

HOME & DIGITAL

# After Rejection, They Self-Published Books

BY HEIDI MITCHELL

The popular saying that everyone has a book in them has never been truer, as the much-heralded rise of self-publishing—and companies dedicated to editing, printing and promoting books—has put the power to publish at people's fingertips.

The cost of producing a paperback has gone from thousands of dollars—from editing and jacket design to printing, distribution and warehousing—to free on Amazon.com Inc.'s CreateSpace and the popular independent e-book distributor Smashwords.

Readers don't miss a traditional publishing house, says Ann McIndoo, who runs an author-coaching business. "The author or the topic or the brand drives the sale. When you go to the bookstore, you want Stephen King or a book on How To Knit. It doesn't matter who published it."

Here are several authors and their different strategies for self-publishing their books.

## The Unlikely Author

Theresa Ragan's three-part Lizzy Gardner series, which began with "Abducted," follows the adventures of a private eye who escaped a serial killer as a teen.

Two years ago, Ms. Ragan was a stay-at-home mother living just outside Sacramento, Calif. She had been writing time-travel and romance novels and had completed more than 10 books. She attended writers' conferences. She found an agent. After a dozen publishers rejected her manuscripts, she was ready to quit.

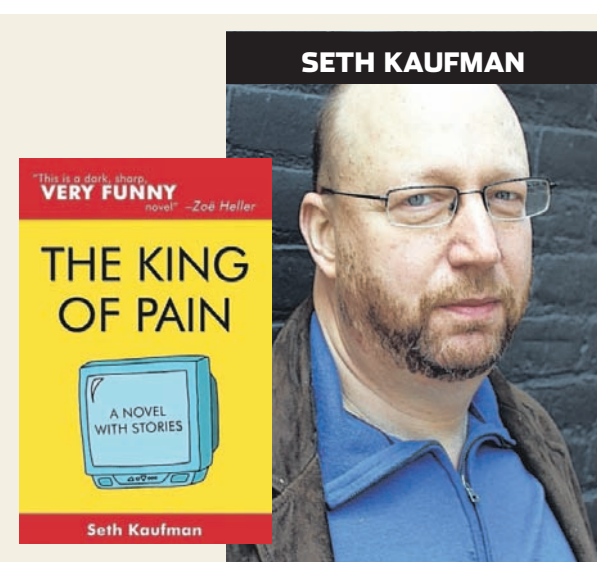
While looking through online ads in March 2011, Ms. Ragan came upon an email from a fellow writer praising Kindle Direct Publishing, and was inspired. She bought a book to learn HTML code, hired a jacket designer for \$40, then uploaded the word documents for the first of three books in her Lizzy Gardner series to Amazon at no cost. She hoped she would sell 10 or 20 copies.

"Abducted" was a hit. "I sold 1,500 e-books in the first month. I was selling 12,000 books a month by August, and then 40,000 in September," says the author. Pricing her book at \$2.99, Ms. Ragan was taking in 70%, or \$2 a book—far more than she would have earned in a typical deal with a traditional publisher, at about 10% of sales minus any advance.

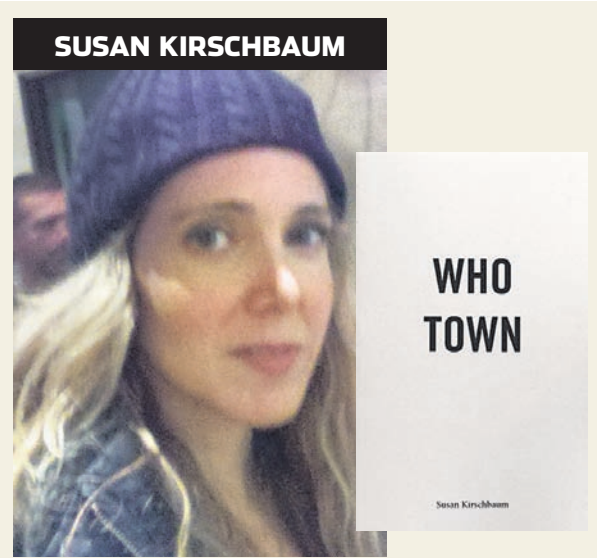
Ms. Ragan has self-published seven novels, and her personal reve-



▲ Ms. Ragan's three-part series, which began with 'Abducted,' follows the adventures of a private eye who escaped a serial killer as a teen.



▲ While on his commute, Mr. Kaufman came up with a comic tale of a reality TV show producer trapped beneath his home entertainment system.



▲ Ms. Kirschbaum had her book 'Who Town,' about the underbelly of New York's downtown art scene, placed in the gift bags at a fashion show.



▲ Ms. Ware realized she wanted to write a book after blogging about her eight years working as a palliative caregiver.

(Clockwise from top left) Morgan Ragan; Daniel Blackman; Amanda Jameson; Bob Morris

nue from them crossed the \$1 million mark in February. She has sold more than 650,000 copies of all her e-books combined and is still selling about 400 copies a day of "Abducted."

## The Industry Insider

Seth Kaufman, a vice president at the e-book platform Copia Interactive, self-published "The King of Pain," a comic literary novel about reality TV and torture.

Mr. Kaufman is proof that even book publishing insiders can have a

difficult time. While commuting by subway to his job as a vice president at BN.com, bookseller Barnes & Noble Inc.'s e-retailer, Mr. Kaufman wrote a story in longhand about a reality TV show producer trapped beneath his home entertainment system. Despite all his connections and a literary agent, his fiction was passed over by the major publishers.

Mr. Kaufman had an agent edit the manuscript, a friend design the jacket and hired a typesetter in India to lay it out. His total investment was \$1,000, plus marketing costs. His

novel was released in paperback and e-book through his own imprint, Sukuma Books, to Amazon, iTunes, BN.com and other e-commerce sites in July 2012. "The King of Pain: A Novel with Stories" has sold only about 2,000 copies to date, earning Mr. Kaufman about \$10,000. He says it isn't a terrible return on his investment.

Mr. Kaufman is currently revising a second novel, "Inspector Lester & the Vig," and is working on a sequel to "The King of Pain." When both are ready, he and his agent plan to ap-

proach traditional publishers.

## The Promoter

Susan Kirschbaum, a magazine writer in New York, kept hitting walls with publishers with her novel, "Who Town," about the underbelly of New York's downtown art scene. She published her novel herself in May 2012, seven years after writing the first draft.

She published it on multiple platforms, from CreateSpace to the print-on-demand company Lightning Source. Then she shopped it to every independent bookseller in New York she could find. She convinced hotelier André Balazs, whom she knew socially, to put copies in his Mercer Hotel in New York. Ms. Kirschbaum asked fashion designer Charlotte Ronson to place her book in the front-row gift bags at her last fall fashion show. "The point of all of this was to create buzz, to get people talking about it," she says.

Her total investment was just over \$1,750 in production and marketing. Sales of 2,000 or so books have earned her about \$11,000.

## The Traditionalist

Singer-songwriter Bronnie Ware self-published her book, "The Top Five Regrets of the Dying: A Life Transformed by the Dearly Departing," which earned her the attention of a traditional publisher, who then published it.

As Ms. Ware's blog about her eight years as a palliative caregiver hit 3 million views in November 2009, she realized she had a book's worth of stories. She wrote a few sample chapters, signed to an agent, then waited. Twenty publishers turned down her manuscript. "I'd been an independent songwriter, so I thought, why not be an independent author?" Ms. Ware says.

Through Internet research she found the self-publisher Balboa Press, a partner of the traditional publisher Hay House.

Ms. Ware spent about \$2,000 to produce the book and try to get it to retailers. Four months after its release in October 2011, Ms. Ware had sold 5,000 copies. In February 2012, Hay House came to her with an offer: It would rerelease the book and sell it overseas, translating it into 27 other languages.

The book is currently No. 4 on the hardcover list in Germany. Hay House expects a manuscript for Ms. Ware's next book, a collection of short stories, next month.

## DREAM SPACE | California Man Cave

# L.A.'s Most Civilized Garage



## Club for One

Stephen Danelian, above, sits in his lounge and office. The large D on the shelf behind him was a gift from his wife that she bought at an antique store in Savannah, Ga. Below, a metal monkey holds his business cards. A friend gave him 'The Key to the Universe' to wish him good luck with his new venture. Below left, an exterior view of the office.



Stephen Danelian, 50, is an app developer who likes clean lines and linear ideas. Lulu Powers, 45, is an event planner and caterer who likes Americana and stacks of ripped magazine pages that stoke her creativity. Married in 2000, they used to share an office in their 1927 Los Angeles home.

"I have A.D.D. and Stevie has O.C.D.," Ms. Powers says.

"We're both loud phone-talkers," says Mr. Danelian. They decided their marriage would benefit from a second home office.

So in 2004, they transformed their dilapidated backyard garage into a man cave for Mr. Danelian, who earlier this summer launched MeeLocal, an iPhone app that allows users to build and share directories of their go-to restaurants, gyms and hiking trails, among other things.

Mr. Danelian, who has worked as a photographer, took the design lead. He selected dark, faux-grass wallpaper, brown-marble countertops, leather and suede sofas and chairs. There is a bathroom and a fully stocked bar. "I wanted it to feel like when you go into an old gentleman's club," he said of the space in which he spends most of his workday.

Ms. Powers, a self-described "entertainmentist" prone to bursts of enthusiasm, added one crucial element to the design. When the construction team was nearing the end of its exterior renovation, she says she ran from the main house yelling, "Stop what you're doing! The roof needs to be 4 feet higher!" They raised the roof and installed tall windows. In this case, it took a woman to bring a bit of light into her husband's man cave.

—Katherine Rosman

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