

Beyond Vanity: How Indie  
Publishing Builds  
Professional Writers

*By Ian J. Malone*

# Why indie publishing?

In January 2016, Big 5 titles accounted for less than 25% of ebook purchases on Amazon, while indies closed in on 45%.

- 4 of Amazon’s overall Top 10 Best Selling ebooks were indie published titles
- 10 of Amazon’s overall Top 20 Best Selling ebooks were indie titles
- 56 of Amazon’s overall Top 100 Best Selling ebooks were indie titles

(Source — [The Author Earnings Report](#))

“Gone are the days when self-publishing was virtually synonymous with self-defeating.” — Paul Nathan, *Publishers Weekly*

# The perks of independence

Major advantages of indie pub vs. traditional pub:

- Significantly faster turnaround time from draft to press
- Access across the board to the book-sales marketplace
- Full creative control
- Higher royalties (40-80% for indies vs. 7-25% for traditionals)
- Equal footing with book marketing

(Source — NYT Bestseller and indie pub pro, [Joanna Penn](#))

# Traditional Pub = Rejection City

Stephen King's *Carrie*, was rejected 30 times.

- *Gone With the Wind*, 38 times
- *Dune*, 20 times
- *A Wrinkle in Time*, 29 times
- *Lord of the Flies*, 20 times
- *A Time to Kill*, 12 times

(Source — [\*The Huffington Post\*](#) )

# Indie Authors Get Noticed

Pretend you're an agent. You get two queries:

- *Query 1* – “I’ve written a 323-page manuscript that is smart, funny, fast-paced, and very much in line with the works you represent.”
- *Query 2* – “... I am also the author of three other projects, which have combined to sell more than 4,200 units worldwide. To learn more about me, visit my website at [authorx.com](http://authorx.com) or follow me on Facebook and Twitter. PS: At present, my mailing list has more than 650 subscribers.”

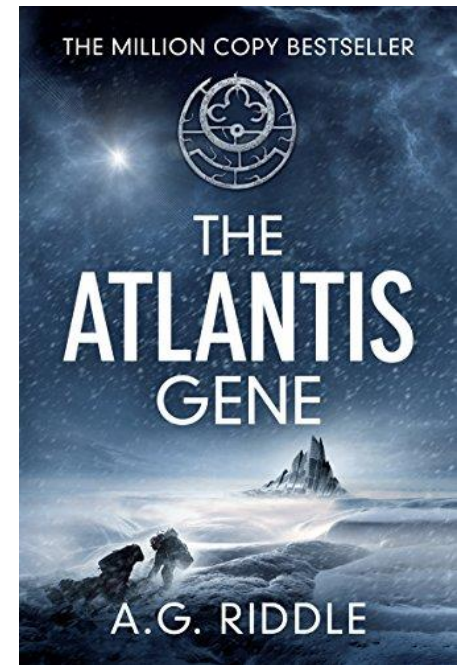
*Who impresses you more?*

# What the queries say...

- Query 1 = good potential
  - Has a manuscript
  - Can finish a polished draft
- Query 2 = a grinder with proven results
  - Has a manuscript
  - Can finish a project
  - Has an established fanbase
  - Can work with an editor
  - Can market a brand and a project
  - Can grown an author platform
- A note on “hybrid” authors...

# So you didn't get signed...

- You release your book as an indie then position it for best possible success.
- You hone your craft by leaps and bounds
- Maybe you land a 6-7 figure income:
  - Hugh Howey
  - B.V. Larson
  - Andy Weir
  - J.A. Konrath
  - Marko Kloos
  - A.G. Riddle



# Agenda

- Pre-Launch
  - Starting a Business
  - Finding an Editor
  - Designing a Cover
  - Formatting & Distribution
  - Early Marketing
- Post-Launch
  - Marketing once your book is live
  - Growing the Brand
- Finances/Quitting the day job
- Questions





# Starting a Publishing Press

- Choosing a business model:
  - Second source of personal income
  - Sole Proprietorship
  - Limited Liability Company (LLC)
  - Corporation
  - Resource: [Legal Zoom](#)
- Steps to take afterward:
  - Open a separate checking account
  - Open a business Paypal account
  - Open an account with Bowker (for ISBNs)



# Editing & Beta Readers (aka your #1 priority)

- Picking an Editor:
  - Research their work (contact their clients)
  - Are they reputable?
  - Do they know your genre?
  - Are they competitively priced?
  - What services do they offer? (content edit vs. line edit vs. proofread, etc.)

*When you can't afford an editor...*

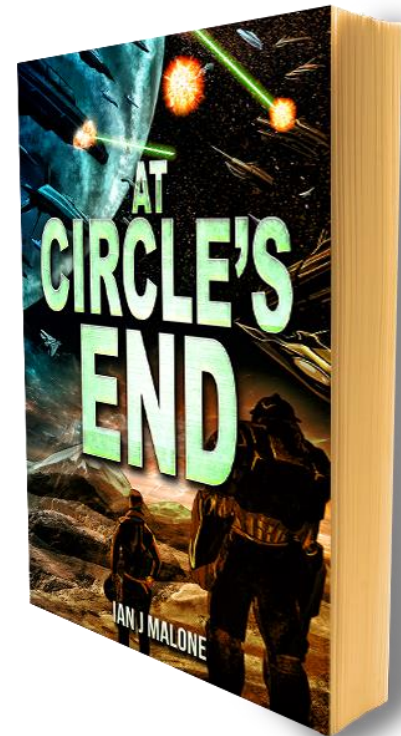
- Picking Beta Readers:
  - Find Honest Readers
  - All praise = HORRIBLE beta reader
  - Give them a deadline
  - Give them a questionnaire to fill out



# Cover

“You should never judge a book by its cover” = LIES!!!

- When Hiring a Designer
  - Research their portfolio online
  - Are they **legal**? (No pirated images!)
  - Do they know your genre?
  - Contact their clients
  - Be involved in the design process
- When building your design:
  - Research your genre (what’s selling?)
  - Remember the thumbnail



# Formatting

- DIY is an option (tedious)
- When hiring a formatter
  - Know your platforms and file formats (.mobi vs. .epub, .pdf for paperbacks)
  - Do your homework
  - Cost Compare
  - TIP: Many cover designers bundle formatting with a cover to save you \$.

# Distribution

- The three major platforms:
  - E-books
  - Paperbacks
  - Audiobooks



# E-books are King

19.5% = The proportion of all books sold in the U.S. that are Kindle titles.

In 2014, e-books made up around 30% of all book sales. Amazon had a 65% share of that, while Apple and B&N accounted for most of the balance.

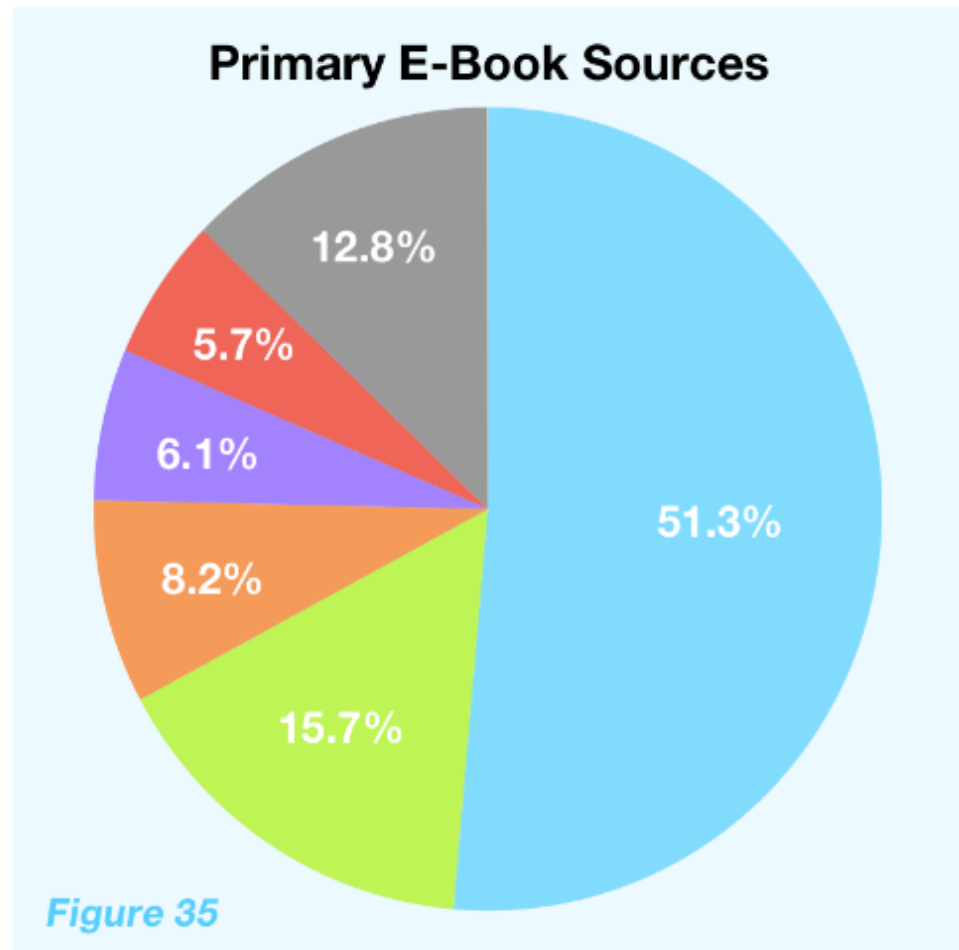
*Take Home Point: E-books = no overhead.*

(Source -- [Forbes Magazine](#))

# Where Readers Buy E-Books

**QUESTION:** Where do you typically acquire e-books (either purchased or free)? Select one only.

- Amazon.com website
- Amazon app
- iBooks/iTunes (Apple)
- Barnes & Noble App
- Barnes & Noble website
- All other sources



# E-Book Platforms

- Go as wide as possible
  - [Amazon](#) (Kindle Direct Publishing)
  - [Apple iBookstore](#)
  - [B&N](#) (Nook Press)
  - [Kobo](#) (Writing Life)
- Consider an Aggregator
  - [Draft 2 Digital](#)
  - [Smashwords](#)





# Categories and Keywords

- Selecting a category for your book: Be the big fish in the small pond.
  - Science Fiction - 139,344 results
  - Space Opera - 21,637 results
  - Space Marines - 2,723 results
- Amazon give you 7 key words/phrases to associate with your book.
  - CHOOSE WISELY!
  - Google is your friend

# Paperbacks

- All about Print on Demand (POD)
  - Gives readers the option, no overhead
- Leaders in Print On Demand Publishing:
  - [CreateSpace](#) (subsidiary of Amazon)
  - [Ingram Spark](#) (indie stores won't work with CreateSpace)
  - [Lulu](#) (based in Raleigh)

# Audiobooks

- Great \$ maker!
  - Today's portable tech (Smartphones, etc.) makes for ease of access by millions
  - Reaches new audience, i.e. the blind/sight impaired and heavy commuters
- [Audiobook Creative Exchange](#) (ACX)
  - Royalty Sharing = \$0 overhead
  - Audible, iTunes, Amazon
- Pointers for hiring a producer:
  - Know your genre/scout your voice talent
  - Be involved in the production process



# Pre-Launch Marketing

- 3-6 Months Prior to Launch:
  - Professional author website
  - Blog ([Wordpress](#), [Blogger](#), etc.)
  - Email List (this is HUGE!)
  - [Amazon Author Central](#) (Amazon author page)
  - Social Media (more in a moment...)
  - Create a Media Kit for your website
- Plug in with online indie-pub communities (authors helping authors!)
  - [KBoards](#)
  - [World Literary Café](#)
  - [Independent Author Network](#)
  - [Alliance for Independent Authors](#)

# Social Media

- Social Media Best Practices
  - Be involved but Be Yourself!
  - Be visual (never post sans image)
  - Be service-oriented (post useful content)
- Know your audience, which platforms they prefer
  - Facebook is a must for everyone
  - Pinterest = popular with female readers
  - Instagram/Snapchat = popular with teens and young adults
- Don't try to be everywhere!
- Use management tools/analytics
  - [Hootsuite](#), [Buffer](#), etc.

# Post-Launch Marketing: All about the Algorithm

- Let Amazon promote your book by driving traffic to its sales page.
  - Full court press with social media
  - Leverage friends, family, professional networks
  - Email Blasts
  - Blog Tours
  - Guest Blog Posts
  - Podcasting
  - Media Press
- On media pitches:
  - Reporters have a job to do
  - Know their audience
  - Send quality materials



# Financial Peace in Writing

- Easiest ways to become a full-time writer:
  - Increase royalties by writing multiple books
  - Cut expenses by eliminating all debt

*How much could you live on if you had no payments?*

# Financial Action Steps

- Steps to becoming a debt-free writer:
  - Create a project budget (editing, covers, etc.)
  - Create project fund (requisite cash for current project)
  - Create project emergency fund (cash for one book if previous book doesn't sell)
  - Create tax fund (30% of all royalties)
  - Create marketing fund (optional)
  - Line up debts smallest to largest (not by interest rates) and attack them with all extra funds. Aka, the “debt snowball.”
  - Stockpile 6 months of expenses (gas, groceries, bills, etc.)
  - Invest and be generous

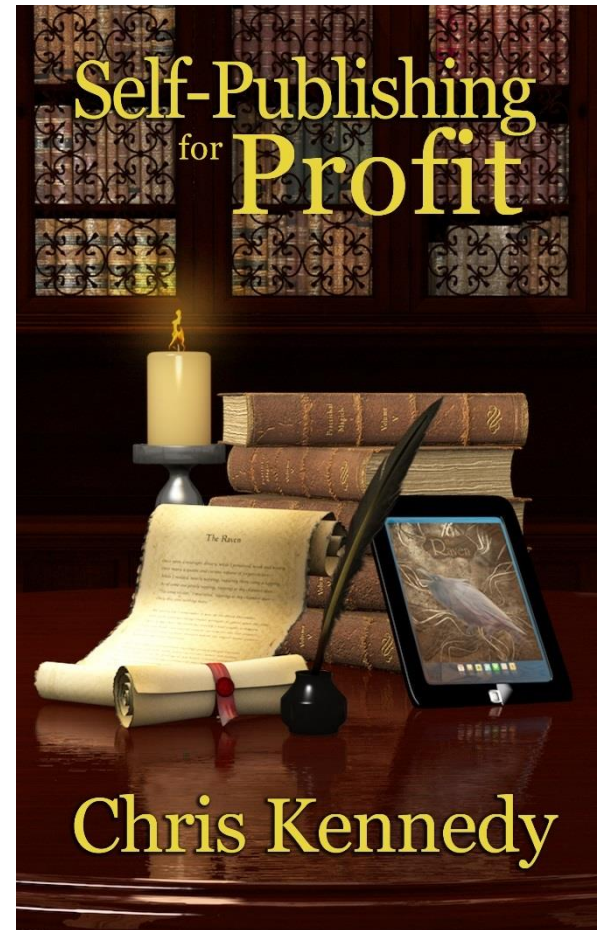
Visit [www.daveramsey.com](http://www.daveramsey.com) to learn more.



# *Self-Publishing for Profit* by Chris Kennedy

This Amazon #1 bestseller details the plan Kennedy used to sell almost 40,000 book copies in his first year, after starting with nothing but a story.

- About the Author:
  - A bestselling Science Fiction/Fantasy author and speaker, Chris Kennedy is a former naval aviator and elementary school principal.
- Resources:
  - [ChrisKennedyPublishing.com](http://ChrisKennedyPublishing.com)
  - Buy this book [on Amazon](#)



# A bit more about Ian J. Malone

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