



BarbaraBrabecProductions.com

Barbara Brabec's

Crash Course in How to Self-Publish a Book

Author's Guide to Understanding and Working in the Self-Publishing Industry

This comprehensive special report details your print-on-demand (POD) self-publishing options with perspective on eBook publishing—essentially a mini PDF book and summary of what Barbara has learned from years of first-hand experience, with tips from successful self-published authors and industry experts and links to the best resources for writers, authors, and self-publishers.

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THE CLIMATE FOR self-publishing has never been better than it is right now, and authors have more self-publishing power and control over their work than ever before. But many pitfalls await authors who don't fully understand all their publishing options or how the self-publishing industry operates and is continuing to evolve in response to changing technology.

Many web-based companies now offer services to authors who are looking for someone to publish their book, hooking them with ads on radio and television hawking, "We're looking for authors!" and promising to "publish your book and get it into bookstores." Oh yes, most of them will do everything for authors, including taking as much of their money as they can get their greedy hands on.

First-time authors in particular must be careful not to get suckered by one of these companies. This comprehensive report gives you the skinny on the self-publishing industry at large with details on each of its facets. It will save you hours of research on the web. It is presented in four parts:

PART I: [Your Print-on-Demand \(POD\) Self-Publishing Options](#) through IngramSpark/LightningSource and/or Amazon KDP

PART II: [Other POD Book Publishing Companies to Consider— or Avoid](#)

PART III: [Your eBook Publishing Options and Distribution Strategies](#) through KDP, Smashwords, Barnes & Noble, and more

PART IV: [Skills and Services Needed for Self-Publishing Success](#)

≈ PART I ≈

Your Print-on-Demand (POD) Self-Publishing Options through IngramSpark/LightningSource and or Amazon

SOMETHING THAT MAY NOT BE apparent to beginning authors who want to publish a print book is that there is a big difference between a “POD book printing service” and a “POD book publishing company.” Many of the self-publishing companies that have positioned themselves on the web as book publishers are nothing more than service providers who send their clients’ books somewhere else for printing (usually to Lightning Source), and then load the electronic file to online bookstores only.

Professional authors and independent publishers do not publish through companies posing as real book publishers but generally publish instead through one or both of the *two leading book publishing companies*: IngramSpark/Lightning Source and Amazon’s Kindle Direct Publishing, which [now incorporates CreateSpace](#).

IngramSpark/LightningSource

LIGHTNING SOURCE is the parent company of IngramSpark. Ingram is the largest distributor of books in the world, and Lightning Source, which has printing and distribution centers in several countries, does the POD printing for most of those books. [When you publish with either of them](#), your book will be available through Ingram Book Group, a leader in print and electronic wholesale and distribution serving over 39,000 retailers, libraries, schools, internet commerce companies and other channel partners including Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Chapters/Indigo (Canada), and other well-known retailers and wholesalers of books.

If you’ve written a good book description, you’ll sell some books with no effort on your part. If your book has a global market and you set your wholesale discount high enough, you may greatly increase your sales. The big benefit for me is that by publishing with Lightning Source or Ingram, someone can walk into their local bookstore and special-order one of my books.

Important: If you decide to publish with both Amazon and Ingram or Lightning Source, do not sign up for Amazon's expanded distribution channel. *Although you can use the same ISBN number for your book on both publishing sites, the bookstores option is operated by Lightning Source, which cannot handle a duplicate ISBN in this system.* Both publishers operate through the same book product page on Amazon, whose content you can control through Amazon's Author Central department. Most of Lightning Source's orders come through Ingram, but any orders that come through Amazon from Lightning Source's distributors are automatically forwarded to them for printing and shipment, with Amazon doing the printing and shipping for all other orders.

Regarding the duplicate ISBN number, in setting up the product page for my second memoir, which I first published through Lightning Source and then through Amazon's CreateSpace, Lightning Source advised me to simply de-select Amazon as part of its distribution process so there wouldn't be conflict between the two publishers.

Note that Lightning Source doesn't offer hand-holding services and prefers to work with larger or independent publishers. Authors are expected to study their how-to guidelines and send them properly formatted PDF documents for the book's text and cover. IngramSpark was established especially for self-publishers who want to save a little money by opening an account here, and they offer many helpful articles that replace the personal hand-holding we all like to get. Since I published my first memoir with Lightning Source before IngramSpark was launched, I'll stay with them even though their publishing cost is a little higher and the cost to order print books for my direct sales is much higher because you have to order a larger quantity to get the lowest price. That's why I'll also continue to publish a print edition through Amazon KDP.

For an interesting comparison of IngramSpark and Amazon KDP print book publishing, [read "IngramSpark vs. Amazon KDP"](#) on the IngramSpark website.

Note that Part III of this document provides detailed information on your eBook publishing options and marketing strategies for IngramSpark, Lightning Source, Amazon, and others that specialize in eBook printing and distribution.

Amazon/Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP)

IF SELLING ONLINE is your goal and you also want to be able to buy copies of your print book at the lowest price for resale, promo purposes, or gifts, [publishing through KDP](#) is probably the easiest and best way for most beginning self-publishers to go.

Amazon excels in writing detailed, easy-to-understand instructions for every phase of self-publishing, so all one has to do is read and follow instructions to learn the process. They offer templates, help in designing a book cover, calculators for determining royalties and printing costs, a cover generator, and more.

I liked the ease with which I was able to publish a book through CreateSpace. ([This page](#) explains that CreateSpace and KDP are basically one and the same, except for a few small differences discussed below.)

For my last book, I got hands-on help by phone when I ran into some PDF acceptance problems on CreateSpace, but I doubt that this service has been retained by KDP. I think one reason Amazon changed the way they publish print books was to get away from the need of having to give this kind of personal support in the future. As I see it, their approach now seems to be toward complete automation, and if you can't figure out something from their countless HELP pages on how to do this or that, it will be helpful to have an author friend who has figured it out and can help you. I remain hopeful that when I publish my next book through KDP that I'll have a satisfactory publishing experience.

Publishing through Amazon means your book will be available *only* through Amazon and all of its online bookstores in other countries. Of most interest to Americans will probably be their stores in Canada, the UK, and Japan. As explained above, KDP offers expanded distribution beyond their own online stores, *but don't choose this option if you plan to also publish through IngramSpark or Lightning Source.*

On Amazon, authors can order copies for review, gifts, or direct sales in any quantity for a flat selling price, whereas Lightning Source's price is dependent on quantity of books ordered. There, I found I needed to order fifty to a hundred books to get a price comparable to Amazon's price for twenty. Amazon royalties are based on a 60 percent discount off the list price minus shipping costs, and there are calculators to determine both figures in advance.

Quality of POD Printing. Amazon does its own POD printing, but the quality I got with my book published through CreateSpace was somewhat inferior to that of Lightning Source. The average reader won't notice the difference, but it's easy to see when you compare both print jobs by looking at them with a jeweler's eyepiece or a good magnifying glass. LS's covers are more vivid, and the resolution of text and any photos in a book is significantly sharper.

Bookstore Considerations

WHETHER YOU DECIDE to publish through KDP and/or Ingram/Lightning Source depends on whether you want your book listed in Ingram's database so bookstores, libraries, and other institutional buyers can order it. But don't dream of seeing your self-published book on the shelves of brick-and-mortar bookstores unless a bookstore buyer sees you as an "independent small publisher" and not a "self-published author." Of course you'll also be expected to set your wholesale prices to give bookstores a discount of at least 30 percent. * *But . . . sometimes to be able to offer a higher discount, a book has to be priced higher than it's likely to sell to consumers, and not every self-publisher can do this and make any money in royalties.*

** In working with Lightning Source for my [Drummer Drives memoir](#), I learned that I could offer just a 20 percent discount with no returns, which made sense to me since bookstores won't stock a POD book regardless of the discount given them. Lightning Source did fulfill a*

number of orders from bookstores, and interested buyers could still walk into any brick-and-mortar bookstore and ask to special-order this book and my second memoir as well.

Whether you can afford to work with brick-and-mortar bookstores in the first place will depend on how much you have to pay for books you order for your own needs. One of my author friends who is well known in her community got her local B&N bookstore and other outlets to let her do book signings, and she got them to take books on consignment by offering them a 30 percent discount for those sold through the store. But the self-publishing company she published with only gives her a 50 percent discount off the retail price, so she had little room for profit when she wholesaled them at a 30 percent discount. However, her books sold so well that in time B&N began to stock them and now buys books directly from their distributor. Of course this author has earned significantly more by selling autographed copies through local shows and speaking engagements.

Once you get into Ingram's database, you can indirectly sell a few books in bookstores and libraries if you can motivate your fan base to walk into a bookstore and special-order it or ask their local library to order a copy so they can read it free of charge.

Something both of these publishers need is a PDF file of the book manuscript that has been properly prepared for the particular size of the book you want to publish. For any pre-publication service you may need, see Part IV to contact freelance providers I've recommended.

Revising a Published Print Book

IT'S A SIMPLE PROCESS to upload a revised edition of a print or eBook published through Amazon/KDP; another thing entirely to publish a revised print edition through Ingram/Lightning Source. I learned the hard way that revising a book published only through LS means your product page on Amazon will show your book to be unavailable or out of stock for a long period of time—long enough for all the used-book sellers to move in with offers of your book at outrageous prices.

The bottom line for me is that I won't upload a new book to Lightning Source until I've proofed it to death and have decided to live with any errors or typos I may find later.

One truth self-publishers need to accept it this: No matter how many times you may proofread your book, or how many others may check it before publication, the first time you open your hot-off-the-press copy, it is almost guaranteed that you will suddenly be able to see some little typo (a dropped letter, missing or wrong punctuation error, etc.), a missed word or a wrong word, or some small formatting error. I have yet to meet an author who has self-published a perfect book. *May YOU be the exception!*

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Other POD Book Publishing Companies to Consider—or Avoid

BELOW YOU'LL FIND my recommendations for two other long-established book publishers you might want to consider if you need help in getting published:

- **Booklocker.** Your list of prospective POD publishers should include [Booklocker](#) because it has a [track record of success](#). Their stated goal is “to get a quality book into the market, with the lowest initial investment for an author, and usually within a month.”

Although I would not choose this publishing route, I like Booklocker and have great respect for its owner, Angela Hoy, not only for her accomplishments, but because she sued Amazon and won. The self-publishing industry changed in April 2008 when Amazon announced that in order for self-published authors to sell POD and regularly-printed books on its site, independent authors and publishers had to print their books using its BookSurge service. But Amazon's attempt to monopolize the entire POD industry failed when Booklocker issued a class action [antitrust lawsuit against Amazon](#) in July, 2008 and won that lawsuit in January 2010. Amazon then "retired" the BookSurge name and POD service and agreed to pay \$300,000 in attorney's fees. Later, BookSurge was simply replaced by CreateSpace, which has now been replaced with Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP). As you begin to see, nothing in the world of self-publishing stays the same for long with Amazon ruling the roost.

- **BookBaby.com.** [Bookbaby](#) is reportedly one of the better print and eBook self-publishing companies that you might want to compare to Amazon. (*I don't know anyone who has used their services, so I can't personally recommend them.*) They offer many standalone services, including copy editing and line editing, book cover design, and eBook conversions. Their [short-run book printing service](#) for businesses and organizations creates softcover and hardcover books of all kinds and offer two types of printing: traditional offset printing, or digital (POD) printing. The first is recommended for book runs of a thousand or more, while digital printing means you can order from one to a thousand books.

ONCE YOU DECIDE YOU NEED to work with a self-publishing service company, you'll need to do diligent research. To compare their services and costs, do a spreadsheet that lists their basic package charge (if there is one), plus what they are charging for all the extras (such as editing, cover design, marketing, etc.), and what their royalties and discounts are.

For ideas on how to structure your own worksheet to select the best self-publishing company for you, check this online [“Incomplete Guide to Print on Demand Publishers.”](#) Although it hasn't been updated since 2013, it's a good illustration of how to structure your own worksheet.

A good place to start for information on publishers not discussed herein is [“The 17 Best Self-Publishing Companies of 2021”](#) on Reedsy.com, which offers connections to many freelance professionals you may need, including editors, designers, publicists, web designers, and more.

MAKE SURE the company you decide to work with does not demand exclusive rights to publish and distribute your book, and be sure you understand all the fine print and legalese in the publishing contract. Before you sign on the dotted line, know how you can eventually sever this publishing relationship and get your rights back.

Money Considerations

A FEW OUTSTANDING self-publishing companies offer complete publishing and marketing packages to authors who need help with every aspect of the publication process, but these packages can get very pricey (\$3,500 and up). Before you sign a contract with one of them, consider my affordable Book Contract Consulting Service. I’ve saved some authors thousands of dollars and a lot of grief by critiquing their author-publisher book contract and pointing out financial pitfalls and intellectual rights problems and why self-publishing may be a better option for them.

For a good example of what I mean, check out the [customer complaints for Christian Faith Publishing](#) on the Better Business Bureau website. This is a highly regarded Christian self-publishing company, but I have two Christian author friends who were extremely dissatisfied with their experience with this company. For a while, one seriously contemplated filing a lawsuit; both are now planning to self-publish when their present contract expires. *Understand that these comments are only to suggest that authors don’t have as much control here—or with any self-publishing company—as they would like.*

As an author's consultant, part of my job is to help an author decide how to publish their book and avoid the pitfalls so many other beginning authors have experienced. I've now helped several first-time authors publish independently by sharing what I've learned and then referring them to trusted freelance service providers in my network that will give them personal attention and a guarantee of satisfaction (something I don't see any of the self-publishing companies offering). *In all cases, authors who work with independent service providers can self-publish for much less than what they would have to pay to any self-publishing company for the same services.* But saving money is only one of the benefits enjoyed by independent self-publishers.

When you publish independently—doing it all yourself or with the help of freelancers—YOU are the publisher named in the book (not the self-publishing company). YOU retain complete control of the book and its ISBN number and the book’s selling price, and YOU keep 100 percent of the profits and can increase those profits by publishing an eBook edition that will yield 60-70 percent of its retail, which is much more than any self-publishing service offers. As your own publisher, you can also get into the same marketing channels offered by the self-publishing companies.

Most self-publishers today figure that the bulk of their sales will come primarily from Amazon and other online bookstores and that, to sell a book online, they must learn how to promote it on their own website or blog and/or through social networking, word of mouth, public speaking, or paid ads.

But not all authors want or need to sell a book online or set up a website to promote it. Some authors make most of their money from a print book by going on the road with it or selling it in their workshops or speaking engagements. This was the route I took in the 80s and 90s before the Internet changed the world. In those days I used offset printers to publish two of my early home-business books and some directories for sale by mail and at workshops and home-business conferences and sold thousands of copies that way. If you plan to do a lot of public speaking with back-of-the-room sales, you might want to publish with Amazon and/or Ingram as well as ordering a supply of books from an offset printer that can use the same PDF document you'd load to Amazon, Ingram, or Lightning Source.

Short-Run Book Printing Companies

THE COMPANY I USED in my mail-order days was [McNaughton and Gunn](#), a printer/publisher that specializes in short to medium print runs. I highly recommend this company because they always shipped when promised and gave me beautifully printed paperback editions at a low price that enabled me to make a hefty profit on every book I sold. They also had an affordable book fulfillment service that was a blessing to me and my husband when he was no longer physically able to help me by wrapping and delivering books to the post office. If you only want a few copies of a personal book (memoir, poetry, collection of stories, etc.) that you can give to your family and perhaps sell to a few friends, here are three other book printers you might want to check out:

- [DiggyPod.com](#). An author friend who helped one of her friends with Parkinson's get her first 96-page book of poetry published told me how satisfied she and her friend were with this company's service and printing. (*I bought a copy of that book, and the printing is excellent.*) Even with sales tax included, the cost to buy copies of this book was only \$3.45 cents, and shipping was free because the author ordered a hundred copies. She later published a second book with them, and her third book is in progress. (*You can get an instant quote online.*) This company also offers traditional self-publishing services, and their site includes a number of articles that may add to your overall self-publishing education.
- [48HourBooks.com](#). Their FAQ page will answer your questions. Basically, here you can order as few as 10 books and get 25 extra books if you order a hundred or more.
- [C-M Books \(Cushing-Malloy, Inc.\)](#). One of the first book printers on the scene in 1948, this family-owned company offers offset and digital printing of books (request an online quote [here](#).) You'll need to upload a PDF copy of your book, and if you can't provide it, they offer a PDF conversion program you can download from [PromoPdf.com](#) and use to create the document needed for printing with them. (*I did a lot of research trying to find a free professional PDF conversion program before I turned up this service provider. It must be pretty good if this book printing company is recommending it to their clients.*)

Self-Publishing Companies to Avoid

FIRST, A FEW WORDS about [Lulu.com](#). While Lulu is a reputable company that has helped countless authors in many countries to publish a book, this book publisher is not recommended to professional authors who need a beautifully designed book to sell. A couple of my author friends who lacked skills, software, and money told me that Lulu was a perfect solution for them, but they planned to sell their books direct to individuals. *It appears that most of the books sold by Lulu are to the authors who have published through them—which basically makes them a vanity press.* In searching for [complaints against Lulu publishing](#), I turned up this informative article on Quora.com. Although not a complaint, it does offer reasons why professional writers avoid them. *(Scroll down to find the comments from Ben Waggoner, which offers excellent guidance in what self-published authors need to know.)*

I turn my focus now on some book publishing companies with a reputation for ripping off authors. Thousands of authors have been caught and left in limbo when their self-publishing company stopped paying royalties, wouldn't answer emails, or simply vanished.

Unfortunately, the self-publishing explosion gave birth to many POD publishers, some of whom have racked up many complaints from unhappy authors. Some have renamed themselves as a result and continue to operate the same old way, while others have simply gone out of business, leaving authors in the lurch. [This article](#) by Angela Hoy, owner of Booklocker, offers insight on what happens to authors when a POD publisher goes out of business.

A few years ago I learned that five companies to avoid were owned by the same company: [Author Solutions](#). They included Authorhouse, iUniverse, Tate Publishing, Trafford Publishing, and Xlibris. What all of them had in common (then and still) were hundreds of consumer complaints and a few thousand web pages on this topic. The law finally caught up with Tate Publishing in 2017 and put them out of business, leaving many authors without access to their books. This article discusses that problem and what the state did to help those authors: [Tate Publishing victims might get their works back.](#)"

Tate Publishing may be gone, but you'll still find the others on the web today. To learn about the complaints against these companies—or any other self-publishing company you may be considering—simply type the publisher's name, a plus sign, and the word "complaints" into a search engine. You'll be astonished by how many authors have documented their sad publishing experiences with each of the above companies. In fact, the last time I checked, Author Solutions had more than 46 million web pages connecting its name to the word "complaint." *Be careful.*

Believe it or not . . . Author Solutions was bought by the world-renowned Penguin Group in 2012. Mark Coker, owner of Smashwords, wrote about this [in one of his newsletters](#), wondering why this traditional publisher paid \$116 million for a self-publishing company that, as he put it, "... put the 'V' in vanity and earns 2/3 or more of their income selling services and books to authors, not selling authors' books to readers."

If you plan to publish eBooks (*see next section*), be sure to subscribe to Coker's newsletters using the subscribe box on the above linked page. You'll get some remarkable writing and self-publishing perspective here even if you decide not to publish a Smashwords edition of your eBook.

For more information on scams and schemes to watch out for, check the [Information Center for Authors](#) and the "Writer's Beware" department on the website of Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America ([SFWA](#)).

Also read "[Authors Beware: Scams and Publishing Companies to Avoid](#)" (on Reedsy.com) and "[Self-Publishing & Vanity Publishing: Confuse Them and Pay the Price](#)" (on theWorld'sGreatestBook.com).

IN SUMMARY . . . Like the mail order con artists back in the day that were closed down by U.S. postal inspectors but simply opened up somewhere else under a new name, today's scam artists in the world of self-publishing services either change their names and website URLs or continue to operate as long as they can stay ahead of all the consumer complaints they're racking up.

Another example of this is America Star Books (ASB), formally named PublishAmerica / ASB Promotions. [This article \("Lawsuits, Liens ..."\) explains that PublishAmerica changed its name in 2014](#) because of so many author complaints. In 2017, [PublishAmerica/ASB vanished](#) without terminating authors' contracts or releasing their rights, and some of their books are still for sale on Amazon. This article explains legal options available to authors published by this company.

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≈ PART III ≈

Your eBook Publishing Options and Distribution Strategies through KDP, Smashwords, Barnes & Noble, and More

MANY FIRST-TIME AUTHORS, especially those with a small footprint on the web, would benefit by publishing an eBook edition before going to the expense of publishing a print book. First, except for any expenses related to turning a manuscript into a styled book file for conversion, you can publish an eBook without cost. Second, an eBook gives the author a chance to test the market for the book and begin to understand the kind of promotion it needs if it's going to find its market.

Deciding on which book publisher to use will take some time and research on your part. First understand that there is a difference between the *retailers* who sell eBooks and the *aggregators* that both publish and distribute your eBook to their distributors. An eBook aggregator publishes your eBook but doesn't sell it themselves. Instead, they simply *distribute it* to the eBook retailers with whom they

have a relationship (such as Amazon, Apple, B&N, and more), and then they keep track of your sales and royalties from multiple channels of distribution and take a small percentage of your sales.

Each eBook publisher and retailer has its own distribution list, and a visit to each of their websites will provide a list of them. I've included some of them in my discussion below, and you'll find [a good list of the best self-publishing companies](#) on Kindlepreneur.com. This site, owned by Dave Chesson, offers some of the most helpful posts for eBook publishers that I've found. For example, [this post](#), titled "How to Get Free Book Reviews with No Blog, No List, and No Begging," will prove my point. Many others will be found in the site's archives. (With your subscription, you can get his free *Kindle Ranking eBook*.)

Understand that distribution isn't the same as marketing. David Wogahn has published this excellent article, "[2021 Decision Guide for Evaluating eBook Distribution Options](#)," that will answer many questions you may have about eBook publishing. (First published in 2019 on [DavidWogahn.com](#) and updated in 2021 on [AuthorImprints.com](#).)

Comparing Amazon, Smashwords, and Barnes & Noble

I BROKE INTO eBook publishing in 2012 by publishing three of my books as Kindle, Nook, and/or Smashwords editions. But I won't publish again on Barnes & Noble for reasons given below.

- [KDP](#). Amazon has now made it very easy to publish a beautiful eBook with their free [Kindle Create program](#). Simply write and format your book in Microsoft *Word*, then download the free program for your PC or Mac and add the finishing touches. (I haven't tried this program yet, but it looks promising.) It includes professionally designed themes with font choices, decorative chapter titles, drop caps, and image placement options. It also automatically creates a Table of Contents. [Royalties on Kindle books](#) have long been 35 percent for books priced under \$2.99 and 70 percent for books priced \$2.99 and up. But Amazon's List Price Requirements now indicate that if you price your eBook higher than \$9.99, your royalty rate will drop back to 35 percent.

NOTE: I like to format my own eBooks, and after Amazon began to accept appropriately styled Word docs for a Kindle eBook, I found I could simply load my formatted book as a "web page, filtered" Word doc. Except for the headlines, whose style I needed to modify a bit the first time I tried this, the book converted perfectly.

Once you have a book product page on Amazon, you can take control of the content on it by taking advantage of Amazon's [Author Central program](#), which enables authors to keep their BIO updated and link book readers to their blog. The "Look inside the Book" feature is a big sales assist and it now comes automatically within five days after the book has been published.

One caveat: As you're loading your book for publication, *pay attention to the quantity of content you approve for the preview so you don't give too much of your book away*. Find a point to stop that will make readers want to get more.

Here's something else to think about: Should you publish your book exclusively with Amazon KDP Select or distribute it to all eBook retailers? Some authors have found financial benefits to this route for 90 days before distributing a book to as wide a market as possible. For great perspective on this topic, read this post on the Reedsy blog: ["Read THIS Before You Enroll in KDP Select."](#) You'll find another interesting discussion of the pros and cons of each choice [here on CreateIfWriting.com.](#)

- [Smashwords.](#) According to late 2019 statistics, Smashwords had published more than half a million eBooks, more than 80,000 of them offered free. I suspect that the most popular sellers on Smashwords are novels priced between \$2.99 and \$9.99. They pay 80 percent royalties on books sold through their store; 60 percent for all other sales. To publish here, you need to submit an EPUB file or a styled *Word* document that has been formatted to Smashwords specific instructions.

Mark Coker, founder of Smashwords, annually publishes his predictions on what has changed or is likely to change each year in the world of eBook publishing, including perspective on the book publishing industry as a whole. In his 2021 report, ["Pandemic Reshapes Publishing, Accelerates Consolidation,"](#) he stated:

"Say goodbye to 70% ebook royalties. Yes, every major retailer will continue to offer 70% list (60-80% if you work through Smashwords), yet effective royalty rates will drop. The drop will come in the form of hidden tolls, taxes and so-called 'opportunities,' such as the opportunity to raise the visibility of your book by paying the retailer for visibility; or by discounting the book to appear in a feature or special catalog; or discounting the book so that it can appear in a subscription service that can only list lower priced books that don't break their business model."

I've had no luck with sales of a couple of little eBooks on Smashwords and don't plan to publish there in future, but Smashwords distribution is unequalled. They sell a lot of books in their own store and also distributes to Apple Books (which has stores in 51 countries), Barnes & Noble, Scribd, Kobo, Tolino, Blio, and Gardners (a leading wholesaler). Smashwords' amazing library distribution program also includes OverDrive (world's largest library ebook platform reaching 20,000+ libraries); Axis 360 (Baker & Taylor's digital media circulation platform); Bibliotheca CloudLibrary (3,000 public libraries); Odilo (2,100 public libraries in North America, South America and Europe); and Califa's Enki (powers ebook checkout systems for over 100 California libraries).

One thing Smashwords doesn't offer is digital rights management (DRM) protection. Not every book needs this, and while it's a Kindle and Nook option, many readers hate it; yet this is something to consider. (You'll find many pro/con discussions about this on the web.)

Because so many books published on Smashwords are FREE or \$.99, sales of a book priced higher than \$4.99 may be harder to sell here unless you have a book with great reader appeal, a powerful presence on your own website, and/or skill in social networking. But you could also promote other books and services, too, by publishing free eBooks that link to your website or blog where they will find other

books available. One benefit of publishing on Smashwords is that they offer files to fit every eBook reader: EPUB, Mobi, TXT, RFT, LRF, and PDF.

I admire Mark Coker and subscribe to his highly informative blog posts. Below, an encouraging clip from ["The Ebook as Annuity"](#) that spoke to my heart:

"In the new world of eBook publishing, there are no advances, but your book never goes out of print either. Thanks to the scalability and efficiency of online retailing, the digital bits and bytes that comprise your ebook can happily occupy an online retailer's shelf forever if you let it. Your book is immortal. You always have another day to find your next readers. You harvest your income over time as the book sells.

"Your book-as-an-annuity will very likely produce some level of income for you for the rest of your life. All you need to do is keep the book in stores."

- [Barnes & Noble Nook Books](#). I became disgusted with B&N/Nook's program for a couple of reasons. I have three eBooks on B&N, but I won't be directly publishing there again.

Unlike Amazon, Barnes & Noble gives the author little control over how a book's product page looks. To see what I mean, simply compare the difference in the appearance of the product page for any book on both sites. Only a snippet of editorial reviews show on a B&N product page, and the layout of their web pages lack imagination and design. Simply put, B&N doesn't seem to have any of Amazon's marketing savvy or website design skills, and this is reflected on their poorly designed product pages that also lack sales rank info and a link on the author's name to a the author's BIO page. Although they once had a ["Look Inside" option for my memoir](#), it's not there now.

*Worse, B&N has never figured out how to tie the two editions of my first memoir together on the product page, even though they asked for this information in the publishing process. I published *The Drummer Drives!* for the Nook in November 2012, but today this book still has two product pages on B&N, and anyone landing on one or the other hasn't a clue that another edition of the book is available. What was really annoying to me was that on the print book's product page, B&N was initially asking readers to request that this book be made available as an eBook long after I had uploaded the eBook file and told them there was a print edition on their site. I thus concluded that their right hand didn't know what the left was doing. (The only way to know if one edition of a book has another edition is to click the author's name on the product page, which does link to a page that shows all books that author has on the B&N site.)*

All eBook authors need to promote their eBooks on their own website, blog, or social networking pages, but a big point I had against NOOK books was that they didn't allow the author to include external links in them; only hyperlinks to content within the eBook itself. Maybe they've now changed this policy, but if not, it completely defeats a main goal of an eBook, which is to link the reader to the author's website or blog to learn about other books, products, or services, or just to read related articles or blog posts. At least Smashwords allows external links. And have you noticed that almost no one writes reviews for books on B&N?

B&N was in a state of transition in 2015, so self-publishers will have to decide if it's worth their time to create an eBook conversion specifically for this site when other publishers automatically distribute to it. According to a May 7, 2018 opinion article on the *New York Times* website noted that Nook sales had plummeted, and he opined, "It's plausible that Barnes & Noble will not survive." [This 2019 article, updated in March 2021,](#) compares Amazon to Barnes & Noble, indicating that "the Nook is almost out of the count." (There are comments about Smashwords in this article too.)

Comparing Smashwords, Draft2Digital, and Publish Drive

DAVE CHESSON of [Kindlepreneur.com](#) offers a great comparison of these three eBook publishers and distributors, (aggregators) in his article, ["Smashwords vs. Draft2Digital vs. PublishDrive."](#) It provides all the specifics you need to know to choose the one that's best for you. There are no upfront costs with any of them; two will take 15 percent of your sales; the other 10 percent. ("PublishDrive is more costly," says Chesson, and of the three he votes for Draft2Digital.) I like Chesson's comparative lists of where books are distributed and his handy links to each site.

As for [Draft2Digital](#), a friend with little experience in formatting a *Word* document for an eBook gave me a glowing review on how easy Draft2Digital made this for her. They formatted her manuscript the way they thought it would look best and then gave her the option to make any changes desired. Her book included many photos, and they inserted them where she indicated they should be placed. In other words, she got a lot of hands-on service from this eBook aggregator.

But this company won't work for anyone who wants to control the design of their eBook. D2D accepts only Word documents or files Word can read, but in their EPUB conversion process they will strip your manuscript of all fonts, spacing, indents, etc. and then completely redesign the book, giving it a working Table of Contents, page breaks between chapters, and custom end matter. They "... guarantee that anything we produce will pass Epubcheck, meaning it meets the technical standards for all of our digital stores."

[Smashwords](#) and [PublishDrive](#), on the other hand, require special formatting the author must do. I have experience in using Smashword's *Style Guide*, which drove me nuts the first time I published a little eBook there. Yes, it clearly explains all the tedious special formatting an author must do to make a *Word* doc acceptable to its "meatgrinder" converter, but I did that only once before I learned that the easy way to publish here is simply to upload an ePub file. ([Read this article for perspective on the "meatgrinder" and tips for easier publishing through Smashwords, and see below for how to create an ePub file.](#))

Although Amazon dominates the eBook industry, you now see that you have several other eBook publishing options available to you.

How to convert a Word doc to an ePub file. If you need to convert a *Word* doc to ePub format, you can find free online converters by searching for "Word to ePub converter." In doing this I turned up some converters you might want to check out:

- [Microsoft's Store](#) offers a free download of their Word to ePub Converter. "Word to EPub Converter can convert a Word file (docx or doc) directly into an ePub format ebook!"
- [Convertio](#) offers DOC (WORD) to EPUB Converter. "Convert your doc files to epub online & free."
- [Zamzar](#) Online File Conversion. "Convert DOC To EPUB—Online And Free."

A few Words about Calibre: Many articles on the web are still recommending Calibre as a good eBook conversion program, and I used it years ago to do annual updates to one of my eBooks until Amazon stopped accepting their AZW Kindle conversions. Their conversions lack digital rights management (DRM) protection; further, the latest Kindle reader will not read any eBook conversions readers may have done just to get a book on their Kindle, and Amazon no longer accepts Mobi file conversions.

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≈ PART IV ≈

Skills and Services Needed for Self-Publishing Success

EACH POD BOOK PRINTER has its own specifications and requirements for how text pages and cover images must be designed and submitted for printing, but not all authors follow them carefully enough or have the technical skills to do what is required. As I learned from a spokesperson for one of the companies on the web that helps authors get into print, there is always something significantly wrong with most "camera-ready" books they receive from new authors:

"There are errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation," this person said. "Or the author-turned-layout-artist has left floating headers on blank pages. Or the margins are much too tight. Or the images are too low-resolution for print. If we published one of these books 'as is,' the book would look amateurish and no one would buy it."

Although many writers have the computer software to do the design and layout of their own books, few may have all the skills needed to do a professional job. No writer, however capable, should publish a book that hasn't been professionally edited. As a professional editor who has always edited her own work, I don't need copy or content editing now, but after I've done extensive rewriting to refine my books and have proofread them to death, I still need help with proofreading. Although I can see the errors other writers make, it's extremely difficult for me to catch all my own typos, missed words, or wrong word usages. *No writer can see all of his or her own writing errors.* Trust me on this. (See my ["Editing Checklist of Common Writing Errors"](#) for the "why" of this and the kind of errors writers commonly make that they can easily fix themselves to lower their editing costs.)

Without question, most authors—especially first-time authors—also need help with cover design, as well as the interior design of the book itself (selection of typefaces, layout, graphic illustrations in the text, and so on). Granted, many of the publishing companies on the web who are serving the self-publishing industry offer editing and cover design services, but their cover designs are based on standard templates (nothing very creative here), and the editing offered is bare-bones at best—usually nothing more than basic copy editing, when in fact every manuscript by a first-time author I've ever edited has needed a great deal of content (developmental) editing as well.

A manuscript may be poorly structured or formatted, or have choppy or incomplete sentences, clumsy dialogue, or paragraphing that needs improvement. Sometimes quoted material has been used improperly or illegally. A good freelance editor will bring such matters to the author's attention, whereas a "quick and dirty" copy edit by a company whose only concern is how much the author is paying them for this service couldn't care less. *Most of the self-publishing companies will publish any manuscript that comes their way, whether it has merit or not.*

Lulu is one of those companies. My thoughts on this company were included in Part II (in the short-run book printers section), but here I want to talk about their free editing. This sounds good if you have no money to spare, but the following note from one of my editor friends will tell you how important it is to start with a properly edited and formatted manuscript to get a good-looking book from this or any book publishing company:

"I received a book published by Lulu, and it looks AWFUL. It has TWO spaces between sentences and a sans serif font for the text (never should be done) that is almost unreadable, and the leading is all off. Lines are crammed together like sardines. What a travesty! They also have her name in the left-page header where the book title should be. *Unheard of.* Also no drop caps. There are also straggling lines (widows and orphans) on almost every page. And the paragraph indent is way too big. I thought Lulu was better than this. Obviously, I was wrong."

After your book manuscript has been edited and you've decided whether you're going to publish a POD book, eBook, or both, you'll need a good cover design, and if you're doing a print edition, you'll also need affordable book design/typesetting and a PDF file conversion service or the software to do this yourself. I'm no longer accepting editing jobs because I want more time for my own writing, but I'm always interested in [critiquing book manuscripts](#), a prepublication step that has saved many authors a considerable amount of money when it comes to the editing process. I help writers see all the problems in a book that they can fix before the copy editing process begins. For whatever help you may need beyond the services I offer, see next section.

If you feel you must work with one of the self-publishing companies on the web—and there are some good reasons for doing this if the company is a good one—it's still best to work with a freelance editor whose editing will be far more comprehensive than that of any self-publishing service you may be considering.

REMEMBER: *If your first book isn't well written and professionally edited and produced, no one will buy your second.*

Valuable Writing-Publishing Resources

(In alphabetical order)

- [Bryan Cohen's Amazon Ad School](#)—A Step-by-Step Walkthrough and Strategy Guide. [James Dillehay](#), a long-time self-publishing author friend who has been a great help and encouragement to me, told me in late 2021 that he has taken this course and benefited greatly from it. “Most of the authors write fiction, but some do non-fiction,” he said. “The training is tedious and requires long waiting periods in order to gather data that reveals which categories and search terms bring in sales (each book has different data). My results were so good, I bought the advanced mastermind coaching program for around \$800. It paid for itself within a few weeks.”

James added that Cohen also offers a free [5-Day Ad Course on Facebook](#), which is what James started with before advancing to the main course (\$397) and finally the mastermind program. *(The free course is offered four times a year, and [this link on Cohen's Facebook page](#) should enable you to access it then.)*

“Whether the program will work for all authors in all genres, I cannot say. But there was a wide enough variety of authors who have increased their net royalties. Even so, I don't recommend it to anyone who wants fast results or who can't look at ad data spreadsheets without fainting.”

Caveat: James did point out one downside here that he hadn't foreseen: “Amazon bills me for ads every two weeks but doesn't pay royalties for two months, so scaling up to my current level of sales success caused difficult cash flow problems for a while.”

- [Rob Eagar](#) (startawildfire.com) is an author's consultant who offers e-courses and three “Author's Guide” marketing eBooks you can get free by signing up on his website. Also note his free author tips and resources and his blog, which has an archive of many enticing articles I wish I had time to read. But one in particular caught my attention since it addresses a problem every author has: how to write a good book product page. “Anatomy of an Attractive Book Description,” part one of four articles, [starts here](#).

- [John Matthew Fox](#), (theJohnFox.com) an award-winning author and editor who calls himself “Bookfox,” is one of my favorite sources for writing inspiration. His website is loaded with the kind of resources writers and authors need for success, but what I appreciate most are his instructive posts, which read like stories that are as entertaining as they are thought provoking. If you check out his [Resources for Writers](#) and subscribe to his blog posts, I think you'll quickly become one of his fans too.

- [Joel Friedlander](#) (theBookDesigner.com) is the author of several books for self-publishers and a popular speaker and blogger. His website offers a wealth of free articles in a couple dozen categories, all of them for writers who want to write better and self-publishers who want to publish a better book.

- [David Gaughran](http://davidgaughran.com) (davidgaughran.com) is a leader in the self-publishing industry who has helped thousands of authors self-publish their work via his workshops, blog, and books. I haven't read his books yet, but I've found his blog posts to be very informative and helpful.
- [Aaron Shepard](http://aaronsherp.com) (aaronsherp.com) is a prolific author and publisher who blazed a trail for self-publishers for many years. In 2009 when I was writing my first memoir for self-publication and trying to get a grip on how the self-publishing world had changed, I was fortunate to connect with his website and books for self-publishers. From one of them (*Perfect Pages*), I learned how to design and style my two memoirs in Word and also maximize sales on Amazon. Shepard closed [his old publishing blog](#) but left access to some of the old posts for historic purposes. For Shepard's ongoing discussions, he recommends joining the [business and marketing oriented group](#) for print-on-demand and electronic publishers.

Publishing Services

- [Designrr eBook Creator](#). If you'd like to be able to easily create eBooks and reports from content you've already written (website, blog posts, Microsoft Word, Google Docs, PDFs, etc.), check out this program. I find the technology here fascinating. A video on the site illustrates how easy it appears to be, and you can't beat the price: \$27 buys you a lifetime of use.
- [LibreOffice](#). This highly rated free shareware program mimics Microsoft Word and in many respects its writer word processor is reportedly better than the latest version of Word. It reads Word docs and can save docs either in Word or its own special ODT format. It does PDF and ePub conversions, neither of which has DRM (digital rights management), but it was a great solution for me to be able to quickly create (and update as necessary) all the PDF docs on this website.
- [Carrie Peters](http://MonarchCottages.com) (MonarchCottages.com) is my Webmaster, friend, and a writer who understands how authors think. She designed my current WordPress site and has done other sites for me and several of my author clients. Recently she branched out to do very affordable eBook and print book covers through her [Cheeky Covers site](#), which also offers graphics for Facebook ads, teasers, and banners. Carrie is a delight to work with, and I highly recommend all of her services.
- [Lisa Vento](http://LisaVento.com) (LisaVento.com). Lisa is a gifted graphic designer, art director, and illustrator with 40 years' experience in the advertising industry. In recent years her focus has been on helping other authors self-publish their books (see her book cover portfolio [HERE](#)). She also creates logos and other advertising aids. Lisa designed the [cover of my second memoir](#) and also [this book](#) by a friend of mine not showing in her portfolio. She's easy to work with, and I highly recommend her services.

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ISBN stands for "International Standard Book Number." This is the identification number used by booksellers, libraries, book wholesalers and retailers. Each edition of a published book needs an ISBN number. That is, the print edition of your book

will have one ISBN number and your eBook another. And the same ISBN number can be used for an ePub book that is widely distributed to many retailers.

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- [Bowker Identifier Services](#). Bowker is the only company in the United States authorized to administer the ISBN program, and the only one who can authorize third-party sellers like Amazon to sell ISBN numbers. Here you can buy one ISBN number (currently \$125), or a package of ten, which serious self-publishers will find more practical and affordable (currently \$295—sometimes on sale for \$250). A barcode is not included in this price but is available for a small extra charge. *(A search of the web will turn up many ways to generate a free barcode, which is what my book cover designers do for me.)*

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- [Publisher Services](#): Official US ISBN Agency Channel Partner. I'm not recommending this provider for professional self-publishers, but they do offer a choice of ISBN/barcode packages that may be perfect for authors who plan to publish only one or two books.

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- [Library of Congress Control Number \(LCCC\)](#). In addition to an ISBN number you should get a preassigned catalog control number, which is a unique identification number that the Library of Congress assigns to the catalog record created for each book in its cataloged collections. Librarians use it to locate a specific Library of Congress catalog record in the national databases. These numbers are preassigned

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