

## 3. SELF-PUBLISH AN EBOOK

The author of young adult novels and non-fiction, Emily Craven has self-published three ebooks. She has not made her fortune yet but is optimistic this will be her full-time job.



Do-it-yourself ... inspired by her favourite author, Emily Craven started writing her first book when she was at high school.

**I WAS FIRST INSPIRED TO** write when I was 12, after I learnt one of my favourite authors, Isobelle Carmody, started her first book at 14 (it was later published). I worked on that book all through high school and almost a decade later I got the chance to do a 12-month writing mentorship with the woman who started me writing in the first place, Isobelle.

Young adult (YA) fiction has always been my passion and I've written five books – four for young adults, ranging from comedy to fantasy to travel, and one non-fiction. Three of these I've self-published.

### Why self-publishing

It's sadly a similar story for most would-be writers – I amassed a stack of rejection slips. More fortunate than most, I was getting back personalised versions of the rejection letter,

praising my writing style in one line and in the next telling me that my book just didn't "fit their list".

The final straw came when I sent my gap-year travel book to Lonely Planet, only to be rejected; and then six months later found it had produced its own version of my idea. It was then I said, "To hell with this!" and started finding out everything I could about publishing my own work. For almost three years I talked to experts from around the globe about author marketing and the ebook revolution, seeking mentors and pooling all my research into a blog, *The E-book Revolution*.

### All about the process

First I educated myself in not only good writing but digital publishing and, most importantly, internet marketing. There was a lot of free but contradictory information, so to save

time better spent on writing I bit the bullet and paid for the information. From there I hired editors to go through my non-fiction and fiction book – one a friend, another a freelancer. I hired a lovely guy called Kit Foster based in the UK to do the covers.

I decided I was in this for the long haul, so I purchased my own ISBNs rather than accept the free ones from the various ebook platforms. You need an ISBN to sell and it's better if you're listed as the publisher, not Amazon. Formatting was a lot easier than I first thought when I turned to PressBooks to create the EPUB and MOBI files for the two major ebook stores, Kobo and Amazon Kindle (KDP). This program uses the WordPress code and you can put together an ebook as easily as you can write a blog, and it's free.

Using those files I uploaded to Amazon Kindle (KDP) and Kobo directly within 10 minutes, and then to a smaller ebook store run out of Australia called Tomely (which pays authors instantly via PayPal while the other platforms pay monthly). The final platform I needed to approach was Smashwords, an ebook distributor. I hired someone to do the Smashwords formatting for me. All up, after two solid months of tweaking, checking price points and making artistic decisions, I was up and running.

I'm also a speaker, teaching both adults and young adults about ebooks, digital media and marketing as well as visiting schools to talk about my own books. I realised it was hard to sell ebooks, something that had no physical presence, to my audiences. So I turned to print on demand publishing (POD) via Lightning Source and now have physical copies of each book to print and sell as I please.

### The costs involved

Ebook creation: editing \$350, cover \$160, Smashwords formatting \$54, ISBN (block of 10) \$150. Total \$714. To create the POD copies I spent a further: cover \$45, upload files to Lightning Source \$85, proof copy \$43. Total \$173. (I created the internal PDF via PressBooks for nothing but it now charges \$100.)

### Setting the price

My original plan was 99¢, a common starting point for new authors; however, if you do this

in Amazon you only get a royalty of 35% for each book sold. So I raised it to the minimum price point for a 70% royalty with Amazon, \$2.99, a reasonable price for an ebook. Selling through Tomely, Kobo and Smashwords, you always get 70%-80%.

Recently, in an effort to boost sales, I've dropped it to 99¢ for some paid promotions I'm going to run. The price point of the POD copies is that of most young adult and how-to books: \$15.99. As this is triple the price of the ebooks, I am hoping the print book pricing will help increase ebook sales. My point of difference is that when someone buys my print book they always get the ebook free with it.

### All about the \$

Have I sold thousands? No, I haven't. This is a long-term game and my ebooks have been out for a little under six months. My income will only increase as I start to add more and more books and content. By far my best seller has been my non-fiction book, which can be more easily targeted. I hope this will eventually be a full-time occupation but it's early days.

### Promoting the book

I promote my books in a little blurb at the end of every podcast and blog I do, as well as prominently on my blog. Facebook and Twitter are invaluable for passing on little snippets of information, but it does suck up time. My next marketing push will be podcasting my novels and approaching bookstores to stock my physical books.

The market is saturated with new titles every day you need a strategy for standing out from the crowd. The hardest thing by far is getting people who are not your friends and family to review the work, as many influential reviewers won't review self-published works. Having an existing base of clients or readers will give you a good leg-up though.

### Tips for others

First you need to ask yourself why you are self-publishing. Is there a strategy behind it, do you want a book as a proof of expertise, do you want to be the next Stephen King or Amanda Hocking? While it's not a get-rich-quick path, authors who do it right and have two or three well-written series under their belt, have been known to earn up to \$20,000 in three months. You need to be prolific; one or two books is not enough. You need something for the readers to move on to.

You need to build a relationship with readers, for example by creating a Facebook page in your genre and sharing things. There are more tips on my blog [ebookrevolution.blogspot.com](http://ebookrevolution.blogspot.com).

## HOW YOU CAN DO IT

### How to self-publish

Once you've written your book you'll need to get it put into a format that can be sold at online stores – EPUB or MOBI are the most popular options. "EPUB and MOBI files can be created easily and for free using a fantastic online tool called PressBooks," says our case study, Emily. Once it's ready to go "upload your work with the cover, formatted file and blurb to Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing, Kobo, Smashwords and Australian ebook store Tomely".

### The right price

Working out how much to charge can be tough. Emily's suggestion is to price it low. "The average cost of ebooks tends to be \$3.99, with non-fiction books sitting at around \$5.99," she says. "If you have a series of books, it appears pricing the first low, and the rest at \$4.99, is your best bet for drawing in new readers and making a profit."

### Market your book

"The key strategy you should always begin with is courting as many reviewers as you can," says Emily. You should also have a website, Facebook and Twitter account at the very least to engage with readers.

"The majority of your success will be through connecting and having conversations with people, mainly on social media," she says.

It can help if you have an existing base of clients or readers – whether from a blog or through social media. "It is always worthwhile trying to build a relationship months, indeed years before you first release your book," says Emily. You could approach blogs or websites that appeal to your target audience to offer giveaway copies.

### Making it a success

"Write a book that speaks to people – whether it entertains or solves a problem, it has to be good," says Emily. Get a second opinion, too. "You are not the best judge of your work – an editor is and you need your book edited," she suggests.

Now while we all know you shouldn't judge a book by its cover, a lot of people still do, so make sure you have a strong one. "Hire a professional, whether it be from a freelancing website like 99designs, from the Smashwords email list ([list@smashwords.com](mailto:list@smashwords.com)) or handpicked by you from online competitions like The Book Designer's monthly ebook cover awards," says Emily. MARIA BEKIARIS

## 3. AN EBAY STORE

Adele XXXXXX started her eBay store, Pack It In, selling cellophane bags and complementary products, six years ago. Within a year she was making enough money to give up her full-time job. This is her story.

**A**S A CARDMAKER, I always struggled to find the perfect crystal-clear cello bag to put my cards into. I searched everywhere and scoured the internet. I purchased cello bags from many places in Australia and overseas, but was always disappointed in the quality.

After a long search I finally found bags that I was happy with and I thought that if I struggled to find good bags perhaps others might too. So I bought in bulk from the supplier and sold the extra packets on eBay.

Over the months our store got busier and busier. I started stocking more sizes and had to increase the amount of stock I held to cope with demand. It was about a year down the track that I realised we needed to manufacture the bags ourselves and so began the exhausting process of finding a factory.

What started with three sizes of bags and stock totalling 3000 bags is now a business with over 70 sizes and stock of many tens of millions of bags. Our customer base is made up of retailers, handcrafters and designers, and, while our core product remains cello bags, we've added a vast range of complementary products to become a one-stop shop for creative packaging supplies.

### Why eBay?

With only a single product to begin with, I couldn't justify the expense of having a website of my own. eBay was the perfect solution. It's a high-traffic site and it was an inexpensive way to test the water. Most of the fees you incur are when an item sells, so it's an easy, low-risk way to get started.

The eBay store was easy to set up. As our business grew we had a template custom designed for us so that our brand was con-