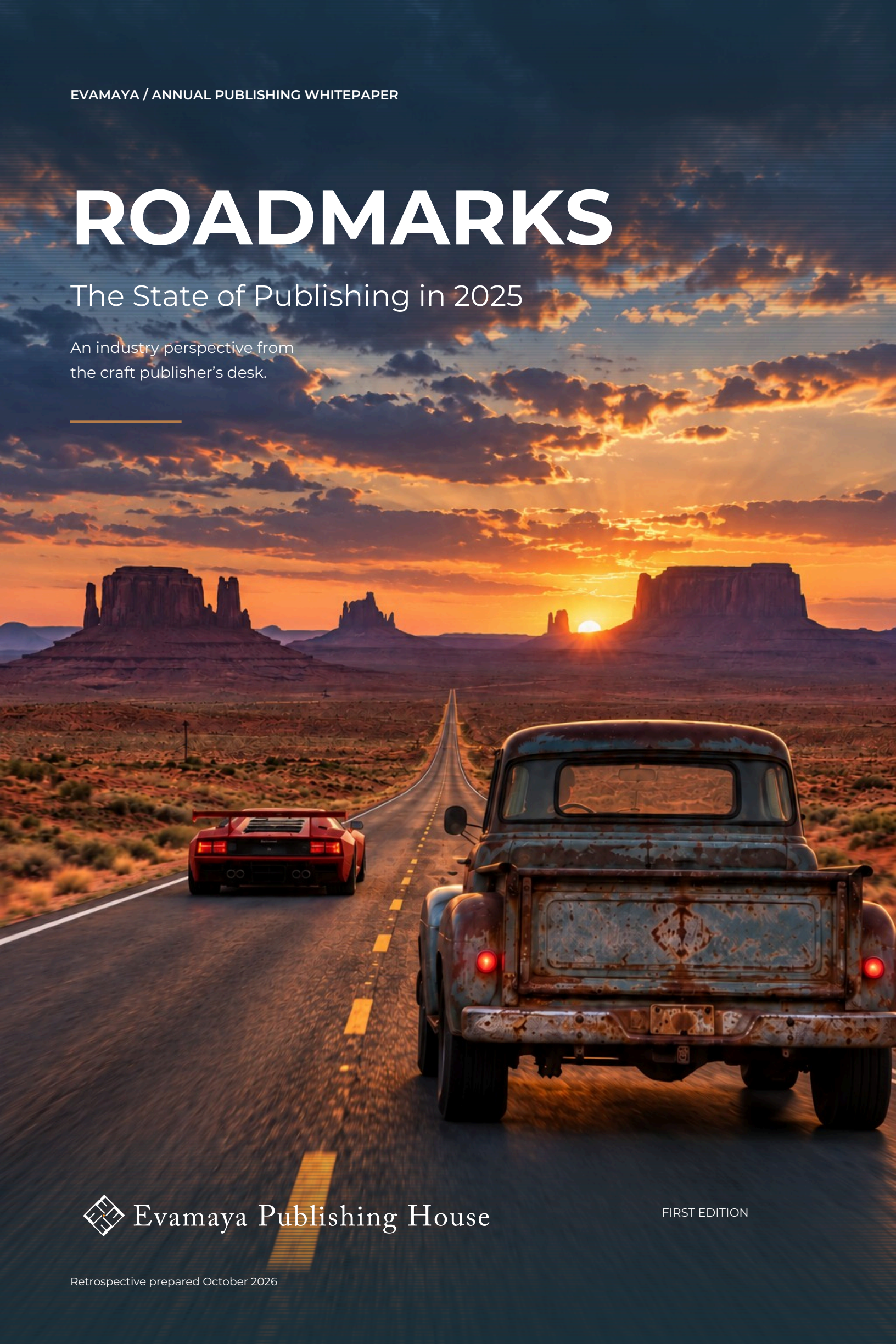


ROADMARKS

The State of Publishing in 2025

An industry perspective from
the craft publisher's desk.



Evamaya Publishing House

FIRST EDITION

01 / THE ESTABLISHED ROAD

When a book came with an organization behind it.

For much of the twentieth century, reaching a substantial readership meant persuading an institution to stand behind your manuscript. The institution supplied money, expertise, and access to a trade built around producing books before anyone knew how many would sell.

For academic writers, a familiar route ran through doctoral research, a university appointment, journal publications, and eventually a scholarly press. Nonfiction also drew on journalism, professional expertise, and public life.¹

Consider the aspiring fiction writer. You went to Columbia, earned a master's degree in English and literature, and went to work for a publishing house in Manhattan as a junior editor, or found work writing for magazines. You spent your days working with other people's words and your evenings developing your own. You learned how editors evaluated a manuscript, how revisions improved it, and how a promising story became a book someone would buy.

Over time, you accumulated published pieces, developed a portfolio, and built relationships with editors and other writers. Meanwhile, your own manuscript took shape. When you believed it was ready, you had more than a stack of pages. You had a record of work, experience with the editorial process, and people in the publishing world who knew your name. You approached an agent or an

acquisitions editor with that manuscript and the portfolio you had spent years building.

An offer might bring a modest advance and a contract exchanging some control over publication for the publisher's investment. Imagine an initial printing of 10,000 copies. Editing, design, manufacturing, warehousing, and distribution had to be organized before those copies could earn their cost back.²

In return, the author gained access to a commercial organization. An editor could champion the work. Sales representatives presented it to accounts. Wholesalers and distributors helped supply retailers, and booksellers could introduce it to customers. Support varied, and no contract guaranteed thousands of enthusiastic stores. But people beyond the author had committed resources and had a reason to help the book sell. Success could lead to another print run: a second printing.

That required judgment and responsibility. We admire the editors and publishing teams prepared to back a book at scale. A commitment to 100,000 copies can be consequential for a large house. For a small business, even 1,000 copies at an illustrative \$5 manufacturing cost ties up \$5,000 before editing, design, freight, or promotion.

A manuscript could arrive with an entire organization behind it.

Investment. Editorial judgment. Distribution. Reach.

02 / TOOLS CHANGE THE JOURNEY

From the typewriter to the reader's screen.

In the opening sequence of **Romancing the Stone** (1984), Kathleen Turner's Joan Wilder finishes her latest romance at a typewriter, moved to tears by the ending she has written. Angelina is the heroine on the page. Joan is the author at the keyboard. The scene captures the physical world of manuscript production: typed sheets, corrections, and a finished stack of pages to deliver to an editor.²⁸

Personal computers and word-processing software, already emerging when the film appeared, transformed that routine as they spread. Writers could move paragraphs, revise chapters, and save successive drafts without retyping entire pages. Editing increasingly took place in shared files, with comments and tracked changes replacing exchanges of marked-up paper. Spell-checkers, autocorrect, and grammar tools added another layer of assistance. Advanced AI tools now help writers examine phrasing, identify inconsistencies, and explore revisions, with the author or editor responsible for deciding what belongs in the work.²⁹

The change reached beyond the writing desk. As manuscripts became digital files, production and distribution also became more flexible. A book no longer had to begin its commercial life as a large inventory waiting for buyers.

Print on demand overturned the inventory requirement. A production file could wait for a buyer; the order could trigger the printing. A book could be manufactured and shipped within days without its author first financing a room full of unsold copies. Actual delivery depended on production capacity and shipping.³

Ebooks went further. With a suitable device or application, a reader could purchase a book and begin reading almost immediately. Physical inventory and shipping disappeared from that transaction. Online retailers and platforms remained, but an author no longer needed a conventional print run or physical store placement to reach a customer.

Access widened dramatically. So did the author's responsibilities. Someone still had to edit the manuscript, develop the cover, prepare the files, explain the book's value, and find its readers. A platform could manufacture and deliver a book without supplying the editor, publicist, sales team, and bookseller relationships that might accompany an acquisition.

Large publishers adopted these technologies too. They continue to commission books, fund production, and support sales. The disruption gave authors additional routes and allowed publishing businesses to assemble services in new combinations.

Getting a book into the market became easier.
Getting people to care about it remained
demanding work.

03 / A LARGER PUBLISHING LANDSCAPE

More books.
More routes to readers.



U.S. output, 2025 / Bowker reporting categories

In 1990, the historical U.S. series recorded approximately **47,000 new titles and editions**, close to 50,000 books entering the market in a year. By 2025, Bowker reported **642,242 traditionally published ISBN records**, alongside **3,529,980 self-published records**. Counting methods and format coverage changed, so these endpoints cannot support a precise growth multiple. They nonetheless show why the industry can no longer be understood at its earlier scale.^{4, 5}

Output in Bowker’s “traditional” category continued expanding. In the reported 2022-2025 series, that category increased about 10%; the “self-published” category rose approximately 43.5%. In 2025, self-publishing accounted for **84.6%** of the combined record count. That measures ISBN-bearing output, not the percentage of authors, copies sold, or revenue. Different editions and formats can generate separate records.⁴

Acquiring publishers cannot take every manuscript. Their lists, budgets, and editorial capacity are finite. Authors also seek control over timing, presentation, rights, and pricing. Publishing directly can offer a larger share of receipts per sale, accompanied by production costs and promotional obligations. The output figures demonstrate widespread use of this route; they do not establish that most authors would prefer it to an acceptable publishing offer.

The market remains substantial. AAP estimates **\$33.4 billion in U.S. publisher revenue** from books and course materials in 2025. Future Market Insights estimates a **\$103.7 billion global book publishers market**. The latter is a commercial estimate with a different methodology, rather than a directly comparable global census.^{16, 17}

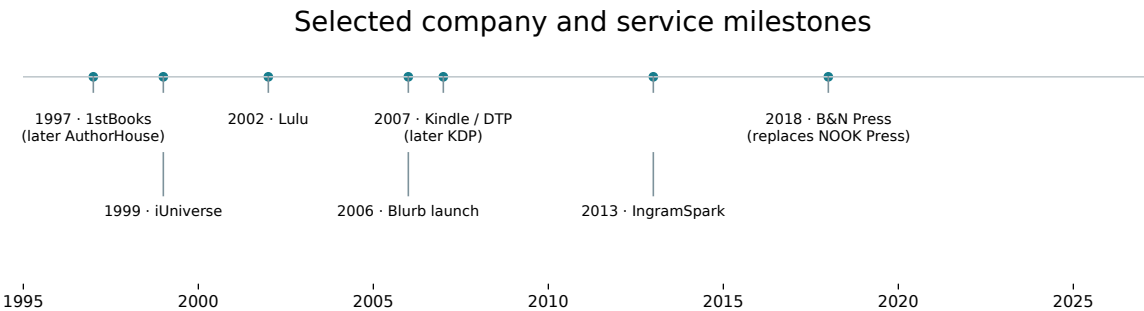
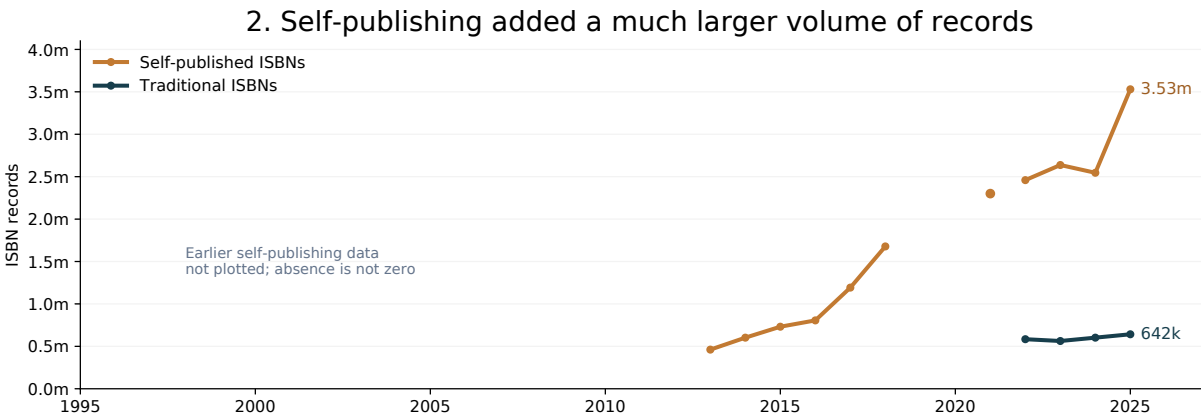
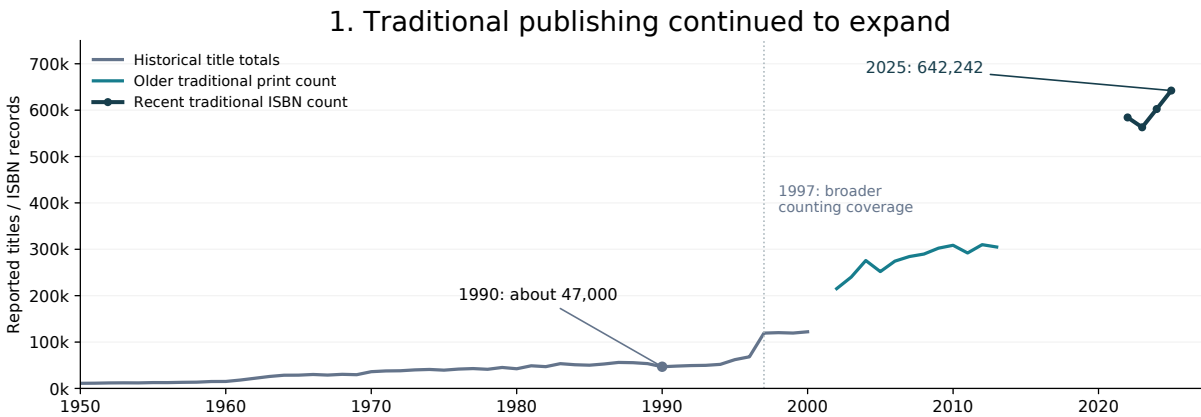
WHAT THESE CATEGORIES CAN AND CANNOT TELL US

“Traditional” and “self-published” are the source’s reporting labels, not a clean division between large publishing houses and individual authors. Bowker’s 2013-2018 self-publishing report included a “Small Publishers” group defined as publishers that had produced ten or fewer ISBNs in total. A company name or directly purchased ISBNs does not, by itself, establish placement in either category.^{7, 34}

The published 2025 summary does not explain the classification rules sufficiently to place a company such as Evamaya in either group. We therefore cannot equate “traditional” with the Big Five, or “self-published” with authors using platform-supplied ISBNs. The figures show the scale of reported output; they do not establish publishers’ size, business model, quality, or legitimacy.⁴

04 / THE NUMBERS AND THE MILESTONES

Seventy-five years of expanding output.



Category labels follow the source; “traditional” does not mean Big Five, and “self-published” is not limited to platform-issued ISBNs. See page 4. Historical and modern counts differ in coverage; missing years are not estimated. Formats can generate separate ISBNs. The 2021 self-publishing count includes audio. Milestones show chronology, not causation. Sources 4-15.

05 / CHOOSING A ROUTE

A broader field of services. A changing division of work.

The platforms developed over decades. AuthorHouse began as 1stBooks in 1997; iUniverse followed in 1999. Lulu launched in 2002. Blurb, founded in 2005, launched its service in 2006. Amazon introduced the ebook service that became KDP alongside Kindle in 2007. IngramSpark launched in 2013, and Barnes & Noble Press replaced NOOK Press in 2018.^{9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15}

These businesses perform overlapping but different jobs. Lulu and Blurb offer alternatives for book creation, printing, and fulfillment. IngramSpark connects production with Ingram’s distribution network. KDP and B&N Press connect publication with major retail channels. AuthorHouse and iUniverse illustrate the established author-paid service sector, offering assistance with the work of publication. Both appear in Bowker’s historical output reports; inclusion here is not a current ranking or recommendation.^{18, 7}

An author may now commission individual professionals, purchase a package, use a publishing platform, or combine these approaches. What once arrived primarily through one publishing relationship can be assembled from several suppliers. Access to a distribution catalog still does not guarantee a bookstore order, and a retail listing does not guarantee attention.

“Traditional” no longer describes a fixed package

Established publishing houses changed along with the market. The division of work associated with a

publishing agreement in 1990 is not necessarily what an author encounters in 2025. Advances and substantial campaigns were never universal, but today’s authors face additional expectations around their own visibility and audience development.

Authors increasingly need a website, a way to reach readers directly, and an active presence in the online communities where those readers gather. Speaking engagements, readings, and signings remain valuable. Newsletters, social media, podcasts, virtual appearances, and digital advertising extend that work beyond the launch event. Promotion becomes an ongoing undertaking alongside writing.

Publisher guidance and author organizations describe marketing as shared work. Authors contribute contacts, communicate with readers, and sustain their public presence; publishers retain marketing, publicity, and trade-sales capabilities. How much support a particular book receives varies considerably. The evidence reviewed here establishes substantial author participation, rather than a quantified industry-wide decline in publisher support since 1990.^{19, 20}

Calling one business “traditional” and another “independent” says little about these obligations. For an author, the advance, rights, editorial support, distribution arrangements, and promotional commitments are more informative than the label.

Who will do the work of finding your readers?

06 / INVESTMENT AND OWNERSHIP

More routes. Different arrangements.

Authors once looked to a publishing contract for an entire organization behind their book. Today, the services accompanying that contract vary considerably, and authors often carry substantial responsibility for promotion. Smaller publishers can assemble editing, design, printing, and distribution through the same broader industry. The question is what each arrangement provides, what it costs, and who will do the work of finding readers.^{19, 20}

Contracts can also reach into future work. First-refusal rights and options can give a publisher priority over the next manuscript; broad non-compete clauses can limit the kinds of work an author may publish. Those provisions can become onerous when their scope or duration extends beyond a reasonable commercial purpose. A

license of exclusive rights can impose substantial constraints even when the author retains copyright ownership; an assignment of ownership goes further.^{21, 22, 23, 24}

Creative control has long motivated authors to organize publication themselves. Edward Tufte completed **The Visual Display of Quantitative Information** in 1982 and published it through Graphics Press in 1983. His account describes disagreement over design, price, and the proposed size of the printing. He worked with designer Howard Gralla and took another mortgage on his home to finance the book. Control required both organization and capital.²⁵



07 / THE NEXT GENERATION OF TOOLS

AI is changing work across publishing.

The typewriter, the computer, the word processor, spell-checking, grammar software, and now AI belong to a continuing progression in how books are made. Each has changed what authors and editors can accomplish at their desks. Imagine demanding in 2000 that editors abandon their computers and return to typewriters to preserve the integrity of the craft. We might as well have asked printers to return to setting every page by hand.

AI extends that progression into work on language and images, including editing and cover development. It also introduces the ability to generate content, making human judgment about what to accept, revise, or reject essential. The opportunity reaches from an author working at home to a publishing company applying these tools across its operations.

In January 2025, Bertelsmann, Penguin Random House's parent company, announced an OpenAI collaboration that included employee use of ChatGPT Enterprise and planned book-marketing applications at Penguin Random House. Wiley reported integrating AI-powered submission and integrity screening into its scholarly publishing platform. Hachette's March 2025 guidance described operational AI pilots and employee-use policies, while noting that it had not yet authorized a company-wide generative AI tool.^{30, 31, 32}

For a craft publisher, these tools can make ambitious design and production work more affordable. For a large enterprise, they can help teams manage substantial volumes of material and streamline repeated tasks. Both have reasons to adopt them. The applications, investment, and rules differ, but the technological change reaches across the industry.

At Evamaya, newer tools have expanded what we can accomplish after the painstaking Photoshop work that went into the original **Hearts & Spades** cover. Our experience belongs within this broader change in how publishing work gets done.

Efficiency at an author's desk deserves the same fair consideration as efficiency inside a publishing house. Tools that help a writer improve clarity, identify inconsistencies, or develop a stronger cover should be judged by their contribution to the finished work. Where publishers set different rules for authors and their own staff, those differences should have clear reasons grounded in the work being done. Quality, rights, and disclosure should guide the standard, whoever uses the tools.

We welcome better tools. Editorial judgment, quality control, rights, and reader trust remain responsibilities for every publisher. Operational assistance, generated artwork, and generated book text raise different questions; policies on disclosure, consent, and copyright continue to shape their use.^{26, 27}

Efficiency at an author's desk deserves the same fair consideration as efficiency inside a publishing house.

08 / LOOKING FORWARD

The Road Ahead

Authors today have more freedom than ever before to decide how their work reaches readers. From our perspective as a small publisher, the old stigma attached to publishing outside an established house has lost much of its force. A publishing route alone tells us little about a book's quality. Authors can choose a contract, build a team, or establish a publishing house. More than ever, they need to understand where those choices lead.

That freedom brings formidable competition. The roughly 642,000 traditional-publishing ISBNs recorded for 2025 are more than ten times the approximately 47,000 titles and editions reported in 1990, although changes in counting prevent a direct measure of growth. Alongside them were more than 3.5 million self-published ISBNs in 2025. ISBNs can represent different formats of the same work; even so, the scale of the crowded marketplace is unmistakable.^{4,5}

Standing out is the challenge for everyone. Money still buys production, advertising, and reach, but a budget alone cannot guarantee attention. Think of the network television era, when a handful of

prime-time schedules supplied so much of the next morning's conversation. Today, audiences choose among streaming services, online creators, and countless communities. In May 2025, streaming's share of U.S. television viewing exceeded broadcast and cable combined.³³ Publishing faces its own version of that fragmentation: getting a book onto a platform is only the beginning. Finding its readers and earning their attention is the work ahead. It is a whole new game.

Roadmarks is Evamaya's annual whitepaper on the state of publishing, viewed from the small publisher's desk. Its name is an homage to Roger Zelazny, one of the writers who inspired our founder as a young Science Fiction Book Club reader. Evamaya grew from a first manuscript and the enthusiasm of his daughters, Eva and Maya; Distant Star Books later became its science fiction imprint. We offer these roadmarks as our contribution to the publishing community, helping authors understand the changing landscape and choose their next steps with confidence.

Standing out is the challenge for everyone.

More freedom. More choices. A greater need to understand the path.

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THE ROAD AHEAD

 Evamaya Publishing House

The last offramp.
The next chapter.

ROADMARKS / 2025


DISTANT
STAR