

Our “best practices” for general market book publishing in mid-2013

Isn't the idea to get your book out right now so the words are available for immediate purchase by others? Your PDF ebook downloads first, the Kindle-Nook kind of reader ebooks can see light in minutes once their submission is completed. And your core printed paperback, plus CreateSpace's version, are a week or two behind.

I was reminded to blog this because of a book publication discussion on LinkedIn, and how or whether that involves BookBaby.

Last first: **I have no problems with BookBaby** and I used them, in a test, for a popular book we sell to K-12 administrators. It was still new then and they must have been working out the kinks because I sent the form, money, and book text/cover, etc. and nothing happened. I wrote asking if they had sent it to the houses they suggested. No reply, so I called and a lass said yes, it was sent out but they didn't confirm that nor did they send a copy of the book that was sent. (Maybe they do both now, but I stopped the test there.) Later, I checked on the book's availability directly on a particular open publisher's list and it wasn't there. I wrote again and it was added. BookBaby has also paid me twice.

But why the hassle, the \$99, and the \$19 annual fee when I can do all of this free without applying and wondering? But that's my choice. I recommend BookBaby to several new writers/publishers a week who have one fledgling book just hatched and are seeking more sales outlets. For them, it's faster and safer than what I am about to admit that we do.

When we bring a new book into existence, I focus on the bigger

houses in this order: Kindle first (they sell most), then Pubit (Nook reader, or its replacement) for Barnes & Noble, then Smashwords (so I can get into Apple, but we've also reached Kobo, Sony, and Diesel that way too), all with the same ebook Word file. If we have adjustment problems converting into other's software from Word, I see it in the monitor proof and fix it. Pubit is great, Kindle usually requires some tinkering, and Smashwords is becoming a giant pain to get into their premium catalog (and not selling much either). Sometimes I add in Scribd too, I guess because it's so easy and they do advertise 80 zillion (I think) readers. But I never expect to get paid there (though once they surprised me.)

It's all pretty fast because by the time I'm ready to submit, my interior text file is ready-to-go, the cover file is too, and I have written my descriptions and bio, plus devined the best keywords and a starter price. Then it's just fill-in-the-blanks for the open publishers. It may take, max, two hours to get all three services to get my gems up and available.

Since almost every regular market book we produce now starts with a paperback book and full cover, and we submit it to CreateSpace first in PDF, that book is the core of all that follows. We might buy 50 CreateSpace books to meet first promises, but if the book has legs we either go directly to McNaughton & Gunn for a run of 1000+, or their POD house for less. Those are our direct-sale shrinkwrapped books, for libraries and bookstores. (We might use LSI for a short run later, mostly for backlist, but they don't shrinkwrap.)

While we wait for CreateSpace to post that core book, we add the PDF version of the book to our order form as a directly downloadable PDF ebook sold to our customers and the public. (We also use that PDF ebook for a lot of early promotion and for testimonials from field leaders.) The PDF ebook goes on our [order form](#) first, and the bound paperback book is listed a few days later. (How much later depends on how long the bound

copies dawdle en route.)

All that remains with that core manuscript is to “ebook” it: get rid of the numbers, resize it, change font sizes, delete or reposition the images, make it flush left, and so on, so it will reproduce in the free-flow ebook way.

That’s when I decide whether to handle the open publishing myself or call in BookBaby. (In 2013 we do it ourselves.) Which means we set aside a day or so to create the basic promo material. then we submit the new “ebooked” file and front cover (modified a bit) to Kindle, Pubit, and Smashwords.

We did this process to two new general market books in the past two weeks. The first marched through the steps without a flaw. It was called [Surviving Prostate Cancer...](#) and it’s now in print, horrifying or amusing nervous readers. The second is awaiting a box of printed bound copies to complete this cycle. We hope it will be out next Monday, 7/29/23). It’s called [100 Ready-to-Use Treasure Hunt Clues](#). For its eager to-be buyers, their hunt is over!

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Some folks know me as a niche publisher, probably because of my book [Niche Publishing: Publish Profitably Every Time](#). My firm has published general books and niche products since 1981. The process is very different for niche books. For one thing, the open publishing system is hardly used at all. And we never sell to the general public, except by chance when they see one of our niche titles listed somewhere. (We will gladly sell the item to them, but we discourage it becoming their habit.) We pretest and sell directly to our niche. We have two books on the docket. I’ll explain the niche publishing path they take in a couple of months. (Niche publishing is far more profitable and less risky.)

I hope this helps you create a production order that helps restore your sanity.

How to find your 2012 earnings from CreateSpace, Kindle, Nook, Smashwords, and Bookbaby...

If you had Kindle, Nook, Smashwords, or BookBaby publish or sell your ebooks (or CreateSpace sell your paperbacks) in 2012, how can you find out how much you earned, how many books of each title you sold (and the total income for each), and in which countries your masterpieces sold?

All of the firms send an occasional accounting (Amazon–Kindle and CreateSpace–is the best, telling you your income at the end of each month). But here's the step-by-step process to get your actual numbers:

CreateSpace:

Find

<https://www.createspace.com/pub/reports/init.paymenthistory.do?msk=Mr> (or go to <https://createspace.com>, check at My Account, View Reports, Report all 2012 sales (or Payment History in the top row). Enter the dates 1/1/2012 and 12/31/2012. That will tell you the months, books, # of each item sold that month, and income per book. Since they pay at the end of the following month, get the final December total a month or so later. Also, you may not have been paid for some of the last books sold–yet.

Kindle:

Go to <https://kdp.amazon.com/self-publishing/reports>, and then to the third choice: Prior Months' Royalties. Select the 2012 batch, which includes the previous 12 months (generated by the 15th day of the month). So you may have to get the January 2013 numbers to get those last 15 days. Each month includes the titles, quantity of each sold, and your royalty for each. Below the U.S. totals is the same information from sales in the U.K, Germany, France, Japan, Italy, and Spain, all ultimately converted into dollars.

Nook:

Very easy. Head for www.pubit.com, login with your email and password, open My Sales, and the Date/Month. If there's income from that month, hit the payment ID link and it will give you the book title(s), # bought of each, and the amount paid for each.

Smashwords:

More confusing, and harder to tell precisely which month the sale took place. Go to www.smashwords.com, enter your username and password, go to Dashboard, in the left column find Sales and Payment Report and in the line below download 2012 Sales and Payment Report. See the spreadsheet on the bottom of the page.

Reports are made quarterly, and in each quarter the tallies indicate the titles, quantity, and total income for each item, plus an indication which distributor made the respective sales. The sales spread of our books sold through Smashwords was more limited in 2012, to Apple, Smashwords itself, and Barnes & Noble.

Bookbaby:

Find www.bookbaby.com, log in, go to My Account, go to the

Accounting Dashboard (at the left), download the sales report at the end of total sales, enter a time period (1/1/2012-12/31/2012), then download that report. It tells the distributor (for us, Barnes & Noble and iBookstore), the quantity for each, and the payment total.

I hope my book [How to Get Your Book Published in Minutes and Marketed Worldwide in Days](#) helped you get a book together and submitted to the free (or almost free) “open” publishers, so you too received the royalties mentioned above. As you know, once you submit the ebooks or paperbacks, the publishing companies do the marketing and pay you from 35-85% of the income as royalties. If you missed 2012, get going now so next year you’ll be tallying up your hands-off while-you-sleep income!

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett

Can you earn much from “open published” ebook nonfiction?

“Open publishing” means the houses that will publish your submissions free and make them accessible to the public for purchase, like Kindle, Nook, Smashwords, Blurb, Lulu, Scribd, LSI, and BookBaby. (We call it [ancillary publishing](#).)

Let’s follow, say, the Kindle path. You write the book; get a front cover prepped; put the whole book in final, ready-to-go fashion (including proofing); open up the publishing path at Kindle, enter the needed data about you and the book; send the jpg cover; submit the book (probably in Word); sign the

contract, and wait to be bathed in riches (minus deductions).

My book [How to Get Your Book Published Free in Minutes and Marketed Worldwide in Days](#) explains the process for almost all of the publishing houses just mentioned.

The question is how many riches can you expect from ebook nonfiction?

From open publishers? Very little, sadly. The boons by this process that you read about are almost always for fiction, much of it exotic, erotic, romantic, extra-worldly, about detectives, or for kids.

Nonfiction is a tougher road, at least from our experience and that of every other ebook nonfiction writer I've spoken with. That road is straight uphill, bumpy, and little-travelled. So we use the occasional monthly nonfiction payments from open publishers (except Blurb, that publishes mostly art books, and Lulu, where we've had no luck at all) as tiny sinecures.

How, then, do you profitably sell ebook nonfiction? Through your own sales mechanism and ingenuity.

If there's a paperback version of our book, we simply use the final book copy converted to ebook format, save it in PDF, and sell it (with its own front cover) alongside the bound version on our [order form](#).

Who buys it?

We're mostly a nonfiction niche book house (currently serving K-12 administrators and teachers) so lots of those in our target market buy our books in paperback, usually sold through the authors' presentations, to group school gatherings, or at ed conferences or conventions.

All of our K-12 books are also used as textbooks in graded classes, where we usually send a comp ebook to the instructor, who invariably (until now) has the bookstore order the

paperback version. (Savvy students find us, though, through Google and buy the ebook from us.)

Thus at least 90% of our book income is from bound books. Almost all of that other 10% either visit our website or see the ebook alternative on a flyer or order form. They order from our 1ShoppingCart form, and it is downloaded seconds later.

But we also sell general market nonfiction, and there our reports sell as well as our digital books. Buyers mostly come from our blogs, newsletters, other web marketing, and from associates. We also “advertise” them widely on our or others’ e-lists. A few items sell better digitally than in paperback. [Treasure and Scavenger Hunts](#) is usually wanted to plan a party a day or two after they hear about the book at Google, so overnight shipping makes no sense (or cents for either of us) when they can get the same words almost instantly, then get going...

Thus, while “open publishing” liberates wanna-be publishers, so far it hasn’t generated much income for their digital nonfiction books. They are churning up those ebook sales by their own persistent, often clever efforts and order forms or shopping carts.

Incidentally, another spurt of income can be found when the book is brand new and the paperback has yet to arrive from the printer. You have ebook copies to fill the buyers’ impatience almost from the moment the last word is proofed! (Though we know that time/book gap is pretty much a fiction from the past. You can have P.O.D. paperback copies from LSI in about four days.)

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett

BookBaby and publishing your ebook

Half of the reason I went to hear **Brian Felsen** give a 2 1/2-hour program on June 9, sponsored by [BAIPA](#) (Bay Area Independent Publishing Association), was to hear what additional magic he was going to unravel about this out-of-the-woodwork e-publishing phenomenon. Just months back who had heard of BookBaby? Now, who hasn't? It's the world's largest ebook distributor for Indies, like us. (Oh yes, it's also CDBaby's kid cousin, and Felsen runs both.)

Brian's a short dynamo who plowed through too much jet lag and too little air conditioning (like none) to make us laugh, make huge sense about the tumultuous open publishing happening, and to drive home the fact that the big houses either didn't believe the digital deluge or were too ossified to either get on top or jump out of the way.

I don't want to spend our time outlining what BookBaby can do for you. Please go to their [website](#) and particularly look at "About Us" and the Q-A section. In short, they offer the full monty of services, and it seems economically wiser to let them do some of the gnarlier deeds than to waste your editorial skills doing stuff, then undoing and doing it again, like trying to get Word to look civil in mobi or epub.

I'd much rather zero in on the most important points that Felsen made, and let the services sell themselves—or not.

1. Why self-publish? Because the old ship is sinking, the publishers are consolidating (without you), and it's time for a radical readjustment.

2. 95% of today's published books flop.
3. The big houses really want monster books, not what you are offering. To get the monster books they are jettisoning their mid-tail authors. And since you must do your own marketing anyway, with or with big-house "support," why take 10% of the list price (worse yet, net) when doing it yourself you can keep a third or a half? (If you niche publish, and pretest, think 40-50% every time—my how-to link [here](#).)
4. The big houses do have virtues: marketing and editorial support, exceptional physical distribution and store contacts, they are the king of certain genres, and being published by them makes it easier to get higher-paying speaking gigs.
5. Then why do it yourself? The speed and time to market, you can dominate the smaller niches, you already bring your own platform, you get a bigger cut of the profit pie, and it's not either-or. Do both. (Aren't most of us still printing bound versions and letting others publish our ebooks?)
6. With POD (print on demand) producing good-looking books in small quantities overnight, long gone are the opener runs of 2,500 books costing \$5-6,000. They look as good as the bookstore books and can go from the press to the conference breakout room to your bank in a week.
7. Ingram's royalty payment for ebooks is poor.
8. Covers are very important: "success leaves clues." Make your ebook text 12-point, 14-18 point for chapter titles. Create them in Word or PDF. Keep your book in free-flow page format, a dynamic layout. The fixed format (locked) only works for children's photo books, and not well there.
9. It now costs you a basic \$99 or a premium \$199 to use BookBaby, but soon it will be \$99 for distribution and another \$50 for set-up.

10. To survive as a self-publisher you must involve social and multimedia: website, online retail stores, blogs, speaking, YouTube. Soon you will have video and audio in the books too.

11. **Marketing** involves **product** (content and cover), **pricing**, **placement** (in ebook order, Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Sony, and Apple), and **promotion** (from your website: Twitter, Facebook, and a blog, plus Google. Also, sales direct to the reader, the metadata registered, and the basic SEO steps and lead words employed). Finally, to survive you must define your USP (unique selling proposal) and have a clear and compelling idea.

12. Identify your followers, use Stumbleupon.com, network with your heroes, ask your readers what they need to know, and help them.

13. Don't avoid or overlook email: that's where you get the best response. Do a newsletter, broadcast, directly engage your followers.

14. "It's your scared duty to articulate." Add to the conversation, express your unique voice. The time has never been better for writers because the old gatekeepers are folding. Anybody can get in, anybody can be in print.

15. Sell what you can—editions, a series, guest articles—and make money from other sources from your singular idea(s).

16. Pay attention to your time use. DIY (doing it yourself) can be very dumb: farm out what others do better and faster. Let others do the technical stuff. You write.

17. Nobody's going to steal your words. Piracy isn't the problem, it's anonymity. Nobody knows who you are or that your book exists because it wasn't shown, marketed, and sold.

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett