



Beware of Scams

Not all services are as promising as they seem. Make sure you do your research. Always dig deeper.

by Melinda Clayton

I'm an author, but I'm also a very small publisher ("boutique," as one of my authors likes to say). My publishing company is a proud member of IBPA, an organization that works hard to support indie authors in all facets of the publishing business. After a year or two of IBPA membership, I was invited to apply for a position on their Membership Benefits Jury. This means every quarter I'm one of several members who reviews and vets entities that want to be listed as an IBPA benefit. As you can imagine, companies are eager to partner up. As a writer for IndiesUnlimited.com, I'm used to vetting such entities, so this was a natural fit for me.

I've made it through three rounds of IBPA vetting now, and I'm noticing a worrisome trend. We've all heard or read about publishers that turn out to be scammers, but what I'm seeing is an increase in services for authors—publicists, author coaches, marketers, workshops—that are questionable at best. Not a day goes by that I don't see at least one sponsored ad from one of the above in my Facebook newsfeed, or a post from someone selling services on various author/publisher discussion fora. Not a quarter goes by that I don't see at least one proposal from one in my duty as a member of the Benefits Jury.

Make no mistake; there are certainly legitimate services out there under all of those umbrellas. Unfortunately, there are also scams. Do your research before depleting your bank account. Google is your friend. Research everything and everyone.

If someone wants to charge you to attend their book-marketing workshop, make sure their books are selling. If they can't sell their own, how are they going to help you sell yours? No one outside of Amazon knows specifically how Amazon ranking works, but it's a combination of your book sales in relation to other book sales. The lower the rank, the better. If you're invited to attend a marketing workshop whose presenters have

Do your research before depleting your bank account. Google is your friend. Research everything and everyone."

books languishing in the hundreds of thousands on Amazon, save your money. They aren't selling enough to justify charging you to tell you their marketing secrets.

Author coaches should have written successfully selling books. If they haven't done it themselves, how can they coach you? Again, perform a search on the company, and, while you're at it, check their Amazon rankings. Printers should offer a better deal than the ones small presses and self-published authors can already access from CreateSpace or IngramSpark. Publicists should be able to demonstrate their ability to get you and your book into places you can't access on your own—and not just any places, but places designed to result in sales.

No matter how pretty the presentation is, dig deeper to make sure you're getting your money's worth.

Melinda Clayton is the author of two series: *The Cedar Hollow Series*, which includes novels *Appalachian Justice*, *Return to Crutcher Mountain*, *Entangled Thorns*, and *Shadow Days*, and *The Tennessee Delta Series*, which includes *Blessed Are the Wholly Broken* and *A Woman Misunderstood*. Clayton also authored *Making Amends*, a novel of psychological suspense.