

How to Publish an Ebook

Publishing your work as a ebook can be a cheap, simple and low-risk way of getting your work 'out there', or it can be a complement to more traditional forms. Several well-known authors – such as Amanda Hocking and Hugh Howey, as well as Irish writers Hazel Gaynor and Carmel Harrington – published their first novels as ebooks before they signed a contract with a traditional publishing house.

Good ebook sales do at least demonstrate that you can produce marketable content, and any publisher will be interested in that. But it doesn't always work that way: ebooks only sell well if their content is well-suited to the form. They are great for works that you don't want to carry round with you as print – for whatever reason: fat technical manuals, self-improvement books, cookbooks, *Fifty Shades of Grey* – as well as for good old-fashioned storytelling. They are not so good for graphic novels and other works that rely heavily on illustrations. Every new ereader, it seems, comes with a free copy of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to show off its capabilities, but would you really prefer that to a book you can handle?

Print books are more expensive, so a publisher may well think that a successful ebook has taken most of the potential sales from a print version. A traditional publisher will often only release an ebook version of their bestsellers several weeks (or even months) later. Many people who would never buy a print copy (or who have already bought one) would prefer the convenience of an ebook version, but going from ebook to print is a harder sell.

In short: if your masterpiece has unexpected success as a ebook it will not necessarily lead to a publisher snapping it up but it may help you to get a print contract for your next work, so why not give it a go?

If all you want is a few print copies for family and friends then there are many companies that provide a print-on-demand service. Naturally this is more expensive per copy, so if you are confident of being able to sell a sizable print run it may be better to deal with a local printer who has experience of your sort of book.

It isn't difficult to produce an ebook; all you need is a good clean electronic copy. A Word document is fine, though Scrivener is highly recommended for composing longer works. Companies that sell ebooks, such as Amazon and Smashwords, provide instructions on their website about how to prepare your manuscript. It isn't difficult but it can be time consuming and attention to detail is vital. Keep it simple: remember your words will be read on all sorts of devices, in all sorts of fonts and sizes – so it is foolish to try to dictate how it must appear – but do make sure it is properly proof-read and edited before you set it before the public. It is important to make sure your document doesn't contain any formatting other than what the website asks for. The best way to ensure that, if you have a Word document, is to start from a plain text copy and build from there. If

you understand how stylesheets work then you should have no trouble, otherwise you may prefer hire someone to format the manuscript for you. Mark's List is a good place to start looking.

Now all you need is a cover image. If you are confident of your ability you may design it yourself. Several sellers have (limited) tools on their websites, but you should at least consider hiring a designer. You know the old proverb "Don't judge a book by its cover"? We all do, of course, and rightly so. If it's obvious that no one has given much thought to the cover, why would we expect the contents to be any better?

Your ebook is ready for launch and all you need worry about is publicity and marketing. This is where a traditional publisher earns their keep, but that's a story for another day.

Diane Ascroft lives near Fivemiletown and writes Historical Fiction. Her latest story is *An Unbidden Visitor*