

MODULE 6: FORMATS & PLATFORMS

*“Selling to people who actually want to hear from you
is more effective than interrupting strangers who don’t.”*

~Seth Godin

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Deciding Where to Sell Your eBook

By far, the most common questions people ask about ebooks are, “Where should I sell my book?” and “Is Amazon’s KDP program worth it?” Unfortunately, the answer to these questions isn’t as straightforward as you might hope, but I think there are a couple important things to remember:

1. It’s okay to experiment. Deciding where to sell your book might feel like a one-time decision, but it’s really not, and you can experiment with different options for one book or across several different books. The key is to be patient and be willing to take the time to try different things and evaluate the results.
2. The answers to these questions are really going to vary across various niches and even between different ebooks by the same author. There is no one-size-fits-all answer, and there’s not really even a “right” answer for any given ebook.

With that out of the way, here are a few things to consider:

Pros & Cons of Selling a PDF Directly on Your Site

If you have an established audience, or platform, selling the PDF version of your ebook directly on your site is a great opportunity, for a number of reasons:

- Your audience is already there. If you can make the sale without sending them away from your site, you’re building customer loyalty and you’ll also probably have a higher conversion rate which means more sales.
- You’ll earn more. While Amazon and other major ebook retailers offer a competitive royalty split, in most cases you’ll earn more by selling an ebook or digital product directly through your site, where your only per-book cost is a small transaction fee through your payment gateway.
- You’re able to focus more on design. If you’re creating an image-rich or design-specific ebook, such as the photography ebooks Darren Rowse mentions below, a PDF is really a much better way to showcase the design of your ebook rather than just the words.
- Similarly, if you’re offering more of a digital product than just a straight ebook, the PDF format allows you to include checklists, printables and other tools that can’t be packaged with other ebook formats.

However, if you don’t have an established audience already, investing in a beautiful PDF design, shopping cart program or web design may not make as much sense unless you plan to work really hard at connecting with other bloggers and website owners who do have established platforms.

Selling directly on your site also means you alone are responsible for customer service, which can sometimes turn into a time-consuming task.

From [Darren Rowse](#):

There are a number of factors [that went into our decision to sell our ebooks exclusively as PDFs] and these may change.

My first ebooks were only ever PDFs and they did well.

We found a lot of our readers were reading our PDFs on their iPads and Kindles anyway.

Our photography ebooks are image rich so didn't look any good on the original kindles.

Pricing is an issue – Amazon is full of cheap (and sometimes nasty) ebooks that are free or 0.99. We did go to the effort of producing one of our photography ebooks in other formats but were not willing to discount it so drastically – as a result while it is reviewed as being a great book it doesn't sell well because other ebooks on the topic are so much cheaper (even though ours is of a better quality).

We will continue to play and experiment in this space though. We've since released a site called SnapnGuides.com on which we'll produce shorter and cheaper photography ebooks, so these may do better on places like Amazon.

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

Pros & Cons of Selling on Amazon

In addition to selling an ebook directly on your website, most ebook authors these days make their ebooks available for Kindle and sell through Amazon as well.

The reason is simple: Amazon continues to be a leader in the ebook industry, and with Kindle apps available for almost every device on the market, it's a popular format that people understand and know.

In addition, Amazon's "bestsellers" lists and recommended product sections make it a great platform for reaching a new audience that you would probably never connect with otherwise, which increases your sales opportunities.

While Amazon does take 30% of the purchase price for most ebook purchases, there are very few upfront costs for selling an ebook on Amazon (and we'll talk more about formatting for Kindle in a little bit), which makes this a win for most authors in the middle price range.

Note: You should be aware, though, that image-heavy books should be compressed to as small a file size as possible without impacting quality because there is a delivery fee based on the file size of your ebook. This does not affect most text-only ebooks but can impact larger files fairly significantly. ([See more about pricing and royalty options here.](#))

On the other hand, if you're in a popular niche where ebooks are selling for a much higher price (paleo, photography and online money making, to name a few), selling on Amazon may not be as beneficial, since books that are priced outside the \$2.99-9.99 range are ineligible for the 70% royalty rate and automatically set at a 35% royalty rate instead ([See the list price requirements here.](#))

From [Joshua Becker](#):

While the PDF version [of my ebooks] are still available, I try to send everyone to Amazon. I imagine Amazon as being similar to the streets of Manhattan... millions of people hanging out and window shopping. The goal is to get Amazon to put your book in the window where people can see it, get interested, and purchase. And the more sales you register at Amazon, the closer they move your book to the window... and promote it through e-mails, "people also bought" lists, etc. I may sell 3-4 PDF versions each month, but sell 500+ copies on Amazon so it's a pretty big difference.

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

Pros & Cons of Selling Exclusively on Amazon

Another popular option for ebook authors is to sell exclusively on Amazon through the KDP Select program, which gives Amazon sole rights to the ebook for a 90-day period.

As a participant in KDP Select, you have the option to offer your ebook free to readers for 5 days in every enrollment period, and you can also add your ebook to the Kindle Owners' Lending Library, where you'll earn a percentage of the KDP Select Global Fund based on the number of times your ebook is shared. ([See how the Lending Library funds are calculated here.](#))

From [Susan Heid](#):

The first book I put on Amazon, [Becoming the Confident Mom You've Always Wanted to Be](#), was a great learning experience.

I had done some research on other authors who've sold on other venues (Nook, iTunes, etc.) and the sales with these other options were very small. I also felt that most of my audience would feel comfortable using Amazon to purchase a Kindle, even if they didn't have a Kindle, since Amazon has made it so easy to read kindle books on most any device. I never did a free promotion with that book, but when I released it, the first few days it was marked for only \$0.99, which sky rocketed me into the top of certain categories, which is what you want on Amazon!

My second book on Amazon, [Become a Frugalista in 30 Days](#), was offered free for two days on its initial release. I was flabbergasted that it was downloaded 7,400 times in the two days! My heart is to get my information out to those who can use it, so offering it free is always a nice part, but I also have to make some money to keep my business going, so it is a nice combination – to offer it for free at certain times. Offering it free then leads to those who downloaded one book to be fed my other book on their recommendation page – where they might purchase that one too.

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

While there are many benefits of selling an ebook on Amazon, and I would recommend it for almost every author, it's important to consider all of your options before enrolling in KDP Select. For example, if you're an established blogger or author, it may make sense to offer the PDF version directly on your site *first* so that you can capture the sales of your loyal readers before making it exclusive to Amazon.

And that's the most important thing to remember about KDP Select: you're only committed to the program for 90 days at a time, so you can plan your promotion in a way that allows you to offer the PDF *and* take advantage of the KDP Select program.

My KDP Experience

I recently launched a new ebook, [101 Days of Christmas](#), which is a compilation of the best projects from the Christmas series we run each year at [Life Your Way](#).

To launch the ebook, I included it in a bundle at [BundleoftheWeek.com](#) at launch, and then enrolled it in Amazon's KDP program the following week in order to offer it free during a two-day promotion.

In the days leading up to that promotion, I spent a lot of time on marketing – emailing deal bloggers, submitting it to various free Kindle sites, etc. That actually worked really well, and during the promotion we gave away more than 27,000 free copies and made it to the very top of the bestsellers list for Kindle freebies!

Unfortunately, while I hoped that momentum would translate into continued sales once the free offer ended, it really didn't, which was rather disappointing. We've only actually sold a couple hundred ebooks since the free offer ended, and while I'm happy to have the ebook out there in the hands of so many people – especially because it includes liberal links to my blog and helps promote our current 101 Days of Christmas series as well – I would have loved to have seen at least 1,000 ebooks sold from the promotion.

What I didn't realize about the KDP program was that even though we were on the bestsellers list as a free ebook (and 27,000+ copies in two days is pretty impressive!), those sales did not translate to the regular bestsellers list once the free promotion ended. So rather than showing up automatically on the bestsellers list, we had to earn our way there with ebooks sold at the full price, and that just didn't happen.

It is very likely that this has to do with the timing of the promotion since we ran it in mid-September when people aren't exactly thinking about Christmas yet. It's possible that if we re-run the free promotion after Thanksgiving, we could see a higher number of sales once it ends. But I'm not sure that's a risk I want to take with this ebook. Instead, I'm considering a \$0.99 promotion for a few days after Thanksgiving so that I will have some guarantee of income.

I'll update with more details on what I decide and how that works out later this year!

From [Katie Kimball](#):

I'm very much in the middle of evaluating this [KDP Select] process, but it's very interesting so far! The Camping Handbook is currently only for sale on Amazon, not on my own site. When I get to the end of the 90 days, I will have to compare to last summer's camping book sales stats and see how much I may have "missed out on" here at KS vs. what I make at Amazon.

I did offer the book for free for 2 days, which was GREAT for promotion. Results:

- Gave away almost 10K books – being in the hands of 10K people has to be a good thing, if they read the book someday.
- No noticeable increase in blog traffic from people browsing the book and clicking links to KS.
- Sold a good handful of books after the free promotion at full price. I'm fairly certain that was positive fallout from the promo.
- The next month, the camping book sold 5-10x as many copies as my other books – again, I think that's because of increased exposure with the promo, and I'm very happy with that! However, it's POSSIBLE that it's because I just released the camping book on Kindle. Hard to tell – If I do KDP Select with another book, it would NOT be within the first week of the Kindle release.
- I didn't see increased sales of other books, unfortunately, but I think I did the freebie too early – my books weren't really "related" as far as Amazon knew, so my other books weren't showing up in the "people are also looking at..." thumbnails. Oops on my part.
- I offer a coupon for \$1.95 to get printable versions of the charts, checklists and recipes in the book back at my own site. I have seen 20 people purchase that, so that's nice – although not a very big percentage of the 10K freebies!!
- The book HAS been lent out through the Kindle lending library, which can only happen as part of KDP select. I love that part, because I can offer a book for free to my readers, but Amazon pays out based on the percentage of all books lent out. The first month, I was VERY pleasantly surprised to see that the payout per book was close to \$2, which is very respectable in my mind.

So 2 questions remain for me – (1) is the KDP Select program worthwhile based on the lending library payouts (vs. being able to sell on my own site)? (2) Is giving away the book for free worth the promotion time and energy? If yes, then KDP Select is more worthwhile, if no, then KDP Select has to stand on the lending library alone.

I DO think that publishing via Kindle is always a good idea – Amazon sells itself, so there are always a few sales a month, totally passive income, and I love that. If you have an eBook, Kindle-ize it immediately.

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

Pros & Cons of Selling *Everywhere*

Which brings me to the last popular option I want to talk about: making your ebook available pretty much everywhere that ebooks are sold.

The benefits of this strategy are obvious. The more places and formats that your ebook is offered in, the wider the appeal. Whether a customer reads on their iPad or Nook, through the Kindle app or with iBooks, they'll be able to find the exact format they're looking for.

On the other hand, there are upfront expenses involved with each format you choose for your ebook, and you want to be sure that your ebook sales in each place will cover those additional costs.

Publishing in multiple places also adds a layer of complexity to your digital sales – not only do you have to keep track of the income from each outlet, but you also have to decide how to link to each one, which ones to mention where, making updates in all of those places, etc.

That doesn't necessarily mean you shouldn't do it, but it is something to keep in mind when you're deciding whether to sell through BN.com, Apple and other ebook retailers in addition to PDF and/or Kindle. In my experience, my Nook sales have been enough to justify the upfront cost of converting an ebook to ePUB (more on that in a minute), but not so great that I feel like publishing on BN.com is a must for all of my future ebooks.

Selling eBooks Directly from Your Site

Once you've decided you want to sell an ebook directly on your site, it's time to figure out *how* to do that. The two most popular platforms, both of which I've used, are [e-Junkie](#), which is a third-party service, and [WordPress eStore from Tips & Tricks](#), which is a WordPress plugin that is actually installed on your server and runs independently on your site.

Using e-Junkie

e-Junkie is a great, inexpensive service for selling digital downloads on your site. It's easy to use and doesn't require any special technical know-how, and the tools you need to work with affiliates are automatically included.

On the other hand, it's a recurring monthly charge (starting at \$5/month for a basic account) – which may not seem like a big deal over 6 months but adds up over 18! – and it begins to get expensive as you add additional products. It's also got a fairly limited set of features, although the ones it has are more than enough for you to successfully sell an ebook!

Although I only have experience with PayPal as a payment gateway, e-Junkie can also be integrated with PayPal, Google Checkout, Authorize.Net, TrialPay, ClickBank and 2CheckOut if you prefer another one instead.

I actually just canceled my e-Junkie account after more than five years, and I can honestly say that I was very happy with their service during that time. If you're only planning to sell one or two products and you prefer simplicity, then I highly recommend e-Junkie as the best option.

To get started with [visit this how-to guide and sign up for a 1-week trial](#).

Using WordPress eStore

On the other hand, if you're looking for a more robust "store" platform, WordPress eStore may be the way to go. The plugin costs just \$49.95, or get the eStore platform together with the affiliate platform for just \$79.95, which is much less expensive than e-Junkie even over a relatively short period of time.

Both of these plugins (as well as a wide variety of additional plugins and add-ons) run directly on your server, which means you're not at the mercy of e-Junkie when they have heavy traffic or server issues.

On the other hand, you have to have WordPress in order to use this particular option, while e-Junkie can be used anywhere you can use HTML. Also, the program itself is so robust that the sheer number of options can be overwhelming (after almost a year of using it, I still discover new features every time I go back through the settings!). And it may be overkill if you're only planning to sell a single flagship product or will mostly be focusing on Kindle sales.

The WordPress eStore plugin works with PayPal, 2Checkout or Authorize.net, and Tips & Tricks also has a very active customer forum where you can find tons of additional information and support questions are answered quickly.

To learn more about the features or get started, [head here](#).

A Note About PayPal

I use PayPal for almost all of my online transactions, and for the most part I think it's a great service. However, I do think they sometimes fail to properly define and explain different options that are available, so I wanted to mention a couple things here:

PayPal Micropayments

Last year I happened across a note about PayPal micropayments, and I was surprised to realize that PayPal offers two different fee scales – the standard \$0.30 plus 1.9% that most of us are used to or a separate \$0.05 plus 5% fee for [micropayment accounts](#). The sign up site at paypal-labs.com seemed a little sketchy, but after researching it a bit, I went ahead and converted one of my accounts to a micropayment account, where I can accept payments under \$12 for a much lower fee, and it's saved me thousands of dollars over the past year.

To sign up for a micropayments account, you will need to first create an account and then contact Paypal ([via phone or email](#)) to ask them to convert it to this fee structure.

Business versus Premier

You can accept online payments with either a Business or Premier account, but there's one important difference you should be aware of if you'll be working with affiliates: Under their latest terms, mass payments can only be made from Business accounts; if you have a Premier account, you'll have to make individual payments, which results in a higher fee that is deducted from your affiliates' payments (or from your account if you choose to pay them).

In order to have a Business account, you must have an Employer Identification Number (EIN), which you can [register for in a matter of minutes on the IRS site](#). In my opinion, an EIN is a great thing anyway, because it gives you an identification number that you can put on W-9s and other tax documents rather than sharing your SSN, but you'll want to check with an account or tax advisor if you have any questions!

Converting Files to ePub, Mobi & iBook

Once you decide where and how you're going to offer your ebook for sale, it's time to make some decisions about the conversion process.

There are really three options for converting your ebook to one of the most popular ebook formats: hire an independent designer to format it for you, use a mass conversion service or do it yourself.

First, a bit about formats:

- ePub – format used by Nook and other e-readers
- Mobi – format used exclusively by Amazon Kindle
- iBooks – format used on Apple iPads

Here's the thing: You *can* convert an ebook to ePub and Mobi yourself. I've done it, and it's not rocket science, but it is basically straight HTML, and there are some quirky things you'll have to figure out as you go. Unless you have lots of time on your hands to figure it out, I think paying someone to do the conversion is well worth the expense.

I personally like working with an individual designer for this process because I appreciate the one-on-one conversations and personal touch. Both FiveJsDesign.com and DesignByInsight.com offer conversion services, and I've enjoyed working with them both.

Another option is using a conversion service. However, be aware that some of these services take a percentage of your profit, which can add up to a big chunk of change if your ebook is successful, so consider this option carefully before moving forward.

If you decide that's the way you want to go, there are several services available. I've never used one of these companies, but I've heard great things about each of them:

- [Book Baby](#) — convert and distribute your ebook to Amazon, Apple, B&N, Sony, Kobo and more. Starts at \$199 for conversion service with no commission on sales.
- [eBookit!](#) — convert and distribute your ebook to all the major ebook retailers including Amazon, Apple, B&N, Google, Sony, Ingram, and Kobo. Starts at \$149 for basic ebook conversion plus 15% of all net sales.

Converting to ePub and Mobi Yourself

To convert a Word document yourself, it's important that you start by using the preprogrammed styles, such as Headings, Bold, Italics, rather than changing the color and text size manually. Then, go to File -> Save As and save your file as a web page.

Next, download both [Calibre](#) and [Kindle Reader](#).

Caution: Be sure to read [this post](#) about potential issues with creating a combined MOBI/KF8 file before you begin your conversion.

Open your HTML document in Calibre and use the Convert tool to convert the file to both ePub and Mobi. You'll be given a variety of options that affect the formatting (things like line height, spacing, etc.).

Select Okay when you're ready, and when the conversion is done, it will be loaded to the pane on the right side of the window. Click on the file extension in that pane for a preview of a file.

To test the Kindle version in your Kindle Reader, click on "Click to open" next to Path and then double click the Mobi file, which should automatically open it in your Kindle Reader so you can double check the formatting and make any adjustments to your Word document before walking through the process again.

Your first time through, you'll probably notice things that the formatting picked up that you'd like done differently – things like funny line spacing or weird headings. As you get more familiar with the ways things convert from Word to those file formats, you'll be able to more quickly walk through the conversion process.

You can also use the Tweak Book tool (right click on the ebook title for this option) to edit the actual HTML and make small changes.

Like I said, this process isn't extremely difficult, and if you're a blogger and have a basic understanding of HTML and are comfortable using new technology, you will be able to figure it out. Only you can decide if that learning curve is worth your time and effort!

Piracy & Copyright Issues

As a blogger or writer, it can be tempting to fiercely protect the content that you've worked so hard on. Many people are hesitant to sell PDF copies of their ebook for this reason (because it can be more easily shared than a Kindle purchase made through Amazon).

I get it, but I also think it's important to take a broader view. While I'm not exactly giving away all of my content for free or giving up my copyright ([like Leo Babauto from Zen Habits](#)), I also don't spend a lot of time stressing about whether someone might share one of my recipes. First of all, I think most people are honest and I don't think they're just buying one \$3.99 ebook and passing copies around to all of their friends anyway. But secondly, the loss from people sharing pirated copies of your work is generally much less than the gain of people spreading your ideas.

I'm not the first or only person to take that view of it, and I love what [Tim O'Reilly says](#): "Obscurity is a far greater threat to authors and creative artists than piracy."

Similarly, at the end of one of his lengthier posts about [the free-rider benefit](#), Seth Godin says this: "On the other hand, once you can get your head (and your heart) around the idea that ideas that spread, win, there are significant opportunities in a digital world where it's easier than ever to help people go for a free ride."

Does that mean you shouldn't do anything to protect your work? No, I don't think so! But don't waste so much of your energy on worrying about and trying desperately to protect your rights that you lose sight of creative opportunities to share and spread them and ultimately build your brand and reputation!

Getting an ISBN for Your eBook

Another common question authors ask is whether they need an ISBN for their books. An ISBN is basically a unique number that identifies each of the different editions and formats of your book, which means that each edition technically needs its own number.

I'm open to hearing other opinions, but my feeling in general is that no, you don't need an ISBN. Amazon and BN.com actually offer unique identifiers of their own for every ebook listed on the site. From what I understand, you *will* need one to list with Apple.com, and I'm honestly not sure the expense (\$125 for one, or \$250 for *ten*, which just seems gimmicky to me!) is worth it just to be able to list in what is a relatively small platform at this point.

Note: Some mass conversion services, like eBookIt!, offer ISBNs free as part of their conversion package. I wouldn't turn one down if someone was giving me one!

Some people argue that having an ISBN makes an ebook seem more professional, but I'd argue that the design and content are more important than a silly number!

We have an ongoing thread in the forums about this question, and I'd love to hear your thoughts as well. [Click here to chime in.](#)

Either way, if you'd like to learn more about ISBNs or the purchasing process, you can visit [ISBN.org](#).

Getting a Formal Copyright for Your eBook

Did you know your words are actually copyrighted the minute you write them? In the United States, and most other countries, they are, and that's why your title page (and this goes for websites and blog posts too!) should always include the copyright symbol, the date of copyright and your name (or the copyright holder's name if it's different). That's how you actually claim your copyright.

Unfortunately, enforcing your copyright it isn't *quite* as easy, and while you'll hopefully never have the experience of having to aggressively protect your rights, it's relatively inexpensive to formally register your ebook with the [U.S. Copyright Office](#), and doing so provides extra protection and recourse under the law. You can register an ebook online for just \$35 through the [Electronic Copyright Office \(eCO\)](#).

Similarly, Canadian authors can [register copyrighted works](#) for additional legal protection.

On the other hand, authors in the United Kingdom (and many other countries) are [automatically granted copyrights](#) when they create an original work, and there is no additional registration necessary.

To find the copyright laws for your country, simple Google the country name and copyright law and look for the official government page for the copyright or intellectual property office.