Creating and Formatting e-Books
Lesson 11
Pricing and Marketing

Pricing

Here's a list of some of the most expensive Kindle books I found.

- *[Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics](#)* (Second Edition 2005) $11,850
- *[International Encyclopedia of Social & Behavioral Sciences](#)* (First Edition 2001) $16,870
- The winner is multi-volume *[Collier Encyclopedia on Bankruptcy](#)* $11,519 each. Yes, that price is for each one of the reported 29 volumes.

I haven't decided if pricing of an e-book is a fine science, art, or magic. Both of my PDF books are priced at $2.99. They were originally priced $4.95 each. One has sold moderately well, the other hasn't. I know I need to do some readjusting and different marketing. Sales have only changed with my marketing effort.

Many traditional publishers are using e-books as a way to shore up falling print profits. In that quest, some e-books cost more than the print edition. I'm not sure how effective that strategy is for the self-publisher or small press. [A May 2016 report at Author Earnings](#) says the Big Five are steadily lowering e-book prices.

An interesting note: Two of the above books are available in hard cover for less than $200 each. It would be interesting to see the sales information on those titles.

Looking through my consumer glasses, I don't want to pay close to the same price, or more, for an e-book as I do for a print edition. It just doesn't seem fair to pay nearly the same for a pile of electrons as for a tangible item. One of my editing clients has the e-book version of their leading title priced only $5.00 less than the print edition. The organization has been disappointed in sales.

Looking through my self-publisher glasses, I know that the primary cost of my e-book is very low compared to the print edition. Actually, almost nothing in terms of material and the hard work of writing is done. This fact probably clouds my consumer glasses.

Search the internet for "pricing e-books" and a number of lists with several different theories will be found. Some factors do seem to rise to the top.

1. The Audience. Knowing our audience is important when writing and important when pricing. A writer or publisher needs to know what the audience will pay for specific topics and genres. Business books, whether print or electronic, tend to cost more than general how-to books or novels. One of my target audiences is homeschool families. I know they primarily have one income, so don't have a lot of extra money to spend on non-essential items. (And, yes, I have to admit my books are non-essential : >)
2. The Competition. Check the price of books with a similar theme. This gives an

indication of what the audience is willing to pay. Pricing slightly lower than the average or the same price may be the best strategy.

3. The Cost. There is a cost involved in selling e-books. Books sold through Amazon or iBookstore require a payment of a fee for each book sold. Amazon has set their "royalty" to encourage certain pricing. My PDF books cost more than the Kindle version because the cost for me is more.

One advantage with e-books is that if the price isn't working, it can be easily changed. Some say it's a bad idea to lower the price because those who buy at the higher price will be upset. If the price fluctuates too often that can be a result. I consider that everything whether a car or an e-book has discounted prices at some point.

Pricing an e-book can be "rocket science," but there is no magic formula. The best strategy can be done by reviewing the price of similar products and adjust from there. Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) now has a service, KDP Pricing Support, which helps with this comparison. It looks like this and is found in the Kindle Book Pricing section.

The system uses such factors as categories, page count, and number books the author has sold previously. Here's more information.

When I write a book on bankruptcy law, I can look at the most expensive Kindle book and get an idea of a good price for it.

Some good articles on e-book pricing:

Kristen Eckstein offers [suggestions to pricing based on the content and use of an e-book](#).

Marketing

We've learned many of the decisions made before an e-book, or any book for that matter, is published affect marketing. Many of us already know marketing begins long before the book is released.

Marketing an e-book is much the same as marketing a print book. Even if the book is published through a traditional publisher marketing is the writer's job. We can devote an entire class to marketing, so we'll only be covering the highlights.

Through a website

Many writers, if not most, have a blog/website. I think most write their own content. In terms of book marketing, the content should preview the book and add bonus information. Of course, it necessary to get readers to the website.

If we've heard it once, we've heard eight or nine times: A newsletter is a must for marketing. The newsletter needs to be regular and not always have the same content as a blog or the book. My newsletter always has something exclusive for the readers of the newsletter. A newsletter is often the first place to announce a book release.

There are several ways to set up an e-newsletter. Yahoo Groups or Google Groups can be used. These are primarily known for group email discussions. They do have an "announcement only" feature, which can be used for a newsletter. There are limitations on how subscriptions are gathered and adding subscribers. If the newsletter list is large, some e-mail outlets won't allow multiple recipients in the TO or BCC box. Yahoo and Google are strictly manual, no automation.

Email newsletter services abound. [MailChimp](#) offers free service for those with a small email list. [Here's a simple list of free email services.](#) Some web hosting companies have newsletter functions as well. Check with the host to see what is offered. I have my newsletter with MailChimp and have been happy with the free service. When my list grows larger, I'll probably stay with that company's pay service.

Social media

There are so many social media channels available that it's possible to spend all day, every day trying to keep up, and still fall behind. Plus, we could spend an entire week talking about ways to use social media to drive traffic to a website or to sell books.

The two most popular, today, are Facebook and Twitter, with Pinterest coming on quickly. I recommend being on at least Facebook and Twitter. The two accounts can be linked so posting to one allows a presence of both. As a book is written or edited a list of tweetable statements can be compiled to use while marketing.

There are also services, such as HootSuite and Buffer to automate social media post. I do have a peeve about using the auto-posting services. There is no direct contact with the reader. It's too easy to just push out thoughts (or sales pitch) without spending time interacting with friends and followers. Always remember the "social" part.

Pinterest is becoming more talked about as a marketing tool for authors. I have not used my Pinterest account for marketing, although I do have boards that cover topics I write and speak about. Not only is time a factor, I haven't quite figured out how to best use Pinterest for marketing my books. I have a Pin It button on my website and do get notices that my posts are being pinned.

On the other side, Laura Christianson at Blogging Bistro has a series about Pinterest, which begins here. (At the time of this writing, the link for the recommended e-book isn't working.) Ms. Christianson has several how-to posts for Pinterest.

Here is an article from Writer's Digest "How to Use Pinterest to Market Your Book"

Using the Crowd

No, I don't mean "cloud," I mean "crowd." This means involving relatives, neighbors, and friends. Because the business of writing is viewed as glamorous, people like to feel a part of the adventure. Often all it takes is asking.

An editor I met at a conference has a group of beta readers. These are people who like to read. They are the first line of readers for some of her clients. Where does she get her beta readers? She asks. If she sees someone reading a specific genre at a bookstore or coffee shop, she asks if they would like to preview books. In online groups and at social events, she keeps her ears open for people who like to read and what they like to read. Beta readers often become the first to review and recommend a book.

Goodreads has groups for writers to find beta readers. A local critique group can be a source for beta readers. For more information about beta readers Chuck Sambuchino has two Writer's Digest articles:

What Are Beta Readers? And Do You Need Them?

Peer Reviews: Seek Quality in Your Beta Readers, Not Quantity

Belinda Pollard offers "How to find a beta reader" on her blog.

Another way to involve the crowd is to get advice from social media. Recently I asked members of several Facebook groups about title possibilities for an upcoming book. These people are now engaged. This is a first step to marketing a book that's not finished yet. I have a place to start keeping people updated. The same method can be, and has been used by writers, for book covers, character names, and even should a character live or not.

Blogging an upcoming book is another way to engage readers before release. I have posted bits and pieces of information from *Formatting e-Books for Writers* on my blog. (Here's a sample http://practicalinspirations.com/step-one-to-a-good-e-book/) I don't say, "Here's another section of my book." I just post the information and see the reaction. Some writers do blog the entire book. Nina Amir discusses blogging a book at howtoblogabook.com

Some fiction writers set up Facebook and Twitter accounts for characters in their stories. The reader can have an ongoing conversation with those characters. This technique can be used to drop hints of upcoming sequels. Lauraine Snelling has a website for the setting of her Blessings series, www.blessingnd.com.

Crowdsourcing, also called crowdfunding, is becoming very popular for financing all sorts of projects including books. The idea is to ask people to contribute various amounts of money in exchange for perks. The perks are based on the level of monetary gift.

It is also a way to include others, the crowd, in the production and launch of a book. In other words, crowdsourcing can be a marketing tool. To be successful, crowdsourcing requires a well-planned campaign.

Mary DeMuth successfully funded her one of her book, *Not Marked,* with crowdsourcing. By reviewing her crowdsourcing webpage, you can get an idea of what is involved https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/not-marked#/. If you have time, take a look at the update section. In the early part of the campaign, Ms. DeMuth had daily updates.

I used crowdsourcing for my last book project. It didn't have the impact that Mary's did because I don't have as large an e-mail list. However, the funds did cover some of the cost associated with indie-publishing.

Another benefit of the crowdsource is the people who took part had an interest in the success of my book. These were my first endorsers and reviewers.

Launch Team

Just as people like to be part of the background of writing a book, they also like to be part of the team that gets a book seen in the market. This is your launch team.

A launch team can be a few dozen or a couple hundred. It depends upon the size of your current audience. Here's a short plan.

- A couple of months before the release date start asking friend, relatives, through social media, at the coffee shop for folks to join the team.
- Set up a special newsletter for them to receive updates of the progress, suggested social media comments, and other tools to help the team promote the book prior to release.
- Set up a Thunderclap campaign. Thunderclap is another type of crowdsourcing. A tribe is gathered to push notifications to social media on the release day. A minimum of 100 participants is needed. The tribe member can choose one or more social media accounts.
- Give each member of the team a PDF file of the book. This gives them the opportunity to read the book and be ready to post a review on the release day.

One author had a study for her launch time prior to the release. Again, a way to get these important people engaged.

Pre-release campaign

Smashwords recently announced the [asset-less preorder](#). An author can begin pre-release sales without the book actually being written. According to the announcement article, books with a preorder campaign earn three times as much as those without pre-release offer. If this is correct, a pre-release campaign might be worth the effort.

KDP also has a pre-order option for e-books. Kindle has strict requirements and penalties if the product is not ready on the release date. Whereas Smashwords allows the author to change the release date.

Pre-release offers are usually priced lower than the price will be on day of release. Pre-sales, or pre-orders, is not a new technique or limited to e-books. Books by celebrity authors are often available for pre-order.

All these marketing techniques require time and effort. Each possibility needs to be considered prior to hitting the publish button.

Paid Advertising

If a marketing budget has room, paid advertising shouldn't be overlooked. Facebook, Kindle Advertising Services, and Goodreads all have plans that allow the user to set a maximum budget for the ad. A writer can set the amount to be spent and the length of time the ad will run.

Assignment

What are your thoughts about Seth Godin's pricing scheme outlined in "How Much Should an E-book Cost?"

If you have an e-book, how did you determine the price? Have you made adjustments?

Do some research on Amazon and online stores to compare prices of books in your niche. What have you learned?

Also look at the same title in different bookstores. Is there the price different? If you have time, check the author's website to see if the e-books are offered and if there's a price difference.

Have you used any of the paid advertising service? If so, what has been your experience?

Is there another marketing technique not mention? What is it?