

KIRKUS --- REVIEWS



SELF- PUBLISHING GUIDE

A Concise Primer on Getting Your Book to Market and Reaching Readers, Publishers, Librarians, and Agents

www.kirkus.com/indie



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Introduction

The act of writing will probably always drive authors to stupefying feats of procrastination, but it's never been easier to reach readers. The self-publishing boom means that many librarians, agents, publishers, film executives, and booksellers are stocking, acquiring, and selling self-pubbed books. Kirkus Indie editors have seen many self-pubbed authors go on to publish traditionally, including [Sylvain Neuvel](#) and [Kevin Morris](#), although many are happy to permanently reside in Indieland. Many readers have shown they don't care about a book's provenance as long as it's good: a January 2018 [Author Earnings report](#) noted that indie sales grew 2.1 percent during the last nine months of 2017—nearly twice the 1.1 percent increase of all trade publishers. The [2015 Author Earnings report](#) also notes that non-traditionally published books account for nearly 60 percent of all Kindle e-books purchased in the US—more than the “Big Five” publishers (Hachette, HarperCollins, Macmillan, Penguin Random House, and Simon & Schuster) combined.

Now that there are multiple platforms for self-publishing, along with various distributors, discounts, formats, and price points to consider, getting a book to market can be nearly as complicated and daunting as writing one. This primer is designed to simplify the process and help writers reach everyone from Kindle readers to print devotees to staunch supporters of independent bookstores.

This guide draws on several excellent sources that you may want to read on your own, including Shawn Welch and Guy Kawasaki's [APE: Author, Publisher, Entrepreneur—How to Publish a Book](#). Kawasaki offers additional guidance here, as does Mark Coker, founder of Smashwords; Jan F. Constantine, former general counsel for the Authors Guild; and several indie authors. Other helpful resources include University of Virginia publishing and digital media instructor [Jane Friedman's blog](#); Joel Friedlander's website, [The Book Designer](#); author and designer Guido Henkel's [Zen of eBook Formatting](#); Amazon.com's author forum on [KBoards](#); and Coker's free e-book [The Secrets to Ebook Publishing Success: How to Reach More Readers](#).

Editing

Whether to self- or traditionally publish sparks debate, but everyone agrees on the importance of a good editor. Kirkus Indie has reviewed thousands of books that would have been significantly improved (and gotten better reviews) had they been professionally edited.

“Even more than the weight the review carries externally, offering strong business and professional advances, my starred Kirkus review confirmed in me my identity as a writer, and the belief that not only do I love writing and find purpose in it, but my writing is good, and others find soul in it, too.”

—Alyssa Petersel, author of *Somehow I Am Different*

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"I learned more in a few months with the Kirkus pros than I did in years with my kindhearted friends. Their three-level editing process was one of the best investments I've ever made."

—Carey Richard, author of *The Poppy Field Diary*

"It took blood, sweat, and many tears to write a memoir. Finding the right editor for my book was mandatory. I chose Kirkus Editorial because it has the best reputation in the industry. My editor was a joy to work with. I had absolute confidence in her editorial comments. They were astute, comprehensive, and ultimately made my book shine."

—Kami Corban, author of *Ex-Rich Girl Tells All*

"As a first-time novelist, Kirkus Editorial was my secret weapon. Sure, they caught the typos I missed and flagged the stylistic inconsistencies. But the clincher was the hour-long phone consultation with their editor, which gave me the other answers I needed. I recommend Kirkus to any writer who is serious about presenting a polished, professional manuscript."

—Gerry O'Brien, author of *1901*

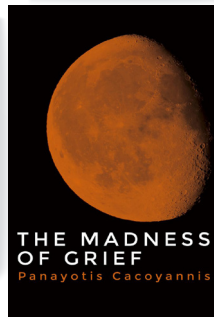
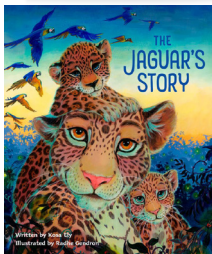
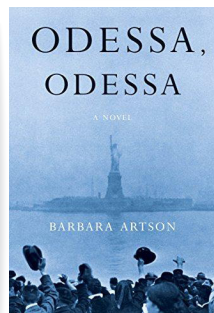
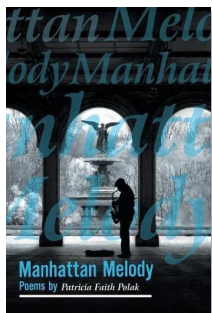
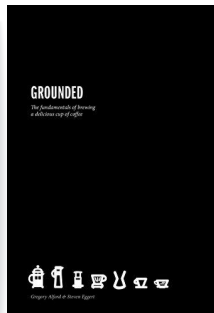
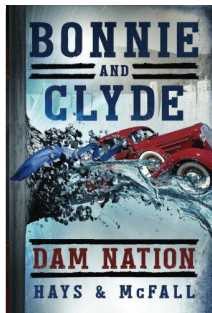
Do your due diligence when hunting for an editor. Start by asking candidates questions. Has she worked as a full-time editor? Where? How long? What style is she most familiar with? Many magazine and newspaper editors follow the [Associated Press Stylebook](#) (as does *Kirkus Reviews*), but book editors tend to use the [Chicago Manual of Style](#) (as does Kirkus Editorial). Ask editors to take a short edit test.

"Many of our most successful authors at Smashwords are hiring developmental editors, copy editors, e-book formatters, cover designers, publicists, and personal assistants," said Coker. "They retain the services of e-book distributors such as Smashwords, and print on demand printers such as IngramSpark or CreateSpace." He noted that it's difficult for one author to take on all tasks involved in creating a high-quality book. "There are certain professional publishing best practices that are dangerous to shortchange—like professional editing and cover design. This doesn't mean, however, that the indie author should surrender the fate of their book to these freelance professionals. A smart indie author actively manages their team."

Kirkus Editorial, whose services Guy Kawasaki suggests authors consider, is a collection of publishing industry professionals who offer editing services to independent authors as well as publishing partner clients. All Kirkus Editorial editors have worked at major publishing houses—Random House, Hachette, Penguin, HarperCollins, Simon & Schuster, Macmillan—or at smaller respected literary and genre publishers like Harlequin, Graywolf, and more. Each prospective editor takes a rigorous editing test. And because Kirkus works at high volume, authors can hire highly experienced editors at competitive rates.

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|---|---|--|
|  COPYEDITING |  COLLABORATIVE EDITING |  PROFESSIONAL EDITING PACKAGE |
| Perfect if you're looking for basic manuscript cleanup or if you're facing budget and timeline restrictions | Best place to start if your manuscript has not yet been edited by a professional publishing industry editor | Ideal if you want to put your manuscript through the same editorial process the major houses follow |
| 2 cents/word | \$99 + 3 cents/word | \$99 + 6.5 cents/word |
| 15 business days | 20 business days | custom timeline |

Kirkus Indie editors' choices for top recent covers



Kirkus Editorial offers [three tiers of editing](#): basic copy editing; substantive—or collaborative editing; and a complete professional package, which includes three editorial rounds.

FROM COVER DESIGN TO TITLE

Cover Design

Covers—both as full-size and as thumbnail images—must stop readers in their tracks. The best strategy is to study covers in your genre and note appropriate and typical color palettes, fonts, themes, images, etc. You may also want to comb through Joel Friedlander's website, [The Book Designer](#), which has tips on the art of cover design.

Readers will often view your cover alongside many others. “Ensure that it stands out on an Amazon page next to ten other covers, all postage-stamp size,” says Guy Kawasaki. “This means bold graphics, big sans-serif font. Don't even bother looking at it six by nine inches printed on paper. Hardly anyone will see it this way. I'm conflicted because I work for the company, but Canva.com can help you design Kindle covers in minutes.” (Watch a [YouTube talk](#) Kawasaki had with VP of Kirkus Indie Karen Schechner on using the online graphic design platform Canva to help with cover design.)

On Creating Covers

“My official cover designer has been Todd Engel. He is contracted with [BookLocker.com](#).

All but one of my covers have images from Dreamstime or iStock. I can spend hours looking for just the right cover. I also learned along the way that it is important to have an image not only for the front cover but one also for the back. The ones on the back are often just 'texture,' but having an image of some kind adds a richness to the feel of the book that I like.

I think often artwork looks more impressive than a simple photograph, but using artwork is far, far more expensive than purchasing some royalty-free images online.” —Johnny Townsend, author of *Missionaries Make the Best Companions*

Interior Pages

Interior book design usually goes unnoticed until it goes wrong. A good, affordable option to create an attractive design and avoid newbie mistakes is Joel Friedlander's [book design templates](#) for print and e-books. All conversion and formatting needs are coded into their predesigned templates, which are compatible with CreateSpace, Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP), Lulu, Smashwords, Lightning Source, IngramSpark, and others. Each template includes five kinds of interior pages, preinstalled section breaks, running chapter heads, and page numbers. The 2Way template, which can be used for both print and e-books, starts at \$59.

To learn more about book design, visit Friedlander's website, [The Book Designer](#), which outlines everything from chapter heads to typefaces.

Guido Henkel, author of *Zen of eBook Formatting*, notes that when creating e-books, the simpler the better: "New devices may have cool gimmicks and features, but they are useless if they make up only a small fraction of the market. What good are colorful headlines or sidebars when 75 percent of the e-book devices are black and white? E-books are being read and displayed on anything ranging from a tiny cellphone display to a humungous ultrahigh-definition desktop monitor, and since one version of the book has to work on all these platforms with all these vastly different technical specs, it does require restraint."

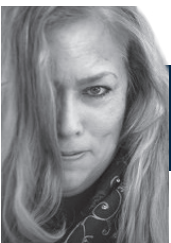
Henkel offers [professional custom interior design and formatting services](#) at very reasonable rates starting at \$150.

Choosing a Good Title

Like the cover, the title should be genre-influenced and give readers a sense of the book's content; it should be evocative and memorable, but not clichéd. For example, the title of Jacob M. Appel's [The Liars' Asylum](#) works well to encapsulate the tendentious and complex climate in which his collection of short stories takes place. [A Theory of Nothing](#)—fatalistic, irreverent—is perfect for [Thomas Barlow's](#) debut novel, described by Kirkus as "a cheekily ironic takedown of academic adventures in absurdity." And you can't do much better than the title of Eli P. Cox III's [Seeking Adam Smith](#) for a business resource for considering archetypical ideologies. And its subtitle (don't forget the

“

Would I advise authors to get a book review from Kirkus? Was it all worth it? Yes, and yes.”



—Barbara Amaya,
author of *Nobody's Girl*

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subtitle!), *Finding the Shadow Curriculum of Business*, gives readers additional context. (All three of these books were among Kirkus's [Best Books of 2017](#).)

Author Bio and Photo

It's wise to read several bios before you write your own, to get a sense for what most authors include. In your author bio, make sure to refer to yourself in the third person, list any writing awards and previous titles, and briefly mention where you live. And be sure to include a way for readers to follow you on social media and/or visit your author website. The author photo should be on the back for paperbacks; for e-books, you can add the photo to the About the Author section. (Many authors don't include a photo in their e-books.) Try to match the tone of your bio and your photo's style with your genre, don't be too stiff (in language or posture), and let people see your face.

CHECKLIST

Consider Joining: The Authors Guild

The Authors Guild is the nation's oldest and largest professional organization for writers. Members include novelists, historians, journalists, and poets—traditionally and independently published—as well as literary agents and representatives of writers' estates.

The Guild advocates for authors on issues of copyright, fair contracts, free speech, and tax fairness and has initiated lawsuits in defense of authors' rights where necessary. Members have access to a broad range of legal and web services. The Guild's legal staff reviews members' book and freelance contracts and intervenes in publishing disputes. They provide [liability insurance](#) at group rates, a [Back-in-Print program](#), and a free subscription to their quarterly bulletin, and they host and help develop members' websites.

The Guild welcomes self-published authors. Find out about membership [here](#).

| CHECKLIST | |
|-----------|------------------------|
| ✓ | Join The Authors Guild |
| ✓ | Trim Sizes |
| ✓ | Page Numbers |
| ✓ | Content Order |
| ✓ | ISBNs and Bar Codes |
| ✓ | Pricing |
| ✓ | Copyright |
| ✓ | Permissions |
| ✓ | Electronic formats |

Trim Sizes

Joel Friedlander has an excellent (and evergreen), [concise list](#) (consolidated below) of various genres' typical trim sizes; these are suggestions only.

- **Mass market:** 4 1/4" x 7"
- **Trade paperbacks:** often in the 5 1/2" x 8 1/2" to 6" x 9" range
- **Manuals and workbooks:** often in the 8" x 10" to 8-1/2" x 11" range
- **Novels, Memoirs, and Short Story and Essay Collections:** there are numerous options. 5-1/2" x 8-1/2" and 5-1/4" x 8" are popular
- **General nonfiction:** generally 6" x 9"

Page Numbers

Use Arabic numerals for main body and backmatter and Roman numerals for frontmatter. The page number is often found at the top of the page, flush left verso (left-hand page) and flush right recto (right-hand page). Leave blank pages unnumbered.

Content Order

This running order is suggested by the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Many elements will not apply to your book; if so, just skip them.

Front Matter

- Half Title Page
- Frontispiece
- Title Page
- Copyright Page
- Dedication
- Table of Contents
- List of Illustrations and List of Tables
- Foreword, Preface, Acknowledgments, and Introduction
- Other Frontmatter

Text (Parts, Chapters, et al.)

- Epilogues, Afterwords, and Conclusions

“

Since then, it has won several awards, and the Kirkus star glitters cheerfully alongside them. Thank you, thank you, thank you!”



—Robin Gregory, author of
*The Improbable Wonders
of Moojie Littleman*

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Back Matter

- Acknowledgements (if not in front matter)
- Appendices
- Chronology
- Endnotes
- Glossary
- Bibliography or Reference List
- List of Contributors
- Index

ISBNs and Bar Codes

The International Standard Book Number is the thirteen-digit unique identifier of a book. Each format (e-book, paperback, and hardcover, for example) should have its own ISBN. In the US, ISBNs are available for purchase from [Bowker](#)—\$125 for one and \$295 for ten. We recommend that authors buy their own ISBNs. Distributors may offer less-expensive or even free ISBNs, but the ISBN will then list that company, rather than the author, as the publisher.

Bar codes, used by booksellers, are scannable and may contain additional information, such as pricing. Unless you plan on selling your book in a bookstore, though, you don't need one.

Pricing

Most full-length self-pubbed books will fall somewhere in the \$2.99 to \$9.99 range. Prices can always be changed, and many authors opt to make their books cheaper in the beginning to generate interest and reviews. Authors with multiple books, especially authors with series, will often heavily discount or even give away their first books.

Guy Kawasaki recommends: "\$2.95 for first-time fiction. \$9.95 for second, third fiction. \$9.95 for any business book, first time or not. You can do a lot of cogitation about pricing, but it comes down to this."

Copyright

Under the US copyright law, a book is protected as soon as it is written. However, authors are advised to register the work in order to be recognized as the copyright holder in a court of law. Here's the

[FAQ sheet](#) from the US Copyright Office that answers all copyright-related questions and links to online registration forms. The [online registration fees](#) start at \$35; paper registration is \$85.

Should Authors Copyright Their Work, and What Are the Benefits of Doing So?

Jan F. Constantine, former general counsel for the Authors Guild, answers:

“This gets a bit complicated, but I’ll be as clear as I can be. Technically, it’s a bit imprecise to talk about ‘copyrighting’ a work. The copyright comes into being when a work is set down (‘fixed’ is the legal term) in a tangible medium. So as soon as you write something—pen on paper or fingers on keyboard—that’s when copyright protection attaches to the writing.

Registering the copyright is a different story—you get copyright protection whether or not you formally register your work with the Copyright Office, but if you do register, there are added benefits that have been put in place to incentivize copyright owners to register their works. For example, you must register your copyright before you can sue someone for copyright infringement.

Also, timely registration is evidence in court that a copyright is valid and that the facts in the certificate of registration are true. This means, in a copyright infringement suit, it becomes the opposing party’s responsibility to show that your copyright is invalid or that you’re not the owner. Lastly, registration makes it clear that you own the copyright, making it harder for infringers to argue that they infringed without knowing who truly owned the work.”

“As a trusted, unbiased source, *Kirkus Reviews* has given me the industry credibility needed to appeal to libraries, booksellers and readers.”



—Autumn J. Bright,
author of *Love Sick*

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Permissions

To include others’ work (lyrics, poetry, etc.) within a book, the author must obtain permission by contacting the rights holder. Often the publisher, rather than the artist, holds the rights. How much material you can include without obtaining permission is trickier than it ought to be because the law can’t decide what constitutes fair use. Please visit Jane Friedman’s [concise-as-possible blog post](#) for more guidance.

Electronic formats (EPUB, MOBI, PDF)

EPUB

The people who brought you EPUB, the International Digital Publishing Forum, describe the format this way: “EPUB allows publishers to produce and send a single digital publication file through distribution and offers consumers interoperability between software/hardware for unencrypted reflowable digital books and other publications.” It’s probably the most popular reflowable text used on laptops, smartphones, and nearly all e-readers, including the Nook and iPad, with the exception of the Kindle. It’s a free and open standard (which means it can be used by anyone).

Mobipocket Ebook Format

Like EPUB, Mobipocket, or MOBI, is also an open-standard format. The company that created the format is now owned by Amazon.com. Mobipocket allows authors to create e-books from a variety of sources to be viewed on all platforms that support Mobipocket Reader, including Kindle.

PDF

The Portable Document Format is a file format used to present and exchange documents independent of software, hardware, or operating system. It can be used for fixed or reflowable content. Invented by Adobe Systems, the PDF is now an open standard maintained by the International Organization for Standardization. PDFs can contain links and buttons, form fields, audio, and video. They can also be signed electronically and are viewed using free Acrobat Reader software.

DRM

Digital rights management is software designed to prevent books from being pirated. Many feel that DRM is more trouble than it’s worth. It’s not effective enough to stop hackers, and it often makes life more troublesome for legitimate users.

Publication Date

This is the date you first publish your book online or in print. How much thought you dedicate to the pub date depends on your marketing campaign. If you’re developing a comprehensive plan, you’ll want to have your reviews in and your publicity machine up and running at least three months before the book is published.

“

I had all three books of my trilogy reviewed and with each review I received new and fresh sound-bites for describing the book to others.”

—D.K. Reed, author of *Minimize*



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THIRD-PARTY ENDORSEMENTS

Blurbs

Blurbs are quotes of endorsement from well-known writers or experts. They're typically included in press materials and printed on the book itself, usually on the back, but they can be on the cover, too. Choose your blurbs wisely. "Few people agree with me, but most authors get too many blurbs," says Guy Kawasaki. "They think more is more. I have the opposite theory: more is less. When you see a book with ten to twenty blurbs from people you don't recognize, it means that the author is trying too hard. One blurb from the right person is enough, so use a rifle-shot approach."

Reviews and Advance Praise

A primary challenge for writers is discoverability. Advance reviews make readers aware of the quality of your work and provide an objective, informed opinion. An important resource for publishers, librarians, and booksellers, *Kirkus Reviews* has regularly provided advance reviews of the books of the country's top publishers for more than eighty years.

A [Kirkus Indie review](#):

- Reaches readers via the Kirkus.com website, which gets 1.5 million monthly page views
- May appear in *Kirkus Reviews*'s print magazine, which has 15,000 industry subscribers
- May be the focus of attention-grabbing marketing materials
- Is distributed to Kirkus's licensees, including BN.com, Google Books, Ingram, and others
- Can be used to pitch other publications for additional coverage
- May catch the attention of agents, editors, and other publishing professionals

Please note that Kirkus Indie maintains strict editorial standards. A positive review is far from guaranteed, but when it occurs, it carries significant weight.

“The endorsement *The Great Carp Escape* received from Kirkus helped launch my children's book to a new level.”

—Irish Beth Maddock,
author of *The Great Carp
Escape*



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"The starred review I received from Kirkus won the attention of both my agents, film and literary, which in turn has led to a fantastic publishing deal in North America, the sale of foreign rights in several countries, as well as a film option with one of Hollywood's major studios."—Sylvain Neuvel, author of *Sleeping Giants* ([Read more about Sylvain's success in the Wall Street Journal.](#))

"Kirkus' review of *The Mill River Recluse* played an important role in encouraging readers to take a chance on a first novel by an unknown author."—Darcie Chan, independent author of *The Mill River Recluse*, which sold more than 600,000 copies ([Read more about Darcie's success in the Wall Street Journal.](#))

"Kirkus definitely played a major role in making this happen!"—James Bannon, author of *I2*, when his novel hit No. 1 on Kindle's bestselling fiction list and No. 1 in overall Kindle downloads

"When I sought a review for my book, I was selective in choosing what I thought was a highly regarded and fair source. Noted for being thorough, unbiased, and a 'tough critic,' I knew if I received a positive review from Kirkus it would open doors to new possibilities. It didn't take long before that started to occur. Thank you for opening the world's eyes to otherwise unknown authors. We are making a difference and paving the way to the future of publishing."—Lori St. John, author of *The Corruption of Innocence*

Librarians Value Reviews

Jeanne Lamb, a children's librarian from the New York Public Library, talked with Kirkus about working with self-pubbed authors:

"Submissions of self-published materials have increased tenfold, so we are no longer able to respond to each inquiry. Authors new to the industry may not be aware that most public libraries have acquisition policies for children's collections that contain more stringent guidelines than bookstores and online retailers. Often, there's a requirement of at least one review from a standard reviewing medium. However, we can and do add titles whenever possible. A wonderful story is a wonderful story, no matter the publisher.

I love the reviews of indie works in *Kirkus*. It can be a game-changer where self-publishing is concerned."

"The starred review I received from Kirkus won the attention of both my agents, film and literary, which in turn has led to a fantastic publishing deal in North America, the sale of foreign rights in several countries, as well as a film option with one of Hollywood's major studios."—Sylvain Neuvel, author of *Only Human* (Read more about Sylvain's success with *Sleeping Giants*, the first book in his [The Themis Files](#) series, in the [Wall Street Journal.](#))

"Kirkus definitely played a major role in making this happen!"—[James Bannon](#), author of *I2*, when his novel hit No. 1 on Kindle's bestselling fiction list and No. 1 in overall Kindle downloads

"When I sought a review for my book, I was selective in choosing what I thought was a highly regarded and fair source. Noted for being thorough, unbiased, and a 'tough critic,' I knew if I received a positive review from Kirkus it would open doors to new possibilities. It didn't take long before that started to occur. Thank you for opening the world's eyes to otherwise unknown authors. We are making a difference and paving the way to the future of publishing."

—Lori St. John, author of [The Corruption of Innocence](#)

"The indie publishing world can be hugely intimidating, but there is gold in those hills, and as a reader and an agent I always pay attention to titles that Kirkus highlights. A great discovery tool."

—Daniel Lazar, senior literary agent at Writers House

DISTRIBUTION

Hardcover, Paperback, or E-book?

Most debut authors may want to sell only print-on-demand and e-books rather than preprinted books. With most POD books, the author makes the file available to a distributor, like CreateSpace or IngramSpark. The distributor then takes a percentage of sales and fulfills the orders. This way, authors don't have to guess about print runs, changes can be made easily, and upfront costs are minimized or eliminated.

E-book Retailers

The major e-book retailers, or resellers, are Amazon.com, Apple, Barnes & Noble, Google Play, and Kobo (through which you can reach independent bookstores). You can upload your book with each retailer separately and retain a larger percentage for yourself, but you'll have to send the files in the various formats required by each retailer and track sales separately. Another drawback: you'll also need to upload any changes to each retailer individually.

To simplify distribution and obtain aggregated e-book sales information, you can work with e-book distributors, also called aggregators, which will take a larger percentage of your sales but will save you time and frustration. (Note that when you use these distributors, you still retain all rights to your work.)

Mark Coker on the Best Strategy for Streamlined Distribution

"I'm obviously a big believer in authors working with a professional distributor like Smashwords. Distributors help authors reach retailers and libraries that aren't accessible any other way. But most importantly, distributors save authors a lot of time with consolidated metadata management, sales reporting, payments, and tax reporting. A great distributor will help you spend more time writing and less time on everything else. Distributors allow you to upload your book once and then make it easy for you to manage it across multiple sales channels from a single console."

“I have been absolutely committed to writing for decades, no matter the obstacles, and Kirkus is a valued resource toward achieving my ultimate goal of critical success.”



Johnny Townsend, author of *Lying for the Lord*

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Formatting and File Conversion

Some distributors offer various tools (both free and for a fee) for file conversion and formatting, but a popular option is using Joel Friedlander's [book design templates](#) for print and e-books. All conversion and formatting needs are coded into the predesigned templates.

[The Smashwords Style Guide](#) teaches writers how to professionally format an e-book to prepare it for publication so it reads great on any e-reading device.

Guido Henkel offers a highly recommended [free guide](#) that outlines the entire formatting process. He also has an expanded version, *Zen of eBook Formatting*, available for sale. Henkel explains the benefits of formatting one's work: "One of the biggest challenges is to make sure your e-book displays correctly on all platforms. A lot of authors simply export their manuscripts from Word and then publish the resulting e-book file. The problem with that approach is that all word processors hide a lot of formatting specifics in order to create their WYSIWYG environment."

The result can be nearly unreadable. However, formatting the work, rather than simply exporting it, gives the author much more control over the final product. "It allows you to create a much cleaner e-book, but you can also make sure it is structurally sound, and you can make sure your implementation is rock solid, avoiding or working around known device glitches and problems, creating e-books that will display nicely on any device in the market," says Henkel.

Popular E-book Distributors

BookBaby

BookBaby's "eBook conversion and distribution" package costs \$249 (they charge up front but don't take a percentage of net sales) and includes conversion from Word and PDF. It distributes books in over 170 countries through more than sixty online retail stores, including Amazon.com, Apple, Barnes & Noble, Copia, UK retailer Gardners Books, Powell's, Kobo, and wholesale networks including Baker & Taylor and Ingram. BookBaby also offers print-book services.

“

To say the review was well worth it is an understatement...Already I am experiencing an increase in book sales and interest in my work.”

Michelle Bitting, author of *Good Friday Kiss*



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Blurb

For full-color print and e-books, Blurb is a favorite. Joel Friedlander recommends Blurb on his website. Authors can sell directly through Blurb, which doesn't take a royalty but charges for its services. Blurb also has distribution arrangements with Amazon, Apple, and Ingram, among others.

Draft2Digital

Draft2Digital takes 10 percent of the book's retail price as a fee. Its simple interface and conversion tool and responsive customer service make it popular among authors. They accept Word and EPUB files and distribute to Apple, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, Inktera, Scribd, 24Symbols, Tolino, and CreateSpace.

Kindle Direct Publishing

KDP is a direct retailer rather than a distributor, but its market share is the equivalent of a distributor's. Author earnings are determined by their share of total pages read, up to a total of three thousand pages per customer per title. KDP accepts all major file formats but recommends DOC/DOCX or HTML formats.

Lulu

Lulu is one of the larger distributors. Net profits of print books sold on Lulu.com are split 80/20 between the author and Lulu. For e-books sold on Lulu.com, the net profits are split 90/10 between the author and Lulu. Lulu also offers comprehensive author services and various distribution packages, including GlobalREACH, which is worldwide. Lulu accepts all major file formats.

Smashwords

Smashwords' royalty rate is 85 percent on books sold on Smashwords and approximately 60 percent of books sold via other retailers, including Apple and others. Smashwords, one of the largest distributors of indie books, doesn't sell author services. Authors must upload manuscripts that conform to the formatting rules in Smashwords' [style guide](#) (Smashwords offers a [list](#) of reasonably priced freelance manuscript formatters). They accept Word or EPUB files.

“Was it worth it? You bet! I have been delighted with my book's increased visibility and awareness as a result of the review.”

Michelle Bitting, author
of *How to Game People
Without Even Trying*



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Smashwords' Premium Catalog distribution network (authors must meet some basic requirements to participate) includes Apple, Barnes & Noble (US and UK), Scribd, Kobo, Yuzu, Blio, and Inktera. Their library distribution reaches OverDrive, Baker & Taylor, Axis360, and others.

Another Option

Gumroad

Gumroad allows anyone to sell e-books directly from their website. It offers monthly subscription packages starting at \$10/month, and charges 3.5 percent plus 30 cents per transaction. There are no other associated fees.

Common Strategies for Distribution

Save yourself some time and use Jane Friedman's suggested strategy for distribution, as noted on her blog: "One popular approach for independent authors is to start by distributing through Amazon KDP and to then add multichannel distributor Smashwords, which has no upfront fee and distributes to all major devices and retailers *except* Amazon."

Distributors of Print-on-Demand Books

CreateSpace

Authors can sell POD books via CreateSpace without incurring any upfront costs. CreateSpace makes its money on POD books by charging a royalty, a budget-friendly option for authors. Royalties depend on trim size, etc. CreateSpace also has excellent customer service. *(Please note that as of April 20, 2018, CreateSpace no longer offers paid professional services, such as text or design changes to covers or interior files. It does, however, still provide print-on-demand and distribution services.)*

IngramSpark

IngramSpark also offers POD distribution and e-book distribution to a vast global network, including big chains, little chains, libraries,

“

As a result [of my Kirkus Indie review], my books are consistently on the SPD best-seller list. I am confident that this achievement would not have been possible without Kirkus.”

Jacob M. Appel,
author of *The Man Who
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independent bookstores, and, as they say on their website, “just about anyone, anywhere in the world who sells (or is even thinking about selling) a book in any format.” Depending on your wholesale discount, you will receive between 45 and 70 percent, minus print costs (Ingram provides a [cost calculator](#)). There’s a \$49 setup fee for a print and e-book combo and options for individual e-books or print books. Note that the setup fee is refunded with one single order of over 50 print copies within the first 60 days of setup. As previously mentioned, you can also use Joel Friedlander’s interior design templates to create your file and upload to IngramSpark.

Best Practices

Kirkus Indie Asks Smashwords’ Mark Coker: What are some of the best ways for indie authors to stand out and find readers?

There’s no single magic bullet to bestsellerdom. The truth of the matter is that all writers struggle to reach readers. The secret to reaching readers is to implement professional publishing best practices. The opportunity for authors is to implement as many best practices as possible, and then to constantly iterate and improve their implementation.

Here’s a representative example of five e-book publishing best practices:

1. Write a super awesome WOW book. Every writer believes their book is awesome, but the truth of the matter is that most books are not awesome to readers. A wow book is a book that takes the reader to an emotionally satisfying extreme. Wow books average 4.5- to 5-star reviews. These are the books that rock the reader’s world. These are the books that generate passionate reader word of mouth. If your book is unable to turn one reader into another reader through word of mouth, then it’s probably not taking the reader to that emotionally satisfying extreme. Bottom line, good books aren’t good enough anymore. There’s a glut of high-quality, low-cost e-books out there, so the competition is tougher than ever to satisfy readers. Super awesome books start with great writing, followed by great editing and an obsessive compulsive desire on the part of the writer to get every little detail just right.

2. Give the book a professionally designed cover image. Readers *do* judge books by their covers. Great cover design starts with the author having a razor-sharp understanding of their target reader. Who

“I have placed it in my query letter and in newspaper marketing ads for my books. They really provided me a solid platform for my work, and their reviews propelled me forward to continue writing.”

– Gail Parker, author of *Zaphram, The Hidden Jewel*

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is that reader who will derive the most satisfaction from your book? If you're targeting all romance readers, or all mystery readers, you're thinking too broadly. Maybe your book will appeal most to YA fantasy readers who enjoy action-packed battles between fairies and dragons set in Victorian times. Your cover image—through the symbols in your imagery—must convey a promise that your book's topic, category, setting, and emotional reading experience match your target reader's aspirational desires. A great cover designer can incorporate imagery to help you make that honest promise to readers. If you succeed, your cover will be the one that jumps off the page (or device screen) to your target readers.

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“Following publication of these accolades in the Kirkus magazine, my book sales dramatically increased and, according to the latest word from my publisher, sales continue to go well.”

Miriam Herin, author of *A Stone for Bread*



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For more on best practices from Mark Coker, download [The Secrets to Ebook Publishing Success](#), which identifies over thirty proven best practices of the bestselling indie e-book authors.

A Few Last Tips

"I think the most important thing is to produce something meaningful to you—the writing, cover, and design, exceptionally well rendered and professionally edited. That said, many self-publishers don't realize that marketing and promotion (making lists of bloggers, reviewers, contests, book signings; planning interviews, endorsements, podcasts, and giveaways, etc.) start long before the final book is in hand. If you are anxious to get it out, Amazon will sell it before the release date, but three to four months before the official release, it needs to be sent out for review and for procuring blurbs. Rush things and you might miss opportunities from institutions or contests that can give it a lot of exposure. Yeah, self-publishers are not only writers, they're also small-business owners. Sigh." —Robin Gregory, author of

“The review produced magic. I quoted Kirkus in the opening of my query letters. Many agents ask to see the book, and more than one asked to represent me.”

Laurel Huber, author of
Margery & Pamela

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[The Improbable Wonders of Moojie Littleman](#), which received a starred review from Kirkus

“No matter how good a writer you are, you absolutely need to have a critique group. It can be online or in person. You WILL miss important problems and suggestions if you don’t have other people critiquing your work. Don’t accept everything someone says, of course, but you definitely need to consider it. I’ve corrected so many logistical errors, etc., because of another reader catching them. It has not only saved me from embarrassment, but has also simply made my stories better.”—[Johnny Townsend](#), author of [Missionaries Make the Best Companions](#)

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“Work hard. Learn from those who are ahead of you—it is a very helpful and friendly environment, and the ladder won’t be pulled up after those who have had success. Invest in your education. Listen to podcasts on the subject. Read blog posts. Soak it all in. And enjoy it—if it feels like a chore, you’re probably in the wrong game.”—Mark Dawson, author of the bestselling John Milton series

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