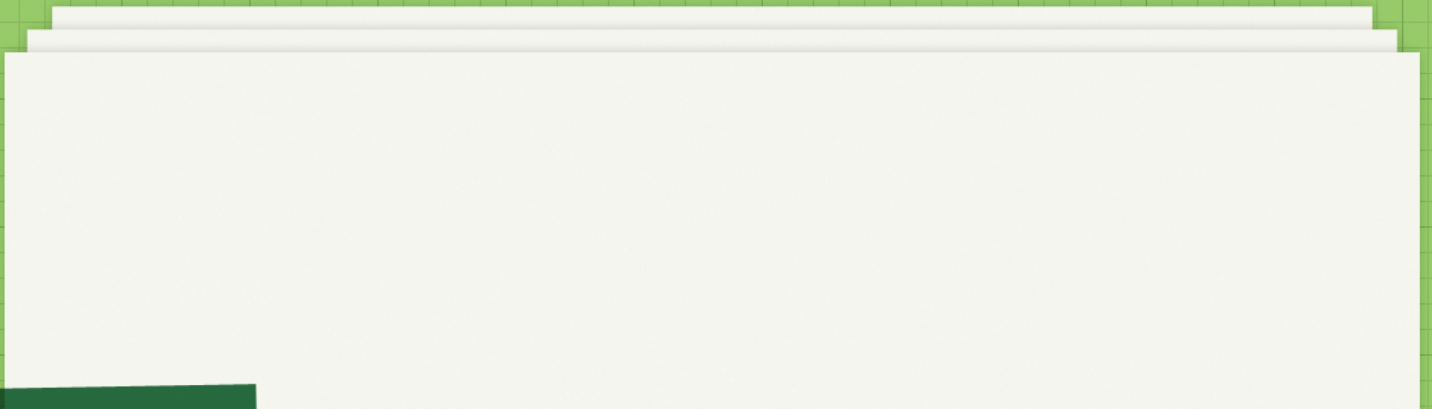


HOW-TO

**CREATE
YOUR FIRST
EBOOK**

***FROM INITIAL IDEA TO
READY FOR READERS***



How to Create Your First Ebook

From Initial Idea to Ready for Readers



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Contents

Introduction	4
Topic	7
Planning	13
Writing	16
Editing	25
Publishing	28
Selling	38
Promoting	43
In Closing	48

Introduction

We like ebooks at iThemes. We've published [a few](#) of our own.

We think you'll like publishing your own as well. It's easier than you think and the rewards are immeasurable. We're going to explore how to create your own ebook, diving into some of the sticky issues of writing, editing and actually publishing your ebook.

But before we get to the how, let's talk about why: **Why would you want to write an ebook?**

We've got five reasons why you should create an ebook:

1. Share & Spread Your Ideas

One of the main reasons to write an ebook is to share your idea.

Books are powerful ways to spread ideas. Each volume can be a succinct yet detailed defense of an idea. Ebooks have made those ideas even more portable.

Marketing guru Seth Godin championed this idea in a little ebook he gave away, [Unleashing the Ideavirus](#). He even encouraged people to write their own ebooks [way back in 2007](#).

If you've got ideas you want to share and spread, write an ebook.

2. Establish Your Expertise

An ebook is an ideal way to establish yourself as an expert. People discover you because they hear your voice on a particular topic and

those who already know you will recognize your expertise thanks to your ebook.

It's a powerful way to plant your flag and back it up with published wisdom anybody can read for themselves. It's a way to build a platform for yourself, and from that platform you can promote other products and services.

3. Communicate in a Different Format

An ebook allows you to branch out into a new medium and go beyond your blog, Twitter feed, email newsletter or YouTube channel:

- Ebooks can go more in depth than a standard blog post. You can explore your content in more detail.
- **An ebook also has more staying power.** Tweets are usually old after a few hours. Blog posts generally stay relevant for weeks, maybe months. An email newsletter is usually forgotten soon after it's sent. But an ebook can be evergreen content that lasts longer.
- Different people prefer different formats and an ebook allows you to reach a new audience. Some people devour ebooks and ignore blog posts. By collecting your blog posts into an ebook, you can reach those people who otherwise wouldn't see your stuff.

4. Make Money

You can make money selling an ebook.

Now let's be honest: There's no guarantee you're going to make big bucks. Writing a book is a lot of work. Except for the rare lottery-winner case, authors are not generally rich. But if you do it right, your

ebook can earn a sizable chunk from a big launch and then ongoing passive income. That's perhaps one of the most enticing reasons—**getting paid over and over again for work you already did.**

Not everyone will sell their ebooks. The free model can be a huge boost to indirect income. But for some people directly selling their ebooks is a good way to go.

5. Because You Can

Self publishing is coming into its own. Once upon a time you would have had to come up with an idea, write a proposal, hire an agent and make a pitch to a publisher. A few years later your published book might actually show up on bookstore shelves. If you were extremely lucky.

In rare cases you might have made money from that book.

But times change. **Now you can publish an ebook in an afternoon.**

Technology has radically shifted and it opens a whole new world. There are incredible opportunities and great potential for those willing to try. You can experiment with a format and be one of the early success stories.

Never before in history has it been so easy to write a book. What ebook do you have inside ready to come out? Do you have an incredible story that needs to be heard, depths of wisdom to impart, a world-changing idea? There's only one way to find out.

And we'll show you how to do it.

Topic

The very first step of creating an ebook is figuring out what you're going to write about.

Duh.

OK, that's obvious. But you should take time to think about what you're going to write, how you're going to approach it—and most important of all—why you're writing about this topic.

Necessary

You may have noticed there are a lot of books out there. Millions of books. And millions more are published every year.

It's crazy.

So before diving into your ebook you should consider what you can add to the conversation:

- Does the world need another book on marketing?
- Must we endure another self important autobiography?
- Is anyone clamoring for the story you're trying to tell?

You need to test, refine and narrow your topic to make sure you've got a unique angle that's worth writing an ebook about.

While publishing an ebook has become easier, it's still a lot of work. **Don't go through all that work if you're not bringing anything new to the table.** It's hard enough to get people to read your book when you have a brilliant and ground-breaking concept to share. It's impossible when you're rehashing the same old stuff that's already

published. Make sure your ebook is needed.

Draw on Your Experience

Now all that talk of no one wanting to read your book can be deflating. But it's necessary. You must know how hard it is and be prepared to overcome.

But if you have something to offer—bring it.

The beauty of the digital world and the advent of ebooks is you have a voice. **The gatekeepers have been pushed aside.** You can give your story a platform and let it be heard.

No one else has your experience. Use it. Tap into that well of insight and deliver something that will change people's lives.

Research

Now is a good time to see what else is out there. Research your topic to see what books exist. Who else is telling stories like you are? Have other people had similar experiences? What do you have to offer that's unique? Some basic research can save you the embarrassment of discovering someone else already wrote the book you want to write.

If you find a book that's just like what you want to write, don't worry. In fact, congratulations! You just saved yourself a ton of work. Now you have a choice. Keep at it and use that book to see what's already been said and how you can add something new. Or you might decide that book covered it and you have nothing else to add.

Are You Sure?

Writing a book—even a short one—is a big commitment. It will take time and energy. You're going to be diving deep into your chosen topic for however long it takes to finish your book. Can you commit to your topic? Do you have the enthusiasm and interest to stick with it? It's easy to get tired of a topic after spending so much time with it. Make sure this is something you can commit to for the long haul.

What Should You Write About?

Let's look at some examples of what you might write about:

- **You're an expert.** Explore a topic you know better than anybody and share your wisdom. That's a lot of what we do at iThemes, including the books [5 Keys to Rockin' Websites](#), [Getting Started With Plugins](#) and [15 Best Practices for Rockin' Webinars](#) (we like to rock). Sometimes the real trick is finding a unique way to present your expert knowledge. [DJ Waldow](#) has found a good solution with *The Anatomy of an Email*, as have Chris Lema and James Dalman with [Pricing Explained](#).
- If you've got a personal blog you could write an **autobiography**. Write your memoirs. Go deeper than a blog post and explore what you normally cover in book form. Take a personal moment and share your feelings and insights. Our freelance writer, Kevin D. Hendricks, took his tweets about his son's adoption and wrote the book [Addition by Adoption](#) (which isn't technically an ebook, but close enough).
- **You could write about your mission.** Give your followers a manifesto for your movement. Why is what you do so important? What inspires you to do it? What motivates you to keep going? iThemes founder Cory Miller has written several books on his

passions: *The Entrepreneurial Adventure*, *Getting Paid Well to Do What You Love* and *Purposeful Paychecks*.

- If you run a business you could **talk about the lessons you've learned over the years**. What makes your business work? What successes have you had? What mistakes have you made? Share your insights with the business community. Help other entrepreneurs learn those crucial lessons. Several of our books mine lessons we've learned, including *I Want to Hire You but Your Resume Sucks*, *So You Want to Be a Freelancer?* and *Turning Contacts Into Contracts*.
- If your organization has any longevity you could write the history of your company or nonprofit. History tends to put people to sleep, so this isn't the best idea. But if you have a compelling story, it could be perfect. **History could be more valuable internally than externally, a project to inspire your employees.**
- **Focus on an achievement** or accomplishment—whether yours or someone else's—and tell the story. Explain how others can do the same thing, share lessons and insights or just capture the moment. Kevin D. Hendricks turned his experience into the book *137 Books in One Year: How to Fall in Love With Reading Again*.
- The **how-to manual** is an old standby in the publishing industry. Pick a topic (such as how to create an ebook?) and share your expertise. Tell someone how to do it, exploring pitfalls and best practices that can help others find success. *How to Pick Web Hosting Without a Computer Science Degree* is a perfect example.
- Another approach is to look for a highly sought-after topic and fill that need. **What question are people always asking you? There's a book waiting to be written.** This one might require more research if you're not intimately familiar with the topic and you run the risk of chasing what's cool (and being wrong), but there's also greater potential for reward. We wrote *Kids Creating*

[Stuff Online](#) after hearing from lots of people who wanted to teach web design to kids.

- **Write a manual.** This might not be bedtime reading, but an instruction manual to go along with whatever product or service you offer could be a way to more thoroughly inform your customers. You can write one for your own products, such as [Getting Started With Backup Buddy](#), or focus on a wider industry, such as [Getting Started With WordPress](#).
- **Create a tool or resource that walks people through a difficult task.** How to balance your budget or launch a website. [A Business Plan Primer for WordPress Web Designers](#) manages to walk through the laborious task of writing a business plan while focusing on our niche. [Launch a WordPress.com Blog in a Day](#) by Lisa Sabin-Wilson is another good example of walking the reader through a challenge.

When you're trying to pick a topic **remember that specificity is your friend**. General topics are the enemy. Writing the book that covers your entire industry is overwhelming to write and difficult for readers to connect with. You want something very specific and narrowly focused.

Marketing 101? No.

How to Market Your Local Produce Co-Op? Yes!

Change is OK

Whatever topic you decide on, you might change your mind. That's OK. Sometimes you come up with a great idea, you start writing your book and part way through the idea changes. You have an epiphany as you're writing and you start to veer into new territory. Sometimes you need to get started before you realize where you're going. It's all part of the journey.

The trick is to stick with the journey, make the necessary changes and push to the finish. It's fine for your topic to morph, but at some point you have to nail down your topic and finish the book.

Planning

Before you dive into writing your brilliant new ebook, take a moment to plan out what you're going to do. Writing an ebook is a lot of work and it'd be no good to waste a ton of time with the wrong software or using a weird format that will require you to go back and redo everything.

No, think it through ahead of time, plan out what you're going to do and what it will take to get there. Save yourself the headaches, time and sanity.

Ask yourself some important questions up front as you plan your ebook:

Who's your audience?

You may not know exactly who your audience is, but you probably have some ideas. The more you know, the better decisions you can make. This will impact all sorts of things, from the style of writing to the format of the final product.

If you're writing for seniors it might be more important to offer your book in a physical format as well as an ebook. If you're writing for children you probably shouldn't use those SAT vocab words. If you're writing a short book for small businesses, a PDF might be ideal. But if you're writing a lengthy work of fiction, making your book available for Amazon's Kindle is a must.

What ebook format are you using?

There are all kinds of ebooks and you can release one in any format you like—or even all of them. This is an important distinction because some formats require more work than others. Creating a PDF is pretty quick and straight-forward. Creating an .epub or Kindle-compatible format requires a little more work. Some tools can make the process easier, but you might want to use them from the start or at least have them in mind.

We'll talk more about formatting in the Publishing chapter (see [page 28](#)), but it's good to ask these questions now.

How are you going to sell your ebook?

You also need to think about how you're going to sell your book. If the ebook will only be available on your site, then things are simpler. But if you're planning to make it available on any of the ebook stores, like Kindle, Nook, Kobo, iBookstore, etc., then you'll need to make sure you're following their rules. That might mean thinking through things ahead of time. It helps to know, for example, that Apple won't allow you to link to any other bookstore, so don't put links to Amazon in your text. It's a small thing, but it will save your sanity later.

We'll talk more about selling later (see [page 38](#)), but again, ask these questions now.

How are you going to promote your book?

Marketing your book is a lot of work, and yes, we'll talk about it more in the Promoting chapter (see [page 43](#)). But it can help to think about this from the start. Would your book benefit from being released at a specific time of year? Would it help to coordinate it with a major

event? Are there things you could include in the writing of your book that would help with promotion? You want your book to stand on its own and sell itself, but getting attention in the marketplace is hard. Anything you can do to give your ebook a boost is going to be huge.

Writing

Now it's time to sit down and write. Of course it's rare you can just sit down and vomit out text. You'll likely need to do research, put together an outline, then start writing and later come back to rewrite.

We'll cover those four primary topics separately, and in general they happen in order: research, outline, write, rewrite. But it doesn't always work that way. You'll often go back and forth between the four. You start your outline only to realize you're unclear on something, so you go back to research. In the midst of writing you realize you forgot something in your outline so you go back to tweak the order. Your research is inspiring and you jump directly to the writing, eager to get a scene or an idea down. You really like one section, so you go back to rewrite it and polish it up before you finish writing the rest. A question comes up during the rewrite and it's back to research.

Jump around and do what you need to do to get your ebook written. It's all part of the process.

Research

Hopefully you've already done some research on your topic, focusing and refining what you're going to write about. Now it's time to go deeper and thoroughly explore your topic, figuring out what you need to cover, what you already know and where you need to learn more.

The amount of research will vary depending on your topic. But you almost always need to do some research. Maybe you need to verify some facts or take a cursory understanding of an event a step or two deeper so you can accurately describe it. You might just be looking up stats or quotes to add punch and variety to your argument.

At the very least you should be aware of what's out there that's similar to your topic so you have other sources to draw on. Your work doesn't happen in a vacuum.

Fill in any holes you have so you can put together a solid outline and write what you need to write. **Never be afraid to come back and do more research.** It might be enough to start with some minimal research, get the basic idea and come back for more when you're ready to write that section.

Outline

It's tempting to just skip straight to the writing. Don't.

You should spend time outlining what you're going to cover. It will give direction and keep you on track. Don't feel limited by your outline—it's fluid. You can always come back and tweak the outline. Sometimes when you're writing you realize there's a better way to structure your outline and you shuffle it around.

The outline is supposed to be a guide to help you stay on track with your writing. It's not a strict map. Sometimes you go off-road and come back to the path later. That's good. Sometimes those diversions are necessary. But the point of the outline is to help you make progress in your journey. You know where you've been and you know where you're going.

It will be a big help when you get stuck and wonder what you're doing. When frustration sets in you'll be thankful for the roadmap.

And if you really want to dive in and go straight to the writing, go for it. Get your stream of consciousness out and on the page. Then come back and do an outline. It'll help you make sense of what you have and how to get where you need to go.

Writing

Time to sit down and crank out your ebook. Actually writing your book can be one of the hardest steps in the entire process. Suddenly your book is going from vague idea to difficult reality, and that's hard work. It can be frustrating if your words aren't coming out the way you want. It can be amazing how much work and energy it takes to put words on the page.

But you've got to keep writing.

Power through.

This is what it's all about, the very heart of your ebook. So keep your eyes on the prize, and let the words flow.

Here are a few tips to help you focus on the writing and finish your ebook:

Write Now

Don't wait for inspiration to strike. You don't write a book in bursts of creativity. It happens by daily slogging through and doing the work. Writing is like any other activity—you have to sit down and do it. There's no magic formula that makes it easy or good. Just like building a wall, you have to lay one brick at a time. The builder doesn't wait for inspiration to strike before laying the next brick. They just do it. Same with writing.

Do you have a backup plan in place?

Rough is OK

When you sit down to write your first draft won't be brilliant.

Sometimes you need to get some awful writing out before you can do anything good.

Anne Lamott is a successful and neurotic author and she puts it like this in her manual on writing, *Bird by Bird*: "The only way I can get anything written at all is to write really, really shitty first drafts."

The rough draft is rough for a reason. Sometimes you need to pour out a lot of words to get a few that are any good. You'll probably end up writing a lot more than what ends up in the book. That's part of the process. You have to write a lot, work through the cliches, get the tired, boring stuff out of your system so you can get down to the good, inspiring, powerful words you want. That's why you don't wait for inspiration. You have to work through the bad stuff and that means treating writing like a job. Because it is.

Bottom line: You should talk to a tax expert to make sure you're doing it right. WordPress or your chosen plugin are not tax experts. However, a good plugin should allow you to do almost anything the IRS requires. So that's a relief.

Writing Time

While you do need to sit down every day to do the work of writing, it helps to find your most creative time to write. Figure out when your brain is working best and that's your writing time. You might need to get up early or stay up late, but find the time that works best for your brain and write. **Don't waste your most creative time of the day watching TV or answering email.**

Don't Stay Stuck

If you find yourself stuck, move on. Go on to something else and come

back to the spot giving you trouble. Sometimes it's easier to let your subconscious work and when you come back you'll have worked out a solution without even knowing it. **Don't just sit there and stare at the screen getting frustrated.** Move on to something that is working and keep going. You want forward momentum and progress.

Set Goals & Reward Yourself

Writing an entire book can be intimidating. When you sit down to write the first word of the first page it's the first of so many more. You've got a long way to go. That can be overwhelming. Break your book down into manageable chunks and set goals. Ebooks can be a lot shorter than print books, and that helps, but still set goals. Maybe you're writing a 10,000-word ebook. You want to get it done in a month, so try writing 500 words per day.

Set short, manageable goals you can accomplish without pulling out your hair. You want to claim victory every time you sit down. **Yes, it's OK to set yourself up for easy wins.** Victory snacks are also encouraged: Did you write 500 words today? You get a cookie!

Hey, whatever works.

Write What You Know

Draw on your experience. It's the one thing you have that nobody else does. It will give your book personality and authenticity. Lean into what you know and share it.

Write Conversationally

You're not writing a stuffy essay. Don't overload your writing with big

words and long sentences. Keep it conversational. You can still follow the rules of grammar and be engaging.

Don't Be Passive

You should avoid passive voice. This starts to sound like advice from a high school grammar teacher nobody quite understands. So let's keep it simple: Use strong action verbs and make it clear who is doing the action. The classic bad example of passive voice is Richard Nixon's blame-avoiding "Mistakes were made."

Break It Up

While you are writing longer form content than the typical blog post, some of the same rules about breaking up content still apply. In fact, they can be even more important. It's hard to digest long stretches of text, so make sure you're breaking things up with **subheads, bulleted lists and bold text**.

Simplify

Keep it simple. We've talked about writing conversationally, but another way to approach it is to pare your writing down to the simplest form. Cut everything that isn't necessary:

- We stick in extra adverbs like really, very and absolutely when trying to make a stronger point, but the result is just more words.
- Delete every use of the word 'that' and see if your sentence still make sense. Most of the time it will.
- We add 'up' to all kinds of words for no reason. We 'head up' or 'face up' or 'light up' when 'head,' 'face' and 'light' work just fine.
- Use simple phrases whenever you can: "now" instead of "at this point in time."
- Avoid jargon: Every industry has their own lingo that's

incomprehensible to outsiders. You should be able to explain it without acronyms and corporate speak.

Avoid Cliches

Keep it simple. We've talked about writing conversationally, but another way to approach it is to pare your writing down to the simplest form. Cut everything that isn't necessary:

Give Us Variety

Variety keeps things interesting. Vary your sentence structure and length. You want to keep your writing engaging, catchy and easy to listen to. If the sentences are the same length and the same style they start to sound the same and it gets boring quick. Likewise look at your word usage and make sure you're not using the same tired words over and over again.

Exclamation Marks

Don't. Just don't.

Contractions

Contractions are cool. They may be informal, but they add to your conversational style and make your prose more approachable. You'll sound more natural.

Take a Break

As you're writing and rewriting sometimes you need a break. Step

back from your writing and take some time away. Get some space between yourself and the words so you can come back with fresh eyes.

Back to School

Writing is a skill that needs to be practiced and refined. If you're not writing on a regular basis, you might need a refresher. Check out some books on the topic, such as *On Writing Well* by William Zinsser, *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott and *On Writing* by Stephen King. It also wouldn't hurt to brush up on the technical aspects. Check out *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White or something more modern like *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* by Lynn Truss. You should also invest in a style guide like the AP Stylebook, which will answer all your questions about when to capitalize titles, when to write out numbers or use figures and the proper usage of affect and effect.

Rah, Rah, Rah

For some people writing is easy. We hate those people. For most people, even professional writers, churning out words is work. It's an uphill battle and the temptation to quit is ever present. **So do whatever it takes to keep yourself in the game.** Set goals, give yourself rewards, recruit a group of cheerleaders, find inspiration, seek out encouragement.

In many ways finishing the writing is a mental challenge. How well can you stick with it? How motivated are you? Figure out what you're going to need to finish writing your book and get it.

Rewriting

You've written a rough draft. Congratulations (have a cookie).

Now get back to writing.

The first draft is never good enough. It's not fully formed, it's not written as well as it can be, it's not the amazing book you envisioned. That's why it's a rough draft.

If you try to publish your first draft, you're being lazy. People won't be impressed and you'll have sold yourself short.

Now it's time to go back and rewrite your work. This isn't a simple edit to fix your typos and tweak a few things. We put this in the writing chapter for a reason. This is part of the process.

Read through what you have and find the spots where it's not working. Look for places where the language is repetitive (how many times in one page did you use the same word or phrase?). Look for the story that's not quite as strong as it could be and find a better one. Reorganize the confusing spots. If you need to, throw out what doesn't work and start over.

This is the time when you need to know how much work it takes to write a book. Just because you have to delete something doesn't mean it's wasted effort. You'd never get perfect turn of phrase if you hadn't gone through so many awful and then OK and then not-quite-there phrases.

Rewriting is the process that takes your book from a fleshed out idea to a polished book. Don't skip this step—there are no shortcuts to final drafts.

Editing

Once your book is done it's time to do some editing.

This is not the second draft. Your book should already have gone through several drafts before you're ready for editing. If you haven't done several drafts, go back to rewriting and work through several drafts.

Now are you ready to edit? For real?

Get ready for an investment. You should really hire an editor. No matter how many times you read through your book you'll still miss something. Editing and proofreading require fresh eyes. They also require the expertise of a professional to look for all those nitpicky grammatical things.

Sure, you know English. You know how to write. But do you know AP Style? Do you know what a serial comma is? If not, you need to hire someone to proofread your work.

Don't skimp here. Editing and proofreading will separate the quality, top notch ebooks from the junk. We're talking typos and so much more.

There are three types of editing that need to happen to your ebook:

Content Editing

First you need big picture editing. This type of editing primarily looks at your content and tries to ensure your book is the best it can be. This is where you check facts, confirm stories, straighten out twisted arguments and make the content everything it needs to be.

A content editor will look at the structure of your book. How logical is your approach? Did you leave anything out? Would it be better to approach it from a different angle? Are you making the strongest argument or did you succumb to a common fallacy? Does the tone of your writing match the subject? These are the kind of things a content editor will look at.

Copy Editing

Next is copy editing. This is where an editor goes line by line and word by word fixing everything. This is what usually separates a professional manuscript from the work of an amateur. We're talking typos and grammatical errors as well as style issues. This is where you have to make decisions about serial commas and when you write out numbers or use figures (five vs. 5).

While content editing is something you might be able to do yourself or ask your mom, copy editing is best done by a professional. You want someone who is intimately familiar with style and the rules of grammar.

Proofreading

The final step is proofreading. This is a final check to make sure everything is correct. This is usually one of the last steps you take and is often employed to make sure all your work survived the layout process and mistakes either didn't make it this far or weren't inadvertently introduced by software (thank you Microsoft Word!).

No matter how many times you read over your work, you'll find another mistake. This is why proofreading is so vital. Proofread it multiple times in multiple formats (for some people it's easier to catch typos in print). Ask other people to read it. Get several sets of eyes on it to ensure you catch as many errors as possible.

When you think you've proofread it to death and can never look at it again, do it one more time. Maybe give it a day first, but then proofread it once more and call it good. And remember, no matter how thoroughly your book is proofed, mistakes will sneak through. It happens to the professional publishers all the time and it will happen to you. Do your best, but then live with it. You can't proofread forever.

Final Editing Thoughts

Editing is crucial. It's the polish that makes your ebook presentable. It's like wearing a suit to an interview. You want to look professional. Most people won't hire someone who shows up wearing pajamas and most people won't read that book either.

If you have a limited budget there are ways to get creative here. You can rely on friends, crowdsourcing or online groups (our own Cory Miller highly recommends [crowdsourcing to make your writing better](#)). But be careful: Too many cooks in the kitchen can also be hard. There are different styles and no single right way of doing things. Consistency is key.

Above all you want a quality product. Do what it takes to get there.

Publishing

Once you finish writing your book you need to share it with the world. But that requires the tricky step of publishing your book. This is where you'll need to work on laying out your manuscript, design elements (primarily the cover) and exporting the final ebook files.

Layout

Layout is the process of making your book look professional and following the standard formats. It's the difference between an 8.5 x 11 Word doc and a printed book, or in this case an ebook.

You should add the common components of the publishing industry—title page, copyright page, dedication, table of contents, foreword, etc.—to give your book that professional look. You'll also want to do some basics like page breaks before new chapters and consistently formatting chapter titles.

Bonus: The introductory chapter of a book usually written by someone other than the author is known as a foreword. Not a forward. It's the 'word' at the 'fore' of the book, not onward. It's a painfully common mistake.

Much of your layout is going to depend on the final format you want and the solution you're using to export your work. We'll cover that in more detail in the Export section (see [page 32](#)), though you should check that now and pick your method before starting the layout.

Ebook Formats

Standard layout with print books involves all kinds of decisions about the font, font size, line spacing, page numbers, headers, paragraph

indents, blank pages and more. It's all about how the printed page looks to the reader. And with ebooks you can throw it all out the window.

For most ebooks layout is an outdated concept. Ebook readers like the Kindle or Nook don't have pages like traditional printed books. The reader controls the font and font size and the "page" changes all the time depending on those settings and sometimes even how the reader is holding the device (portrait or landscape).

With print books the publisher determines 100% of the layout.

With ebooks the reader and the device determine at least half of the layout.

That changes how you approach the layout. You can't force text to appear the way you want. Much like web design and HTML layout, you need to let the text flow. You have to give up a measure of control.

While there's a lot that's handled and determined by the device, you do need to make sure you're formatting it properly so it displays correctly. Stuff like bulleted lists, pull quotes, indented paragraphs, etc. can be tricky. These may seem like minor components in an ebook, but it's easy for software to screw them up and it's amateur hour at your ebook.

Make sure you're properly formatting your book and then double-check to make sure your formatting made it through the export and into the final file. This can be tricky thanks to different file formats and export options.

PDF Ebooks

There are two reasons to use the PDF format for your ebook:

1. It's easy. Even Microsoft Word can export a PDF, which means even the most technophobe user can create a PDF ebook.
2. While it may be easy, it also allows for complex design. PDFs are visual and not text-driven, which means you can create anything, from graphic novels to coffee table books.

Many of the ebook headaches caused by flexible formatting can be avoided with PDF. PDF is effectively a mirror image of the print version, with everything fixed and nothing varying depending on the device. That means you can get creative with your design, including pictures, graphics, tables and more.

You might want to hire a graphic designer to do your interior design. This could include everything from font selection to graphical flourishes at the beginning of chapters. Many professional PDF ebooks will use a more thorough interior design reminiscent of a magazine layout to make up for the shortness of the book.

If you're going the PDF route and don't have the budget for a designer, you can always ask around for free help or do it yourself. The DIY route can be tough, but you can get good results if you keep things simple and consistent. Don't try to be too flashy with your design. The vast majority of published books have a simple layout, so there's no need to get flashy, especially if you're not sure what you're doing.

Picture Books

If you're planning to do a picture book—anything from a coffee table style book to a children's book—then you're going to have special issues with layout. Standard ebook formats don't do picture books

well because the size is always in flux, which is a problem when you have pictures and text that need to interact in a specific way.

The easiest way to make picture books work and maintain control is to do them as PDFs. It is possible to create picture books in ebook formats, though it's going to be a challenge. You'll have to give up a lot of control, either making the text a part of the image (which often defeats the purpose of ereaders and can reduce readability) or separating the text and the image and ceding control over their exact placement.

You'll want to research this thoroughly and do lots of testing to make sure your ebook works the way you intended—or at least as close as possible to the way you intended.

Design

People say you shouldn't judge a book by its cover, but they totally do. Your cover is one of the primary marketing tools for your book. You'll be using it in virtually all your book marketing so it needs to work.

For ebooks the cover is a particular challenge because you need something that works well at the standard cover size (roughly 6x9 inches) but also as a tiny thumbnail viewed on a site like Amazon. Your cover needs to work at both six inches wide and 90 pixels wide.

The cover is important and you'll do your book a grave disservice if you don't give it the proper attention. Hire a designer! But this can be more treacherous and less straight forward than hiring a copy editor. While editing is mostly objective, design is extremely subjective. Your designer could put together 10 covers (unless you're paying a fortune, they won't) and you could hate every single one. But you don't get a discount for hating the design.

Communicate as much as possible with your designer up front to

avoid problems. You should talk a lot about what you're looking for, what you like and what you don't like. You should talk about the kind of cover that will work for your book and the kind that won't. You want your designer to have as much information as possible. If your designer is not asking a lot of questions, you should be worried.

While you want to load your designer up with information, you also need to be aware of your own subjective tastes. You're probably not a designer. Trust that this person trained in the visual arts knows more than you do. While you should like your cover design, you might not fall in love with it. Sometimes you need to be realistic about costs. Unless you're willing to pay until you get something you love, you might need to settle.

But even if you settle on a professionally designed cover, it's going to be lightyears ahead of what you could have done yourself (unless you happen to be a designer). Customers will be able to tell the difference and your sales will reflect it.

In our increasingly visual age, design matters. Invest in it.

Export

Aside from actually writing your book, creating the final ebook files has to be the most difficult part of the process. It's complicated, intimidating and it changes often. But if you can master this step then you're well on your way to creating quality ebooks.

Let's just face it: This is the part of the process that will have you beating your head against the wall. Different formats, different requirements, different needs. File conversion usually means subversion and something always goes wrong. It's going to get crazy. Remember you don't have complete control over layout with ebook formats and know that simpler is always easier.

We'll look at five different tools you can use to export your ebook files. Several are good creation tools as well and allow you to do the entire process. We look at what they can do, their pros and cons, costs and who is recommending each approach.

Word

The age-old standard of offices everywhere, Microsoft Word. It's the workhorse of a word processor everybody loves to hate, but we all still use it. And yes, you can use it to create your ebook.

Create: Yes, Word is the go-to word processor and the most likely place to start writing your ebook.

Import: You're not going to import to Word.

Export: Word has a lot of export options but none are that helpful for creating ebooks. You can export directly to PDF and Kindle will accept Word docs, though you have no control over the conversion process.

Cost: If you're going to use Word, you probably already have it. Nobody buys Word as a tool to create ebooks.

Pros: If you already use Word then it's familiar, cheap and simple (assuming you use it correctly).

Cons: This is your barebones approach because it doesn't do .epub and the Kindle conversion is out of your hands. It's not ideal. But it does PDFs.

Recommended By: Most people putting out a professional product won't admit to using Word for anything more than the initial creation.

Scrivener

Writing software designed specifically for writers.

Create: Yes, Scrivener is ideally suited for writers to create books. It makes it easy to organize your work, swap chapters around, set goals and track word counts.

Import: Yes, but your source document needs to be set up properly. You can start in Word and import to Scrivener, but that's missing out on half the benefits of Scrivener and making more work for yourself.

Export: One of the great strengths of Scrivener is exporting to practically any format you want. It keeps your manuscript and your export options separate, allowing you to export radically different final files from the same document.

Cost: At around \$50, it's relatively cheap software.

Pros: Powerful creation tool, loads of export options, not too big of a hit on your wallet.

Cons: While it's powerful, there's a steep learning curve. Exporting can get complicated. Sorting out the options and getting everything to work the way you like is not easy.

Recommended By: Publishing pro [Michael Hyatt](#) uses Scrivener for writing (it's not clear what he uses to publish his ebooks) and the [Self Publishing Podcast](#) heartily endorses Scrivener for both writing and publishing.

InDesign

The high-end professional layout software from Adobe. This is what the pros use.

Create: Um, you could write your ebook in InDesign, but nobody wants to do that.

Import: There you go. Create in Word and import to InDesign, that's how the pros do it.

Export: Oh yes. This is the professional software, so it can handle all the export needs (Note: Kindle export requires a plugin from Adobe).

Cost: The top notch software has a top notch price. You'll pay around \$700 for InDesign, though there are some pay-per-month subscription options that might be more cost effective (in the range of \$30 per month on a month-to-month basis).

Pros: Professional quality book layout. You can do everything with InDesign.

Cons: Complicated. Expensive. Getting everything to work just right is still not easy.

Recommended By: Guy Kawasaki recommends InDesign as his method of choice in his book on the subject, [APE: How to Publish a Book](#). This is also the approach we use at [iThemes](#) to create all of our PDF ebooks.

PressBooks

This is a book publishing software built on top of WordPress and designed to make book publishing as easy as blogging.

Create: Yes, you can write your ebook in PressBooks. It's just like writing blog entries in WordPress. Biggest downside is you have to be online to see your work and since each chapter is a separate post it's a little cumbersome to see your entire book at once.

Import: Yes, there are import options, so you can start your book somewhere else and move it over to PressBooks. Currently you can't easily import from Word, but they're working on it.

Export: PDF, Kindle, .epub—the popular formats. They use a theme system for each format, so there are some default themes or you can code your own (not for the faint of heart).

Cost: You can use it for free with the PressBooks watermark in your exported files or pay for no watermark: \$10 per title for Kindle and .epub formats or \$100 for PDF, Kindle and .epub formats.

Pros: Built on WordPress, so it has a familiar feel. It's also quick and easy.

Cons: Simplified approach means you have fewer options and control. You're limited to a few themes for the layout. It has minimal design options for PDFs, so you're going to end up with a pretty basic PDF layout. It's also a relatively new service that's quickly rolling out features. That's not really a con, but our summary could quickly become outdated and misleading—so check their latest features for yourself.

Recommended By: Social media guru Chris Brogan used PressBooks for *It's Not About the Tights* and endorses it in his [Human Business Way podcast](#).

Services

If all of this sounds completely overwhelming (wuss!), you can always hire someone else to do it. There are plenty of services out there, such as [Your Digital Book](#) or [BookBaby](#), that offer conversion services.

Create: Nope. You create your ebook in something else and deliver it to these folks to do their magic.

Import: They can probably work with whatever you have, but most likely they want something standard like a Word doc.

Export: They should be able to spit out whatever file you want (and are willing to pay for).

Cost: This is going to vary wildly depending on the company and the services offered. You'll probably pay a few hundred bucks.

Pros: You don't have to do any of the work or beat your head against the wall when something goes wrong.

Cons: You're going to pay for that privilege. Plus, if you ever make changes and need to update your ebook, you'll probably have to pay for conversion all over again. Doh.

Recommended By: Author Jeff Goins used [Your Digital Book](#) for his self-published ebook [You Are a Writer \(So Start Acting Like One\)](#).

Selling

Now that your ebook is created it's time to make it available for sale. You've got several options here and you can pick as many as you want. You can make your book available in some of the prominent ebook stores, like Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, iBookstore, etc. You can also sell the book yourself, either through third party sites like Gumroad or through your own site. There are several tools that can help you set up a simple store to directly sell your ebook.

Let's look at these two main approaches.

Your Own Shop

First we'll look at setting up your own shop to sell your ebook.

It's your book. You're publishing it yourself, why not sell it yourself as well?

Let's take a look at the advantages:

- You get a bigger cut of the profits. You're not sharing with the publisher, so you're making more money. The only thing you pay for is processing charges depending on your setup (for a \$2.99 ebook you can make \$2.09 from Amazon or \$2.79 when you sell it yourself with PayPal's micropayment rates).
- It's a lot easier. You don't have to follow any strict rules or requirements set by the bookstores. You can sell a basic PDF and keep it simple.
- It's fast. You don't have to wait for approval from anyone but you. When you're ready, it's for sale. The only thing that can slow you down is you.

- It's a good way to offer choice. Some people either don't have e-readers and want a PDF or they want to opt out of the Amazon domination. Making your book available as a PDF is an easy way to pick up extra sales.
- You can offer extras. Bundle your ebook with other products or services. Sell multi-copy licenses for organizations. Offer a thank you phone call to the first dozen buyers.

The biggest downside to selling your ebook yourself is you need to generate your own traffic. Your book won't sell itself. You need to have a following and you need to put a lot of work into promotion (we'll talk more about that on [page 43](#)).

You're also on your own to set things up. But it's not that hard. We can help. You can be up and selling in no time with minimal investment.

There are two main ways to go:

1. Set Up Your Own Ecommerce Site

The best way to go is to build your own ecommerce site. That might sound insane, but it's way easier than you think. Plus you get the most control, power and profit.

You can get an inexpensive site going using WordPress and the [free Exchange ecommerce plugin from iThemes](#).

To use Exchange, just install and activate the plugin, choose your payment method and add your book as a product. Tack on the features you need with the appropriate add-ons.

Check out these [Exchange video tutorials](#) for step-by-step instructions for adding products, using the digital downloads add-on and more.

2. Use a Third Party Store

If setting up your own ecommerce site fills you with dread, you can let someone else do it. There are simple, third party sites that will let you sell digital goods. [Gumroad](#) is a good example of a site with super simple set up and checkout. You still have to pay for the privilege (Gumroad takes a small cut of each payment), but you don't have to do any complicated setup.

While a third party store will handle the ecommerce functions for you, you still need to promote your book. You'll probably want a website to serve as your ebook's home and point people to the store to buy.

Ebook Stores

Next we'll look at setting up your ebook in the common digital bookstores.

Making your ebook available in stores is a lot of work, but there can also be a big pay off. It's an important way to get your book in front of readers. There's a reason Amazon is the king of the hill.

One of the major advantages to putting your book in stores as opposed to just relying on your own site is that readers go to the stores. Those bookstore sites can drive sales on their own through bestseller lists, reviews, 'customers also bought' lists and the inherent trust consumers have with Amazon. Your mom may be willing to plunk down her credit card on your site to buy your ebook, but a total stranger may be a little more wary. You're an unknown to them, but they'll trust Amazon.

While Amazon is the biggest player by far, you don't want to put all your eggs in one basket. It can be dangerous to completely rely on Amazon, ignore the other stores and get burned when Amazon makes a change that's detrimental to your sales.

Making your book available in as many places as possible is a good way to reach as many customers as possible. You don't want to leave money on the table by neglecting certain readers.

Some of the major ebook stores include Amazon (Kindle), Barnes & Noble (Nook), Apple (iBookstore) and Kobo. Most stores have specific rules and requirements about what they accept and the formats required. For Amazon you'll need the .mobi format. Most others accept the standard .epub format. None of the sites will accept a PDF.

You've got two choices:

1. Do It Yourself

You can add your book to each store individually, setting up separate accounts, uploading files and adding all the details about your book. Some stores are easier than others. You'll need all sorts of legal and technical details, such as bank account info, Social Security numbers or taxpayer IDs, and more.

Be prepared for this process to take a lot of time. Sometimes accounts need to be approved and that can take a few days. Or you get rejected on some technicality and need to try again. In other words, don't wait until the week you're planning to launch to set up these accounts. Of the major sites, Apple is probably the most difficult to get up and running.

The biggest advantage to doing it yourself is you're in control and you're not paying extra.

2. Can't Someone Else Do It?

If setting up all those accounts sounds overwhelming, there are services that will do it for you. For a fee. [Smashwords](#) and [BookBaby](#) are two of the most common. Smashwords takes a cut of your royalties and can get you on all the major sites except Amazon.

Bookbaby has a flat rate price with an annual fee and can get you on all the major sites including Amazon.

Do Both

Remember, you don't have to choose between the major ebook stores and selling it yourself. You can do both.

Set up your own shop and make it available in the stores. It's more work, but you get all the benefits. But be sure to watch the fine print on the various stores. Often you're not allowed to sell your book cheaper anywhere else (or you can, but the digital stores will match your price).

Bonus: Encourage your fans to buy through your own site (where you make more money) by offering a special deal. Give extra content, discounts on your other products, access to a webinar, a personal call or something else unique and special for your biggest fans.

Promoting

Just because you wrote it doesn't mean they'll buy it. This isn't Field of Dreams. The heavy lifting of writing and publishing your book may be over, but you've got plenty more to do. Now it's time to promote your book. You need to work hard selling it.

First things first, let's get some perspective. **Most books don't sell.** If you can sell more than 100 copies of your book, you're in the top 20% of publishing. That's all it takes. People don't read and that means they're even less likely to buy books.

You've got an uphill battle.

But that doesn't mean it's a lost cause. A few things you need to do:

Ask For Help

First and foremost you need to ask your friends, family and connections for help. Tell them about your ebook and ask them to spread the word. **This is the time to call in favors.** Books don't sell themselves, it takes people talking about them and spreading the word. That's what you need to generate, and it starts with the people you know.

Don't worry about whether or not your book's topic will be of interest to your connections. That's great if it is, but you're asking friends and they'll be willing to help. All you have to do is ask. They may not find your topic interesting, but they might know people who do.

Friends of friends—that's what you want. It means you're reaching beyond your own network. You're seeding your ideas and letting them spread. You're networking for your book. The more you can reach

out the farther you can spread your book, and that's what you need. Let's be realistic: Of all the people you tell about your book, a small percentage will actually buy it and read it. So you need to make sure the pool of people you tell about your book is as large as possible.

Use Your Channels

This is obvious, but you need to use your existing channels to promote your book. Put it in your email newsletter, tweet it to your friends, post it to your Facebook page, Instagram it, pin it, whatever you got, do it. It's surprising how often people fail to use their own existing channels to promote their stuff.

And don't do it just once.

Depending on your channel, you might need to send it out a few times, a dozen times or a few dozen times. Be honest: **Do you read every tweet your friends post? No.** Unless you're obsessive or you follow a very limited number of people, you're missing a lot of tweets. The same is true with your followers. Which means you can (and should) send your tweets out multiple times. You don't want to overdo it and you might not even want to send the exact same tweet out every time (the obsessive types will notice), but you should be repeating the same message multiple times.

Even if people see your tweet, it often takes multiple times hearing or seeing a message before people respond. It's why commercials are repeated so often.

Find Conversations

Another tactic is to find conversations about your book's topic and find ways to insert yourself into the conversation. Be careful: If you do this wrong it's easy to come off as shameless promotion. It's a

conversation, not a commercial. You need to contribute something. You also need to listen. Yes, you want to sell your book, but if that's all you're there to do nobody will listen. Don't be the dreaded salesperson.

Find those conversations, whether it's on blogs, discussion boards, community groups, conferences, chat groups, etc. Take part in the discussions, listen, share your ideas. And when it makes sense, talk about your ebook.

Press

Getting the media talking about your book is always huge. This isn't easy though. Traditional media is going to be pretty leery of an ebook. Again, you'll want to tightly target potential publications that fit your audience. Look for small publications, blogs and online sites that specialize in your topic.

The standard way to reach the media is with a press release and you should probably follow the norm, but also include some personal connection and make a unique pitch to each outlet. Press releases are easily ignored, so you need to include something to stand out. It really helps if you have some kind of connection to the outlet, whether you're a reader, known commenter, etc. Get a feel for what they cover and find an angle that works for them.

Most press releases fail because they're too focused on the product and don't talk about what's actually newsworthy. **The fact you wrote a book is not news.**

Advertise

You can always promote your book by advertising. It can be hard to make this work, but if you find the right channels you can make the

most of it. Consider highly targeted online advertising, like promoted posts on Twitter or Facebook, or banner ads on a blog focused on the same topic. The key is going to be tightly targeting the likely audience for your book. **Steer clear of general advertising.** You don't want to waste time, effort or money on a scattershot approach.

Encourage Reviews

As your book starts selling you want to keep the momentum rolling.

Ask, encourage, beg and plead your readers to review your book.

If you're selling the book yourself, ask for quotes you can put on your website. If your book is on sites like Amazon or Kobo, ask your readers to post reviews there. Reviews matter, especially on those bookstore sites. Readers are more likely to buy a book that's well-reviewed. A few good quotes and four out of five stars can tip the scales when someone is trying to make that purchase decision.

Internal Promotion

Even though you tell your friends and family about your book, even though somebody visits your website or follows you on Twitter, even though someone is on your email list—**none of that means they're actually paying attention.** People are busy. It's so easy to hear about something, nod in agreement and then quickly forget about it. Don't take it personally, just remember people need to be reminded. You can make that happen with your own connections by making sure you're promoting your book "internally" as much as you can.

- Feature your book prominently on your website. Don't just put it on the homepage, make sure it's showing up on every page.
- Plug your book in the footer of your email.
- After your initial push of promotion it can be easy to stop talking

about it. Don't. Throw out a few tweets about your book every week to remind people and keep it at the top of their mind.

- If you have other books released, it's always helpful for those books to advertise each other. Just because someone read one of your books doesn't mean they know all about your other books. In the back of your book include a pitch for your other books.
- If you have any kind of physical location people visit, whether it's a store, coffee shop, office or even just your cubicle, put up a flyer promoting your book.

Create a Funnel

One common strategy for ebook promotion is to create a funnel. The idea is to push people toward your marketing channel with the goal of selling your books and putting them on your email newsletter list for future purchases—effectively building your channel.

This can be done in a number of ways, but commonly you want to push people in a direction to accomplish a specific task. So if you want people to buy your books, you create opportunities to push them toward your books. You might create a free ebook that's a teaser for a full version of the ebook that's for sale. You have a push at the end of the free ebook to the paid ebook. You funnel them toward your paid book.

The goal is to give people an obvious next step. Don't give them six choices, give them one.

In Closing

See? Not so hard.

OK, so creating an ebook is still a lot of work. It's no walk in the park, but it's within your grasp. Hopefully we've given a good overview of what it's going to take.

- Feeling empowered? Get to work. Write your ebook and set up shop.
- Feeling overwhelmed? Go the simple route: Create a PDF ebook with Microsoft Word and put it up on a third party site. Minimize the hassle but still get your book out there.

Either way, it's time to get to work. Write, create and share your ebook with the world.

Because the only thing holding you back is you.

That's what I learned. Now that I've shared everything about creating an ebook with you, let me share a personal story. My name is Kevin D. Hendricks and I'm a freelance writer for iThemes. I have a bachelor's degree in writing. I run my own business where I do freelance writing and editing. Get the picture? I write.

But writing and publishing a book always used to be the pinnacle of the writing career that seemed too overwhelming to grasp. A book felt mammoth and intimidating and not a project I could just dive into. Even for a writer like me.

That changed in 2004 when I took part in [National Novel Writing Month](#) and wrote my first novel. A month later I self



Kevin D.
Hendricks
Author

- [Addition by Adoption](#)
- [Open Our Eyes](#)
- [Outspoken](#)
- [The Stephanies](#)
- [137 Books in One Year](#)
- [Dangerous](#)

published it through Lulu.com and had my own copy of the novel. Technology made it possible to publish a book and a herculean effort like National Novel Writing Month made it possible to actually do the writing.

Creating a book was now possible. I would write two more novels in 2006 and 2008, but the economics of fiction and a difficult publishing process meant I didn't do much more with it.

But then in 2010 Amazon launched CreateSpace to make self publishing easy (especially the important part: getting your book on Amazon). I dusted off one of my unfinished novels and published it just to see if I could. Within a week of coming up with the idea I had my printed book in hand (horrible cover design and all).

The sheer simplicity of publishing started a revolution. I would go on to publish six more books over the next four years (never mind all the ebooks I write for iThemes):

- In 2010 I published [*Addition by Adoption*](#), a collection of Twitter posts and essays about my family and our adoption process, and teamed up with Mark Horvath for [*Open Our Eyes*](#), a collection of stories and essays about homelessness.
- In 2011 it was the church marketing collaboration project, [*Outspoken*](#).
- In 2012 I teamed up with my daughter to write a children's story, [*The Stephanies*](#).
- In 2013 I wrote about my experience reading lots of books, [*137 Books in One Year*](#), and also put together another church marketing collection, [*Dangerous*](#).

Five of those six books are also available in ebook format and in three of those cases the ebook outsells the print version.

Writing and publishing a book used to be an intimidating height I'd never reach. But technology has put print books and ebooks within reach. The actual writing is still a challenge, but I've discovered it's not the barrier I made it out to be.

Get out there and create your book.

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ithemes.com/publishing