



## TIPS TO MARKET E-BOOKS

BY ROB EAGAR

\*\*Bonus article based on Rob Eagar's *Sell Your Book Like Wildfire*  
([bookwildfire.com](http://bookwildfire.com))

The primary thread running through all technological innovation is that change is constant. Therefore I don't pretend to know all of the answers about the future of publishing and the e-book revolution that has transformed the reading landscape. Regardless, e-books are here to stay and they make up the fastest growing part of the publishing industry. Every day, more and more people choose to consume content via an electronic means rather than print format. This doesn't mean print books are dead. They will remain for a long time. Yet the convenience, speed, and inexpensive cost of e-books have made them attractive to a large part of the reading population.

A huge reason for the explosion of e-books is that they've leveled the playing field for independent authors. No longer do self-published books have to languish in an author's garage gathering dust because bookstores won't carry them. Due to e-books, independent authors don't need to rely on brick-and-mortar bookstores anymore. At the time of this writing, three self-published novels are on *The New York Times* Best Seller List of Combined Print and E-Book Fiction. These are e-books with no retail bookstore

shelf space. Yet they are selling several thousand copies per day—that's what I call a marketing wildfire!

The rise of e-books has turned the publishing industry upside down in several ways.

1. Authors no longer need an agent or a publisher to get their book published. You can write a book and publish it on your own by choosing to self-publish.
2. Authors no longer need bookstore distribution to sell a lot of books. You can sell direct to consumers through online websites and e-reading devices, such as the Kindle and iPad.
3. Authors no longer have to wait twelve to twenty-four months for a publisher to produce a book. You can create an e-book and make it available for sale in a matter of days.
4. Authors no longer have to receive a tiny royalty when their book sells. Some e-book sites, such as Amazon, give royalty rates that are upwards of 35 percent.

With all of these apparent benefits, you would think that self-publishing e-books is the way to go. For some authors, it is a great choice. I started my author career by self-publishing my first print book in 2002. However, that doesn't mean self-publishing is risk-free. There are several land mines that must be negotiated before you can be successful in the e-book world.

## E-BOOK DANGER #1—LACK OF EDITING

Because it is quick and easy to publish an e-book, authors tend to rush the process. Nowhere is this more harmful than in the editing phase. Just because you've written a manuscript does not mean it's ready to sell. If you try to sell a poorly written book, going the electronic route won't help you. You'll just find out faster that you've got a bad book.

Therefore, if you want to be successful at self-publishing an e-book, I cannot stress enough the importance of hiring a professional editor to improve your manuscript. You may possess the ability to tell a great story or write a self-help masterpiece, but if your grammar, spelling, and writing skills aren't professional, readers won't cut you any slack. If this is your

first attempt at writing a book, don't kid yourself into thinking you can wing it. Hire an editor.

When I self-published years ago, obtaining the services of a freelance editor was the best money I ever spent. I didn't look at the cost as an excessive expense. I viewed the cost as an investment in the success of my book. That investment paid off when reader after reader remarked, "The quality of your book is excellent. I had no idea this was self-published."

To find a good editor, get referrals from other authors you know. You want to hire someone who has experience working on manuscripts in your genre. And before you choose an editor, be sure to get references and review some of their editing work. Likewise I suggest paying an editor to review the first few chapters of your book before committing to an entire project together. Don't be a guinea pig for a newbie. Your book's future is too precious.

## E-BOOK DANGER #2—LACK OF KEY DISTRIBUTION OPTIONS

One advantage of e-books is the ability to make them available for worldwide download through the Internet. In essence, you can get access to anyone with a computer or e-reading device. However, the reality is that sales of print books still outweigh the sales of e-books. Plus more people still read physical books than electronic versions. This balance will shift over time, but there continues to be a large market for brick-and-mortar bookstores selling print books. And since shelf-space is so limited in a typical bookstore, books by major publishers tend to be the few that make the cut.

Therefore, if your only distribution option is an electronic format, you'll wind up limiting your total sales and revenue potential. For some authors, such as those who have already built a platform in a specific niche, this is less of an issue. When you know where a distinctive audience exists that's easy to reach, then e-books can be your best bet.

On the other hand, if your goal is to reach the masses, you would be wise to offer your manuscript in both electronic and print formats through a major publisher. Yes, this will take more time and effort, but it is still the best way to gain access to the overall population. This principle bears itself

out repeatedly as successful independent authors sign contracts with big publishers once their name gets established (think William Paul Young and Amanda Hocking).

### E-BOOK DANGER #3—LACK OF CREDIBILITY

Until now, independent authors and self-published e-books suffered from an inferiority complex. As e-books capture the mainstream market, this issue will continue to subside. Far too many self-published books still shoot themselves in the foot, however, because the writing quality, layout style, or subject matter smacks of amateurism. In addition, many people still look at self-published books and think, “There are hundreds of traditional publishers in business. Yet you couldn’t convince one of them to publish your book. Something must be wrong with it.”

Hence, if the added credibility of a traditional publisher is important to you, you may want to avoid self-publishing. Many nonfiction authors, such as business leaders, politicians, pastors, and celebrities, need the weight of a well-known publisher to enhance their image in the marketplace. A self-published book could actually work against their brand, rather than help build it.

Conversely a first-time author, especially of fiction, doesn’t necessarily need a publisher’s name behind his work to build a following. If you can tell an amazing story in a great writing voice, you can capture plenty of readers on your own. If you succeed, you’ll have plenty of traditional publishers knocking on your door.

### TIPS TO MARKET INDEPENDENT E-BOOKS

Independent authors have more opportunity to succeed than ever before. In some ways, a cult status has developed for self-published e-books among cost-conscious readers and techno-geeks. Some people feel cool downloading books at cheap prices and helping drive the e-reading revolution. If you want to join the fray, use these tips to market like a pro.

#### 1. Start small

If you are a first-time author, I recommend dipping your toe into the publishing pool by starting with a small project first. If you write nonfiction, consider writing a short booklet. Or, if you write fiction, create a short story

to test the waters. The benefit of starting small is that you can gauge acceptance for your message without investing a large amount of time, money, and effort. If you get a good response to your initial work, you can expand it into a full book.

## 2. Give it away for free

One of the best ways to assess if you can make it as a new author is by giving away your material for free for a limited time, such as thirty or ninety days. Free is the quickest way to generate word of mouth, which is essential to success. If you're writing isn't good enough to get friends and family to share your book with others, you probably won't get the general public to follow suit. By giving away your e-book for free, you can generate enough short-term momentum to carry you through to the real sales process.

Publishing expert and e-book superstar, Seth Godin, encourages aspiring authors to give away their first book for free. "You should give your book away for free and send it to your twenty closest friends," he says. "And, if that's the end of it, then you're not a good writer. On the other hand, if those twenty people send it to twenty more people, then you have four hundred readers, and then eight thousand readers, and so on. If you can get up to twenty thousand readers of your first book for free, there will be a line out the door of people wanting to help you with your next book."

*Source: <http://michaelhyatt.com/an-interview-with-seth-godin.html>*

Using a free approach with your e-book allows you to test your material with readers without losing your shirt financially if you fail. The opportunity to build a new audience has never been this quick and easy.

## 3. The price is right

A large percentage of people who read e-books are extremely price sensitive. Amazon started this process by trying to set the cost for all e-books no higher than \$9.99. They eventually lost that battle to the publishers, but they also created a trend in the minds of many readers. Many independent authors picked up on this trend and now use low pricing as a way to get readers to take a chance on their new book.

For example, Darcie Chan, e-book author of *The New York Times* best-selling novel, *The Mill River Recluse*, used low prices to gain an initial audience. “The goal of my ‘e-book experiment’ has never been to make money,” she says. “I only wanted to get my work out there over time and gauge people’s responses to it. For that reason, I lowered the price to \$0.99. I think it is true that readers are more willing to take a chance on a completely unknown author at that price point, and I definitely wanted to encourage people to take a chance on me.”

Source: <http://redroom.com/member/christopher-meeks/blog/interview-with-best-selling-novelist-darcie-chan>

Not only did people take a chance on Darcie’s novel, they gave rave reviews and spread an electronic wildfire. Within four months, she was selling several thousand copies a day. You could argue that Darcie didn’t make much money from this low-price strategy, but with an established fan base, she’s now in a position to get a big advance from a major publisher or sell her next book at a much higher price.

#### 4. Partner with e-book blogs

E-book junkies are a tight-knit tribe that possess a powerful communication network. Everyone knows where to go for information, and they check in regularly. There are numerous blogs, websites, and social media pages that specifically review and promote e-books. The influence of these reviewers affects a lot of e-book buyers. Below is a list of several well-known blogs and websites:

- Ereader News Today: [www.ereadernewstoday.com/](http://www.ereadernewstoday.com/)
- Kindle Nation: <http://kindlenationdaily.com/>
- Pixel of Ink: [www.pixelofink.com](http://www.pixelofink.com)
- Kindle Reader: <http://kindlereader.blogspot.com/>
- GoodReads: [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com)
- IndieReader: <http://indiereader.com/author-promotional-opportunities/>

Getting your e-book mentioned on these websites can help generate a lot of downloads. You can write to the administrators of these e-book blogs and request a feature of your book. Some sites give free listings while others will feature your book for a fee.

For instance, Kindle Nation offers author sponsorship opportunities to promote your book for \$140 to \$400. In addition, you can arrange for web-based ads to run on e-book-related sites, such as GoodReads and IndieReader.

## 5. Pursue paid book reviews

Besides book mentions and paid advertising, independent authors can pursue literary reviews of their work for a fee. These review sites can help provide a level of legitimacy to an unknown author.

Consider the following organizations if you'd like to pursue a paid review:

- Kirkus Reviews: <http://www.kirkusreviews.com/indie/about/> Review fees cost from \$425 to \$575.
- BookRooster: <http://www.bookrooster.com/for-authors/> Review fees start at \$67.

## 6. Subsidize your writing costs with a sponsor

Taking the time to write a book can work against your ability to make a living.

If that is the case, consider getting a sponsor for your e-book. This process is similar to getting an advance from a traditional publisher, because someone pays you up front to create your book. The difference is that the money comes from a business, rather than a publisher. In return, you agree to give the sponsor some free advertising space or perform promotional activities on their behalf.

For example, e-book author, Al Pittampalli, landed Citrix Systems as a sponsor for his new e-book called, *Read This Before Our Next Meeting*. Citrix invented the popular GoToMeeting videoconferencing service ([www.GoTo-Meeting.com](http://www.GoTo-Meeting.com)), which is used by companies around the world. As a sponsor of Al's book, Citrix got exposure to thousands of potential new customers. Likewise Al got funding through Citrix, legitimacy from their brand, and exposure to a much wider audience.

The key to landing a sponsor is to identify companies or nonprofit organizations that want to reach the same audience you want to reach with your book. In essence, you offer yourself as a spokesperson or product placement opportunity for that organization. The company receives the

benefit of marketing their product or service in a nonthreatening manner to potential customers or donors. Sponsorship will work only if the company believes your book's audience fits their target market and that you have the ability to sell a lot of books.