

Creating Ebooks

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Smashwords Edition

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www.paul-hurst.com

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My thanks to Richard Green, a graphic artist specialising in book cover design and book trailers for the cover:

<http://www.richardkgreen.com>

Introduction

Ebooks - some authors hate them. Baroness P.D. James, president of the Society of Authors, finds ebooks 'unattractive'. Many authors and readers much prefer the look, feel and even smell of a physical book. Some technophobes just hate them on principal whilst others, particularly those of us somewhat longer in the tooth can find the whole subject rather intimidating.

JK Rowling refused to consider letting any of her work be offered in this format until April 2011, in spite of clamouring from fans. But if you knew where to look on line, all seven of her books could be found quite easily, available as electronic downloads - and all free. The reality is that her fans wanted her books in this form, and made it happen unofficially where no official option was available. I had a quick look at one of the pirate versions, and the quality of the scanning was pretty grim. No-one really gained. Readers got a poor quality product; the author was left appearing to be like King Canute trying to hold back the waves.

But I was fortunate to be one of the first to beta test her 'Pottermore' site. Wow! Perhaps she had this in mind all along. The site gives a lot more free information to fans (including the opportunity to be 'given' a bespoke wand and sorted into a house (Ravenclaw, yay!), based on profiling tests. It is exactly what she promised, a chance for her to give back something to her readers.

As a musician, I felt proud that it was musicians who started charity events such as Band Aid whilst the politicians just talked. As an author, I'm also pleased that this new site not only gives back so much to readers, but also allows a direct connection to be made. Publishers have only themselves to blame if they now start finding themselves left out of the loop. Entirely self-inflicted.

We don't all need to take things to such a level, probably can't afford to anyway! But we can all at the very least set up a web site to give readers more background

information on our subject, with a low pressure option to buy more if they want to. Think of it as a market stall where we can display all our wares and offer free samples. And we can also let our readers sign up for advance warning of free books, discount offers and general updates.

Ebooks also let us quickly and conveniently access a lot of old books. As well as the many out of copyright books free to download from Amazon, Project Gutenberg and other sites offer oodles of the little beasties, - all free and ripe for the plucking. I've stuffed my Kindle with all sorts of books that I've always wanted to read, as well as many I have never heard of before but which had fascinating titles. Some have led me on to yet more books and authors. It was by downloading a range of works by A.A. Milne that I discovered his wide output - including war poetry.

A translation of a Roman book has given me a cracking idea for a possible novel. I'll probably never get round to it, but you never know! And I love being able to carry a library with me at all times, to dip into and browse when the mood takes me or at any suitable opportunity. It's also easy enough to search through them. How often have you thought of a quote, or details from a book, but can't remember just which book it was in? I can look through my entire collection instantly, try that in a library!

So, big deal. Some love them, others don't. What opportunities are there for you, apart from the general ones outlined above? Huge ones - it has never been easier to write your own book, and to distribute it directly to the market. The new author-controlled websites allow a direct link between writer and reader.

I've been adding to this guide as my own experience unfolds. Do please come back and check for updated versions, I'll add new links and share what works, and what does not, as I find out! I've used links quite extensively because of the changeable nature of this format (one reason I love it so much!). Whenever you click through to them, you'll get the latest version.

I've hosted a few more details here that you may find of interest:

<http://www.paul-hurst.com/help-for-writers.html>

Chapter 1: Why write your own ebook?

There are three main problems with writing a book - getting it written, making it available and telling the right people that it is out there. Deciding to go for an ebook rather than a printed version makes all three stages a whole lot easier. Anyone with a computer can create and format a file suitable for conversion, I'll tell you three different ways to get the file converted and ready for download, and later on, I'll point you to another free ebook that will explain ways to let the world know about your book

If you've always wanted to write a book, then an ebook will let you scratch that particular itch without the effort and stress of trying to find an agent or publisher, or the cost of publishing it yourself. I speak from experience on both of these options.

It enables you to float as much or as little of it as you want to friends and family, or on forums, to get feedback and test the waters. It may even allow you to build up a fan base of those willing to buy the material in a full ebook. Or even in a more solid form. After all, you already have the words ready - just add paper. By then, you will probably have had a few typos and errors pointed out to you, and you may also have made changes, additions and revisions. It is a lot easier to simply replace an ebook, rather than any printed earlier edition.

The industry, I am reliably informed, has changed greatly - and not to the benefit of fresh hopeful new author. Publishers now want safe bets and dead certs. They favour books similar to those that are already selling well, and established writers. Come to them as an unknown - especially if you are writing in a niche area - and the odds are very much stacked against you. Even if you are accepted, there will be quite a delay before the first book rolls off the press, and the flat, cheap 'fizz' and wilted sarnies are wheeled out at the launch party.

It is much quicker, easier and cheaper to create an electronic book rather than a paper one, and modern communications enable you to communicate directly with your target market. If you do make massive sales of your own then agents and publishers may even start chasing you. Even if you find that the world is not quite ready for your literary masterpiece you will probably not be greatly out of pocket. And at least you had a go.

If you do decide to self-publish a printed book and sell it through Amazon, be prepared for them to take an eye watering chunk of the income. After the cost of posting the book to them, the discount you are obliged to offer on the sale price and their cut you may end up with only pennies, barely in profit.

Sell the book yourself and you'll obviously do better, but you still have to handle the packaging and posting - and the risk that the book is being mugged or mutilated in the process. But sell an ebook and all becomes sweetness and light. No stock worries, no P&P, greater commissions. Do it right, and the whole process becomes automated. You can adjourn to the beach, club, ski resort or watering hole of your choice without needing to worry about petulant messages from wholesalers and distributors wanting you to post them a few more books by return.

If you do end up with an ebook that you are happy with, are confident of sales and have decided to go ahead and sell it, don't forget that you can get an ISBN number to identify it to the world and register yourself as the writer. You'll need one of these anyway if you want to sell through distributors such as Amazon. I'd happily give you the current links and details, but these may change, so Google is your friend here. If you get stuck, drop me an email.

At the time of writing, these numbers are sold in a minimum of ten numbers but you'll need a different one for printed and electronic format, and if you've gone this far, you probably won't be stopping with just the one book! If you decide to use Smashwords (more about them later) you can get a number for free.

For those planning to become paid authors, there is another benefit. As you write, your style will change. No matter how much experience you have already of creating essays or letters, a book is different. The more you write, the more you will evolve and hone your distinctive and individual style. And the more you can produce for others to read, the more you can take on board their comments and (brace yourself) criticisms. Ebooks provide a handy way to bundle up extracts, short stories and developing ideas for others to review in the format and place of their choice.

You are reading a revised version of this book. It took about half a day to sort this out and make it available. This is considerably easier than sorting out a revised printed version! If you too are writing about a quickly changing area, then you can probably see the benefits.

Free downloads

For those of us in business, these little beasties provide a truly wonderful

opportunity to find new customers and increase sales. Customers hit the interweb looking for information, rather than for sales pitches. They want to know all they can about the background to what they are looking for first, before shelling out any hard-earned dosh. Use ebooks to provide the information they want. Make it freely available in a clear, portable and flexible format that they can read either at home or on their portable electronic gizmos.

The older PDF formats have been around for quite a while, and were certainly a handy way at the time to send out information electronically. Indeed, they are still in use – especially for documents that you want to lock into a fixed format, such as A4, so they will always come out the same size. But this rigidity makes them far less versatile than ebooks, which adjust themselves automatically to fit the display and font size chosen. Where a PDF may be excellent for a form that will always be printed at the same size, using .MOBI and .EPUB files now let our customers choose the format that they want - the files can be a lot smaller, as well.

Remember, it is NOT an opportunity for a blatant sales pitch. Be as genuinely helpful as you can, and don't riddle the text with links unless they are truly relevant and useful. Use this as an opportunity to establish both your credentials and your personality. Will a reader be impressed by what you know, how you communicate it and how you come across as a person? I've lost some potential customers who have found my 'entertainment' websites to be perhaps not as formal as they would have liked. This is a good thing. I would much rather avoid, or pass on to someone more appropriate a booking that is going to be a right pain for us, and take another - more appropriate - one instead.

If you have any strong benefits you can offer, and that will be of real benefit to a client, don't be shy about pointing them out - especially in context. As possibly the only band in the world to offer a free, no quibble money back guarantee to clients, we do tend to bang on a bit about this whenever possible.

Get it right, and your efforts will be appreciated. You may even find that one or more of your little darlings goes viral, leaving home to go off and see the world all on its own as readers circulate it to others. I've had a request from someone wanting to host an old PDF file of mine in Alaska and Texas, as well as on a main stream UK business site.

An ebook, or better yet, several, can also save a whole heap of time. Most of my work is as a performer, and organiser of groups. In the bad old days, this meant staying by the 'phone and answering the same questions every day. The web sites have helped, and most people read through them first. If they make contact now, then they are probably quite serious about making a booking and aware about the general background. I'm only just starting with the downloads, but have ideas on quite a few that should be of help, as well as two potential ebooks for sale. You can see some examples of my ebooks regarding music and entertainment at

<http://www.medieval-jesters.com/downloads.html>

I also use ebooks to help with a particular problem that entertainers have.

For some reason, there seems to be an expectation that the phrase '*But it's for a charity*' acts like a magic charm on musicians, and we'll instantly agree to do any event for nothing. Not only can opinions vary as to what is a genuine charity (private schools? I think not...), but life is tough enough for us anyway. Work is sporadic, and 'charity' enquiries are usually for Saturday night events - the one night when many bands can usually count on a decent gig. No-one expects a garage to give them (or

us!) free fuel to do an event, and musicians can't 'phone up their mortgage company and say 'but I was playing for charity events on two Saturdays last month'. Sorry, rant over, you can see my solution at:

<http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/47974>

Not only does this ebook explain why we cannot really help on the price for a Saturday event, it also gives organisers lots of ideas on how to cover the cost of the band before we even arrive. It helps us both get what we want.

Converting an existing printed book

If you already have a printed book that you self-published, or still have the rights to, why on earth not make it available in electronic formats as well?!

From making my first enquiries in early March 2011, I had found out how to convert and publish my own book by the 23rd of that month, and made my first sale on the 26th. You can see the result here:

<http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/49079>

In fact, by the time I'd done all the research and worked out to do it all, other authors were asking me to convert their books as well. On the 1st of April I had my first sale for a book written by someone else - I became an e-publisher by accident!

A word of caution

If you take a chicken, wring its neck and chuck it in an oven, don't expect the end result to resemble Coq au Vin! (Sorry-pardon to all the vegetarians reading)! The one common problem I've had with almost every author I've talked to so far is explaining that the format for their current book will be lost unless the book is read in exactly the same font size as the original, on a screen exactly the same size as the original book. Not only is it impossible for me to know if you are reading this on a home computer, a mobile 'phone, laptop, tablet or dedicated reader, but how can I tell what font size (or even font) you are using? Sticking with a single format will really screw it up for all the others.

In effect, we provide the equivalent of raw chicken. The reader decides what format to buy it in, then what flavourings and spices to add. It is vital to take the time to convert any existing files properly and get right back to the basics. Don't worry; this is covered in detail later on.

Whilst we are still on basics, let's get another fallacy out of the way.

Kindles are NOT the only option

At one meeting for authors I attend, there is a perception among many of them that ebooks = Kindle, in the same way that Hoover = vacuum cleaner. Yes, Amazon are pretty dominant in the market, and once you have the account set up, it is really easy to download the book by WiFi, but there is absolutely no reason to limit yourself to just a single market. Considering the work it takes to create your book in the first place, the extra effort in saving two different files at the end, with different layouts is a very small price to pay. Especially as it will enable you to cover all the major distributors with just two accounts.

So, it's all a pretty good idea then, how can you get started? Read on, gentle

reader.

Chapter 2: How to write an ebook

The idea is to create and edit your book(s) in a common and basic format, where you can write without distracting computer codes getting in the way. But it is also really helpful to see exactly how a computer or document reader is going to translate your words into a finished product. Please keep it as simple as possible, it really is a different format to a printed book and needs to be developed differently. Don't worry if you feel your eyes glazing over, and your will to live gradually slipping away when we get to the techie stuff. I've added a section later on that gives you a painless way to cope with almost everything apart from the actual writing.

How I used to do it

Skip this section unless you really want to get down to the basics. I now just use Microsoft Word, but felt I should give a few details about the most basic way to get it all sorted out.

Hyper Text Mark-up Language (HTML) is a web design language that uses commands to start doing something to text, then stop doing it at the end. These are enclosed in angular brackets, so the command to start bold text is ``, and the one to finish it ``. Miss out the second command, or the / before the b and it won't stop converting the text to bold. Where more than one command is used, it is best to 'nest' them. In other words, keep the start and stop instructions in order - so text in bold and italics would be `<i>This text will be bold and italic</i>`. All fairly simple once you get the hang of it.

Don't panic. There is no need for you develop advanced computer programming skills as there are handy packages that will do the grunt work for you.

If you don't yet have a program that lets you edit HTML language for web sites, have a quick Google for suitable downloads. I was pointed in the direction of a free one called KompoZer, and was quite happy with it for a while. As well as handling text, it also allows you to insert hyperlinks (automatic links to web sites and downloads) and images.

For those not at home with geek-speak, by clicking between the four tabs at the bottom you can either make the nasty technical words go away (Normal), view a simplified layout with the tags showing what will happen to your text (HTML Tags), go for the full-on screen with all the code revealed in all its glory (Source) or even have a quick gander at the finished product (Preview). It's not necessary to use the Source view to do your editing (the HTML Tag makes it a lot easier), but it is good to use it to check your document at the end as this shows you exactly what is going on. With practice, you'll probably find yourself happily switching between the four options.

As with learning any new software, I'd suggest making a dummy file. Muck about with all the different types of formatting you can find, make a few deliberate mistakes then find out how to correct them. Start a nice new shiny file for your first proper ebook when you've got it all out of your system, and feel comfy with the software.

After that, I would save the books in three formats – PDF, MOBI and EPUB and then host them on my own web sites.

How I do it now

All of the above is a bit of a pain, and can get a bit involved. Not only that, there was the problem of distribution and collecting the money once the thing was written. Fortunately, there are companies who will handle both of these for you, and are quite happy for you to submit files created in Microsoft Word. Early versions that create '.doc' files, rather than '.docx' work pretty well. If you are using the later version, just save in the earlier format. Use the option to see the formatting that will be used (fancy looking 'P' button up the top of the 'Home' tab), so you can keep your work as clean as possible and avoid unnecessary formatting, it really does make the errors stand out. Best to also take advantage of the opportunity to apply standard styles to different parts of the text, and to quickly and easily make global changes that affect the whole document. I've saved some master templates now that I can use to quickly create new files for fresh books.

However, if you are going to use Word, don't even think of typing a single word until you have downloaded, read and completely understand what you need to end up with.

I use two distributors, Amazon and Smashwords, and their requirements differ a little for the final format. For example, if you simply head up your chapters as such, the Smashwords 'Meat Grinder' software picks up on this and creates a Table of Contents for you automatically. With Amazon, however, it is best to set up the Table of Contents yourself, and then insert the bookmarks and hyperlinks (including to the set points they advise, such as the cover).

There is no point in me going into detail here – these things change over time, and you are best learning how to do it all directly from the Word tutorials, and the two companies above.

Smashwords have a free ebook available here:

<http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/52>

Amazon also provides pages of advice, and a forum. At the same time, start familiarising yourself with the layout of the sites, and how to upload your finished books. It all takes time, I'm afraid; there are no short cuts if you want to do it properly yourself.

Keep the format as simple as possible, then save two fresh files, following the requirements of the different publishers. The original then becomes your master, ready for later changes. I find it helps to give them numbers – so for example the finished three files for the first draft of my book *Business Survival & Prosperity Guaranteed* would be BSPG.1, then BSPG.1A and BSPG.1S. The next edition would be BSPG.2, and so on.

Any other options?

Yes. You can either pay someone to research and write it for you, work with a ghost writer or else record yourself and send the transcript to a transcription service. The latter method in particular can get you into print very quickly, and you can also offer the original recordings as downloads and/or CDs as well. You can also hire someone like me to convert your document into an upload-ready state, so the conversions will go smoothly.

Chapter 3: Content for your ebook

Where do I start?

Have a rough idea of the topics to cover and the headings to use. Then just rattle away and get it all down into the file. If, like me, you are a compulsive shuffler and adder in /taker out, then just use normal formatted text - no paragraphs, no headings, no bold or italic garnishing. No particular worries over grammar or spelling either, just the basic info. The cleaning up and polishing comes later. Don't worry if you move, add or delete potential headings as it all comes together; just make sure the ones you are happy with stand out on their own line. It's all just text at the moment, nothing fancy.

This can really save you loads of time, as well as helping to help you stay concentrated on the raw facts. Get these down, cover all the points you want to and then make it all look pretty at the end. Worry about the finer points then. You don't paint a new house or lay carpets until all the pipes, cables, ducts, windows and doors are in place. I tend to write with two documents open at the same time – the main file with rough headlines, and another document with different chunks of text but no headings, I can then shuffle away happily between the two until things start to resolve themselves.

For original ideas and layouts, I tend to use a spreadsheet with different sheets for general ideas, unused ideas and the different chapters. Once the book starts coming together, you can then start a Word document (save as a.doc, NOT .docx file). It is then a lot easier to work through the points one by one, copying and converting the bare points into fully fledged text.

“Kill the spare”

There's no easy way to say this, but it's now time to start killing your babies. Back in 1966, Stephen King was given the comment '*Not bad, but PUFFY. You need to revise for length. Formula: 2nd Draft = 1st Draft - 10%*'. He says it did him 'a hell of a favor'. Once you are happy that your work is all pretty much together, start again at the beginning and work through with murder in your heart. Every single word must earn its place. In my life as a musician, I know of bands who keep players on because they are a partner of someone else, or because they own the P.A. and/or van. Not in our band. Fewer players = more dosh to the rest of us, everyone has to justify their place. Be brutal and determined. Can a sentence be shorter? Does every word enhance, clarify or add to your message? If not, bin it.

Making it all look pretty

And then it's time to run a spell check, add in the headlines and format any text as appropriate. Don't get carried away. Concentrate on the words, not the garnish. Restrict yourself to as few decorations as you can get away with. The title and headlines are obviously important, (the H2, second largest size of headline lines will be converted automatically into your chapter headings, or usually just prefixing the line with 'Chapter' and the number will let the system sort it out for you), and moderate, **relevant**, use of centring, bold, italicised and larger sized text will help make your work easier to read. Keep it simple, the user can choose the overall font and text size for themselves.

My first two mini ebooks were obese. I put in pretty pictures just 'cos I could, as well as unnecessary 'covers' and other contact details. Pointless. A quick hyperlink will take readers to any more information they may want, including further contact

details. After all, anyone reading an ebook must have some kind of Internet access! A bit of pruning reduced the size from 500K to 22K.

My mistake was making the same error that lovers of books make in criticising electronic books. I forgot that they are different; it should be all about the words, not the wrapping. Smaller, simpler files have less chance of containing errors, are easier to download and more portable. In structure, they are far less formal than conventional books and don't have to have chapters and indexes (although it is best if you do at least use chapters). All of this makes them a lot quicker to write, format and upload. This one was ready, from start to finish, in about a day (but then constantly tweaked!). With practice, I aim get this down to about half a day or less.

As well as starting from scratch, it is also possible to lift whole pages from your existing web sites to be the foundation of books. These are already in HTML format (well, mine are, anyway) so a lot of the work is already done. It is probably best to save each page as a chapter, edit them one at a time and then stitch together at the end. This should make the whole job a bit easier ("How do you eat an elephant"? "One bite at a time...!"). It is also safer - if something goes horribly wrong, you only lose that bit. And you may decide to edit and re-load that particular page back to your site while you are about it.

If you later decide to go for a printed hard copy, it will probably be easier to send, edit and proof read chapter by chapter. You can also swap them round for the final version (sounds strange, but I've done that - added in fresh chapters and shuffled the order of existing ones to make more sense overall).

If you have any of the clunkier, larger and less flexible PDF files these can be dropped into KompoZer, notepad (to get rid of ALL the formatting) or Word and edited as well. Although it came as a bit of a revelation just how much 'junk' code had been picked up along the way. I now use an earlier version of Word, or write everything in the simpler HTML format, save that as a master and then work from that. If you are going to be extracting text from old PDF documents, then do make sure you clean out all the rubbish. Fail to do this and you may well have problems getting a finished ebook that opens and reads properly. At the end of your ebook, you will probably want to add some copyright and 'don't blame me' get-out clauses. Feel free to copy mine, but don't blame me if there are any loopholes!

If you don't fancy doing any of this, you can always pay someone else to sort it out for you. I chose this option for my first printed book (as above). It was in 21 different Quark files, and the resulting PDFs were so messy it was going to be a right pain to convert them all. Using 'Elance' I found someone to convert them all into a suitable format for \$110. Seemed like a fair trade, and saved me some time. But in fact I still ended up having to do quite a bit of work to get it finished how I wanted. On balance, I would have been better off tackling the whole job myself, right from the start. At least everything I write now is always correctly formatted ready for conversion straight to ebook.

Chapter 4: Creating your ebook

Having spent hours labouring over your masterpiece, it is now time for it to burst into the world in its full glory. Or something like that. Anyway, there are three main options available for you to choose from.

1) The fully D.I.Y. option

This is the way I used to do it. Choose this path, and you'll be pretty much alone. You create all the different formats that you need, check everything yourself and end up with the full, absolute and uncontested rights to the end products. In the past, I've used another free software package, Calibre to convert from HTML into the different main formats - it provides a simple way to save your file as MOBI for Kindle and EPUB for Sony and others. But do please have a look around to see what's new, as these things do change. And you may of course already have existing software to handle this. Amazon have free 'Kindle for computers' software available - see their website for details. Just include a link on your website .

Decide what formats you want to use, it's the usual battle between the use of your time and the benefit to your customer. Before switching to 'Smashword', I offered all ramblings in MOBI, EPUB and PDF formats, and pointed readers to free software to convert the former files to another format, or to read them on a home computer. That seemed to be a pretty fair balance. By opening the HTML file as a Word document, you can then use 'Print' to output it as a PDF. Have a quick Google if you don't have the software, I use Primo PDF.

Your finished ebooks can now be hosted on your web site, sent out as attachments, added to a CD ROM or USB or sold through a commercial site (see above re ISBN number).

One tip for hosting - I have some pretty large video files for my sites so have decided to use the Amazon S3 hosting service. Being designed for computer programmers it can be a bit daunting to set up, but is very cheap and easy to use with the Firefox 'S3' add-on tool. By having all my files hosted there, I can use one single location address. When you make any changes to an ebook only one file is updated - no matter how many sites it is hosted on.

2) The commercial option

Whilst the option above gives you full control all through the process, you will probably either want to sell your ebook, or else give a free version the widest possible exposure. And, frankly, converting all the files one by one can be a real pain in the bum. There is also going to be the question of what to do with your files once they are ready – how can you distribute them to the widest possible audience? Once again, you can pay someone to do this for you, but if you are going to give away books for free, I'd recommend that you at least check out the link below before you part with a single penny, cent, spondulak or whatever your currency is:

http://www.smashwords.com/about/how_to_publish_on_smashwords.

Usually, there is no such thing as a free lunch, but this site will let you convert a Word.doc file into just about any format you could need, and host the resulting ebooks – all for nothing! For those of us using free ebooks to give out information to potential clients it seems like a no-brainer. Load the file once, and it becomes available in pretty much any format the reader chooses, they can even download software for free to read MOBI (Kindle) or EPUB files on a home computer..

And if you want to sell your work it gets even better – for a fairly modest fee, the site will sort all this out for you. All you have to do after that is concentrate on driving potential customers to your details here, and pretty much everything else is taken care of for you. Your book(s) will also be offered to a much wider audience as well, and you still retain full rights to offer the same books through other outlets, so long as you

format them yourself, and not through their site.

For me, this is an excellent deal (and a very clever business model). The books are converted and hosted for free, without the loss of any rights, ISBN numbers are provided if required and sales are handled for a very fair percentage. Considering the work you've already put into getting your thoughts on paper, and the hassle to come regarding publicity, this scheme can make the 'making it available' part of the process a real doddle.

If you are going to be publicising the books yourself (and you should be) make sure you send buyers straight to the book page for your work, that way you'll get the highest income. But you can also elect for your book to be submitted to the premium list, so other distributors can sell copies. Obviously, the profit per book will drop as they take a commission, but actual number of sales should rise. As at the end of 2011, there was one obvious distributor missing from the list. Although Smashwords have been in discussions with Amazon for some time, no deal has yet been reached. Rather than hanging around any longer, I've now started adding books to both lists. There is an option in Smashwords to restrict any specific distribution partners, so I now exclude Amazon in case they ever manage to get it together. That's pretty much the whole market covered. Job done.

3) I'm a writer, not a geek or a bean counter – you sort it out

To make your book available, you will need to do more than just muck about with a basic word document. You'll still need to sort out a suitable cover, check the formatting to make sure it entitles you to entry into the Premium Catalogue, arrange an ISBN number (available free from the site), and sort out a few other 'techie' odds and ends. I can still see the eyes of some of my author friends glaze over when we talk about all this, so I now offer a service converting and setting up books on both Smashwords and Amazon in exchange for a straight payment – all rights remain with the author. Costs depend on how much work is involved, but feel free to contact me if you would like a no-obligation quote.

Covers

Most of my 'How To' books rely on the title alone, so I can knock up something simple in Photoshop. If readers are actively looking for information and the book is free, then that will be enough. But if your book is fiction, and you have not yet already established a ravening fan base actively looking out for your work, then you'll need something a bit special to help set you apart from the tidal wave of competitors.

The cover for this book was courtesy of Rick Green:

<http://www.richardkgreen.com>

If you cannot afford to commission a full cover at this stage, have a look at his templates as an option. If you do want to run with a cover of your own, run it past as many people as possible first. Don't tell them you created it, just ask for their opinions.

Whatever you decide to run with, do take the time to get it right. Errors in grammar or spelling on a cover will not make a good first impression. Also please remember that you cannot have any kind of a link to a website on the cover, and that fine details will be lost because of the size it will be when displayed onscreen.

Pricing

Obviously, decide what you think is right and fair. But please don't be too greedy – readers are not fools, and know our costs are a lot less with this format. In an experiment to see what readers thought was a fair price, about \$3.00 seemed to be the average, although other evidence points to a lowering of the perceived value of these books. I'd rather charge less and sell more, with the chance for future sales if readers like what they get, than try to wring the absolute top price possible. Look at discounts, offers and vouchers to avoid a low price giving a false picture of the real value of your work. In general, I recommend charging a third of the price of the equivalent printed book.

Some genres can attract a higher price though – nonfiction reference in particular. It stands to reason, if the information it contains can make or save you a significant sum, a product can bear a higher price – especially if the author has a proven track record. Just don't get all enthusiastic with your pricing if you've just written a fictional story about a boy wizard attending boarding school, or any other theme with a lot of competition! A book I've converted and which sells at \$9.99 is one of the most popular, my book on tarot reading is now starting to sell through the wider distribution network, even though sales from the Smashwords site were poor – even though it only costs \$.99. It's all about content, readers are happy to pay, if they want what you are offering. The \$9.99 book will probably more than pay for itself, many times over, for anyone in business. In terms of the cost, it's an absolute bargain.

Giving your ebooks away for free

Let's not get involved in the argument about the rights and wrongs of free ebooks. They are here, and here to stay. Try to stop them, and we'll just end up looking like a silly Canute. Instead, here are some ways we can use them to our advantage.

Don't underestimate the value of giving away at least some of your work for nothing. One view is that the new business model is 'Free, Now.' Consumers want to see hard evidence before they part with hard cash, and why not? I certainly do! If you want to learn more, check out 'The future of a radical price' by Chris Anderson. Free samples have been given away for a long time because they can provide a practical and eloquent demonstration of real world benefits. There is no reason why we can't apply the same technique with our writing. Here are a few ideas on how you can make free ebooks work for you:

Scratching an itch

Many people harbour the dream of writing a book. It's something they feel they have to do, and the process itself can be both cathartic and rewarding. Rather than incurring the cost of self-publishing in print, a free ebook allows them to give away copies to friends, family and colleagues. Edits and re-writes are easy to undertake if their writing skills improve. And no trees are harmed in the process if the book turns out to be a bit of a minger.

Testing

Unlike printed books, length is not so obvious with an ebook. If a free short work is rewarded with more than an obligatory polite but lukewarm response, then an extended version can be tested at, say 99 cents. Following that, if downloads still remain promising, try a full length version at a higher price. I signed two book deals last year, one which had only been available via Smashwords. The sales and

contented to date were enough to attract a publisher who wants an extended hard copy version.

As a teaser for a series

Similar to the above, but where the first book is a full length freebie that establishes the characters well enough that readers will be happy to follow them through later paid for books, or buy new stories by the same author. As an e-publisher, I've tried this approach with free books by two authors. The results so far have not been that promising, but the technique of loss leaders has been established well enough in the past not to give up trying. And if you can attract a loyal following, then the future looks a lot rosier. Just make sure you have a sign up option so you can keep in touch. If you don't know what these look like, here's one of mine –

<http://www.paul-hurst.com/keepmeinformed.html>

Merchandising

There's more than one way to earn money from books – especially those for children. If free books are up to 46 times more popular than the charged sequel (based on one author I know), then why not use downloads (which a lot of readers have become used to getting for free) to build up a loyal fan base who will then be interested in buying the stuffed toys, stickers etc. which we *do* still expect to pay for. I've heard of bands making far more from the sales of clothing and other branded items at the back of the hall than from the actual concert. Some online games let you start for free, and then coax you to start paying for the extras once you are hooked.

I don't write for younglings myself, but this is probably the business model I'd go for if I did – get maximum coverage through free downloads first, then aim to follow up with printed books and products such as those above being sold straight off a web site. Then just hope for a film deal after that! Well, we can all dream.

Sharing information

Being an author tends to lend an aura of authority. By giving away free books on charity events, weddings, medieval banquets and barn dances I can hopefully position myself as someone who knows a bit about these functions, and who should therefore be a good person to book as a performer. Not only that, but I don't have to stay glued to the 'phone or computer answering exactly the same questions over and over again.

It is then a short step to offer to write guides for magazines, venues and other trades/suppliers – all of course mentioning the more detailed free ebooks available. These will hopefully go a bit viral, and of course all contain links to the main web site. One wedding magazine gave me a free 'advertorial' space four times larger than the advert I placed (at a reduced rate), simply because I could help them with relevant copy for their publication. As writers, this should not be that hard for us to do!

When we eventually sell our current house, unless technology has moved on sufficiently by then, I'll probably put all the details, plans and pictures in a free ebook. The time it takes should more than be repaid by the benefit of all the extra info I can get in about all the extras we've added and refined over the last 21 years, the local attractions, the best places to buy logs, meat, fruit & veg. and so on. Even local history (Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton had a secret assignation at the Grange, over the road, Sophie Rhys-Jones lived in the village and pulled pints down the local before becoming Countess of Wessex). It should be possible to make readers realise all the benefits of the property and location, to make them start thinking of the house as 'theirs'. With the sort of prices houses go for now, it could well be possible to earn

more than the average an author normally earns from a book, just by increasing interest and competition.

Getting brownie points

An extension of the above. Following a booking for our band at a St George's Day banquet, I compiled the competition entries (a 50 word saga on George and the Dragon) into a short ebook, complete with the venue's logo and contact details. They liked the kudos of having their own publication available and the punters were happy to see their names in 'print'. A bonus for me was the chance to include our contact details at the end. The whole thing took about three hours to set up, and there have been a surprising number of downloads. Only problem now is sorting out a suitable competition for the repeat booking this year (any ideas please?). We've already done Limericks...

Gifts and presents

Being writers, we should have the ability to wrangle words but may well be short of a bob or two. How about writing and hosting a fully bespoke story for a young relative, writing up a wedding day (or partnership celebration) - including the speeches - for a couple, or putting together a retirement biography? Think about the options, and it should be win-win-win. The recipient gets a personalised and unique gift, the friends and relatives they share it with should enjoy reading it (especially where you can mention them), and of course your contact details are included as the author. If nothing else, you can hone your skills whilst saving the cost of the traditional toaster, toast rack or fish slice.

Copyright

This seems to be a real sticking point for some of the authors I've talked to. They have a real fear that their work will be pirated the very second it becomes available then broadcast round the world as a freebie. Firstly, if someone is really determined, you won't stop them (remember JKR, at the start of this book?). Secondly, the lower your initial price, the less likely it is that someone will bother to pinch it. And thirdly, do make sure that you do at least have a few links and some blurb about yourself in every book so that any ripped off copy has the potential to bring you a benefit in some way.

When I first decided to offer a full money back guarantee on all our performance bookings, a local rival predicted that it would bankrupt me by the end of the year. Instead, sales went up by 27%, and there have only been two instances of people taking advantage in eight years. The vast majority of people are honest, and will respond to you making the first move to establish trust. Don't get hung up with trying to turn your product into an electronic Fort Knox. Concentrate on getting the best possible book out to the widest possible audience at the lowest price you can live with. Forget about the minority of scamps, cads, bounders and other riff-raff out there, just stick a few pins into a clay doll when the mood takes you.

Tax

The moment you start selling ebooks, think of yourself as running a business – with all that entails. Tax authorities will vary a bit worldwide in their tolerance, but probably share a general wish to extract as much as possible of your earnings as they

possibly can. Keep a note of all your expenses, right from the start. Find out what you can claim for and what you can't, then make sure you keep proper records. Always ask for a receipt. If this is all new to you, drop me a line and/or have a look at my [web site](#) and [book](#).

For those of us resident outside the dear old US of A, there is a potentially nasty shock waiting. As both Smashwords and Amazon are based in the States, their version of H.M. Bloodsuckers and Leeches (sorry, Revenue and Customs) will hit us foreigners for a 30% tax deduction. I jumped through all the hoops to get an exemption number, but it was a real pain and not exactly cheap, what with the fees to a public notary. Probably best to grit your teeth, take the hit and claim the tax back, if that is allowed, against your own tax for the year. I'm advised that at present the U.K. has such an arrangement.

Chapter 5: Distributing your ebook

Unless you are already an established author, or have the clout and budget of a mainstream publisher behind you, marketing your ebook(s) will be the big problem. Don't get any ideas about putting your feet up at this stage; the hard part is yet to come.

Amazon have a web page with ideas, and there is another free ebook from 'Smashwords' for some ideas on how to get started
<http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/305>

What's that? You don't need to worry about distribution because you've hosted the files on your own website? Sorry, this is very unlikely to be enough. And don't get all smug because you've decided to use the Smashwords/Amazon option. All you have done so far is make the product available. Yes, a few may stumble across it by chance, but nothing like the numbers you probably want. Even if you are aiming for distribution via the Premium List, it is still essential to get potential readers to actively look for your book.

Think of Smashwords and Amazon as very friendly and helpful massive book warehouses, but off the beaten track. If someone goes to the counter and asks for your book by name, it will be readily found. Just don't expect it to be visible anywhere – the sheer number of ebooks already available, and coming onto the market daily means that yours will be quickly swallowed up.

You must now stop being an author and become a business person – and that means learning about mailing lists, free offers, customer services and all that jazz.

One of my all time favourite books on marketing unfortunately went out of print when the marketing expert who wrote it went into retirement. But without having all the hassles of conventional printing, and after some pretty hard graft converting the text from an old PDF, I was able to make available now crafted from the finest quality electrons and pixels!



<http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/51997>

My own original copy is now somewhat dog-eared, and a mass of yellow highlighter as there are just so many nuggets of information in it.

Because of the lower costs involved with this format, the owner of the copyright has kindly agreed to prices that make them far more accessible. The first book, for example, was selling for £19.97 back at the turn of the Century (and worth every penny), now it's only \$9.99. Do have a look now; this is where the 'money-back guarantee' idea came from. Although if you are a musician or entertainer based in the south east of England, please don't bother reading this, – you'd really hate it, honestly!

Web sites

To me, this seems to be an essential. After all, it gives you so much space to not only tell readers what is available, but to give away some more information about yourself and your work. According to the first person to sell a million ebooks, readers like to know that you have more than one book available. They want to be able to read more if they like the first. A web site lets you set up some kind of system for them to sign on to a secure automated mailing list (I use Aweber), and to let them know more about you and your subject. If you are selling ebooks, it would look a bit strange to shun such an integral part of the etherworld. I've hosted some info on websites here:

<http://www.paul-hurst.com/websites.html>

Social media

An author's group I belong to has been discussing the merits of using social media to sell your book. Yes, it is really important to be active in all the areas you can – face book, twitter, blogging etc. But do it very gently and discreetly. Many authors crash about forums with a blatant sales pitch, and 'author fatigue' is starting to set in. We are in danger of being awarded a status similar to double glazing salespeople, and those annoying types who 'phone on an unlisted number, and after a couple of seconds delay then explain, over a faint and crackly line that they are just conducting a survey of people who live in your area and...' (click, well that's as far as I get, anyway!). It is much easier to comment or contribute on line if you are obviously looking to help or add to a debate rather than looking for sales.

Rather than wanting to get involved in writing my own blog, I prefer to contribute articles for others to host. If you are involved in writing, there are some pretty good articles here that you may find of interest:

<http://morgenbailey.wordpress.com/guest-blogs/>

This way I get a much wider exposure, and the host gains a wider range of content to share with the readers. Win/win/win - my favourite outcome.

Free content

My preferred way of doing things (what, really, you gasp, having read this far in a free ebook!). It's totally passive, and the reader has full control over the process. It is up to them to decide if they are getting what they want from the ebook, be it information or entertainment (or both at the same time). They have a decent chance to decide if they find the style too bland or too eccentric. But if they like your work then great, just provide obvious ways for them to see what else you have available. Writers should look for a long term relationship with their readers, it only seems fair that the

author should make the first step and show what they can do, especially with all the competition out there.

I'd suggest giving away one complete book for free, or at the very least have some kind of discount offer. The default option with Smashwords is to let the reader view the first 20% of a book for free, seems like a very good idea. If you are going to offer a book for free, make sure it is a full one, rather than just a full chapters that end in a cliff hanger. A cynical attempt to hook readers with a minimum of ground bait may lead to hostility. Yes, I know you are giving it away for free, but people still need to invest their time – and they may value that quite highly.

Test as many of the ideas above as you can, and try and think up a few more of your own as well. Find out what works for you. I'm afraid its frog-kissing time (you've got to kiss a lot of frogs before you find your prince/princess!).

Chapter 6: The quickest and easiest way to make money from ebooks

If the idea of spending months labouring over your own books brings you out in a sweaty rash, if the techie side of it all sounds too daunting, or if you really need to start earning some money NOW, fear not. There is a way that you could start earning money from ebooks – and earning it almost immediately.

Go to the 'Smashwords' site and look up the details on 'Affiliates'. This gives you the chance to earn about 11% of the net income simply by doing nothing more than opening an account, signing up as an affiliate, copying the relevant link for a book and then using that link in any adverts, letters, reports – whatever you can think of. Any sales that come from the link will automatically earn you the commission.

Don't the authors mind about this? They spend hours slaving over their pride and joy – you simply point someone in the right direction, and get paid a pretty good slice of the sale.

Of course we don't mind, the way the system works, we'll still get more than if the sale had happened through one of the major distributors. You found the contact, so good luck to you! And most of us hope to sell more books to the same readers at a later date, so 11% of the income is a very small price to pay for your introduction.

And, of course, it works the other way round. If you've written an ebook – especially one about business – Do let me know. I can send the details to my mailing list and then pick up the 11% myself.

Simples.

Chapter 7: So now what?

Errr...just do it!

- * Choose a **suitable subject**, preferably one that you have a passion for.
- * Decide on the **software** you want to use, open a blank file and get writing.
- * List out the headings you want to cover, jot down the important points and start getting words on the page.
- * Run through to **skim it all down** as much as possible and then run a spell check. Worry about the content first, the prettifying later - once the raw details and information have been hammered into shape.

- * Have a last **look for dodgy code**, add in copyright and contact details.
- * **Convert the file** to ebooks in the format of your choice, and Robin's your uncle (well, he's my uncle. You get your own).
- * Get stuck in with some **serious publicity-mongering**.
- *..Read all about the '**Affiliate**' scheme and work out how you can use it – both to earn an income by recommending ebooks written by others, and to get your own books sold to new audiences.

Good luck! If you get stuck, drop me a line via <http://www.paul-hurst.com/Contact.html> ,

By the way, if any links fail to work, please download the latest version of the book to pick up any corrections (or new material). If still no joy, then please let me know.

Thank you for reading. If you have found any of the above helpful in any way, perhaps you could do me the huge favour of adding a review on the Smashwords page. It would be greatly appreciated.

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