" has come to mean different things to different people. In the genre fiction forums that I frequent self-publishing means that one does the work of publishing oneself.

Perhaps we have different expectations of the potential return, but I can't imagine spending thousands of dollars for formatting and book design. Using free software I can prepare a manuscript for e-book and POD in about an hour—I've done four so far and have the process down.

The same with cover design—your cover doesn't seem to have any original artwork, so I am rather at a loss as to why you would pay someone else to do that.

I don't mean to start any fights, I'm just amazed that people pay so much for what seems to me to be fairly simple tasks that the writers I know do for themselves.



- **Beverly**

I work with genre authors (mostly SF, horror, and fantasy, but also some mystery and crime,) so I feel like I can say this: more authors need to take this kind of care with their covers, editing, and formatting. There are too many self-pubbed books that are painfully obvious in their lack of professional formatting and cover design. Not to mention editing!



- **Misha Burnett**

I understand. A lot of people don't like self-published books, just as a lot of people don't like independant film or music. However, there is a market for all three.



- **Diana Burrell**

And there are many of us who drink from all the fountains ... I'm one of them! I'm so grateful to live an age where I can learn about people, places, and ideas via so many venues, old and new. I'm actually a little sad for the people who see this as an "either/or" proposition.



- o **Diana Burrell**

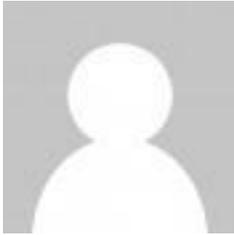
Misha, thank you for your comment, and also you, Beverly, for responding. Beverly makes the points I would make, but I'll add that thinking "self-publishing" means "I have to do everything myself" is unsustainable for many authors, and often not the smartest choice. I'm of the school where you should be brutally honest with yourself about strengths, weaknesses, and skill-sets while keeping a firm hand on costs. Like you, I have no problem laying out a book, but designing a book cover? I'm going to hire my guy in England (James at goonwrite.com — tell him I sent you!) who can do it better than I can at a price I can afford. I don't mind marketing — I worked in marcom/advertising for 10 years so I do my own marketing, but if I had the budget to hire out for it? You'd betcha I'd hire. I also hire proofreaders, as I was a professional proofreader myself and I don't care how great of a writer or editor you are—when you're laying out a field of words, you need someone else to fly over to find the bad seeds. (And while I pay for this, if I didn't have money I'd ask my best grammarian friends for a favor in return for some baked goods or hand-knits.) End-of-year accounting? I \*could\* do it myself and have done so, but it actually saves me money as well as time to haul my well-organized paperwork down to a CPA in February. It works for me to behave more like the small business which, in fact, I am. Taking everything on your own

shoulders is sustainable for awhile, but eventually it'll kill your desire to do the stuff you love. That's my .02.



- **Linda Formichelli** \_

Sandra Beckwith of BuildBookBuzz.com wrote up a post-mortem of all the red flags I ignored with this book project. You can read it here: <http://buildbookbuzz.com/how-one-author-got-ripped-off/>. If you write a post on this situation (or similar situation) that might help other self-pubbed authors, please let us know in the comments...and we'll share in an update if we feel they'll be useful to our readers!



- **Melissa Diskin** \_

Oh my goodness. This gave me an ever-tighter feeling in my chest as I went on reading it. I am so sorry you were let down so profoundly by such poor service. So glad that you finally got what you needed from Cake Creative. Here's hoping CC gets lots of strong clients and you get a boost in sales!

Off to buy your book.



- **Eve** \_

It seems to me after reading the post and comments that Linda received very little in return for her money and was basically scammed.

Tom's explanation is full of nice sounding statements that have zero substance:

“we had at least 7 people working on it in various capacities” could be anywhere from the receptionist answering a phone, to their cleaning staff. Actual accountability would be to provide

specific titles and the number of hours each person worked, as well as what they accomplished in that time.

“Out of the 491 outlets we researched and curated for your launch (from 30 to 90 days out, through 30 to 90 days past launch), we connected with 87 directly weeks before launch to set up blog reviews, podcast interviews, guest posts, and more.”

Anyone who leafed through a publishing guide can claim to have “researched and curated” 491 outlets. Moreover, what does “connected with 87 directly” mean? It sounds like they sent a mass email. If they called a personal contact at each one, I think Tom would have said that. Instead, he uses vague words like “connected”, maybe to disguise the fact that this “direct” connection took someone 5 minutes of work to trigger a mass email or post.

“We had another 113 in the chute for launch week (when we could leverage early success to media platforms that would need proof the book was a legitimate hit to proceed), and another 292 to engage with the following weeks.” No substance whatsoever, since it didn’t happen.

Finally, any good businessman with a client who was dissatisfied with the work of an ex-employee would have used the word “refund” copiously by now. The fact that Tom refuses to provide a refund smells really bad.



- **JL Nichols** \_

Linda,

I am sorry this happened, and thank you for taking the opportunity to educate us all. The Tom/Sarah comments are pretty entertaining. I should get some popcorn.



- **Larry J. Dunlap** \_

Thank you, Linda. You are very brave. A year ago I hired a well-known author who’s books promised to sell truckloads of books on Amazon. She seemed very author friendly, being one herself, and after interviewing several other publicists, I chose to spend roughly \$4,000 with her to publish my first book, “Night People,” the results were worse than abysmal. As Linda notes, I’m certain none of them read my book. The people she must have been hired, though she referred to them as her ‘team,’ did the very same things Linda described. I think they are the scam artists, fronted by people who use their reputation to put a good face on them. It was a 90 day program and after the first 30 days I began complaining. I realized that the guarantees in the contract were actually written as ” amounts – “up to a certain value,” meaning they were not actual guarantees at all so I didn’t seem to have a legal leg to stand on. I spoke in person to the

author, told her my concerns in detail, and gave her a chance to refund my money. She didn't. Since I'm writing a second book and don't have time for a war I have not detailed my results as Linda has done, or gone further with any action though I wanted so badly to. I just want to say, BUYER BEWARE. Just because someone has a book out and just because they are mentioned on supposedly reputable websites (who are actually getting a bounty for signups) who say they are okay, does not mean they are. Be extremely skeptical. I will say despite her terrible job, I was working hard on promotion myself. Because of that the book is doing very well now on its first anniversary and I'm excited about how the second book is coming along. I won't make that mistake again and I warn against any PR firm that can't absolutely convince you of their results. I feel a little cowardly in not taking the time out to make a full case against this person, but I do at least want to add my experience to Linda's expose.



o **Diana Burrell** \_

I'm so sorry to hear this, and thank you for sharing your experience. I can completely understand that you felt cowardly for not sharing your experience. Honestly, I wouldn't have made an experience like that public, either. I think Linda was enormously courageous to share her story because she was putting herself up for everything from ridicule to pity, which are intolerable for me. Yes, she wanted her money back, but she also wanted to prevent other writers from making the same mistakes. Guess I'm not that

generous.



• **computer nurrd** \_

Each computer has a unique physical MAC address, not IP address, and its based on the NIC, hardware, not network/software, as IP is (you can define an IP address, you can't do that for MAC, it is what it is). Anyone can easily spoof an IP address to make it look like a post is coming from one place or another, not as easy to spoof a MAC address. I'm not saying the party in question did this...just clarifying. SNAFUs all around.



o **Diana Burrell** \_

Thanks for clarifying/correcting. My husband (MIT-trained software programmer) said something of the same thing. There was other evidence the messages were coming from

the same place, so we'll leave it at that. Thanks for responding! I learned something new.



- **JoAnne Simson** \_

Sounds a lot like my experience with the marketing firm associated with Abbott Press. I spent about the same amount (around \$6,000) and received very little by way of marketing and publicity. They did do book-related website (since abandoned), and they set up a twitter account, but the sales from their efforts were virtually nil. Most of my sales came from individuals and groups I contacted myself. I now have a new website that was set up for less than a fourth the price of the other.



- **Diana Burrell** \_

I'm sorry to hear this, JoAnne. That stinks!



- **Karin** \_

I just bought your book on Amazon!



- **Linda Formichelli** \_

Aw, THANKS! Let me know what you think!



- **Diana Burrell** \_

Ok folks, I'm going to shut down comments now. Thank you for taking time to share your experiences, offer sympathy, explain your positions, and/or voice your disagreement. If you would like to comment further, you can click on our names above and contact us that way.

Again, thank you for your generally well-behaved responses to a difficult situation.



- **Diana Burrell** \_

We're getting some big waves of traffic thanks to this story spreading, so comments are open again. Comments are being moderated; on your end you'll be able to see that they're being held in the moderation queue and that they're not being deleted. I am approving every post, supportive of either side in this matter, but since I'm not on here every minute of the day, comments aren't always approved right away. Thank you!



- **richard brenner** \_

Hi,

After reading your sad story, I think you need to take more aggressive steps in order to retrieve your payment, in total, not just half, as you (somewhat meekly) requested from Insurgent Publishing. If I were in your situation, I would draw up a list of threats and let tom know that each and every one of them will be acted on, without fail, if you don't receive full repayment within ten days (Actually, if it were me, I'd demand full payment, plus an hourly rate based upon my wasted time, but I suspect that would be a step too far for you.)

The threats would include:

1-a letter and docs to the Better Business Bureau

2-a letter and docs to the consumer fraud bureau in the state in which his business is located.

3-a letter and docs to the requisite state and federal authorities, since if, as looks likely, a scam was perpetrated, the company would, I believe, be in violation of federal laws involving interstate commerce and wire fraud.

4-since no attorney would likely take a case for so little monetary payback, despite the fact that the law might permit trebling, I would suggest that you also convey your intention to seek out

other authors who might have been taken in by the company, so that you could institute a class-action law suit, which might promise enough of a payout to interest an attorney.

Let me assure you that I have used all of the above techniques, except for the last one, which I have never had occasion to use, and have always had success, even against companies as large as AT&T.

BTW, the next time you see red flags, remember what they represent; learn to speak up for yourself; demand specifics before you sign a contract or spend a dime, and always insist on obtaining proof of past performance and testimonials for reliable sources.

Tom sounds like a scoundrel, but you should consider taking responsibility for not being better prepared and more knowledgeable about what and with whom you were getting involved. He may have wielded the knife, but you offered yourself up for the slaughter (his last said not to be judgmental, but as a ,hopefully, helpful critique for your future dealings).



o **Diana Burrell** \_

Thank you, Richard, for taking the time to respond. I like the way you think!



• **Larry J. Dunlap** \_

I really want to stay out of this but I just have to say Richard Brenner, that you are quick to blame the victim here. I considered all those actions myself and decided to lick my wounds rather than proceed with those kinds of actions. We are writers, not litigants. I chose my publicist because my book was beginning to get noticed and I wanted to grab the wave. Instead my publicist lost the wave. My effort had to go into rescuing the book, and writing the second volume. I did not have time, or more importantly the stress-level distraction of pursuing a famous author. I think Linda has been very brave, and I support her efforts entirely. Insurgent has had every opportunity to make her whole and has not. She was not the one who presented a deceptive contract to an unsuspecting author. It is not her responsibility to make up for another's unethical business practices.



o **Diana Burrell** \_

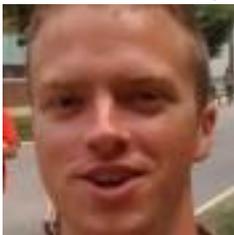
Thank you Larry for your fierce defense of Linda. But in defense of Richard, I don't think he was "quick to blame the victim," at least I didn't read it that way. Read any news story where there's a victim and a perpetrator, and there are always people pointing out what the victim "shoulda/coulda" done and what the reader "woulda" done. In this case, I can assure you that Linda knows now what she should have done differently and she gets that readers/bloggers/commenters are going to point that out. No harm, no foul.

I think the three of us agree who deserves the most scorn. Thanks again.



o **Diana Burrell** \_

... and I'm really sorry to hear you went through something similar. My sympathies.



• **Scott** \_

I'm curious, Richard or the rest, what you think she could have done differently?

I remember Linda mentioning in one of the start of the year podcasts, (I think "Commit in 2016") that she was outsourcing the PR for her book project – as part of an overall strategy of just focusing on what we're best at and outsourcing to people who are the best at the rest.

So it's hard to see how this could have been avoided – it looks legitimate at first glance, a brief Google search reveals no past reports (links from/to this site are appearing on Google though).

I also hope Linda will follow through this as best as possible.



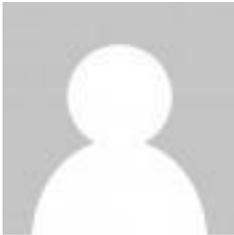
o **Diana Burrell** \_

Scott, thanks for responding. Maybe the question is answered at the end of Linda's original post where she lists the lessons she learned in this fiasco. I talked to Linda via phone and she confirmed she took no offense at what Richard and others have said. She's really good at letting things go ... except out-and-out lies and obfuscation.



• **Linda Formichelli** \_

I added a new update to this post...just scroll down to the bottom of the post to see it!



• **Carol** \_

Thank you for sharing your experience, I've learned a lot from it. I know never easy, however, you're helping so many others learn to identify these red flags. Thank you!

Carol



• **Taya Lynn** \_

Honestly, Tom seems shady. The fact that "Sarah" was obviously him, and him going from victim blaming, calling this article defemation of character, and then completely disregarding the fact that this article has gone out to both your audience and then dozens of other websites (Digital Reader) just seems super disingenuous.

He is trying very hard to do "damage control" yet completely failing to fix his reputation. When I pointed this article out on Twitter, he disabled the account! He doesn't want people to know about this bad review on his services. And he certainly doesn't want to vet the accusations on his

own forum (less anyone find out the truth.) He is probably paying an SEO firm to prevent this article from coming up when searching “Insurgent Publishing.”

Tom, I seriously suggest you give her that refund and apologize for 1) making fake comments as “Sarah” and 2) shaming and victim blaming instead of taking responsibility for your mistakes. I’d be more willing to forgive and understand if you owned up to what transpired here. It would mean you learned from it and this wouldn’t happen again.

Honesty is the best policy. Please realize ethical companies with honorable people get loyal customers and good reviews (and second chances!)



o **Diana Burrell**

Thank you for your comments, Taya. The only thing I’ve heard is he deleted a thread on his FB page when someone linked to this blog post. I understand he must have felt frustrated when Linda didn’t post his response right way, but then using a sockpuppet to ridicule her? He shot himself in the foot, legally and professionally. Hard to defend yourself after that misguided move.



• **Vivra Beene**

Since Tom implies that, had the contract not been cancelled, his company would have worked for another 30-90 days post launch in an effort to generate a great number of sales—it would seem that, in his company’s best interests, he should offer (along with a full refund) to continue for that length of time (free of charge, of course.) That could possibly atone for his failure in his handling of the contract before the launch.



o **Diana Burrell**

Thank you for taking the time to comment. I’m confident Linda would rather not work with this company or person ever again, free of charge or otherwise, given the unprofessional service she’s experienced. That ship has sailed as the saying goes.



- **Michael R. Hicks**

Linda – I’m so sorry to hear that you had to go through such a horrendous experience. I’ve long advocated for authors to avoid any publishing venues that demand money from the author to publish their book, because the business model those companies use to generate their income picks the author’s pocket, rather than generating royalties through book sales (although they rub salt in your wounds by taking a good chunk of those, too). But you should be proud of yourself for making a great stand and taking these swine to task. There’s just no excuse for what these people do.



- **Diana Burrell**

Thanks for advocating on behalf of writers, Michael. I’m a big believer in “if it sounds too good be true, it usually is.” Still, we all have our blind spots. One thing some people forget is that Linda had interviewed this guy before starting her book project and had what she felt was good rapport with him. Her guard was down. Mine was up because I

hadn’t interacted with him personally. I’m also more stingy than Linda is. Thanks again, good to hear you’re fighting the good fight.



- **Monica**

As an aspiring writer – one not close to publishing a book (yet), but who expects to do so one day – this post was educational, intriguing and horrifying. I was unfamiliar with your blog, but trust me, I will be following your work now. Thank you for being so transparent and sharing this with other writers. Sadly, honesty and integrity are never givens in this world. Just because we operate with such values clearly doesn’t mean everyone does. I’m sorry you experienced this. It appears this company may have realized your project was not a good fit, but needed (or just wanted) the money. I hope and pray you’ll at least get some of your investment back. Again, thank you for sharing. This post alone taught me so much about the self-publishing process. We can always learn from the experiences of others if we pay attention. Because you shared, others will more easily see the red flags when they arise. Hope your project catches up and surpasses your expectations.



o **Diana Burrell** \_

Monica, thanks for commenting and glad you'll be following the blog. You wrote, "It appears this company may have realized your project was not a good fit, but needed (or just wanted) the money." I think you nailed it.



• **Bobbi Hughes-Millman** \_

Reading this story brought back painful memories of someone who made promises to sell my husband's artwork, told him to quit his day job because he was going to make hundreds of thousands a year then did nothing, took some of my husband's work and said it was his, even sold prints with his own name as the artist, not my husband's.

Although the two stories are not exactly the same, there is the trust, the grandiose promises, and the waiting to see if anything happens. Our lawyer said we had a good case but the amount of money he owed us wasn't worth the cost of the legal action against him.

Unfortunately, Tom may be one of these guys who is counting on you to give up and go away because you don't have the money to sue him. His story sounds far too prepared and that he has a history of doing this to others. Perhaps a letter to the people he listed as past clients would be interesting. Are these people really satisfied? Have these people actually worked with him at all, or is that made up.

I can say that in my husband's case, one of the well-known artists his "agent" said he'd worked with was a friend of mine and I never took the chance to talk to him before my husband signed the contract. If I had, I would've never allowed him to sign.

Having worked in the entertainment industry, I had the unpleasant experience of outing scam artists more times than I care to remember. They prey on those who trust and believe what is promised. These types of people will always be around. We will never get rid of them, I'm sorry to say, but your retelling of this story may help another author to steer clear of charlatans such as this.

The minute I read that he wouldn't give you an accounting of what was being done and telling you that "All the magic will happen on Launch day" I started screaming inside "No! No! No! That means he hasn't done a thing! Don't trust him!" Of course we want to trust that they are doing what was promised as we've given our livelihoods over to them, right?

I've had my husband write down the name Insurgent Publishing and Tom Morkes. This man and this company have shown from their actions that they are not working in integrity. Thank you for sharing your story, Linda. It must be difficult to have to relive the entire debacle. But your story will help so many others. Thank you, thank you!



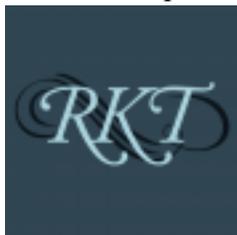
o **Diana Burrell** \_

What a sad story about your husband, Bobbi—I'm so sorry you went through that. It's rather pitiful to be the kind of person whose gift in life is ripping people off to make an easy buck. :-/



• **Bobbi Hughes-Millman** \_

Sadly, Diana, that is the situation in our case. I hope that Linda can get her money back. A company with integrity would have offered to return it, 100%, the minute she told them there was no repairing the situation. They wouldn't come onto her blog and try to argue with her followers. That is the sign of a narcissist. A person without a conscience.



• **R. K. Thorne** \_

Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts, Linda. The lessons you took from this are invaluable to share with people. I wouldn't let the ongoing annoyance of this company overshadow those lessons, unless maybe you add one to bring in legal council right away. As someone who owns a service-based business myself, this is inexcusable. None of the details matter, honestly. They clearly didn't deliver, (Reddit? Seriously?) and you need to simply get them out of your life as quickly as possible (while perhaps protecting others in the process).

I want to save your lessons somewhere, because even though I feel like I've learned them in the past, I seem to forget them when a new nice person comes along! I have felt and done this exact same thing, and it's so frustrating. These lessons are truly worth their weight in gold:

>> Trust needs to be earned, and that I shouldn't offer someone my trust just because they're "an entrepreneur like me."

>> Not everyone adheres to the same level of standards and ethics that I do...

>> I need to look out for red flags and respond to them immediately...

Best of luck getting over this and on with your life!



- **Diana Burrell** \_

IP tracking test. Nothing to see here.



- **Linda Formichelli** \_

For those of you who are following the comments...please check in for a new update on the Insurgent Publishing situation! Also, the Alliance of Independent Authors has done an article on the issue here: <http://selfpublishingadvice.org/insurgent-publishing-caution>. Enjoy!



- **Angela J. Ford** \_

Wow! This was quite the story – thanks for being raw and sharing the process, red flags and going into such detail about it. It's a lessons and good to know what to watch out for.



- **Christa** \_

Linda,

I received one of your emails that mistakenly held the link to your book, but I never opened it. I recently purchased your book and just wanted to let you know how much I'm enjoying it. As a former student, follower of your blog , subscriber to Monday Motivations, and reader of your books, I'm so sad that someone treated you so poorly and that you lost so much money in the

process. I've worked for someone who had "shiny object syndrome," and I can tell you these individuals are extremely difficult to work for and leave a trail of disappointed clients behind. I feel sorry for his staff too. Thank you for sharing what happened with all of us and I hope that you do get a refund. But most of all, I hope you kick butt on sales of your new book. It's a fantastic resource. As soon as I'm finished with it, I'll be sure to post a review.



o **Linda Formichelli**

Christa, thank you so much! I'm glad you're enjoying the book. And I agree about the shiny object syndrome...it must be hard to work for someone who's always out looking for the next new thing, and drops all the "old" stuff in employees' laps. And...it SUCKS

to be the "old stuff" yourself.

And thanks to everyone who has posted here with their comments and support! I don't go online much these days, which is why you don't hear from me much, but I really appreciate each and every one.



• **Nadine Feldman**

I had a similar, though less expensive, problem when I launched my recent novel. I hired a company that was a member of the IBPA to help me with my launch, and they did nothing. I mean, nothing. I did get my money back, but you can't bring back a launch date, and the damage was done. I had done a lot of my own pre-launch work, so the book did appear on some blogging sites, etc., but what a mess!

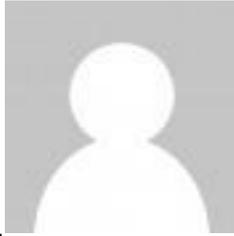
Thank you for sharing these details. We need to pass these scams along to protect other authors.



• **Vivra Beene**

It seems to me, after reading all the posts, that the onus of organizing everything—from launch parties to continuing marketing—falls on us authors, and so we should learn what all that entails and "do it ourselves". It would save money and preserve our sanity!

It horrifies me to read about the cost of services—I don't have even a fraction of that amount of money, can't even afford to give a launch party. There's got to be another way...



o **Bobbi Hughes-Millman** \_

Online launch parties cost nothing except your time. I had one on Facebook and Twitter and was interviewed on Blab on launch day. I made my own memes and promoted the HELL out of my book. Drove it into bestseller status on Amazon. But my publisher did marketing, too, that drove it to bestseller again.



• **Cate Baum** \_

So sorry this happened to you. This contract is nothing but piecrust. We offer marketing for authors at our site starting twenty times cheaper than this, and we have deliverables and time scales. None of these things are here in your so-called contract. They are actions rather than deliverables, which really could be done without any results whatsoever. When contracting marketing, you need to ask “what and when” and ask for proven past results of sales, reviews, exposure. It's so easy for me to pull that data for clients, as it should be for anyone who reckons they can market your book – you should be able to contact other authors if necessary. Make sure whoever you choose to do the marketing of your book can prove they can actually do the job beforehand. Just a note: Stephen King sells ten thousand books. This is a stupid figure you were given, and completely meaningless. Did you pay with PayPal? Maybe you can open a case for non-delivery.



• **Tom Bentley** \_

Linda, damn. Thanks (and thanks Diana) for the warning, and the care with which you've outlined all this misery.

Sarah, your five-o'clock shadow is showing.



- o **Linda Formichelli** \_  
BWA! Sorry, that was too funny. Thanks!



- **Godfrey** \_  
Thanks so much for the feedback on this.

It was only when you mentioned Basecamp that it dawned on me which Tom you were talking about and that I subscribe to his summits, emails, blabs etc.

From what I can tell the shiny object syndrome could be a factor, as he's been involved in a few big things recently. But that's absolutely no excuse for the shoddy level of service. And to think that he's big on using productivity hacks to provide a quality service!



- **Stacey Holley** \_  
Linda, I am so sorry to hear about the terrible time you've had with the book launch. I'm a big fan of your blog and website, and the reason for that is your honesty and willingness to share your experience with newbie writers like me. You seem like a trusting soul, and I am sure that this experience was painful. I've always had difficulty working with people I don't trust. But what's really hurtful is when they act trustworthy, but turn out otherwise. Someday I'll tell you about building my house...perhaps my contractor's lyin' cheatin' ways will make your guy look not so bad.? Anyway, keep moving forward. I'm looking forward to seeing your next project.



- **Joan A. Di Masi** \_  
Linda, I'm so sorry to hear about this. I think going to the Better Business Bureau is a great idea. I just want you to know I have always opened everything you've sent and still want to receive

your e-mails whenever you send them. I have bought several of your books and took some of your classes. You, your books, classes, and little mentoring notes have been so helpful to me over the years! I wish you all the best and hope you can find a way to get all your money back and put them out of business in the process so that they can't ever do this again – to anyone!!!!!!



- o **Linda Formichelli**  
THANK YOU, Joan!



- o **Diana Burrell**

Joan, that was a lovely message to Linda.



- **Heather**

Thank you so much for your honesty! I'm sorry you're dealing with this – but I appreciate your willingness to share with the rest of us. Your books have been a stepping stone in my career and I'm a dedicated follower, so I pay close attention to what you have to say. I'll be following this story and hoping things work out in the best way possible – but know you've already made a huge impact on so many by telling us about your experience!



- o **Linda Formichelli**  
I appreciate the kind words, Heather!



- **Aja @Principles of Increase**

I follow you all and have even read a few SUPER helpful books. I am so sorry this happened. But you did the right thing- putting everyone out there on notice about this company. It might save a lot of people from headaches.



o **Linda Formichelli** \_

Thanks! I thought this was an expensive lesson, but a business consultant I know said it was actually a cheap lesson...some people end up spending hundreds of thousands for poor services. And I just heard from a woman I know who lost \$100,000 to an unscrupulous business. So I guess I should count myself lucky that I just lost \$6,500 and now have the opportunity to help my readers.



• **Taryn** \_

I have a tremendous amount of respect for how you handled this situation. Thank you for sharing what you learned. I found this post through kboards.



o **Linda Formichelli** \_

Thank you...and thanks to whoever started the Kboards thread...great to get the word out to other self-publishers!



• **Williesha** \_

With all that has been going on the last few months, I'm just now getting to this, and I'm very sorry. As someone who has worked for you as an independent contractor, I can attest that your character and quality of work exceeded the expectations of a vast majority of my clients. This includes how you handled e-mail communication and working with you via different project management platforms. You were very clear in how we'd work with each other and also gave me

consistent and positive feedback. I did my best to maintain that same high-level quality of service in my dealings with you.

This is starting to sound formal, but the truth of the matter is – you were one of my favorite clients. I also really enjoyed both How to Do It All and Commit – the latter of which helped me secure my current job, which has been an incredible experience.

As one of your FB members/ambassadors, you worked extraordinarily hard. The only reason why this book didn't take off is because you were given abysmal service.

I'm so sorry this happened, and I hope your re-launch is giving the book the attention it deserves.



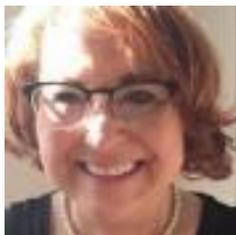
o **Linda Formichelli** \_

Thank you so much, Williesha! I appreciate the kind words and support.



• **Williesha** \_

Also, a company proclaiming to have so much success should have a lot more than 383 Facebook followers. That's a sign of terrible marketing. Wow.



• **Stacy** \_

Thank you for sharing your story. I am sorry that you had to experience Insurgent Publishing's practice of "all talk and no walk" business practices, but happy you found Kim to get your book back on track. This reminds me that it's a good practice to pay a 50% deposit up front for these kinds of services and the balance when the services are fulfilled. I learned this from Carol Tice about working with clients and haven't had to chase clients for pay. After hearing your story, I will use this practice for vendors that I hire in the future. Thanks for this and I wish you all the success with your book.

Stacy



- o **Linda Formichelli** \_

Thanks so much, Stacy! I was actually paying in several installments. By the end when I fired the company, I still had one installment left to go, so at least I didn't lose that final bit.



- **Stacy** \_

I'm glad you didn't lose that final installment!



- **Matt** \_

Between the lack of swift refund and the demand for check payment, it sounds like Tom Morkes is pretty cash-strapped. I think the reason you're not getting the 6.5k back is because the president of Insurgent Publishing spent it the day your check cleared... and his coffers are not getting refilled at a rate that allows him to make good on refunds in the way the head of a full-fledged business would.



- **Sam** \_

I appreciate you sharing your experience with Tom and his company. It took courage and time to write about it. You saved us time, aggravation and possible money. You are a remarkable person and thank you.

My wife Patty is in the process of writing her book, Teaching 21st Century Kids, which is based on her experience in developing and facilitating programs for today's generation, Gen Z; which helps them develop their social and emotional intelligence to be successful in school and life. I'm doing the ground work in preparing for the launch and distribution. It sounds like Sondra of Build Book Buz would be a good start. I invite you to visit our web site

at <http://www.EnvisionYourFuture.org> for more information on what we are doing. Warmest regards, Sam



- **Mark Anderson Smith** \_

Linda,

Thank you for your honesty and courage in sharing this.

May you continue to rise above the experiences you have had,

Mark



- **Jim Newton** \_

Check with Judge Judy.



- **Trisha Faye** \_

Thank you for the heads up. Very informative and factual. As an author much newer in the ranks than you, I appreciate what you've done to share your lessons with the rest of us, hopefully keeping many of us from many the same mistake.

Kudos to you. Wishing you the best with all your current and future projects!



- o **Linda Formichelli** \_

Thank you, Trisha!!



- **Becky** \_

Dear Linda.

This is quite an interesting ordeal. I was one of those who received your initial copies you sent out. It was downloaded as a PDF. There were some editing errors found in book along with some

formatting problems. I felt privilege to be one you felt you could trust with your baby. It is like asking your best friend to preview something special you have been working on. My first thought is “how brave you are to ask 8000 people for their honest opinion of your baby.” I wish I was as brave. ...and Yes I would have bought a hard copy of your book, but the links to purchase the hard copy didn’t work.

My only question to you is, “why didn’t you do your due diligence on a company your are entrusting your baby with. To me that is just bad parenting. The lesson I came away with is after you were ripped off you sought out several resources to figure out what went wrong. Why didn’t you seek out those people in the first place and do your research! Just because the book is finished and put to bed doesn’t mean your research on the project is done. The other thing is you stated you consulted an attorney to look over the contract, you could have had them investigate the company’s practices.

The Consumer Safety Commission does investigate online business whose products are faulty that includes intellectual property. You can also get IRS tax records on company to determine a company’s solvency as part of the freedom of information act. You can also petition the SEC to investigate business that have committed fraudulent or unethical business practices for free.

When everything started to go down hill, why didn’t you have your attorney start making phone calls or write a carefully worded letter?

What it boils down to is we write because we have something to say. We research what we write because we want what we write to be right. So here is a quote I came up with for you to remember:

“We write to share what we know. We research what we know to be right. We publish what we know is the right write to last the test of time. If we do not protect our published writes, time will invariably give us the last rites.”

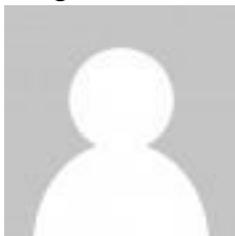
“We Live, We Learn, We Write Again”

Respectfully Submitted,  
R.S.Gourley



o **Diana Burrell** \_

Thanks for your long response, R.S. I know Linda has learned from this — months ago.  
Thanks again!



• **Jim Smith** \_

You may feel that \$6,500 is “wasted” – But, how many hundreds of thousands of dollars have you SAVED OTHER PEOPLE? – You could have just used the experience to create better service for your own coaching business & said nothing. But, by doing this piece, and sending the

warning signal to anyone wanting to internet search the words “Tom Morkes scam” if they’re curious. You’re a hero. Can’t wait to learn more about your Renegade Writers =)



- **Shocked! Trosha** \_

Just wanted to say thank you for sharing. OMG I nearly got sucked into Tom’s sales pitch. So glad you got back on your feet. I’ll avoid him now. All the best with your books. Beautiful writing style.



- **Linda Formichelli** \_

Thank you for reading...I’m glad the report saved you some grief, and I hope you’ll share. Writing and publishing are hard enough without having to deal with people like Tom Morkes of Insurgent Publishing. Good luck with your project!