PENCREST PUBLISHERS

# Your Book, Your Rights

## The Human Self-Publishing Guide

You have a story. This guide walks you, step by step, from that story to a real book on real shelves and screens - one you still own, completely. Follow it page by page and you can publish your book yourself. Or hand the hard parts to us. Either way, you will know exactly what good looks like.



For first-time authors, memoir writers, coaches and experts - written in plain, friendly language, with hints, worked examples and do-it-now checklists on almost every page.

START HERE

# Hello. Let's publish your book.

You are not short of a story. You are short of a map. So here is the map - and a promise: by the last page, you will know how to do this yourself.

Maybe you have a finished draft sitting in a drawer. Maybe you have half a manuscript that stalled last spring. Maybe the book still lives in your head - your life story, the method you teach your clients, the lesson you keep repeating to friends who say, "You should write a book."

You should. And you can. Publishing is not magic, and it is not reserved for famous people. It is a sequence of jobs, done in the right order, by people who care. This guide shows you every job, in order, with the real numbers attached.

## How to use this guide (it takes two minutes)

- **Read the journey first.** It is the whole process, start to finish, in friendly order.
- **Steal the checklists.** Every big stage ends with a "Do this now" list. Work through them with a pen. That is the point of them.
- **Look for the Hint boxes.** They are the shortcuts and traps we wish someone had shown us - the two-second thumbnail test, the printed proof, the one-cent pricing trap.
- **Read the money chapter before you sign anything** - with anyone, including us.
- **Finish with the platforms chapter.** Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Apple, Google, Kobo and more, each explained plainly, so you can choose where your book lives.

> **HINT - BE HONEST WITH THIS GUIDE**
> Where a price or royalty rule is changing, disputed, or could not be verified, we say so - and tell you where to check it live. A guide that hides its doubts is selling you something. This one would rather make you harder to sell to. Even by us.

THE WHOLE PICTURE

# Ten steps. That's the whole mountain.

Publishing a book properly is ten distinct jobs, in a fixed order. Most expensive mistakes come from doing them out of order - designing a cover before you know the page count, or formatting a book nobody has edited yet.

| Step | Job | What you end up holding |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Research and positioning | A defined reader, genre and comparable titles |
| 2 | Outline | A chapter-by-chapter plan the whole book follows |
| 3 | Draft | A complete first manuscript - written by you, or built from your interviews |
| 4 | Developmental editing | Structure, argument and story fixed at the big-picture level |
| 5 | Line editing | Sentences that read smoothly, in your voice |
| 6 | Copyediting, then proofreading | Correct, consistent, print-ready text |
| 7 | Cover design | Front, spine and back, built from a written brief |
| 8 | Interior layout and formatting | A fixed print PDF and a reflowable EPUB |
| 9 | ISBN, metadata and distribution | A book shops and libraries can actually find and order |
| 10 | Launch | Reviews, readers, and a book that keeps selling after week one |

**The PenCrest Promise - stated early, so you can hold us to it.**

With PenCrest, you keep 100% ownership of your book and 100% of your royalties. We take no royalty cut. You are the publisher of record. We help you self-publish on Amazon, Barnes & Noble and other platforms - we never take your book in exchange for publishing it. The final chapter explains exactly what that means.

YOUR FIRST 30 DAYS

# So, where do you actually start?

Here. This is an example plan for you - a realistic first month for a first-time author working through this guide. It is not a delivery promise from anyone. It is simply what "starting properly" looks like, one week at a time.

### Week 1 - Get clear

- [ ] Write down your reader in one specific sentence (page 5 shows you how).
- [ ] Find 5-10 recent comparable books. Note their length, price and covers.
- [ ] Write your book's promise in one sentence. Say it out loud. Does it excite you?
- [ ] Decide what this book is *for* - legacy, clients, speaking, income, or a mix.

### Week 2 - Get a plan

- [ ] Build your chapter-by-chapter outline (page 6).
- [ ] Gather your material: stories, dates, documents, photos, examples.
- [ ] Choose your route: write the draft yourself, or interview-led ghostwriting (page 7).
- [ ] Set a weekly writing or interview rhythm you can actually keep.

### Week 3 - Get words down

- [ ] Draft your first two chapters - ugly is fine, finished is the goal.
- [ ] Score yourself on the manuscript readiness checklist (page 36).
- [ ] Read the money chapter (pages 16-17) and do your own royalty maths.
- [ ] Start a simple email list: friends, clients, readers. Even ten names count.

### Week 4 - Get serious

- [ ] Keep drafting, chapter by chapter, against the outline.
- [ ] Complete the cover-brief checklist (page 12) - you will need it soon.
- [ ] Read the platforms chapter (pages 23-33) and pick your starting combination.
- [ ] Ask the five sorting questions (page 34) of anyone you consider hiring - including us.

> **HINT - MOMENTUM BEATS INTENSITY**
>
> Two focused hours a week, every week, will finish your book. A heroic all-weekend binge followed by a month of guilt will not. Protect a small, regular slot and defend it like an appointment with your future readers - because it is one.

STEP 1 - RESEARCH AND POSITIONING

# First, know who you're writing for

Before a single chapter, answer four questions in writing. Skip this and you do not save time - you spend it later, rewriting a book aimed at nobody.

**1. Who is your reader - exactly?** Not "anyone interested in business." One person: their age range, what they already read, what problem or feeling brings them to a book like yours. Once this person exists on paper, every later decision - cover, title, price - gets easier.

**2. What shelf does your book live on?** Your genre and subgenre decide your cover style, keywords and competition. A thriller that looks like a business book gets ignored by both audiences. Find the shelf first.

**3. Which 5-10 books are your comparables?** Recent, successful books for the same reader - not all-time classics. Note length, price, cover and subtitle style.

**4. What is this book for - for you?** A memoir preserving a family story, a lead magnet for a coaching practice, and a book to launch a speaking career are three different books, even on the same topic.

**See it done:** A Charlotte life coach is writing for women aged 40-60 rebuilding after divorce. Her comparables: five recent self-help memoirs, 180-240 pages, $14.99-$17.99 paperback. Her goal is not a bestseller list - it is a credible book she can hand to clients and event organisers. That one paragraph now drives her outline, her cover brief and her launch plan. Yours can too.

> **HINT - READ THE ONE-STAR REVIEWS**
> Review complaints about your comparable books are free research. They tell you exactly what readers in your genre feel is missing. That gap? That is your book's opening.

## Do this now

- [ ] Write your reader sentence
- [ ] List your shelf (genre + subgenre)
- [ ] List 5 comparables with prices
- [ ] Write what success means for you

STEP 2 - OUTLINE

# An outline is the cheapest place to fix everything

An outline is a chapter-by-chapter plan: each chapter's purpose, its main points or scenes, and how it connects to its neighbours. For nonfiction: the chapter's promise, the story that carries it, the takeaway. For memoir and fiction: the scene list, the turning points, what changes for your main character.

## Why professionals never skip this

- **Structure problems are nearly free here.** Move a card, delete a line. The same problem costs weeks inside a finished 60,000-word draft.
- **It exposes gaps early.** The chapter you cannot summarise is the chapter you have not thought through yet.
- **It keeps a ghostwritten book yours.** You approve the plan before writing begins, so the argument and story are yours by design, not by luck.
- **Everyone works from the same map** - editor, designer and marketer alike.

## What a good outline contains

- [ ] A one-sentence promise for the whole book
- [ ] Chapter titles (working titles are fine) in final order
- [ ] 2-4 bullets per chapter: content, story or scene, takeaway
- [ ] An estimated length per chapter - total size becomes a decision, not a surprise
- [ ] Notes on material only you can supply: stories, dates, documents, interviews
- [ ] A clear ending: what the reader should think, feel or do on the last page

> *"I will just write and see where it goes" works for a diary. A book readers pay for is built - and building starts with a plan.*

**HINT - THE STICKY-NOTE TEST**

Write each chapter title on a sticky note and arrange them on a wall or table. Now step back. Can you see the journey? Does any chapter feel like it belongs in a different book? Moving a sticky note costs nothing. Moving chapter nine later costs plenty.

STEP 3 - THE DRAFT

# Two honest ways to get a first draft

Neither route is cheating. Choosing the wrong one for your life is how manuscripts stall - so choose with your eyes open.

## Route A: You write it

Best if you enjoy writing and can protect regular time. Work from the outline, chapter by chapter, and remember: a first draft's job is to *exist*, not to be good. Editing comes later, in stages. The classic failure? Polishing chapter one for six months and never reaching chapter ten. Draft ugly. Finish first.

## Route B: Interview-led ghostwriting

Best if your knowledge lives in your head, not on paper - or your time is worth more than the months drafting takes. Done properly, it looks like this:

1. **Voice and material interviews.** A writer interviews you in structured sessions, chapter by chapter, following your approved outline. Your stories, opinions and phrases are captured in your words.
2. **Chapter drafting.** The writer builds each chapter from those interviews - your material, professionally organised and written.
3. **You review every chapter.** Correct facts, cut anything that does not sound like you, approve the voice. Nothing moves forward unseen.
4. **Revision rounds.** Agreed changes are made, then the draft is read as a whole before editing begins.

> **HINT - THE FRIEND TEST**
>
> Good ghostwriting passes one simple test: people who know you should *hear you* when they read it. If a sample chapter could belong to anyone, it is not finished - whoever produced it, human or machine. Ask any service: Who interviews me, and how often? Who actually writes? How many revision rounds? Do I approve chapters as we go?

### Do this now

- [ ] Pick Route A or B - honestly
- [ ] Book your writing or interview times in your calendar
- [ ] Finish chapter one this week, however rough

STEPS 4-6 - EDITING

# "Editing" is four jobs, not one

Here is the most misunderstood word in publishing. There are four stages of editing. They happen in this order. Each fixes a different layer of your book. Buying "editing" without asking *which stage* is how authors pay for proofreading when their book actually needs restructuring.

| Stage | What it fixes | What it does NOT fix |
|---|---|---|
| **Developmental** | Structure and chapter order; missing or repeated material; weak openings and endings; argument logic; pacing; whether each chapter earns its place | Sentences, grammar, spelling. Your developmental editor may not correct a single typo - that is not the job yet |
| **Line editing** | How sentences read: flow, rhythm, word choice, clarity, tone, voice consistency; clunky phrasing; paragraphs saying the same thing twice | Big structural problems (too late - the shape is set), and final typos, which later stages can still introduce |
| **Copyediting** | Grammar, punctuation, spelling, consistency (names, dates, capitalisation, US/UK style), basic fact and cross-reference checks; builds your style sheet | Whether the book is interesting or well structured. It makes the text *correct*, not compelling |
| **Proofreading** | The final pass on the laid-out book: last typos, spacing, page numbers, widows, hyphenation, layout errors from formatting | Anything substantial. Rewriting now means re-laying-out pages - which is why real changes happen earlier |

> *Rule of thumb: the earlier the stage, the bigger the change it can still make - and the cheaper that change is.*

Every stage you skip does not disappear. Its problems are simply found later - by readers, in reviews, where you cannot fix them quietly.

**HINT - ASK ONE QUESTION BEFORE YOU PAY ANYONE**

"Which stage is this, exactly?" If a service cannot answer clearly, you are not buying editing. You are buying a word.

# First the shape. Then the sentences.

## Developmental editing - fix the book

Your developmental editor reads the whole manuscript twice over: once as a reader, once as a builder. You receive an honest report - an editorial letter plus comments in the text. Typical findings might sound like this:

- "Your real opening is chapter three."
- "Chapters four and seven make the same point. Merge them."
- "Your strongest story is buried at the back. Move it forward."
- "The ending stops instead of landing. Give the reader somewhere to land."

Your job? Decide, revise, restructure. Chapters move, shrink, or get written fresh. It is real work - and your book gets noticeably better for it. Skip this stage only if your manuscript has already had professional structural feedback. A first draft by a first-time author almost always benefits.

## Line editing - fix the reading

Now a line editor works sentence by sentence: tightening, clarifying, polishing - while protecting your voice like it is the whole point. Because it is. Watch:

**Before:** "Due to the fact that I was basically in a situation where I had no other options available to me at that particular point in time, I made the decision to leave."

**After:** "I had no choice. I left."

Same meaning. Same author. But the second version is the one a reader *feels*.

This is also where a ghostwritten book gets checked hardest for voice. Phrases you would never say come out. Your natural way of putting things stays - and gets sharper.

> **HINT - READ IT ALOUD**
> Before you approve edited chapters, read a page out loud. Your ear catches what your eye forgives. If you stumble, your reader will too.

STEP 6 - COPYEDITING, THEN PROOFREADING

# Now the details. All of them.

## Copyediting - correctness and consistency

Your copyeditor builds a style sheet for your book - how names are spelled, whether numbers are written out, US or UK spelling, how headings are capitalised - then applies it to every single page. Unglamorous? Completely. Essential? Absolutely.

Readers may never notice consistency. But they always notice its absence. A character called "Sara" on page 40 and "Sarah" on page 140 quietly tells your reader that nobody careful ever touched this book. You do not want that sentence in their head.

## Proofreading - the last eyes, on the real pages

Proofreading happens *after* layout, on the actual print file - because formatting creates its own errors. A dropped line. A wrong page number in the contents. A chapter starting on the wrong side. An ugly word break. Your proofreader is not re-editing your book. They are catching the final few percent that no earlier stage could possibly have seen.

## Why the order cannot be shuffled

| If you... | Then... |
|---|---|
| Proofread before developmental editing | You pay to perfect chapters that then get cut or rewritten |
| Copyedit before line editing | Sentences get polished, then rewritten - and you pay for the polish twice |
| Skip proofreading after layout | Formatting errors go to print, and fixing them means re-uploading the book |

> **HINT - NEVER SKIP THE PROOFREAD BECAUSE "THE SOFTWARE CHECKED IT"**
> Spellcheckers and AI checkers are useful assistants, and every professional uses tools. But a tool cannot judge whether a sentence sounds like you, whether a chapter belongs, or whether a perfectly "correct" sentence says the wrong thing. That judgment is what you are actually buying.

### Do this now - edit in four passes

- [ ] Pass 1: structure (developmental) - chapters in the right order?
- [ ] Pass 2: sentences (line) - read aloud
- [ ] Pass 3: correctness (copyedit) - one style sheet, applied everywhere
- [ ] Pass 4: proofread the laid-out pages, on paper if you can

STEP 7 - COVER DESIGN

# Your cover is a sales tool, not a picture

Readers judge your book in about two seconds, at thumbnail size, next to ten competing covers. No pressure. A professional cover does three jobs at once: it signals the genre instantly, it makes your title readable at small size, and it promises a feeling your reader wants.

## What makes covers work in your genre

- **Genre signals come first.** Thrillers: bold condensed type, high contrast. Romance: script or soft serif type, people or places. Business: clean type, strong hierarchy, one idea. If your cover could sit happily on the wrong shelf, it is wrong.
- **One focal idea.** Covers that try to show the whole plot show nothing. One image. One feeling.
- **Typography is the design.** On most strong covers, the type does more work than the image. Title and author-name hierarchy are decisions, not defaults.
- **Design for the thumbnail, check at full size.** Most buyers first meet your cover as a tiny image on a phone screen. If the title cannot be read there, the cover fails its main job.

## Print covers are three pieces, not one

A print cover is a single wrapped file - back cover, spine, front cover - built to the printer's exact template. Spine width depends on your final page count and paper choice, which is why a final print cover cannot exist until your interior is finished. Your back cover carries your blurb (sales copy, not a summary), author photo and bio, the barcode box for your ISBN, and any genuine endorsements.

> **HINT - THE TWO-SECOND THUMBNAIL TEST**
>
> Shrink your draft cover to the size of a postage stamp on your phone. Show it to a friend for two seconds, then hide it. Can they tell you the title and the genre? If not, the cover is not ready - however beautiful it looks full-size.

### Do this now

- [ ] Require from any designer: print-ready PDF to the printer's template, ebook front-cover JPG, image and font licences documented, full commercial rights for your book and its marketing
- [ ] Never settle for a cheap cover you do not have the rights to use commercially. It is not cheap. It is a future problem.

TOOL - KEEP THIS PAGE

# The cover brief that gets you a great cover

Hand a designer this brief, completed, and you will get a better cover from anyone - including us. Vague briefs produce vague covers. It is really that simple.

- [ ] Exact title and subtitle, spelled and capitalised exactly as they will appear - and your author name exactly as it appears on the book
- [ ] Genre and subgenre (for example: memoir / addiction and recovery; business / leadership for founders)
- [ ] Your reader in one sentence - who must stop scrolling when they see this cover?
- [ ] Three tone words only. Warm, defiant, hopeful. Or: cold, precise, dangerous. Ten tone words means no tone.
- [ ] 3-6 comparable covers from recent books for the same reader - noting what you like about each, and any covers you want to avoid resembling
- [ ] One image idea - the single visual you picture, if any. One. Plus anything that must NOT appear
- [ ] Print specs: trim size, final page count (for spine width), paper type, hardcover yes/no
- [ ] Back-cover content: final blurb, author bio and photo, barcode/ISBN ready or pending
- [ ] Deliverables and rights agreed, in writing, before work starts

## Watch the difference a brief makes

**Weak brief:** "Something inspiring, maybe a sunrise? Make it pop."

**Strong brief:** "Memoir for women 40-60 rebuilding after divorce. Tone: warm, defiant, hopeful. One image idea: a woman's hands setting a long table for one, beautifully. Nothing sad, nothing stock-photo smiling. Title must read at thumbnail size. Comparables attached."

Same designer. Same budget. Completely different cover - because the second brief actually briefs.

> **HINT - RED FLAG**
>
> A designer or company that starts your cover before asking for most of this is guessing. And you will pay for the guesses in revision rounds.

STEP 8 - INTERIOR LAYOUT

# The invisible craft inside your book

Good interior design is invisible. Your reader never notices it - they just find the book easy and pleasant to read. Bad layout is noticed on page one: cramped margins, wandering fonts, chapter headings in three styles. It reads as amateur, even when the writing is excellent.

## The decisions a proper layout makes for you

- **Trim size suited to your genre.** Common choices include 5.5 x 8.5 in and 6 x 9 in for nonfiction and memoir; smaller formats suit some fiction, and children's books are their own special case.
- **Margins and gutter.** The inner margin (the gutter) must be wider, so text is not swallowed by the binding - and it grows with page count.
- **Type choices.** A readable serif for body text in most print genres, consistent heading styles, sensible size and line spacing - larger for older audiences.
- **Front and back matter.** Half-title and title pages, copyright page, dedication, contents, acknowledgements, about the author - and, powerfully, a page inviting readers to your website, list, or next book.
- **Clean mechanics.** Chapter openings that start consistently, page numbers placed correctly (never on chapter openings or front matter), running heads where the genre expects them.
- **Images and tables placed with care,** so they never break a sentence or strand a heading at a page bottom.

Children's and illustrated books are a different discipline again: image and text are designed together, page by page, at fixed layout. That is one honest reason they cost more to produce properly than a text-only book of the same length.

> **HINT - STEAL FROM A BOOK YOU LOVE**
>
> Pick a professionally published book in your genre and copy its physical decisions: trim size, chapter-opening style, where page numbers sit. You are not stealing their words. You are borrowing a century of craft in how books feel in a reader's hands.

# Print and ebook are different files. Really.

One of the great first-author surprises: your book is not one file. Print and ebook are built on opposite principles, and a file made for one will not work properly as the other.

| | Print | Ebook |
|---|---|---|
| **Format** | Fixed PDF - every page exactly as designed | Reflowable EPUB - text flows to fit the reader's screen and settings |
| **Page numbers** | Real and fixed; the contents lists them | No fixed pages; the contents is clickable links |
| **Key specs** | Trim size, inside gutter, outside margins, bleed (typically 0.125 in) when images run to the page edge | No trim, margins or bleed; the reader controls font and size |
| **Fonts** | Embedded in the PDF | Usually device fonts; design for flexibility, not control |
| **Images** | High resolution (300 dpi) at placed size | Sized and compressed for screens and file-size limits |
| **Biggest trap** | Uploading a word-processor PDF never built to print spec | Uploading the print PDF and calling it an ebook - fixed, tiny, unreadable on a phone |

**HINT - ALWAYS ORDER A PRINTED PROOF, AND READ IT ON PAPER**

Order a physical proof copy and hold it in your hands. Then read your EPUB on a phone and an e-reader app. Screens hide print problems - a gutter that eats text, a cover that prints darker than expected. Print proofs hide ebook problems - broken contents links, images in the wrong place. There is no shortcut around checking both, in the form your readers will actually receive.

## Do this now - format and proof

- [ ] Build two files: print PDF and EPUB. Never one pretending to be both
- [ ] Order the printed proof. Read it with a pen in hand
- [ ] Open the EPUB on your phone. Tap every contents link
- [ ] Fix, re-upload, and re-check the changed pages

STEP 9 - ISBN AND METADATA

# How the book trade finds your book

## The ISBN decision, in plain words

An ISBN is your book's identifier in the book trade. Each format - paperback, hardcover, ebook - needs its own. In the US, ISBNs are sold by Bowker: at the time of writing, $125 for 1, $295 for a block of 10, and $575 for a block of 100. That is why authors planning more than one format or book usually buy the block of 10. Prices change - check Bowker before you buy.

- **Your own ISBN:** you (or your company) are the publisher of record. The ISBN is portable - the same edition can be sold through different printers and distributors.
- **A free platform ISBN** (for example from Amazon KDP): costs nothing, but the platform is listed as publisher of record, and that ISBN cannot travel to another printer or distributor. Plenty of authors start here happily. Just choose it knowingly - not by default.

## Metadata: your silent salesperson

Metadata is everything around your book that stores and search engines use. Your title and subtitle (your subtitle is prime search space - use words readers actually search). Your description, written as sales copy with a strong first two lines. Your author bio. Your categories - choose the most specific honest ones. Your 7 backend keywords on KDP, reflecting real reader searches.

Weak metadata is why good books sell twelve copies: nobody ever found them. Spend real time here. It costs nothing but attention, and it works for you every day your book is live.

> **HINT - PICK CATEGORIES READERS ACTUALLY BROWSE**
> Choose the categories your reader genuinely shops in, not the ones that sound impressive on your bio. A specific, honest category where your book can be found beats a grand, vague one where it vanishes. Your first 10 reviews will matter more than ads - and reviews only happen when the right readers can find you in the first place.

### Do this now - ISBN and metadata

- [ ] Decide: your own ISBN or a free platform one - knowingly
- [ ] One ISBN per format. Write them down somewhere safe
- [ ] Write your description as sales copy (page 16 shows you how)
- [ ] Choose specific categories and research your keywords from real reader searches

# What publishing actually pays you

First, the fact that confuses almost every new author: publishing on Amazon KDP is **free**. Uploading costs nothing. So when a company charges you, you are not paying "to be published" - you are paying for services: writing help, editing, design, formatting, distribution setup, marketing. Judge every price by which services it actually includes.

## Your description is an advert, not a summary

**Before (a summary - it tells, it doesn't sell):** "This book is about my journey after divorce and the lessons I learned over ten chapters about healing, family and starting a business."

**After (sales copy - it promises, specifically):** "At 47, she started again with $312, a minivan, and a business idea everyone called crazy. This is the honest, funny, practical story of rebuilding a life - and the exact steps she took in year one."

Same book. The second version gives a reader a person, a number, a feeling and a promise. Rewrite yours until it does the same.

## Ebook royalties on KDP

- **70% royalty option** - minus a small delivery fee based on file size - for books priced inside KDP's 70% price band.
- **35% royalty option** for books priced outside that band, and for some territories under the 70% option.

**Check this live - the band is disputed.** Older KDP guidance put the 70% band at $2.99-$9.99. Newer sources describe $2.99-$12.99. Sources disagree, and pricing one cent outside the band can halve your royalty - so confirm the current band inside KDP itself when you publish, rather than trusting any guide. Including this one.

**Worked example:** a $4.99 ebook at 70% earns roughly $3.49 per sale before the small delivery fee. The same book at $1.99 (outside the band, at 35%) earns about $0.70. Pricing is a royalty decision, not just a marketing one.

# Print royalties - where one cent changes everything

Since 10 June 2025, KDP paperback royalties work like this: **60% of list price** for books priced at $9.99 or above, and **50%** for books at $9.98 or below - in both cases minus the printing cost, which depends on page count, trim size and colour. Expanded Distribution pays 40% minus printing cost.

## Do this maths before you price any book

Take a 300-page, 6 x 9 in, black-and-white paperback. Printing cost: about $4.60 per copy (check your own book's exact cost in KDP - it varies).

| List price | Calculation | You earn per copy |
|---|---|---|
| $9.98 | 50% of $9.98 = $4.99, minus $4.60 print cost | about $0.39 |
| $9.99 | 60% of $9.99 = $5.99, minus $4.60 print cost | about $1.39 |
| $14.99 | 60% of $14.99 = $8.99, minus $4.60 print cost | about $4.39 |
| $9.99 via Expanded Distribution | 40% of $9.99 = $4.00, minus $4.60 print cost | about -$0.60 - a loss. Price higher for Expanded Distribution to work at all |

Read the first two rows again. **One cent of list price is worth about a dollar a copy** on this book, because it crosses the 50%/60% threshold. Authors lose real money every day pricing at $9.95 because it "looks nice." Don't be one of them.

## KDP Select - know what you're agreeing to

Enrolling an ebook in KDP Select adds Kindle Unlimited borrowing income and promotional tools - in exchange for **90 days of ebook exclusivity to Amazon**. During those 90 days, your ebook cannot be sold or given away anywhere else, including your own website. It renews automatically unless you untick it. Select is a legitimate strategy for many fiction authors. It is a poor default for a business or memoir author whose readers and clients live elsewhere. Decide. Do not drift into it.

> **HINT - PRICE WITH A CALCULATOR, NOT A FEELING**
>
> Run your royalty maths at three prices - one just below, one just above, and one well above any threshold. Ten minutes with a calculator, before you publish, is worth more than a month of marketing a badly priced book.

# Where your book can be sold - honestly

- **Amazon KDP (print and ebook).** The fastest route to the biggest bookstore. Free. Print books are printed on demand - no stock, no warehouse, one copy printed per order.
- **KDP Expanded Distribution.** Your paperback enters a wider catalogue other retailers and libraries can order from, at a lower royalty (page 17). Reach up, margin down.
- **IngramSpark.** The traditional trade's main print-on-demand network, used by many bookstores and libraries. Free to upload at the time of writing - but you set a wholesale discount and pay print costs, so the economics differ from KDP.
- **Barnes & Noble Press and other retailers.** A direct route onto bn.com, alongside Amazon rather than instead of it.
- **Aggregators such as Draft2Digital.** One upload, many ebook stores, for a commission. Full profiles of every major platform are coming on pages 23-33.
- **Direct sales.** Your website, events, speaking. Highest margin per copy - and entirely your job to fulfil.

**The bookstore reality, kindly stated.** Print-on-demand distribution makes your book *orderable* by bookstores and libraries. It does not put copies on physical shelves. Shelf space is earned through demand and sales history. Any company promising your book "in bookstores everywhere" for a fee is selling you the orderable part and letting you imagine the shelves. Ask exactly which one they mean.

**HINT - ORDERABLE IS STILL VALUABLE**

Do not dismiss "orderable" - a reader who asks for your book by name at any bookstore and can get it in days is a real sale. Just never pay shelf prices for orderable reach.

STEP 10 - LAUNCH

# Your launch starts 8-12 weeks before launch day

A book does not launch on publication day. Publication day is the *end* of the launch work. Here is a realistic timeline for a first-time author.

| When | What happens |
|---|---|
| 8-12 weeks out | Final cover and metadata decided. List-building begins. Your email list is asset number one - ahead of any social following, because you own it |
| 6-8 weeks out | Recruit your ARC team - advance review copy readers who get the book free before launch and agree to leave an honest review in launch week. Aim for more volunteers than you need; only a fraction will follow through |
| 4 weeks out | ARCs go out. Pre-order set up, if you are using one. Tell your list what is coming, and when - more than once |
| Launch week | Book goes live. ARC reviews land. Email your list. Post, appear, and ask - directly - for reviews and shares |
| Weeks 2-8 after | Podcasts, local media, events, groups, speaking. This long tail - not launch day - is where most first books find their readers |

> *Ads come last, not first. Do not spend on Amazon or Meta ads until your book has around 10 genuine reviews and a cover and description that already turn browsers into buyers.*

Ads do not fix a weak book page. They just pay to show it to more people. Your first marketing budget is not money at all - it is time spent building a list and an ARC team.

> **HINT - ASK DIRECTLY, AND MAKE IT EASY**
>
> People help when you ask clearly and remove friction. "Would you read an early copy and leave an honest review in launch week? Here is the file, and here is the link when you're ready." That one message, sent personally, outperforms a month of vague social posts.

### Do this now - launch

- [ ] Start your email list today, even at ten names
- [ ] Recruit more ARC readers than you need
- [ ] Write your launch-week plan down - dates, messages, asks
- [ ] Plan weeks 2-8 now, while you still have energy

LEARN FROM OTHER PEOPLE'S BOOKS

# The mistakes almost everyone makes first

Good news: nearly every first-author mistake is famous, avoidable, and listed right here. Read this page twice.

1. **Publishing the first draft.** Every professional book you admire was edited in stages. Yours will be judged against them, not against other first drafts.
2. **Buying "editing" without asking which stage.** A proofread cannot rescue a book that needs restructuring (page 8).
3. **Designing the cover before the book is finished.** No final page count means no spine - and a cover built on a guess gets rebuilt at your expense.
4. **Using a free platform ISBN without understanding it.** Fine if chosen knowingly (page 15). A problem when you later learn it cannot travel.
5. **Pricing by feel.** $9.98 instead of $9.99 can cost about a dollar a copy (page 17). Do the maths for your page count.
6. **Enrolling in exclusivity by default.** KDP Select's 90 days are a strategy choice, not a formality.
7. **Weak metadata.** A vague subtitle, a summary instead of sales copy, guessed keywords - a good book, invisible.
8. **No proof copies.** Publishing a print book you have never held, or an ebook you have never opened on a phone.
9. **Launching to silence.** No list, no ARC team, no launch-week reviews - then concluding "marketing doesn't work."
10. **Signing a contract you cannot summarise.** If you cannot state, in one sentence each, who owns the rights, who is publisher of record, what royalty you actually receive, and what happens if you leave - do not sign yet. That applies to us, too.

> **HINT - MISTAKES ARE CHEAPER ON PAPER**
>
> Every mistake above costs almost nothing to avoid at the planning stage and real money to fix after publication. That is the entire argument for reading a guide like this one *before* you upload - so well done, you are already ahead.

# Why AI drafts sound like everyone else's

Let us talk about the elephant in the room. You could ask an AI tool for a book this weekend. So why are you reading a guide about doing it properly?

AI writing tools work by predicting the most likely next word, again and again, based on patterns learned from enormous amounts of existing text. That one fact explains both their speed and their weakness. The most likely word is, by definition, the *average* word.

Ask an AI for a chapter and you receive the statistical centre of everything already written on your topic - competent, smooth, and strikingly similar to what every other author prompting the same tools receives. The same openings ("In today's fast-paced world..."). The same structures. The same safe conclusions. Readers feel it before they can name it: the book is *fine* - and a week later they cannot remember a single line of it.

## What that costs you, by book type

**Coaches, consultants and experts:** your book is a reputation asset. Clients pay for your judgment and your stories. A generic-sounding book does not just fail to build authority - it actively argues you do not have any. One reader who concludes "this sounds generated" tells other people. That sentence travels further than your marketing.

**Memoir authors:** AI did not live your life. It cannot know what your mother's kitchen smelled like, what was actually said the night everything changed, or which small detail still matters forty years later. It will invent plausible details in place of true ones - and a memoir with invented details is no longer your story, however smoothly it reads.

**Fiction authors:** voice and surprise are your product. A system optimised for the most likely next word is structurally opposed to both.

> **HINT - THE LINE TEST**
> Read any draft - yours, a ghostwriter's, a tool's - and underline every sentence only you could have written. If a page has none, that page is not yours yet, whatever name goes on the cover.

# The hidden costs: time, disclosure, copyright

## The "free" draft that is not free

Many authors arrive at a human team the long way round: weeks prompting an AI draft, then discovering that fixing it - restructured, re-voiced, fact-checked, repetitions and invented details removed - takes as long as writing properly would have. Except the material was never really theirs to begin with. Editing a weak draft is slower than drafting well, because first the editor must work out what you actually meant.

## Disclosure and copyright - in general terms only

This section is general information, not legal advice. For advice about your own book, consult a qualified attorney.

Amazon KDP requires disclosure of AI-generated text, images and translations when you publish - including AI-generated content you then edited substantially. By contrast, human-written work that you refined with AI assistance (checking grammar, suggesting phrasing) does not have to be disclosed under KDP's policy as currently written. Check the policy live at publication time; it evolves.

US copyright protects human creativity. Material generated purely by AI, from prompts alone, is generally not treated as your authorship - because prompts alone are not authorship. Your own human-written text, and your substantive human edits and creative selection, can be protected.

The practical point, if you care about owning your book: the more of the book that is genuinely yours, the stronger and clearer your claim to it.

**PenCrest's position, stated exactly.**

PenCrest books are written and edited by real writers and editors, working in the author's voice, from the author's material. We will not dress that up with absolute slogans. When you work with us, ask directly who wrote and edited your chapters, and how - and expect a direct answer.

**HINT - USE TOOLS LIKE A PROFESSIONAL DOES**

Professionals use tools - for spellchecking, research, consistency checks. The line is authorship. Tools can assist the person writing your book. The moment a tool *is* the author, you inherit every problem on this page.

CHAPTER - WHERE TO PUBLISH

# Every major platform, explained like a friend would

You do not publish "a book." You publish your book *somewhere* - usually several somewheres. This chapter profiles each major platform in the same, plain way.

For every platform you will get: what it is, what it is best for, its formats, what uploading costs, what royalty to expect, how far it reaches, the 4-6 steps to publish there, an honest Pros and Cons list, one Hint, and one Watch Out.

Two ideas before we start, because they shape everything in this chapter:

- **Direct vs aggregator.** Publishing *direct* means uploading to each store yourself - maximum control, maximum dashboards. An *aggregator* takes one upload and distributes it to many stores - maximum convenience, a small commission, and a little less control per store.
- **Wide vs exclusive.** "Wide" means your ebook is everywhere. "Exclusive" - on Amazon, that is KDP Select - means Amazon only, for 90 days at a time, in exchange for Kindle Unlimited income and promo tools. Neither is morally better. They are strategies, and page 33 helps you choose.

**A note on the numbers in this chapter.** Royalty rates and fees change, and some figures below come from secondary sources rather than the platform's own current page. Where that is true, we say so. Before you publish anywhere, check the platform's current page for yourself. Ten minutes of checking beats a year on the wrong rate.

> **HINT - YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR MIND LATER**
>
> Distribution choices are not tattoos (except during a KDP Select term). Start simple, learn where your readers actually are, then expand. Most first-time authors should start simpler than they expect - page 33 gives you the starter combination.

PLATFORM 1 OF 7 - AMAZON KDP

# Amazon KDP - the biggest bookstore on Earth

**What it is:** Kindle Direct Publishing - Amazon's own self-publishing platform. If you publish one place first, for most authors it is this one.

**Best for:** Almost every first-time author, as the starting point. **Formats:** ebook (Kindle), paperback, hardcover. **Cost to upload:** free. **Reach:** Amazon's stores worldwide - the largest single pool of book buyers there is.

**Royalties:** Ebook - 70% inside the 70% price band (flagged as disputed: older guidance $2.99-$9.99, newer sources $2.99-$12.99 - check live in KDP), 35% outside it. Print - 60% of list at $9.99+, 50% at $9.98 or below, minus print cost; 40% minus print cost via Expanded Distribution. Full workings on pages 16-17.

## Publish here in 6 steps

1. Create your KDP account and complete your tax and payment details - do this first; it holds everything up if left to last.
2. Click "Create" and choose Kindle ebook, paperback, or hardcover. Each format is its own product.
3. Enter your metadata: title, subtitle, description (sales copy!), author name, categories, 7 backend keywords.
4. Upload your manuscript (EPUB or DOCX for ebook; print-ready PDF for print) and your cover.
5. Preview everything in KDP's previewer. Then order a printed proof of any print edition before you publish.
6. Set your price using the royalty maths on page 17, choose territories, decide on KDP Select (below), and publish. Review typically takes a few days.

> **HINT - ENROLMENT IS A DECISION, NOT A DEFAULT**
>
> KDP Select gives your ebook Kindle Unlimited borrowing income and promo tools, in exchange for 90 days of Amazon exclusivity - no selling or giving away the ebook anywhere else, and it auto-renews. Great for many fiction series. A poor default for a business or memoir book whose readers live on your own list and website.

# KDP, honestly: the giant with a crowded shop floor

### Pros

- The biggest audience in books, full stop - your readers are almost certainly already shopping here
- Completely free to publish, with print-on-demand: no stock, no warehouse, no upfront print bill
- Fast and genuinely simple - a well-prepared book can be live in days
- Strong royalty rates when you price inside the bands (70% ebook; 60% print at $9.99+)
- Powerful extras if you want them: Kindle Unlimited via Select, pre-orders, author pages, series pages

### Cons

- The store is crowded beyond imagination - being *on* Amazon is not the same as being *found* on Amazon. Metadata and reviews do that work
- KDP Select's 90-day exclusivity is a real trade-off, and it renews automatically if you forget to untick it
- Print profit is thin at low prices - page 17's one-cent trap lives here
- You are building on rented land: Amazon sets the rules, the rates and the algorithms, and can change them
- A free KDP ISBN lists Amazon's imprint as publisher of record and cannot travel elsewhere (page 15)

**WATCH OUT**

Never publish the print edition without ordering and holding a physical proof first. KDP's on-screen previewer cannot show you a gutter eating your text or a cover printing darker than you expected. Your readers will hold the real thing. So should you - first.

### Do this now - KDP

- [ ] Open your KDP account and finish tax/payment setup today
- [ ] Decide Select vs wide *before* you reach the enrolment checkbox
- [ ] Price using page 17's maths, not a round, pretty number

PLATFORM 2 OF 7 - BARNES & NOBLE PRESS

# Barnes & Noble Press - America's bookstore, direct

**What it is:** Barnes & Noble's own self-publishing platform, selling your book on bn.com and on NOOK e-readers. **Best for:** US authors who want a second major storefront alongside Amazon. **Formats:** ebook (NOOK) and print (paperback and hardcover). **Cost to upload:** free. **Reach:** bn.com shoppers and NOOK readers across the US.

**Royalties:** About 70% of list price for ebooks priced from $0.99, and about 55% of list minus print cost for print, with a $14.99 minimum print price. These figures come from secondary sources - check the platform's current page before you publish.

## Publish here in 5 steps

1. Create your free Barnes & Noble Press account and complete payment details.
2. Start a project: ebook, print, or both - and enter your title information and description.
3. Upload your EPUB (ebook) or print PDF, plus your cover files.
4. Preview carefully, set your prices (remember the print minimum), and choose your ISBN option.
5. Publish. Your book appears on bn.com and NOOK once it clears review.

### Pros

- A trusted, famous bookstore name - some US readers simply prefer buying here
- Free to publish, ebook and print in one dashboard
- A clean ebook royalty (about 70%) with no exclusivity demand - publish here *and* Amazon (unless you enrolled that ebook in KDP Select)
- Print editions can connect with a real high-street bookstore brand

### Cons

- A much smaller buyer pool than Amazon - expect B&N to be a useful second channel, not your main engine
- Print maths is tighter: about 55% minus print cost, and a $14.99 minimum print price limits cheap paperback strategies
- US-centric - far less reach internationally than Amazon or Kobo
- Fewer discoverability tools; your marketing does more of the work

**HINT - THINK OF B&N AS YOUR CREDIBILITY CHANNEL**

Being listed by America's best-known bookstore name reassures readers, libraries and local media. That trust value is real, even when sales volume is modest.

**WATCH OUT**

If your ebook is enrolled in KDP Select, you cannot publish that same ebook here during the Select term. Sequence your enrolments, or go wide from the start.

PLATFORM 3 OF 7 - APPLE BOOKS

# Apple Books - the cleanest 70% in the business

**What it is:** Apple's own bookstore, built into every iPhone, iPad and Mac through the Apple Books app. **Best for:** Authors going wide who want a premium-feeling store with simple maths. **Formats:** ebook only (EPUB3). **Cost to upload:** free. **Reach:** Apple device owners in 50+ countries, with the app pre-installed - no download barrier between your book and its reader.

**Royalty:** About 70% of your list price at any price point, with no delivery fees deducted. Simple, predictable, generous.

## Publish here in 5 steps

1. Choose your route: publish direct with an Apple Books for Authors account, or reach Apple through an aggregator such as Draft2Digital (page 31) - many first-timers choose the aggregator for simplicity.
2. Prepare a clean, valid EPUB3 file. Apple validates strictly - more on that below.
3. Enter your metadata, pricing per territory, and upload your cover (Apple's cover size requirements are generous - use a high-resolution file).
4. Submit for review. Apple's review checks both content and file quality.
5. Once approved, your book appears in Apple Books on devices worldwide. Set up pre-orders for your next launch - Apple readers respond well to them.

### Pros

- About 70% at *any* price, with no delivery fee nibbling at it - the simplest royalty maths anywhere
- Pre-installed on billions of Apple devices; your reader is one tap away
- A curated, premium-feeling store where well-made books stand out more than in Amazon's flood
- No exclusivity demand - sell here alongside everyone else

### Cons

- Ebook only - no print edition here at all
- A smaller market share than Amazon, especially outside Apple-heavy countries
- Strict EPUB validation: a sloppy file that squeaks through elsewhere can be rejected here
- Direct publishing uses Apple's own account and delivery tooling, which some authors find fiddly - hence the aggregator route's popularity

**HINT - VALIDATE BEFORE YOU UPLOAD**

Run your EPUB through a free validator (such as EPUBCheck) *before* submitting. Fixing errors at your desk takes minutes; fixing them after a rejection takes days.

**WATCH OUT**

Do not assume a file that worked on one store will pass everywhere. Each store validates differently. Budget a little time per platform - it is normal, not a sign you did something wrong.

PLATFORM 4 OF 7 - GOOGLE PLAY BOOKS

# Google Play Books - Android's bookstore, powered by search

**What it is:** Google's ebook store, run through the Google Play Books Partner Center, selling to Android users and readers on the web. **Best for:** Authors going wide who want Android reach and Google search visibility. **Formats:** ebook only (EPUB or PDF). **Cost to upload:** free. **Reach:** Android users - the majority of phone owners worldwide - plus anyone searching Google for books like yours.

**Royalty:** About 70% in many supported countries, and 52% as the default rate elsewhere. These figures come from secondary sources - check the Partner Center's current terms before you publish.

## Publish here in 5 steps

1. Create a Partner Center account and complete payment and tax details.
2. Add your book: title, description, author, categories and ISBN.
3. Upload your EPUB (preferred) or PDF, plus your cover image.
4. Set your list price per territory - and read the pricing terms carefully (see Watch Out).
5. Submit, then check your live listing on a phone, exactly as a reader sees it.

### Pros

- Android is the world's biggest phone platform - a reader pool Amazon does not own
- Google search visibility: your book can surface when people search its topic, not just its title
- Free to publish, accepts EPUB or PDF, no exclusivity demanded
- About 70% royalty in many countries

### Cons

- A more complicated dashboard than KDP or Kobo - settings are powerful but less hand-holding, and first-timers can feel lost
- The royalty is not one simple number: about 70% in many countries, 52% default elsewhere
- Google may discount your book from your list price in some cases - your royalty is then based on the discounted price, which can surprise you
- Discovery inside Play is weaker than Amazon's engine; you bring most of your own traffic

**HINT - WRITE YOUR DESCRIPTION FOR SEARCHERS**

Google is a search engine before it is a store. Use the real words readers type - topic, problem, outcome - naturally in your subtitle and description. Honest search wording pays you twice here.

**WATCH OUT**

Check your live price after publishing, in more than one country if you can. If Google discounts your book, know about it from your dashboard - not from a confused reader holding a screenshot.

PLATFORM 5 OF 7 - KOBO WRITING LIFE

# Kobo Writing Life - the friendly international

**What it is:** Rakuten Kobo's self-publishing platform, feeding Kobo e-readers, the Kobo app, and partner stores and libraries. **Best for:** Authors going wide, especially with readers outside the US. **Formats:** ebook. **Cost to upload:** free. **Reach:** 190+ countries, with particular strength in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and parts of Europe.

**Royalties:** About 70% on ebooks priced at $2.99 and above, and 45% below that - so price accordingly. Kobo Plus, Kobo's subscription service, is an optional extra channel for your books.

## Publish here in 5 steps

1. Create your free Kobo Writing Life account.
2. Add your book: upload your EPUB (or convert a document with Kobo's tools), plus your cover.
3. Write your description, choose categories, add your author bio.
4. Set your price - at or above $2.99 if you want the 70% rate - and choose whether to enrol in Kobo Plus.
5. Publish, then check the live listing and your dashboard sales reports as they build.

### Pros

- Genuinely international reach - in some countries Kobo outsells Amazon for ebooks
- One of the friendliest, clearest dashboards for first-time authors
- About 70% at $2.99+, no exclusivity demanded, and library distribution through its partners
- Useful built-in promotional tools and a helpful author community

### Cons

- A smaller US ebook share than Amazon - US-only audiences may barely notice it
- Ebook only: no print programme of its own
- The 45% rate below $2.99 punishes very cheap pricing
- One more dashboard, one more set of reports to check - the wide author's tax

**HINT - ASK WHERE YOUR READERS LIVE**

If your readers are in Toronto, Sydney or Auckland, Kobo is not a side channel - it may be a main one. Let your audience's geography, not habit, rank your platforms.

**WATCH OUT**

Pricing at $2.99 earns about 70%; pricing at $2.98 earns 45%. Thresholds differ per platform - check each one before you copy a price across stores.

PLATFORM 6 OF 7 - INGRAMSPARK

# IngramSpark - how bookstores and libraries order you

**What it is:** Ingram's self-publishing and distribution platform - the same network the traditional book trade uses. **Best for:** Print reach beyond Amazon: bookstores and libraries that can order your book through the trade. **Formats:** print (paperback and hardcover) plus ebook distribution. **Cost to upload:** free at the time of writing. **Reach:** tens of thousands of retailers and libraries worldwide, through Ingram's catalogue.

**How the money works:** You set a wholesale discount (retailers expect a real one), Ingram takes its share, print costs come off, and the rest is yours. Per-copy earnings are lower than a direct Amazon sale - the honest price of trade reach.

## Publish here in 6 steps

1. Create your account and complete the publisher setup - you are acting as your own publisher here, ISBN and all.
2. Add your title with full metadata and your own ISBN.
3. Choose formats and trim sizes; upload print-ready files built exactly to Ingram's specs.
4. Set list price, wholesale discount and returns setting - slowly, with a calculator.
5. Approve the proof - order a physical copy first.
6. Enable distribution - your book becomes orderable across Ingram's network.

### Pros

- The widest print distribution beyond Amazon - how bookstores and libraries actually order
- Hardcover and a broad range of trim sizes
- Your own ISBN and publisher of record fit naturally
- Ebook distribution alongside print, in one account

### Cons

- The steepest learning curve in this chapter - trade terms, discounts and returns settings have real consequences
- Wholesale discount plus print cost can shrink per-copy profit dramatically
- Stricter file specs; corrections can be slower and sometimes cost money
- "Orderable by bookstores" still does not mean "stocked on shelves" (page 18)

**HINT - DO INGRAM SECOND, NOT FIRST**

Learn on KDP, where mistakes are cheap to fix. Bring finished files to IngramSpark once your book sells.

**WATCH OUT**

Run the full maths - price, minus discount, minus print cost - before enabling distribution. Returns can be billed back to you: think hard before enabling them.

PLATFORM 7 OF 7 - DRAFT2DIGITAL, PLUS FOUR MORE

# Draft2Digital - one upload, almost everywhere

**What it is:** An aggregator. Upload once; Draft2Digital (D2D) distributes your ebook to Apple Books, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, Tolino, libraries and more. **Best for:** going wide without five dashboards. **Formats:** ebook, plus print via partners. **Cost:** $0 to upload plus about 10% commission on sales, on top of each store's rate. Newer cases include a $20 activation fee and $12/year in some circumstances - check its current pricing page.

## Publish here in 4 steps

1. Create your free D2D account.
2. Upload manuscript and cover; D2D converts and formats your ebook, and can build front and back matter.
3. Choose your stores and library channels - the ones you are not publishing to directly.
4. Set your price, publish, and watch one combined dashboard instead of five.

### Pros

- Enormous convenience: one upload, one dashboard, many stores and libraries
- Excellent automated ebook conversion and beginner-friendly tools
- No exclusivity - leave or go direct with any store later
- Human, reachable support - rare and valuable when you are stuck

### Cons

- The roughly 10% commission is forever, on every sale, on top of the store's cut
- Less control per store: pricing and promotion tweaks run through D2D, not each store's own tools
- Changes can propagate more slowly than publishing direct
- Newer activation and yearly fees in some cases - read the current pricing page

HINT - THE HYBRID MOST AUTHORS END UP WITH

Publish direct on Amazon (full control), and let D2D carry your ebook almost everywhere else. Never send the same book to the same store twice - direct *or* via D2D, never both.

### Four more, at a glance

| Platform | What it is | Good to know |
|---|---|---|
| **Lulu** | Free-upload print and ebook platform with its own store | About 80% of print profit and 90% of ebook profit to you. No editing or design services |
| **BookBaby** | Paid, a-la-carte publishing services plus distribution | Print distribution about $199/$399 by tier, ebook about $299, covers from about $399, ISBN about $79 |
| **PublishDrive** | Aggregator with strong international and library reach | Subscription-style plans; compare against D2D if your readers are heavily international |
| **Smashwords** | An original ebook aggregator | Now part of Draft2Digital, under the D2D umbrella |

PLATFORMS AT A GLANCE

# Pros and cons, side by side

Keep this page open while you decide. Every platform in this chapter, honestly summarised in one line each way.

| Platform | Biggest pro | Biggest con |
|---|---|---|
| **Amazon KDP** | The largest book-buying audience anywhere, free to publish, print-on-demand | Extremely crowded; KDP Select exclusivity trade-off; thin print profit at low prices |
| **Barnes & Noble Press** | Trusted US bookstore name, free, about 70% ebook royalty, no exclusivity | Smaller buyer pool; tighter print maths with a $14.99 minimum print price* |
| **Apple Books** | About 70% at any price, no delivery fees, pre-installed on Apple devices | Ebook only, smaller share, strict EPUB validation |
| **Google Play Books** | Android reach plus Google search visibility, free to publish | More complicated dashboard; rates vary by country*; Google may discount your price |
| **Kobo Writing Life** | 190+ countries, friendly dashboard, about 70% at $2.99+ | Smaller US share; ebook only; 45% below $2.99 |
| **IngramSpark** | Widest bookstore and library print distribution beyond Amazon | Wholesale discount + print-cost maths, steep learning curve, returns risk |
| **Draft2Digital** | One upload to many stores and libraries; beginner-friendly tools | About 10% commission forever; less per-store control; newer fees in some cases* |
| **Lulu** | Free upload; about 80% print profit / 90% ebook profit | No craft services; smaller storefront traffic |
| **BookBaby** | Buy only the services and distribution pieces you need | Costs add up piece by piece; you project-manage |

* Figure from secondary sources at the time of writing - check the platform's current page before you publish. All rates and fees in this chapter can change; the platforms' own pages are the final word.

**HINT - READ THE CONS COLUMN FIRST**

Every platform's pros sound wonderful in its own marketing. Choose based on which *cons* you can live with. That is the decision you are actually making.

YOUR DECISION

# So which platforms should YOU choose?

## Direct or aggregator?

**Go direct** where a store matters most to you: full control over price, promotions and metadata, the full royalty, and instant changes - paid for with your time, one dashboard at a time. **Use an aggregator** for everywhere else: one upload and one dashboard, paid for with about 10% commission and a little less control. Most authors do both. That is not indecision - it is the sensible shape of wide publishing.

## Wide or KDP Select exclusive?

**Choose Select** if your readers are devoted Kindle readers, you write series fiction, and Kindle Unlimited page-reads could be a real income stream. Remember: 90 days, ebook only, auto-renews, and nowhere else - not even your own website. **Choose wide** if your readers are everywhere, you sell through your own list and events, or your book is a business or memoir asset whose whole job is reaching people wherever they are. You can try Select for one term and leave later. You cannot un-exclude a book mid-term.

**Our honest recommendation for a first-time author:**

Amazon KDP direct - ebook and print - plus one aggregator (Draft2Digital) for Apple, Barnes & Noble, Kobo and libraries everywhere else. Full control where most sales happen. One simple upload for everywhere else. Add IngramSpark later, when your finished book is selling and trade reach is worth its learning curve.

The trade-off, stated plainly: you will pay the aggregator's commission on non-Amazon sales, and manage two dashboards instead of six. For a first book, that is almost always the right bargain.

### Do this now - your platform plan

- [ ] Write down your starter combination - one sentence is enough
- [ ] Note every store your aggregator covers, so you never double-publish
- [ ] Put a calendar note 90 days out to review: stay, expand, or go wider?

# Could you do it all yourself? Yes. Here's the landscape.

You now have a manual for doing this alone. So why does help exist? Because your time, skill and patience are real things too. There is no single "best" route - only the right one for your book, budget and life. Prices change often, so treat every figure as a snapshot and check each company's own site.

**One name to clear up first.** Readers sometimes ask about a company called "Hotspot" (or Book Hotspot / Hot Spot Publishing). We could not find a publishing company by that name to compare. Similarly named books and unrelated firms exist. So judge any company by rights, royalties, publisher of record, and what is included.

| Company / route | Model and price snapshot | Rights, royalties - and who it suits |
|---|---|---|
| **Scribe Media** | Premium full-service ghostwriting and publishing help, from about $29,000 to $135,000+ | You keep 100% rights and royalties. For a founder buying a prestige book - priced accordingly |
| **AuthorHouse** | One of the largest package publishers. Current US prices unverified - check their site | Historically, royalty splits around 10% retail, 25% bookstore, 50% digital net. Read which royalty applies to you |
| **BookBaby** | A-la-carte: print distribution about $199/$399, ebook about $299, covers from about $399, ISBN about $79 | Buy the pieces you need. Suits authors ready to project-manage |
| **IngramSpark / Lulu (DIY)** | Free to upload; wide distribution (IngramSpark) or own store (Lulu, about 80% print / 90% ebook profit) | You keep your rights. No editing, design or writing services |
| **MindStir Media** | Assisted publishing packages | Tiered royalties, roughly 50% to 100% by tier - your tier decides what you keep |
| **selfpublishing.com** | Coaching-led; ghostwriting about $60,000 / $120,000 premium on its own page | 100% rights and royalties. High-investment, supported route |
| **Spines** | Technology-led platform | **Contested:** reviews report about 70% of net to authors; its own pages have claimed 100%. Verify live, in writing |
| **Draft2Digital (DIY)** | $0 upload plus about 10% commission; newer $20 activation and $12/year fees in some cases | Wide ebook distribution in one upload. No craft services - files must already be finished |

## The five questions that sort any company

1. Who owns the rights and copyright - in writing?
2. What royalty do I actually receive, per format and channel?
3. Who is publisher of record, and whose ISBN is used?
4. What exactly is included - and what costs extra?
5. What happens if I leave? Do I keep my files, cover and ISBN?

FINAL CHAPTER

# The PenCrest Advantage

You have read the whole journey, the real numbers, every major platform, and a fair comparison - including doing it entirely yourself. This final chapter is our closing argument, deliberately specific, so you can check it like anyone's.

## Four services, one team, one place

Most authors assemble a book from strangers: a ghostwriter who never met the editor, a designer who never saw the manuscript, a marketer handed a finished book. Every hand-off loses something. PenCrest keeps the whole journey under one roof:

- **Book writing and ghostwriting** - interview-led, in your voice, from an outline you approve
- **Professional publishing help** - formatting, ISBN and metadata, and self-publishing on Amazon, Barnes & Noble and other platforms
- **Book editing and proofreading** - the four stages on page 8, in the right order, by real editors
- **Book marketing and author branding** - launch support, and an author presence built to outlast launch week

One team means your editor knows what your marketer needs, your designer reads the book they are covering, and you have one conversation - not seven.

| What you keep | Why it matters |
|---|---|
| **100% ownership of your book** | Copyright and decisions stay yours - forever, not just while you are a client |
| **100% of your royalties - no cut taken** | Every royalty example in this guide is money that is entirely yours. Our income is our service fee, stated up front - never a percentage of your book for life |
| **You are publisher of record** | Your name or company - not ours, not a platform's - stands as publisher |
| **Human writers and editors, in your voice** | Real people interview you, write with you and edit for you - not a generation queue |
| **A real process, not a package tier** | The 10 steps in this guide are the process your book actually follows |

**The middle path, on purpose.** At one end: upload-only packages for a few hundred dollars that leave the hardest work entirely to you. At the other: premium agencies charging $29,000 to well over $100,000. PenCrest exists for the authors in between - people who want a real human team and a real process, and to keep everything they create. That is why this guide gave you the numbers and the hard questions first - and this pitch last.

**Your book. Your rights. Your royalties. Our job is the work - never a share of what is yours.**

# Before you publish - and when you're ready to talk

## Are you ready? Score yourself honestly

- [ ] I can describe my reader in one sentence, and name 5 comparable recent books
- [ ] I have a chapter-by-chapter outline - or a complete draft - and can state my book's promise in one sentence
- [ ] My material is gathered: stories, dates, documents, examples
- [ ] I understand the four editing stages and which ones my book still needs
- [ ] I could complete most of the cover-brief checklist (page 12), and I have done the royalty maths for my page count and price (page 17)
- [ ] I have chosen my platform combination (page 33) and know the five questions for anyone I hire (page 34)

**5-6 ticks:** ready to talk seriously about production. **3-4:** close - groundwork next, not a contract. **0-2:** a book worth planning, not yet ready to produce - exactly what a roadmap call is for.

## Pre-publication checklist

- [ ] Editing complete, in order - proofreading done on the laid-out files
- [ ] Physical proof copy ordered, held, read and corrected; EPUB checked on a phone and an e-reader app
- [ ] Cover finalised from the completed brief, spine from final page count; cover passed the thumbnail test
- [ ] ISBN decision made knowingly; metadata written as sales copy; categories readers actually browse
- [ ] Royalty maths re-checked at final page count and price - especially either side of $9.99
- [ ] Launch: list built, ARC team recruited, around 10 genuine reviews in place or clearly coming before any ad spend

**Turn this guide into a plan for your book.**

Book a free publishing roadmap call with PenCrest. Bring whatever you have - a draft, an outline, or just the story in your head. You will leave with a clear plan: what your book still needs, in what order, and what your options are - whether you work with us or not.

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