

[The Problems With Self-Publishing on Amazon](#)



Books are wonderful and I love them. But the business model seems to be flawed, especially when you self-publish on Amazon.

I've recently spoken with an author who self-published a book on Amazon. In the first 4 months he sold less than 100 copies and made less than \$200.

My own experience from earlier this year is similar. I published the [first booklet](#) in my Life Handbook Series and the results have not been too exciting.

Here is what I learned:

Writing a book is hard

If you ever wrote a paper or thesis in school, you know what I'm talking about. It's super hard work.

You not only need to write and edit it, but also design the book, and ideally illustrate it. This might cost between \$500 and \$2000+, if you happen to not be a designer (like most people.)

Low willingness to pay

Most ebooks on Amazon are sold for \$3.99 or less. If you push it, you might ask \$9.99 for an ebook and \$19.99 for a paperback. More realistically \$7.99 for the ebook and \$12.99 for the paperback.

Your cut is 35 to 70 percent, depending on which royalty model you choose and whether you have to pay for printing costs.

Low organic sales

There is no such thing as “free sales” from Amazon.

The organic traffic and organic sales you receive are rather low. You need to be able to generate sales yourself and kickstart Amazon’s ranking and recommendation engine. It won’t happen by itself.

If you are serious, you might need to run regular price promotions, and even use Amazon Advertising to increase your visibility. You will also need to go down the rabbit hole of [book marketing](#), which is a whole universe in and of itself.

However, it will be hard to be profitable with low unit prices if you are paying for traffic.

Reading a book is a high friction activity

Processing text is hard, because this skill evolved rather late in human evolution.

In fact, our brain processes images at least 15.6x faster than text (according to MIT).

So even if you sell a book, the chance of it actually being read is lower compared to other forms of media.

If you care about maximizing the impact of your work, it makes sense to at least also create an audiobook, and maybe also a video course.

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Bonus: After signing up, you will receive my exclusive [Good Life Checklist](#) with actionable ideas on how to improve your life.

Leave this field empty if you're human:

I'm not suggesting to never write books. But do it for the right reasons:

- To earn credibility and status
- As part of a bigger portfolio of products you produce
- As a lead magnet (e.g. give away the book to gain more newsletter subscribers or to generate leads for your B2B business)

Possible solutions

If you care about earning income, there are better ways to package and sell information:

Sell your book/ebook outside of Amazon

A lot of people have success selling ebooks on platforms like [Gumroad](#). They can not only set higher prices (usually \$30 to \$50), their cut is also much higher (91 to 96 percent).

The downside is that you are responsible for 100 percent of your traffic and sales. So this only makes sense if you already have an audience, or are able to generate traffic.

Create a video course instead

For my second product in my Life Handbook Series I have decided to create a [video course](#) instead of a book.

The basis for the course is a slide deck, which also doubles as a handout / ebook. I then record the presentation on video and sell the whole thing on [Gumroad](#).

As a result, the students not only have video and audio, but also visuals and text, making it much easier to consume and increasing the chances that my work actually has an impact.

Shortly after starting the project I allowed people to [pre-order my course](#), and the results have been quite promising:

- 575 clicks
- 43 pre-orders from 8 different countries
- \$3000+ in sales

So a course not only generates more income and more impact, it can also be turned into a book later.

To summarize

- The business model of being a self-publisher on Amazon has serious challenges
- Write a book for the right reasons: to earn credibility and to generate leads
- Think about self-publishing on a platform like Gumroad
- Before writing a book, consider creating a course