

MODULE 1: WHY EBOOKS?

ebook (noun): *an electronic or digital book that is readable on computers or other electronic devices (e-readers, tablets, phones, etc.)*

digital product (noun): *any product that is delivered in an electronic format, usually immediately after purchase, via email, downloads or site log in; includes ebooks, online courses, email subscriptions, programs or apps, printables and more*

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Writing eBooks for Profit

eBook sales have continued to increase year over year, and with e-reader and tablet sales continuing to grow, it appears that they won't be slowing down anytime soon!

While most of the "official" stats on eBook sales count sales of Kindle books and other electronic formats through sites such as Amazon, Barnes & Noble, etc., PDF ebooks were among the earliest ebook formats and continue to be popular among readers who want to read on their computer or mobile device or print out ebooks to have a hard copy.

In fact, many bloggers report ebook sales as among their largest income producers, including Darren Rowse at ProBlogger, who says that [ebook sales sometimes rank above all other income streams on his sites](#), which is pretty amazing given the amount of traffic his blogs receive!

From [Crystal Paine](#):

The invention of e-readers and mobile device has also given ebook writers a tremendous boost. Back before e-readers/devices were around, the market for ebooks was much, much smaller as purchasing an ebook meant you either had to read the book on your computer or you had to print it out. Either option wasn't very practical, so ebooks were a much harder sell than traditional print books were.

Nowadays, not only are ebooks very accessible, but many people find them more practical than print books. Plus, the ability to easily upload your ebook to sell on Amazon offers mind-blowing potential. Where else can you get the opportunity to promote your product in front of hundreds of thousands of people that you would likely never have access to otherwise?

And best of all, the Amazon market is open to everyone. You don't have to be anything or anyone special to produce an Amazon bestseller and make hundreds or thousands of dollars in residual income each month from your ebook sales.

I know that might sound like I'm being a little over-the-top, but I'm not. If you produce a great ebook, create an amazing cover image (unless you're a really gifted designer, please hire someone to do it for you — the cover image can make or break your ebook's success), write compelling sales copy, and come up with a smart marketing strategy, and work very hard, earning a part-time or full-time income from ebook sales alone is completely possible. And I know a number of people who are doing it — many who don't have a huge blog following.

[Read Crystal's full case study interview here.](#)

Launch Profit Versus Residual Income

When we talk about profits from digital sales, though, it's important to realize that there are really two kinds of direct profit that ebooks bring in: launch profit and residual or passive income. (More on indirect profit in a little bit!)

Coordinating a big launch is a great way to bring in a burst of income. It's not unreasonable for an average ebook to earn \$5,000 or more at launch (depending on many factors, of course!), and that's a nice chunk of change.

However, the real benefit comes from the continued sales of ebooks. While these sales ebb and flow with the seasons and promotions you're running, they can add up over the course of the month and increase your monthly income with little extra work on your part.

The really cool part, of course, is that — unlike physical product sales — there's not a lot of upfront expense when writing an ebook (cookbooks and craft books that require an investment in supplies and ingredients being the exception), and there are very, very few expenses on residual sales, giving digital products a high profit margin!

Publishing Multiple eBooks or Products

When you begin to publish multiple ebooks, you realize that these benefits increase exponentially as ebooks begin to sell each other.

For example: a reader stumbles across one, purchases it and loves it, and they come back to look for more. Or someone discovers one of your ebooks but isn't quite sold on buying it; then they spot another book (in the related items section of Amazon, in your author profile or on your sales page) that is exactly what they never knew they needed, and you're able to capture a sale that might have been lost otherwise!

Something to Consider:

Before we get too far into this, I would like to offer a word of caution about co-authoring an ebook. While this certainly can work beautifully in some cases, there are also some potential drawbacks to consider as well:

- Remember that when you are co-authoring, you are splitting the income. I know that seems obvious, but the few times I've collaborated on projects, I've always been surprised by how much less the income is once it's split two or three ways.
- If one author is more committed to or excited about the project, they can easily end up bearing the weight of the work on their shoulders. Splitting the profit 50/50 in these cases can lead to resentment, so be sure to be very upfront about expectations and workloads before beginning.
- While working together *can* mean getting a product to market faster, you can only work as fast as the slowest partner, so in some cases collaborating can actually make the project take longer!

If the workload of writing, publishing and promoting an ebook feels like too much to take on, another option is to simply outsource some of those tasks by hiring designers, editors and promotion teams rather than partnering with another author. We'll talk more about outsourcing later on in the course!

From [Katie Kimball](#):

I should start by sharing the reason I started with eBooks in the first place. I read a blog post by Darren Rowse at Problogger.com in fall 2009. He compared some street performers he enjoyed – one sold a CD, the other sold nothing. Both were earning money that day, but the one with a *product to sell* earned exponentially more. He encouraged bloggers to do likewise: capture all the traffic we're working so hard to get and have something available to sell to them. That advice is both accurate and brilliant.

In that light, publishing new eBooks regularly has many benefits:

1. Something new for my regular readers to purchase.
2. The opportunity to make “discount packages” so that if someone gets interested in one book, they might just grab two or three since there's a deal on multiple copies.
3. Chances to “get out there” with other bloggers/affiliates while they promote the new book.
4. Now that I'm on Kindle too, the fact that my other books usually show up when people are browsing/buying one book is huge. For example, I know that when one book is doing well (Better Than a Box during launch, for example) the other books feel the snowball effect and their sales rise (January showed double average sales for Snacks and Beans, the only ones on Kindle at the time).
5. The obvious answer: A new book makes a lot of money on launch, and any product that continues to sell, even a little, is passive income. More books = more income.

[Read Katie's full case study interview here.](#)

eBooks to Upsell Products & Services

We talked about direct profits in the first section of this module, but ebooks can also contribute indirectly to your income. A quality ebook helps establish your expertise and increase brand awareness for you or your blog, which makes it easier to sell other products and services as well.

I'm not saying that you should write an ebook solely for the purpose of promoting yourself. In fact, if you do, I can almost guarantee that customers will see right through you and it will fail.

However, when you provide quality content that really helps people, they are more likely to become loyal blog readers, to purchase other products and services from you, and to recommend you to other people.

The Role of Free eBooks

One strategy that many bloggers use is to offer free ebooks solely for this purpose. They give out great content for free, instantly establishing their expertise with readers and gaining new subscribers (and potential customers) in the process.

A free ebook can also be much shorter than a paid ebook and still wow readers (since their expectations are much lower when receiving something for free), and while it still needs to be good quality, it can be put together more quickly than a paid ebook without hurting your online reputation.

If you don't yet have an established platform, a free ebook is a great way to grow your online presence. Rather than saving all of your content for a paid ebook later on, take some of your best content and turn it into a free ebook for readers in exchange for sharing it or subscribing to your newsletter. You'll establish your expertise and gain loyal readers at the same time, which is usually worth more than you might have made by selling it to a smaller audience!

Comparing eBooks to Traditional Publishing

Up until very recently, self-publishing was accompanied by a stigma that said it's what authors who weren't "good enough" for traditional publishing did. With the rise in popularity of indie artists of all kinds and the success of many ebook authors, however, this stigma is changing. Many people choose the self-publishing route as an alternative to traditional publishing (and although I co-authored a traditionally published book, I am now firmly in this camp), while others see ebooks as a way to open the door to book offers from traditional publishers, and still others use both strategies side by side.

There are pros and cons to traditional publishing, which we'll look at briefly here:

Pros of Traditional Publishing:

- Prestige. Being able to say you're a "published author".
- An established infrastructure to support you during the writing process, with in-house editors, designers and publicists.
- An advance on future royalties during the writing process.
- Hands-off sales process and customer service (for the most part).
- Exposure to a wider market. More publicity opportunities.

From [Jessica Fisher](#):

I make more money on ebooks, at least so far, but the traditional route provides new connections and "street credit". I'd say the "real books" have the potential to lead to other opportunities than my self-published books might not secure, i.e. TV appearances, etc.

I have less control with my publisher than in my self-publishing, but I have a GREAT publisher, so I've learned a lot and worked with some fabulous people. That experience has helped me as an author in tremendous ways. I love all the people that I work with through my publisher. Plus, it's nice to have folks who have a vested interest in your success.

[Read Jessica's full case study interview here.](#)

Cons of Traditional Publishing:

- The process is much slower and can take anywhere from 12-24 months to get the book actually to print.
- Lack of control. The publishing house gets the final say on design, formatting, content, etc.
- Significantly lower royalties, usually only 7-12% of the cover price of physical books (up to 50% for digital versions).

- Much of the marketing and publicity still falls on the author's shoulders.
- The publisher holds the rights to the book.

From [Amy Lynn Andrews](#):

My decision [not to accept a traditional book contract for an expanded edition of [Tell Your Time](#)] was certainly a result of [many factors](#), but two stand out:

First, compared to digital publishing, traditional publishing is a very, very slow process. I had already gained excellent momentum selling [Tell Your Time](#) on my own. Going with a traditional publisher would have caused that progress to slow down significantly and I didn't want to risk losing it altogether.

The second reason was because I would have lost a lot of control over my ebook, from pricing to printing and beyond. After much research, I also learned that authors are largely responsible for marketing their book, regardless of being signed with a publishing house. It didn't make sense to carry that responsibility and lose much of the control at the same time (not to mention much of the profit!).

[Read Amy's full case study interview here.](#)

Opening the Door to Traditional Publishing

Self-publishing an ebook is a great way to begin establishing yourself as a writer even without a traditional book deal, and it can also help open doors that lead to traditional contracts down the road.

If that's your goal, then the most important things you can do are (1) build a platform (more and more, publishing houses are requiring authors to have established platforms before signing them) and (2) produce an *excellent* ebook.

Rather than throwing content together and selling it to make a few bucks (which I don't recommend anyway), really work on showcasing yourself as an author. Hire designers and editors to help you take your book from good to great. And work on a marketing plan that gets your ebook in the hands of a lot of people. You'll be more likely to catch the attention of a publisher this way, and you'll have a portfolio to show them if you decide to pursue a contract yourself.

Obstacles to Publishing an eBook

The big question, then, is if ebooks are such a great opportunity, why isn't everybody publishing them?

That's a great question, actually, so let's look at some of the most common obstacles:

1. Time.

We all have the same 24 hours in a day, but I think it's safe to say that most of us feel like those are packed full with whatever we currently have on our plate!

Sometimes lack of time is simply a matter of laziness, but often the cause is more complicated than that.

Maybe you're at a stage where writing or making money is simply a low priority: The money would be nice, of course, but it's not a necessity. You have little ones that you'd rather focus on. Or you're pouring your energy into other commitments or activities.

Truly, it's okay to say, "I'm going to write an ebook later. Right now I'm going to focus on X, Y or Z."

But if you want to write an ebook but still can't find the time, it could be that one of these things is holding you back:

Lack of organization/discipline.

Finding the time to work on *any* project requires some organization and commitment. You have to make time in your schedule...and then use that time wisely.

You may also need to clear a space for writing rather than trying to work in the middle of the family room or in a cluttered office that leaves you feeling overwhelmed rather than creative.

And you might need to be more disciplined in other areas too in order to protect your work time: avoiding Facebook in favor of your to-do list, turning off email notifications, watching less TV, etc.

"Starting an ebook seems overwhelming. I feel like I need hours of time to focus on just that, or even a couple hour stretch. I know the time is there (we all have the same 24 hours), I just struggle to get past the daily responsibilities in order to focus on *project* time."

~Amy at [The Finer Things in Life](#)

Lack of motivation.

However, sometimes I think our hesitancy to make time for a project like writing an ebook has less to do with actual lack of time and more to do with one simple question: "Will this really be worth it?"

If you're not convinced that an ebook will bring in enough income to make the effort you've put into it worth it, then of course you're having trouble making time for it!

Here's the thing: I can't promise you that it will be worth it. Your first ebook might be a flop (mine was!). But I can promise you that you'll learn something from that experience. And I do believe that anyone can be successful if they're willing to put in the time and effort, accept the failures and try again.

“(1) I’m not sure exactly what type of ebook I’d want to write. (2) I already have so much free content on my blog that I’m not sure if I could come up with enough new information to write an ebook (and justify charging for it). (3) I also don’t know exactly what steps to take and/or how to go about charging for an ebook. To be perfectly honest, the idea has crossed my mind many times and I’ve had many requests from readers to write an ebook. I do think I could make a decent amount of money from it, I’m just not sure where to start and/or if I want to put the time in.”

~Andrea at AndreaDekker.com

2. Process overwhelm.

Also known as perfection paralysis, process overwhelm can simply stop a project in its tracks before it gets going.

Sometimes the time is there, but when it’s time to get down to work, you find yourself choosing other things instead. Why? Often it’s because you’re not sure where to start or overwhelmed by everything that’s in front of you, and taking that first step feels futile.

I experience this one a lot, and I almost always realize once I get started that it was nowhere near as bad as it felt while I was staring at the blank page.

If process overwhelm or perfection paralysis is holding you back, just start. Don’t worry about how good it is, how it’s all going to come together or what step you need to take next. Just start.

“I absolutely hate the writing process. After publishing my first book I said I’d never do it again but three years later I am working on my first ebook. It’s just taking a while because writing doesn’t come naturally for me. It’s very painful actually but the topic is important and one I’m super passionate about so it will get written eventually.”

~Laura at [I’m an Organizing Junkie](http://I'm an Organizing Junkie)

3. Fear.

Or maybe it simply boils down to fear: fear of failure, fear of criticism, fear of wasting time, fear of not getting it just right.

Everyone deals with insecurities, and while it is important to do your best, it’s also important to develop a thick skin toward failure. Rather than fearing failure, embrace it in all its prickliness! The greatest marketers and authors and bloggers and inventors have all experienced it, and when you approach failure as a stepping stone to success, it’s much, much easier to accept!

Finally, it's okay if you don't feel like an expert on your chosen topic. Write about it from your experience and perspective. You shouldn't pretend to know about a subject if you don't really, of course, but you don't need credentials from a third party in order to have something worth sharing with your readers. The beauty of blogging is that most readers find it refreshing to read "real life experts" as opposed to the credentialed ones, and the same is true for self-publishing.

One caveat: you have to be willing to put yourself out there. Just writing the ebook isn't enough if you're not confident enough to stand up and say, "I wrote this ebook, and I really think it will help you."