No publisher? No problem

Young local writers are getting their books published on their own

By NG KIAT HAN

HOLD the presses, young Singaporeans are picking up the pen — or hitting the keyboard — to write.

They're pushing to get their work published — and are succeeding.

They are so determined that, if publishers turn them down, they are getting the books out on their own.

Mint Kang, 22, did exactly that. And it's part of a long-term strategy.

"It's quite simple, I want to be a writer whose books people will pick up just on the strength of seeing my name on the cover," says the Singapore Management University undergraduate.

She is the author of 6 Years Of Parrot, a collection of short stories, and a compilation of poetry and artwork.

Another young writer, Lorraine Koh, 23, believes that writers shouldn't be worried about their work not being well received.

"You should not be afraid of failure; you should not be afraid of what's next. Seriously, you should just go forward," says Lorraine, who runs her own publishing firm Horais Inc.

She wrote Munchy Isn't Everything! — an inspirational tale about living life to the fullest — and Rye's Book, the first of a Manga-styled trilogy called The Photizo Project.

Like Lorraine, Eugene Tan, 25, a medical undergraduate at NUS, oversaw the publication of his self-help book on dating, which he co-authored with schoolmate Kong Jing Wen, 24, and Chung Pin Soon, 25.

Titled Love Clinic — How To Lose Your Bachelor's Degree, it has just been released by Rank Books and is supported by the Social Development Unit.

Traditionally, writers provide the manuscript while the publisher funds the printing and distribution costs. When the book sells, the writer collects royalties.

As will be the case for Johnny Tay, a 25-year-old business student. He has a forthcoming series of comic books and is also the author of the well-received "dot comic" at Anema Online (http://www.anemaonline.com).

"I guess the greatest satisfaction for me is to be able to tell a story that is completely mine, and have others enjoy it," he says.

But self-publishing is different. As the term suggests, the author undertakes the cost of producing the book, including the editorial, layout, design and printing.

"This is usually accomplished by engaging the services of a publishing consultant like myself," says Mr Koh Keng Chuan, 36, of Rank Books.

"Then, if they sell a book for $10, it's $10 in their pocket."

At Rank Books, a print run of 1,000 copies, inclusive of all services, costs upwards of $6,000.

A champion of budding authors here is writer and civil servant Sam Choo, 45.

He had problems finding a publisher, too, and so set up the Singapore Writers Guild (http://www.writers.sg).

His network of young writers includes Mint and Lorraine.

The guild now has more than 70 members, and "the monthly meetings keep getting better and better," Mr Choo says.

"I feel like a midwife," he proudly declares. "Seeing (these writers) get pregnant with ideas, go through labour pains, and finally deliver the baby. We are part of the team to deliver that baby."

The writer is a second-year undergraduate at NUS.