

2013

Self-Publishing Survey

Beverley Kendall

Writes historical, new adult and (soon) contemporary romances. She has not hit any national best sellers lists and hasn't made millions, yet she earns a very comfortable living self-publishing.

She has a [website](#) but you can most often find her on her [blog](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Pinterest](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Google Plus](#). You can contact her directly via email at beverley@beverleykendall.com.

She absolutely loves connecting with her fans and anyone who has a passion for the written word.

A BRAVE NEW WORLD

INTRODUCTION

When I initially set out to write this post, it was in response to the many articles, posts and surveys that proclaimed the vast majority of authors made little to nothing self-publishing. The amount I see most frequently is less than \$500 a year.

The articles did concede that yes, while there were some breakout successes in the likes of *Amanda Hockings*, *H.M. Ward*, *Joe Konrath*, *Bella Andre*, *Barbara Freehy*, *Bob Mayer*, *Marie Force* and *Hugh Howey*, they cautioned these successes were few and far between and as rare as a total solar eclipse over New York City.

The cautionary tales is this, *self-publishing isn't the road to instant riches*—which by the way, I whole-heartedly agree with. I can't stress this enough, but self-publishing requires **a lot** of work. It's not easy even for those who've been traditional publishing for eons and a day. In many ways it's a slightly—some say a totally different—animal from the publishing that has been around for centuries.

That said, it's doable and you don't have to be making millions to do well and make a comfortable living at it. I think what's lost in all of those articles, surveys, and posts is that for authors who are serious about writing and publishing with the intentions of making money, the outlook is much different than making no more than \$500 a year.

I consider myself a prime example of that. A tiny fraction of the reading public has ever heard the name [Beverley Kendall](#). And an even tinier fraction has ever bought or downloaded any of my books. Yet because of self-publishing (when I couldn't get another traditional contract after releasing two books with Kensington Publishing) I was able to quit my day job in a little over a year. At the end of April 2012, I released the book almost every publisher had turned down. Two months later, I was writing full-time. In the 8 months that followed, that single book earned me over \$100,000.

I felt if this happened to an unknown like me, this must be happening to other authors *like me*. I mean I'm not the most prolific of authors (plan to change that in 2014) as I've had only seven books released since 2010, two with Kensington and five self-published, of which two are novellas and are permanent freebies. But that also means I'm earning all of my self-publishing

earnings on three books.

With this in mind, I created a survey to find out how self-published authors—those fairly serious about writing and publishing for profit—fared in 2013. The results are telling.

THE RESPONDENTS

The 822 respondents fall into the following three categories:

- Never been published (never been published traditionally or with a digital first publisher).
- New York or traditionally published
- Digital-first published

I think a nice cross-section of authors self-publishing is represented in this survey. It's not surprising that **never been published** represents the majority of respondents. One of the questions I wished I'd asked authors in that category is if they'd attempted to go the traditional route first. I'm certain the majority of them have.

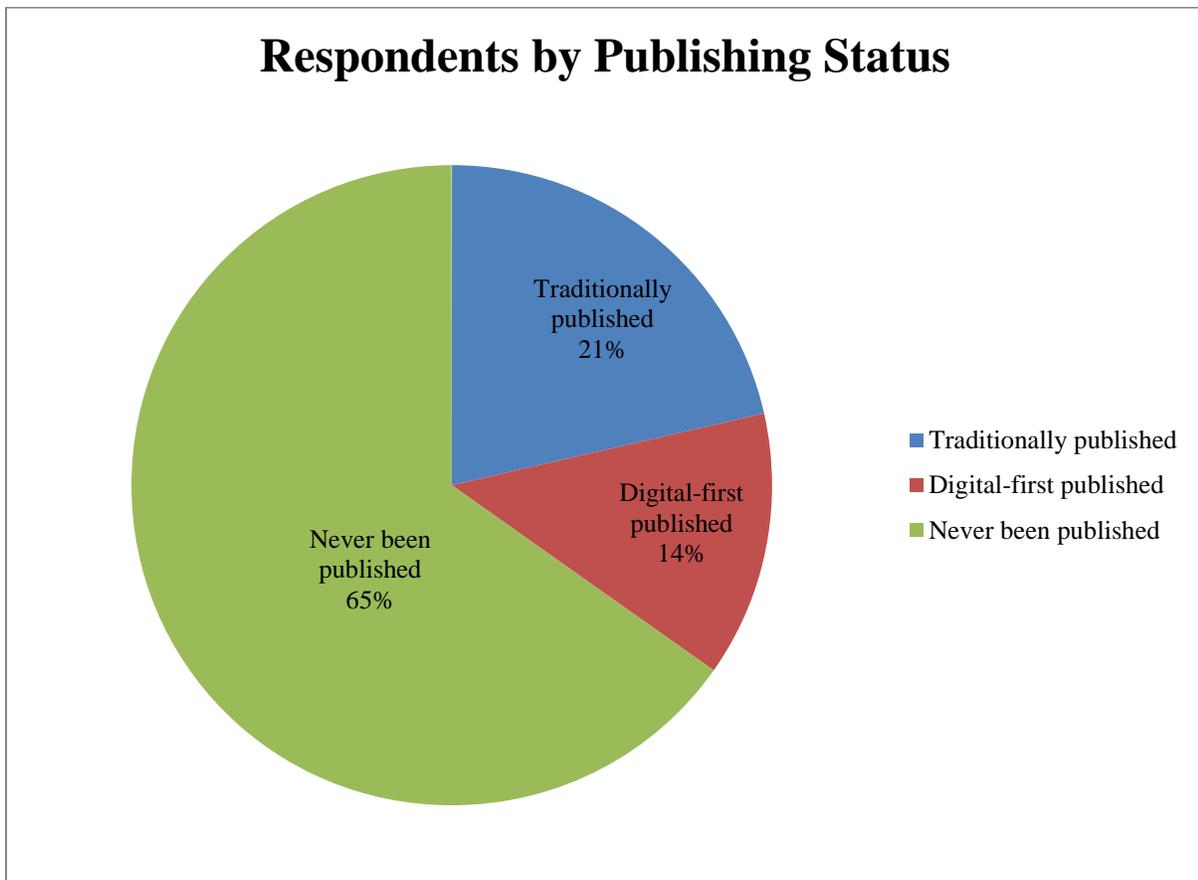


Figure 1 – Breakdown of respondents by publishing status

Now let's look at the respondents by earning range.

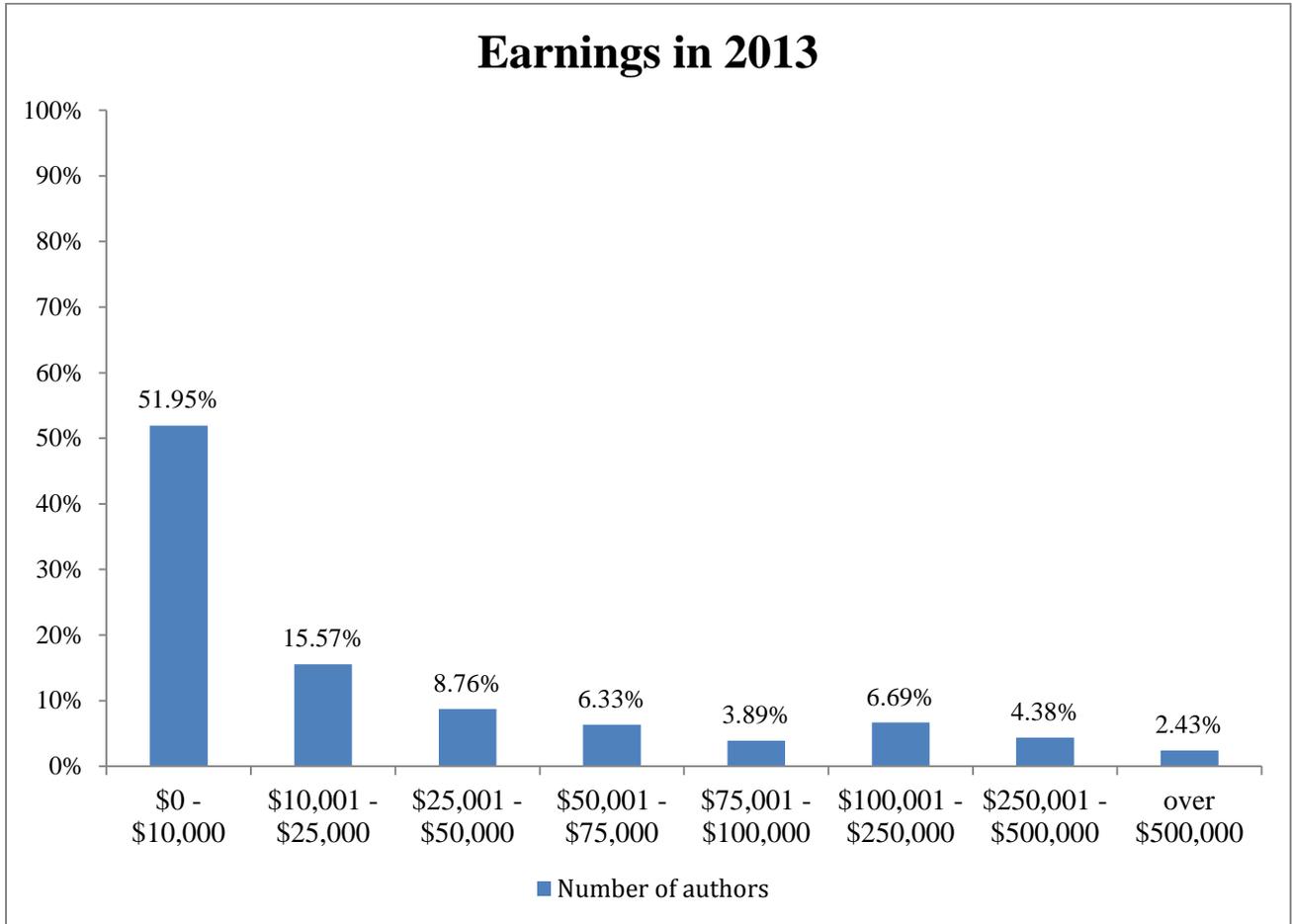


Figure 2 – Breakdown of respondents by earning range

These results I found the most enlightening and satisfying. A surprising 48.05% earned in excess of \$10,000 in 2013 self-publishing. Now I deliberately made the bottom range broad because, while I know that the much touted \$500 a year is absolutely nothing in the scheme of things, I felt anything over \$10,000 a year represented a significant amount (22.21%) given the overall median household income in the U.S. was \$45,016 in 2011. And anything over \$500,000 so far exceeds most of our expectations, it's hard to fathom.

Now it's time to dig deeper into these stats and see if we distinguish commonalities in the earning ranges. I wanted to determine whether being traditionally published is an advantage when self-publishing. The natural assumption for most is that it would be. The stats bear this out.

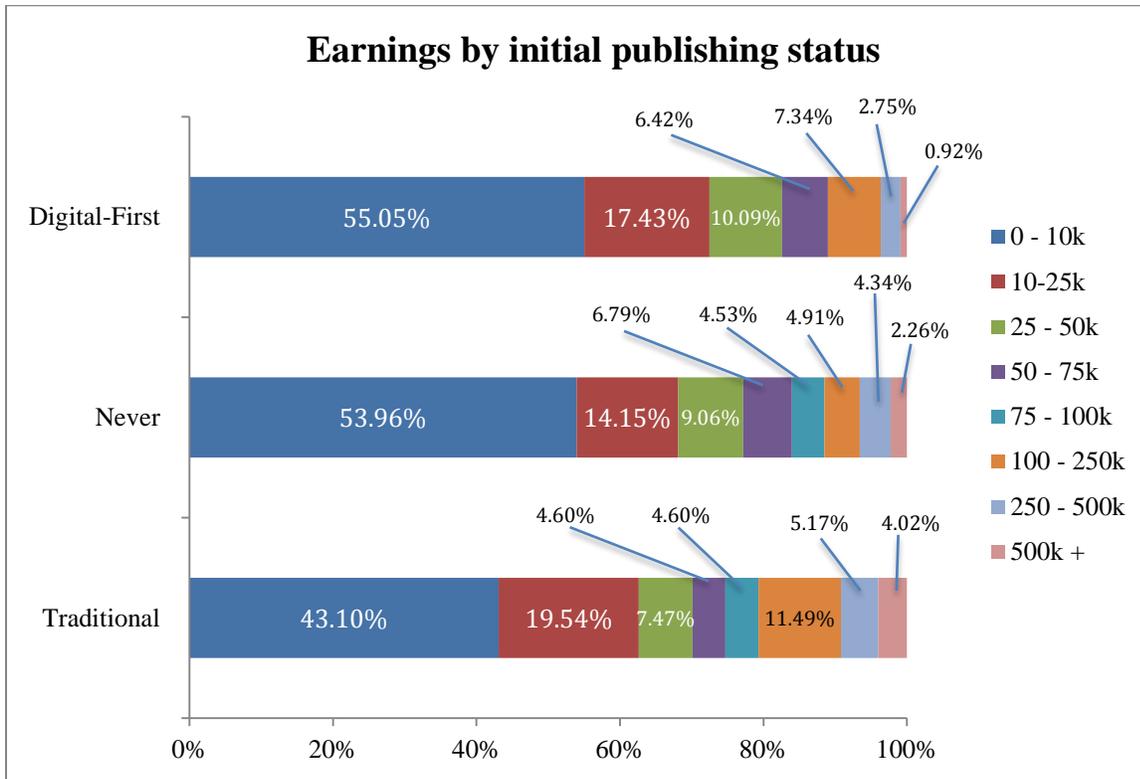


Figure 3 – Breakdown of earnings by publishing status

While 43.10% of traditionally published authors earned \$0 - \$10,000, **56.90% earned more** than that compared to **46.04% of never been published** authors and **44.95% of digital-first** published authors. As you can see on the chart (Figure 3), the authors who were traditionally published first did very in the \$100,000 - \$250,000 range when earnings climbed above \$25,000.

What I found interesting about these results was that being with a digital-first publisher doesn't appear to be an advantage when it comes to self-publishing earnings. I would assume being published at *all* should give those authors an edge. But we'll discuss those results later.

Digging a little deeper, I found, of the respondents who either came from a traditional or digital-first publishing background and earned \$0 - \$10,000, respectively 24.66% and 65% of these authors made more self-publishing. Since traditional publishers offer advances, the expectation is that very few traditional authors would fall in this range. However, as we can see, a quarter of them have. Contrarily, the majority of digital-first publishers don't offer advances so it's not surprising that the majority of those authors do.

When I hiked the range up to \$10,001 - \$25,000, the percentage of traditional published authors who made more self-publishing jumped to 47.06%. I think it's fair to say your average traditional published author isn't rolling in dough.

THE GENRE IMPACT

Before I discuss the breakdown of what is being self-published by genre and sub-genre, I want to be clear that **I write romance**. Therefore, I think it's fair to say that this survey has a *very* nice representation of romance authors who write in all its various sub-genres and categories.

Having said that, I also believe that the percentages represented in the pie chart below (Figure 4) is a reflection of what is *selling*, especially when it comes to digital books. [According to RWA \(Romance Writers of America\), in 2012 romance fiction was the largest share of the consumer market at 16%](#). Romance readers are voracious when it comes to their romance books and there are now a plethora of romance authors ready and willing to fill that need.

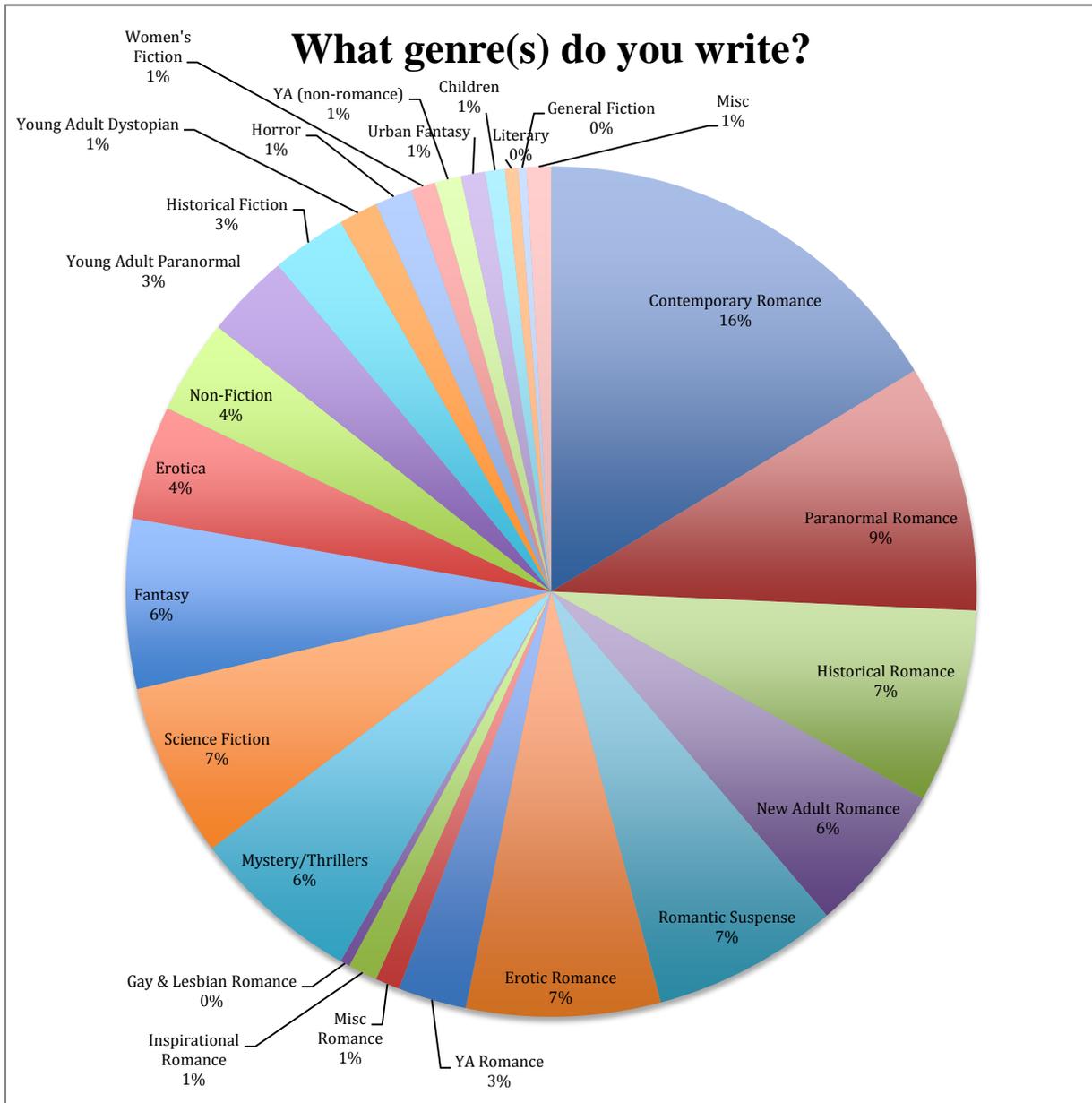


Figure 4 – Breakdown of respondents by genre and sub-genre

With a comprised total of 96%, fiction is the most self-published genre. I don't think anyone is surprised about that. The romance genre represents 58.79% of self-published books, the adult contemporary category taking the largest percentage with 16%. After paranormal romance (9%), the other major genres (mystery/thrillers, science fiction, fantasy) and several other romance categories (suspense, erotic, new adult, historical) are pretty evenly split with percentages of 6 and 7%.

Now let's look at which genres and categories are earning the most for self-published authors.

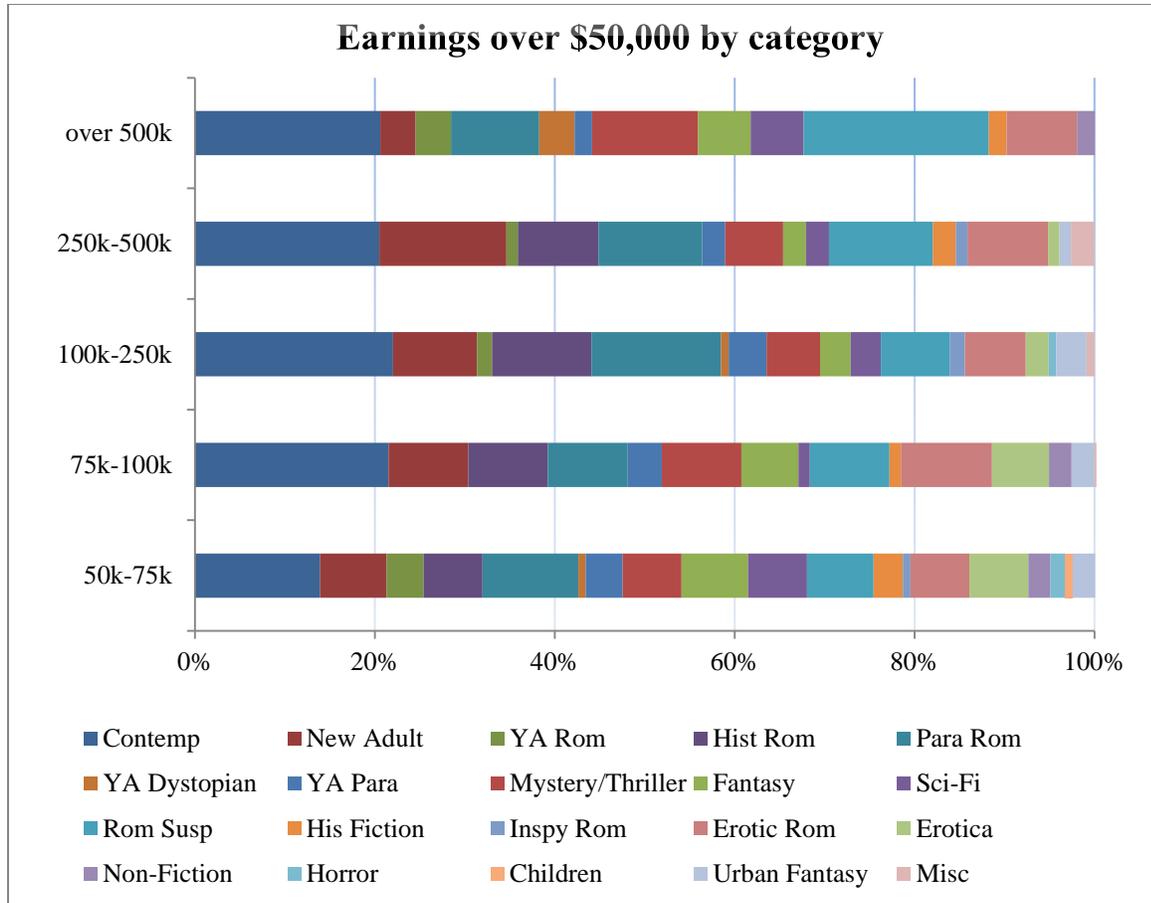


Figure 5 – Effect of genres and sub-genres on earnings

The frontrunner in all earning categories is adult contemporary romance except with earnings over \$500,000 where it ties with romantic suspense at just over 20%. I was surprised to see that paranormal romance did so well given I've heard it's dead—no pun intended. New Adult did pretty well, as did historical romance. I did note that no one writing historical romance made over \$500,000 and that Mystery/Thrillers had its largest percentage in the over \$500,000 range.

Again we also see the romance genre dominating these earning categories as a whole, comprising 56.57% at \$50-75k, 67.09% at \$75-100k, 72.88% at \$100-250k, 78.19% at \$250-500k and 64.72% at earnings over \$500k.

The takeaway from the results so far is that besides fiction as a genre being a better bet when it comes to self-publishing, writing in the romance genre is a better bet than most of the others.

Okay, now let's see what else these higher earners have in common.

THE POWER OF SERIES

As a reader, I know I love reading connected books. Readers, I've found, grow very fond of not only the primary characters but the secondary and tertiary characters as well. I also watch the charts (Amazon and iTunes) to see what's selling. Here's what I found.

Series sell!

Whether it's a series with the same primary character(s), or series with different primary characters in each book (who were secondary characters in earlier books), readers *love* them. I'm currently conducting a [**Readers Survey](#) and so far **79.51%** of respondents say they love reading series, and **18.05%** say it doesn't matter to them. **Only 2.44%** say they **prefer not to read series**.

As you can see from the chart below (Figure 6), those earning in the higher brackets overwhelmingly stated that the books that sell best for them are part of a series.

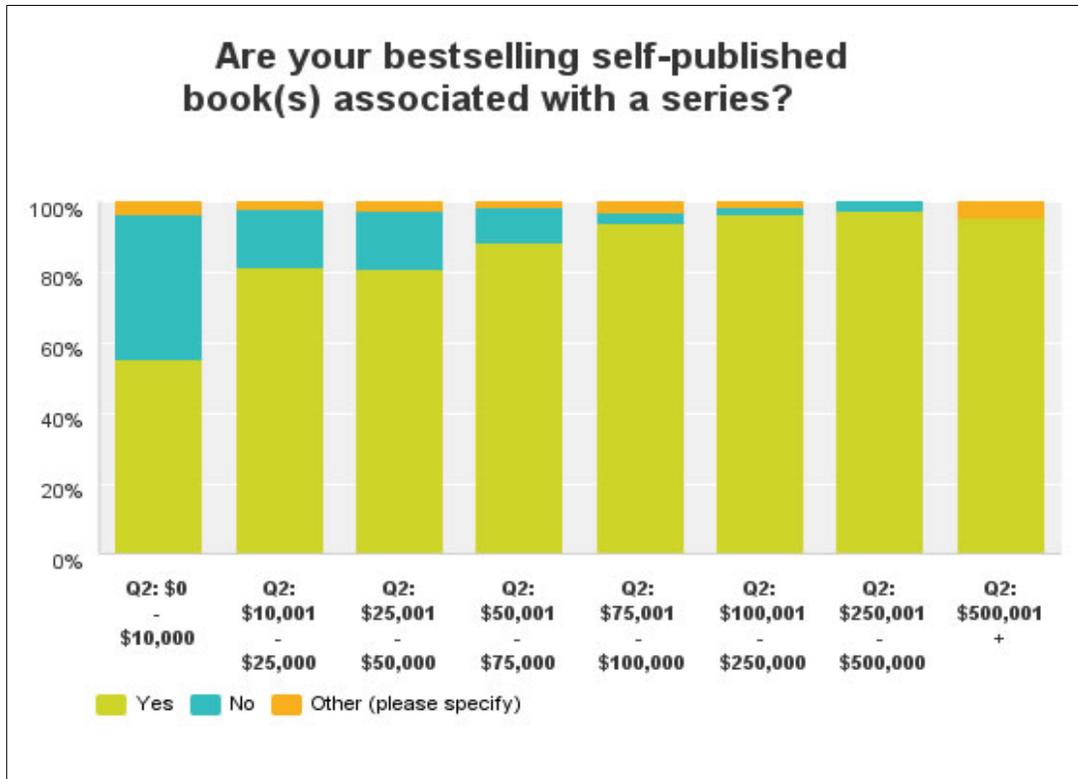


Figure 6 – Effect of series on earnings

Of the self-published authors who earned \$0 - \$10,000 in 2013, **55.21%** said their best selling books **were part of a series**. Compare that to those making in the higher earnings ranges who said the same.

- 81.1% earning \$10,001 - \$25,000
- 80.56% earning \$25,001 - \$50,000
- 88.24% earning \$50,001 - \$75,000
- 93.55% earning \$75,001 - \$100,000
- 96.23% earning \$100,001 - \$250,000
- 97.06% earning \$250,001 - \$500,000
- 97.5% earning over \$500,000

But I don't think writing series tells the *whole* story of why many of self-published authors are so successful.

THE POWER OF FREE

Free can be a very powerful tool to sell books. That said, you have to know how to use it. But it's clear from the chart below (Figure 7) that the higher earners know precisely how to use free books to their advantage.

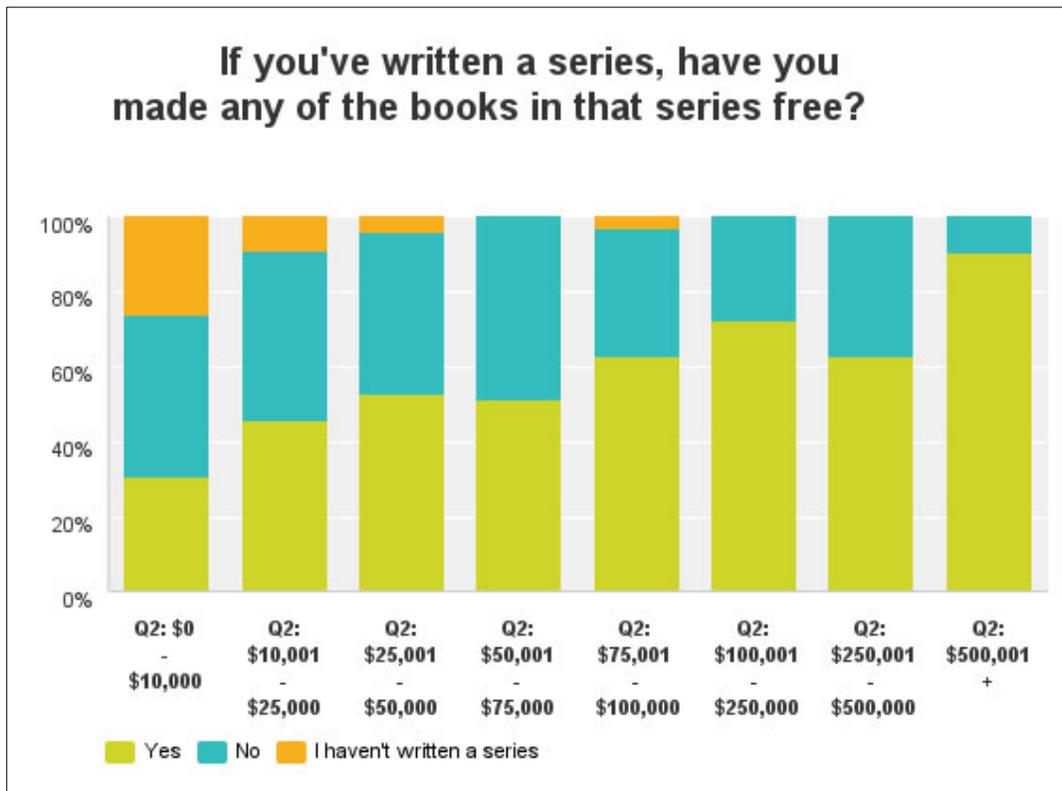


Figure 7 – Effect of free books on earnings

Giving away a book for free *does work* to sell your other books. I'm living proof of that fact. I wrote a blog post about this back in 2011 titled [How Free is Working For Me](#) complete with line graphs and irrefutable proof. I do admit that the effectiveness of making your book free has been reduced over the past year or so. Amazon now has free books hidden under a tab. Prior to that free books were listed right beside paid books on their top 100 lists. And back in October 2012, Amazon also instituted *monetary fines* (affiliates essentially forfeited their earnings for the month) on affiliates whose free downloads exceeded a certain percentage of their affiliate sales.

There was also a time when putting a book up for free and then taking it off free helped sales too. Those days are over. Once upon a time, Amazon counted free downloads the same as a paid sale, so coming off of a free run could—and frequently did—position that book very high on the paid list. And since visibility is the name of game when it comes to marketing and promotion, this was as good as gold. Amazon no longer counts free downloads the same as paid sales so coming off a free run invariably leaves the now **paid** book once again, *invisible*.

Many (like me) have found that making a book in a series **permanently free** a good way to consistently gain new readers and boost paid sales.

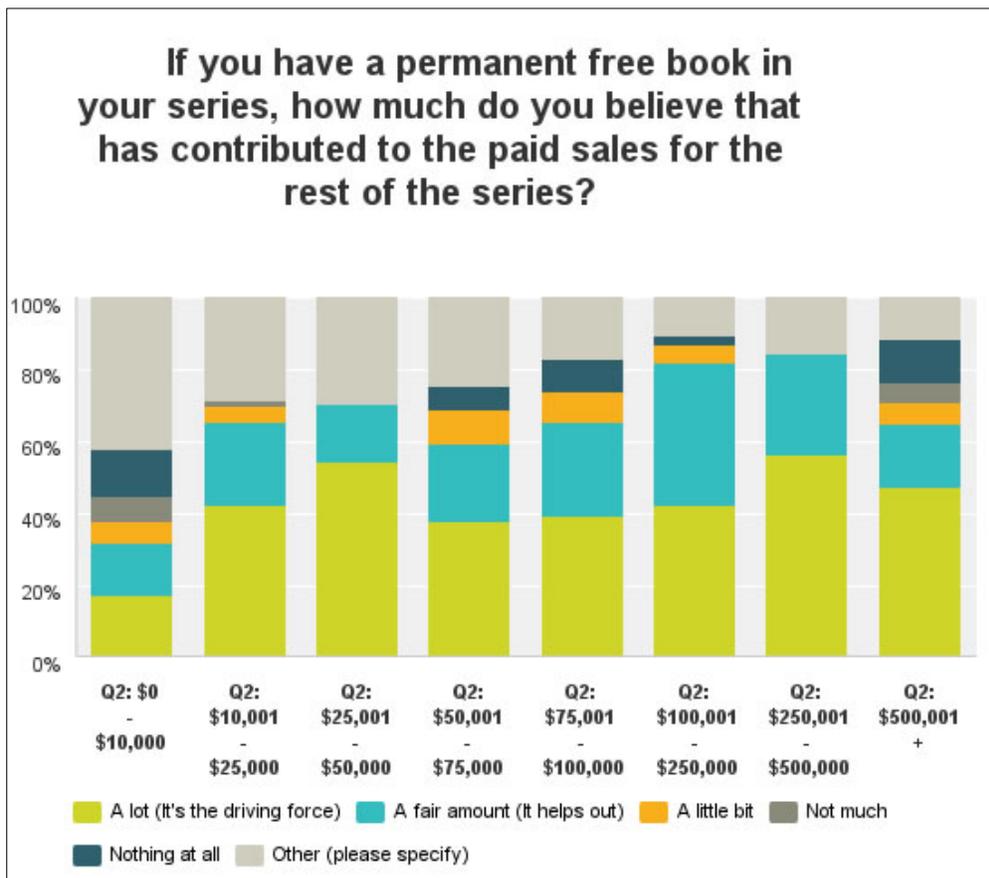


Figure 8 – Effect of permanent free books on earnings

As evidenced in the chart above (Figure 8), of the respondents who have a book in a series permanently free and who earned more than \$10,000, the majority of them claimed that the permanent free books are *the driving force* or *helps sales a fair amount* for the paid books in the series. **The respondents in Other (please specify) do not have permanent free books and/or a series.**

THE MORE PROLIFIC THE BETTER (OR HAVE A SIZEABLE BACKLIST)

It stands to reason, the more books you have up for sale, the more you earn. The chart below (Figure 9) confirms that fact to be true.

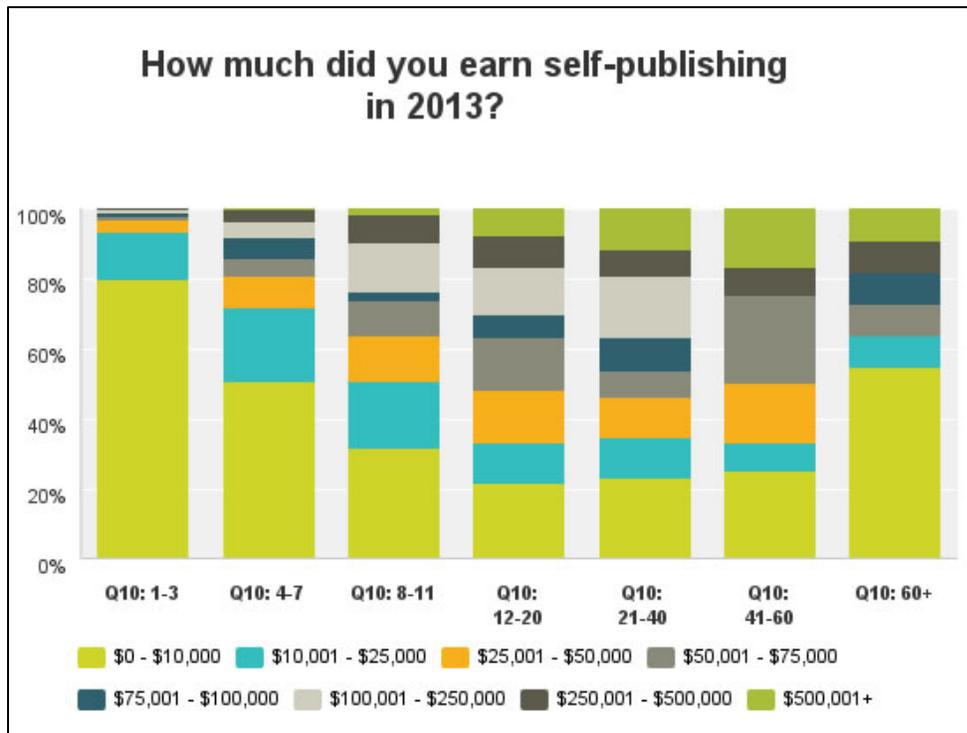


Figure 9 – Earnings by number of self-published books

Of all the respondents who have **1–3 books up for sale**

- 79.93% earned \$0 - \$10,000
- 13.14% earned \$10,001 - \$25,000
- 3.65% earned \$25,001 - \$50,000
- 1.09% earned \$50,001 - \$75,000
- .73% earned \$75,001 - \$100,000
- 1.09% earned \$100,001 - \$250,000
- .36% earned \$250,001 - \$500,000
- 0% earned more than \$500,000

On the other hand, of the respondents who have **12 – 20 books up for sale**

- 21.70% earned \$0 - \$10,000
- 11.32% earned \$10,001 - \$25,000
- 15.09% earned \$25,001 - \$50,000
- 15.09% earned \$50,001 - \$75,000
- 6.60% earned \$75,001 - \$100,000
- 13.21% earned \$100,001 - \$250,000
- 9.43% earned \$250,001 - \$500,000
- 7.55% earned more than \$500,000

The results are clear that **more books = better earnings**. Although it does appear the law of diminishing returns comes into play for 6 of the respondents who said they have 60+ books up.

Naturally, I was curious about these 6 authors who earned \$0 - \$10,000 and have more than 60 books up for sale. I found these things to true:

- 4 of 6 **do not** have their books edited or covers designed by professionals
- 3 of 6 have not written a series
- 2 of 3 who have written series, don't have any of their books free
- 6 of 6 have some combination of the above

SELF-PUBLISHED COMPARED TO TRADITIONAL AND DIGITAL-FIRST EARNINGS

Earlier I looked at earnings by publishing status so now I'm going to look specifically at traditional authors in trying to determine which factors may contribute to whether they're earning more with their publishing company. (Figure 10)

Below we're looking at how many books these authors have out with their traditional publisher. What's interesting to me is that over 53% of the authors who have between 1–11 books out with a traditional publisher **earned more self-publishing**. Only when the authors have 12 or more books out do the percentages shift and more traditionally published authors earned more with their publishers than they did self-publishing. The majority of the authors in the **Other (please specify)** category said their earnings were **evenly split 50/50**.

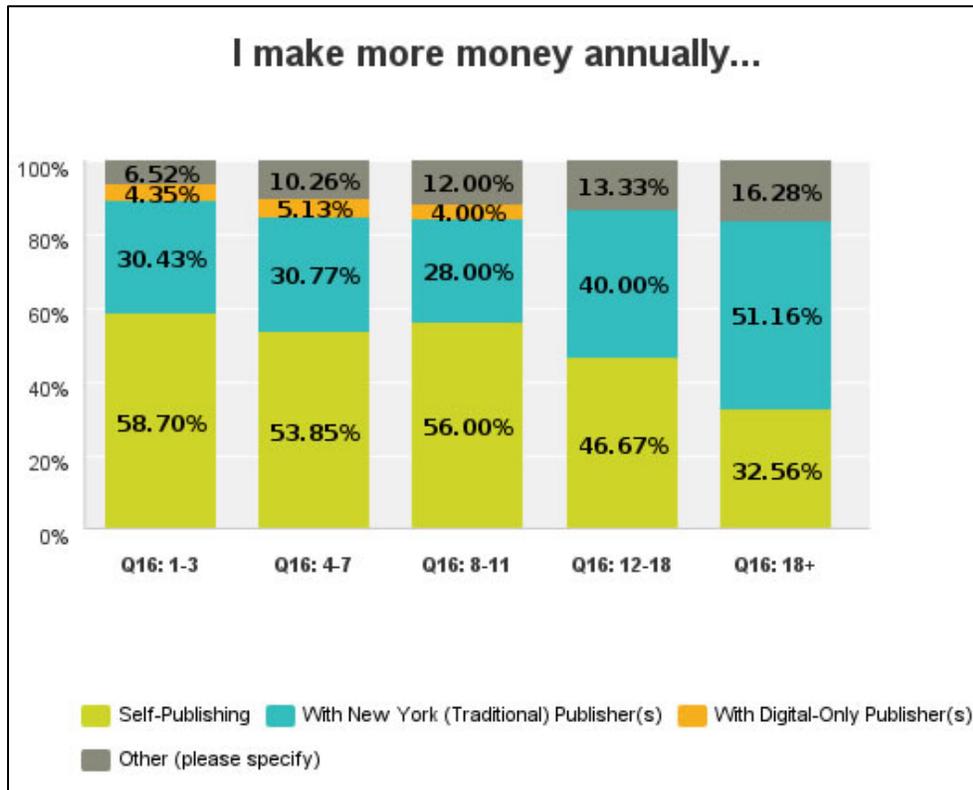


Figure 10 - Number of traditional books published

I fall into the 1–3 book out with a traditional publisher range. With Kensington, I earned:

- \$0 - \$10,000 in 2009 (advance of \$5000 for 2 books)
- \$0 - \$10,000 in 2010 (actually, less than \$500)
- \$25,001 - \$50,000 in 2011
- \$25,001 - \$50,000 in 2012
- \$10,001 - \$25,000 in 2013

Contrarily with self-publishing I earned:

- \$0 - \$10,000 in 2011 (I put out a .99 novella in May and made it permanently free in October)
- \$100,000 - \$250,000 in 2012
- \$100,000 - \$250,000 in 2013

I think it’s pretty clear why I prefer to self-publish at this stage in my career. Financially, it’s just makes more sense. I also love the freedom it gives me in terms of creativity and release schedule. I’ll stress again though, **it is a lot of work**. This isn’t to say I wouldn’t consider traditional publishing again. I would because—with the right contract—I believe they can complement each other advantageously.

Self-Publishing Survey Results 2013

“I had pubbed both with NY and digital first pubs before self-publishing. My trad pub income is an average (\$100,000-\$200,000); in 2012 and 2013, I earned a bit more, about \$250,000+ each year. I do attribute my greater earning in NY to my self-pubbing. Self-pub drove sales at my NY pub in an obvious way.” - Anonymous Respondent

Now let’s take a look at authors who started off with a digital-first publisher and see which publication path earned them more in 2013.

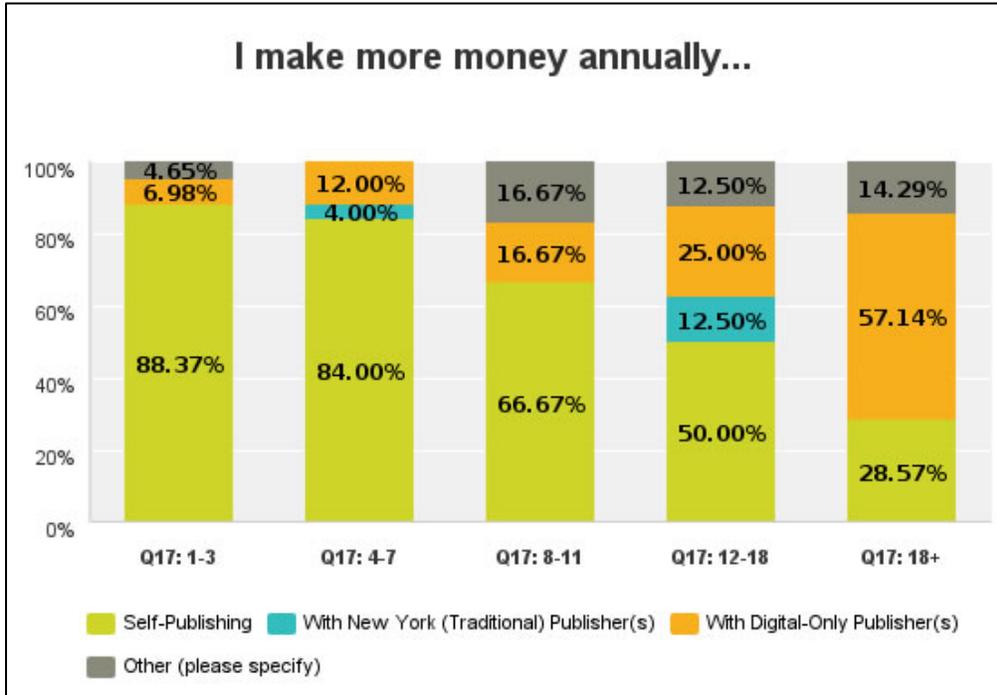


Figure 11 – Number of digital-first books published

I think it’s clear that the majority of authors coming from a digital-first background are earning more self-publishing. Only when we get to the *over 18 books published* range do we see the majority (57.14%) of authors earning more with the digital-first publisher.

A PROFESSIONAL PRODUCT GIVES IT AN EDGE

The results indicate that those earning more self-publishing are using professionals when it comes to designing their covers and editing their books.

Of the 266 respondents who said they **did not** have their books edited by an editor with a publishing background, 59.77% of them earned \$0 - \$10,000, compared to 49.18% who said they **did** use a professional editor. The 59.77% is higher than the overall (51.95%) percentage of respondents who fell within that earning range.

I found similar results when looking at the respondents who said they did not use a graphic artist or professional designer to create their covers. Of those 83 respondents, 39.21% earned more than \$10,000 compared to 52.55% in the same earning range who said they did use a professional cover artist.

Being a member of a professional writers' organization seems to also give authors an edge. Of respondents who earned more than \$10,000, 42.26% don't belong to a writers' organization while 53.42% do.

WHEN THE PRICE IS RIGHT

So which price point appears to be the most lucrative? I looked at all the respondents making more than \$50,000 and this is what I found (Figure 12).

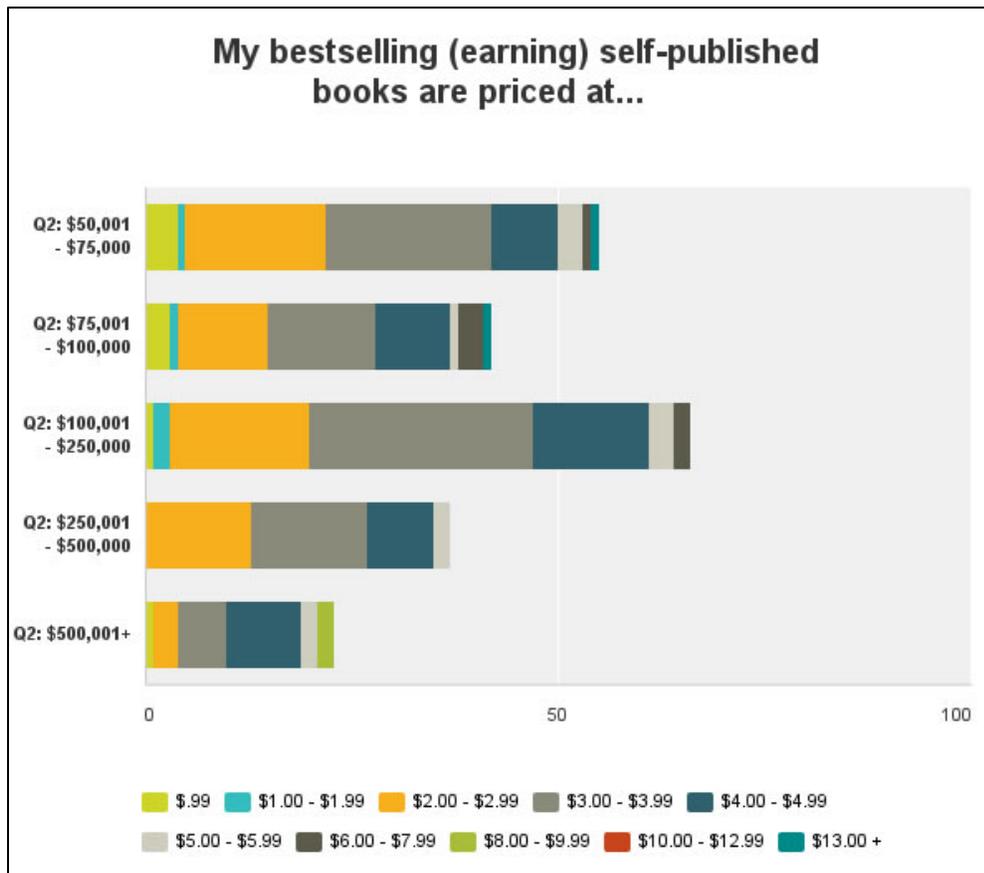


Figure 12 – Pricing by Earnings over \$50,000

For earnings from \$50,000 - \$500,000, **\$3.99 is the price point of choice**. When we get above \$500,000, \$4.99 is the price point the majority (45%) of those authors are using. Note the nominal use of the \$.99 and \$1.99 price point. Also remember that the majority of these authors write series and have one or more of the books in their series free. I think it's fair to say that

there are times when free works much better as an introductory price than \$.99.



Figure 13 – Pricing by Earnings up to \$50,000

While it’s clear that \$2.99 and \$3.99 is the preferred price point, the most glaring thing I see in the chart above (Figure 13) is that 22.2% of respondents who made \$0 - \$10,000 have their bestselling books priced between \$.99 - \$1.99. On the other hand, there are some authors pricing their books at the top end of the pricing range, so collectively, the cheapest *and* most expensive books.

SUCCESS TAKES TIME

For most authors, self-publishing success is not going to happen overnight. There are logical reasons this won’t happen. First, it takes time to write books and as we’ve seen above, the more books you have out, the better your earning potential. Secondly, it takes time to get your name out there. The results in the below chart (Figure 14) support that fact.

Once again, when I looked at the 11 respondents who have been self-publishing for 7 or more years and earned \$0 - \$10,000, there was a story behind what appears to be the law of diminishing returns. The most prominent things I saw were that the majority of those respondents did not have their books edited or covers designed by professionals and lack of series and/or not making any of the books in the series free.

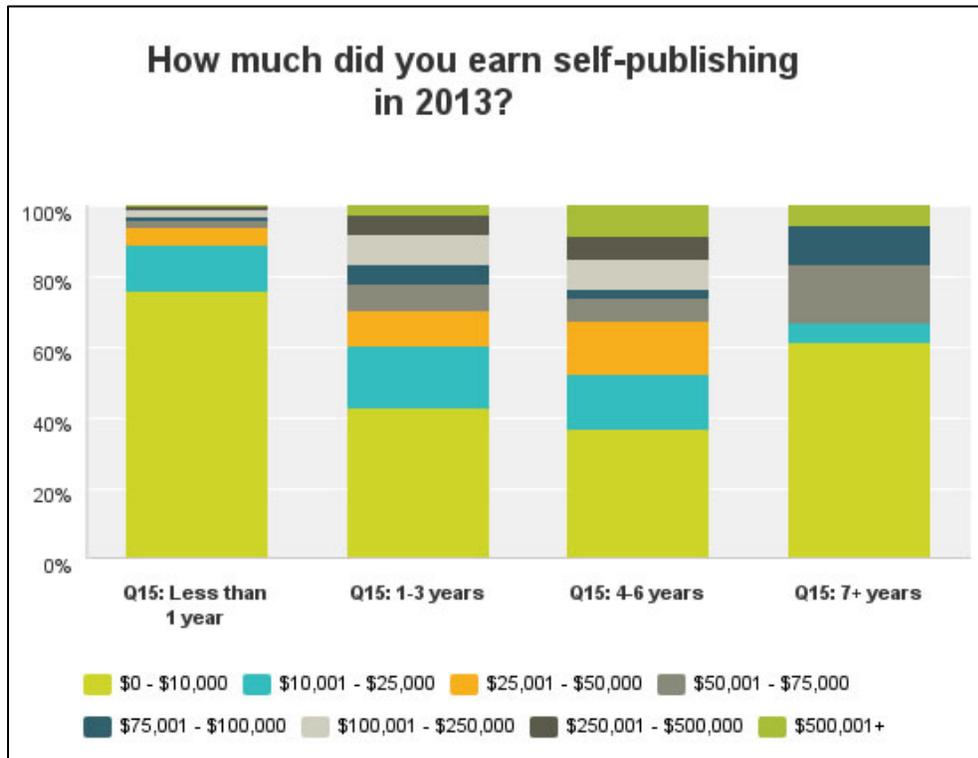


Figure 14 – Earnings based on years self-publishing

THE TAKEAWAY

So what did I learn from the results of this survey. Well it did validate some of the things I found to be true myself.

- **Genre matters a great deal.** Right now fiction is king and romance is its queen. Of course that could all change in a heartbeat, but as it stands, it is the self-published authors writing in these genres earning the most and releasing the most books.
- **It helps if you come from a traditional publishing background.** It **does not** appear to help *at all* if you come from a digital-first publishing background. What I found here is that fewer digital-first authors are willing to give their books away for free. ([See Additional Stats](#))
- **Readers love series.** And if you give readers what they love, you will be rewarded.
- **Free is a powerful marketing tool to gain readers.** Like knives and other sharp instruments, it should be used wisely but it has a powerfully long reach, particularly when you're a relative unknown.
- **Price your books within reason but for maximum profit.** Very few of the authors in the higher earning ranges priced the books that earned them the most money at anything under \$2.99. And very few of them priced them over \$7.99. Whatever they're doing, they

are hitting the right balance.

- **More books equal more money.** This doesn't mean you need to put out an unsustainable number of books a year, but unless your name is J.K. Rowling, self-published authors can't afford to put out only one book a year. **Be as prolific as you can** while still maintaining a quality product, especially if you're *not* coming into this with a decent sized backlist.
- **Give your book the professional edge.** In many ways we want our books to stand out from the rest. This isn't one of them. A professional cover and a clean, well-edited book tells the reader they are getting a quality product. Give the readers what they're paying for. The virtual bookshelves are overflowing with too many other books to choose from. Don't handicap yourself right out of the gate.
- **You don't have to be an overnight success to succeed.** So your first or second book didn't hit it out of the ballpark, don't be discouraged. Among other things, the majority of self-published authors earning in the higher ranges have a minimum of 8 (eight) self-published books up for sale.
- **This is only the tip of the iceberg.** As you know, the results to this survey highlights only *some* of the reasons and methods many self-published authors have achieved their success. But hopefully it will shed some light on this new, robust, and ever-changing path to publication, and offer insight into what appears to be working for authors doing well.

Personal Observations

- **Utilize book subscriptions services if you can.** If you can get a spot with [Bookbub](#), it has the broadest reach and right now it's the best. I prefer to list my free books with them and have that free book boost my paid books. It has worked every time—and I've used them 4 (four) times. My paid sales usually quadruple for a good two weeks and don't come down to its original sales level for about two months. The free downloads have been between 25,000 – 52,000 during the three-day span after the email blast goes out.
- **Include excerpts.** In the back of my [perma-free historical novella](#), I included an excerpt of the next book in the series. **The excerpt ended on a major cliffhanger.** The next book, [An Heir of Deception](#), is *still* my bestselling book despite the fact that I've released 3 (three) other books since.
- **Look, watch and learn.** If you're self-publishing to earn money and/or writing as a career, treat it as a business. Make sure you remain current with what's going on in publishing. Watch and learn from those who are consistently successful and doing it right. I keep my eyes on retailer bestselling lists (iTunes, Amazon, sometimes B&N). I check to see who in my genre is doing well and then try to figure out what they're doing in terms of marketing and promotion. I have to say, invariably I'll find that a permanent free book is driving sales (among various other things).
- **Pre-orders are not your friend with Amazon.** That's the lesson I learned when I was

offered a pre-order option from Amazon for my latest release. While your first day sales take into account all your pre-orders, it doesn't affect your current ranking. What you give up is that nice ranking boost that *could* get you nice and high on a major list. My suggestion, unless you're hoping to make the *New York Times* or *USA Today* bestseller list, or your pre-order sales can already get you fairly high on a major list, say no to pre-orders from Amazon if offered. I know I will. iTunes is a different story. If you can, factor in time to get your book up on iTunes for pre-order. On release day, your ranking does get a nice boost and during your pre-order period, it can get some nice exposure.

IN CONCLUSION

The good news? There's a lot more of us authors I term *serious about writing with the purpose of publication to earn money* than many articles and post let on. We're earning well above the often-touted, \$500-a-year figure.

The bad news? There is none. Self-publishing isn't easy but neither is traditional or digital-first publishing. Yes, it does require more of your time, has a learning curve, and there's a financial expense to it because you truly have to do it all yourself, but in my opinion, the rewards are more than worth it. And not just the financial rewards, it's also the creative freedom it allows and the control an author now has over the final product. The biggest reward is being able to retain the rights to your work. Gone are the days when a book is of little to no value once it's removed from a physical store's bookshelf. Now a backlist is a potential windfall; a new source of income that never existed before.

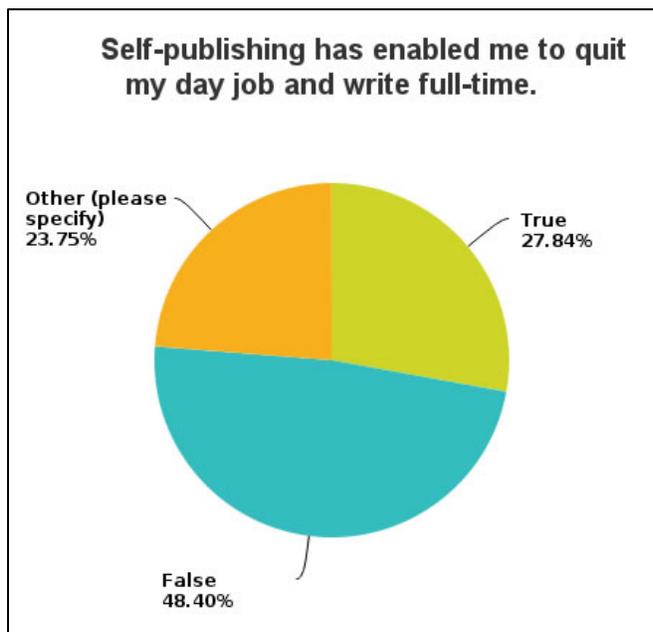


Figure 15 - Who quit their day job?

According to the results (Figure 15), self publication has allowed **27.84% of respondents** to quit their day job and write full-time. Most of these authors (me included) would **not** have been able to do this with either a traditional *or* digital-first publisher. Of the 23.75% of respondents who answered **Other (please specify)**, 43% already wrote full-time, 10.75% said they're close to being able to quit their full-time job, 16.13% are either stay-at-home moms or never worked outside of the home and 9.68% were already retired. I listed only the top four categories as the answers varied a great deal.

Personally, I've heard of more self-published authors being able to write full-time than those writing *only* for a traditional publisher. But even I'm surprised at just how many authors are now able to write full-time due to their self-publishing success.

Speaking of which, let's check out some inspiring success stories from authors you've probably never heard of.

Success Stories

[Sarah Woodbury](#), who writes historical romance/time travel, medieval mysteries and historical fantasy, spent 5 years trying to get a traditional publisher interested, but her agent couldn't sell any of her books. At the end of December 2011, she decided she had nothing to lose and released her first novel.

Now she has 14 novels published and her husband was recently able to quit his job. Sarah made \$270,000 in 2013.

I asked Sarah why she believes she's been successful self-publishing.

I can't say exactly why I've found success with indie publishing, but suspect it's a combination of persistence, maintaining a certain pace of book production (14 novels to date in those three years), and luck. I caught the spring of 2011 algorithms at Amazon perfectly, transitioned from 99 cents to perma-free when KDP select was introduced in December of 2011, and saw my sales shoot up as a result. I have since given away over 1/2 a million books in two years (I have two perma-free books now), and for the moment that drives my sales .

Success feeds on itself too. Both the Apple iBookstore and Amazon have featured my books in broad promotions, and the reason they did that was because of my history of sales, which then leads to more sales.

[Lori Brighton](#) writes young adult paranormal and historical romance. She spent 7 years trying to break into publishing via a traditional publisher. She was eventually contracted by Kensington Publishing. In the four years following, she earned a total \$20,000 (\$5000/yr). When her publisher failed to contract her again, she decided to self-publish.

She earned \$20,000 the first year but it wasn't until she self-published her young adult series, *The Mind Readers* (rejected by traditional publishers), that her sales *really* took off. And that only happened after she released book 2 and made book 1 free. In her second and third year self-publishing, she has earned over \$100,000 each year.

I asked Lori how her self-publishing success has changed her life.

Since self-publishing we've been able to do amazing things with my extra income. As a child I grew up pretty poor. I'm talking living in apartments with cockroaches poor, all of our clothes were hand-me-downs from cousins or garage sales, and of course we never took a family vacation. One of the first things I did with my self-publishing money was take my family (twelve of us, including my mom and brother's family) to Disney World! Last September we were able to take my in-laws to Hawaii, a place they'd always wanted to go to, but never had the chance.

I certainly didn't set out on my career path thinking to self-publish. But every one of my self-published books was rejected by New York. I didn't reject New York, New York rejected me. What choice did I have but to self-publish? Now that I've self-published and enjoyed the freedom that comes with it, I have very little desire to write for a publishing company that would control my career. I'd rather control my own career, thank you very much!

At the age of 62, [Marti Talbot](#) retired with a small amount in savings and less than a thousand dollars a month Social Security coming in. She moved into low-income housing and quickly got bored with other books. She decided to write the kind of romances *she* wanted to read. She posted the first short story free on her website, and was amazed when readers kept coming back to read the next story. By the time there were twenty stories in all, she had thousands of readers.

I asked Marti why she decided to self-publish.

When I heard about Kindle Direct Publishing in 2010, I uploaded that first little story just to see how it worked, and sold three copies in the first hour. What a shock! I'd like to brag that I did

everything right when I combined the stories into five volumes and published them, but the truth is my books were a mess. They needed serious editing and cover art, but they sold anyway. A friend kindly helped me with editing, and in time I was able to afford nice cover art. I now have 27 books with another on the way.

I don't advocate new authors doing it that way, the reviews and complaints are brutal.

Anyway, I moved out of that dinky apartment into a very nice two bedroom with a dishwasher and everything. If nothing else, the taxes I have, and will pay in the future, will bring my Social Security up to an amount I can comfortably live on when I am too old to write.

There are my earnings to date: 2010 - \$7,100.00, 2011 - \$39,325.00. 2012 - \$72,732.00. 2013 - \$111,366.00

I also tapped some of my [Romance Divas](#) to share what they've earned self-publishing the past couple years.

[Deanna Chase](#) has been self-publishing since July 2011. She writes paranormal romance and urban fantasy, and currently has 6 books out. In 2012 she earned \$98,000 and nearly doubled that in 2013, earning a **whopping \$175,000**.

[Katie Reus](#) says technically she's been self-publishing since 2011, but it wasn't until 2012 that she got serious about it with the intentions of growing her readership. She writes both romantic suspense and paranormal romance and has self-published 16 books, and has 21 books out if you count anthologies. In 2012 she earned \$58,000. In 2013 she earned a **jaw-dropping \$230,000**.

Writing erotic romantic suspense under the names [Roxie Rivera](#) and erotica and erotic romance as [Lolita Lopez](#), Lo has been self-publishing since 2011. With a combined total of 22 books under both names, she earned **\$101,000** in 2013. A nice boost from the \$4800 she earned in 2012.

[Marie Hall](#) has been self-publishing since July of 2012 and writes contemporary romance, young adult, urban fantasy, paranormal and fantasy romance. In 2012 she earned \$4520 and in 2013 her earnings climbed to **\$105,400**.

[Suzanna Medieros](#) writes historical romance and self-published her first book December 2012. She's since released two novellas. In 2013, she earned **\$101,500**.

[The Reader Survey](#) is still up. **I would appreciate if you'd share the link with your readers.

ADDITIONAL INTERESTING STATS

Of the respondents who first published with a traditional publisher and who (also) write **Historical Romance**

70.83% earned more than \$10,000
43.75% earned more than \$25,000
33.33% earned more than \$50,000
27.08% earned more than \$75,000
25.00% earned more than \$100,000
6.25% earned more than \$250,000

Of the 104 respondents who (also) write **Mystery/Thrillers**

50.96% earned \$0 - \$10,000
9.62% earned \$10,001 - \$25,000
8.65% earned \$25,001 - \$50,000
6.73% earned \$50,001 - \$75,000
6.73% earned \$75,001 - \$100,000
6.73% earned \$100,001 - \$250,000
4.81% earned \$250,001 - \$500,000
5.77% earned over \$500,000

Of the respondents who said they (also) write **Contemporary Romance**

54.37% say that contemporary romances are their bestselling books
59.70% made more than \$10,000 in 2013

Of the 188 respondents who (also) write **Science Fiction or/and Fantasy**

62.23% earned \$0 - \$10,000
11.70% earned \$10,001 - \$25,000
6.91% earned \$25,001 - \$50,000
8.51% earned \$50,001 - \$75,000
2.13% earned \$75,001 - \$100,000
3.72% earned \$100,001 - \$250,000
2.13% earned \$250,001 - \$500,000
2.66% earned over \$500,000

Of the 119 respondents who (also) write **Erotic Romance**

45.38% earned \$0 - \$10,000
11.76% earned \$10,001 - \$25,000
14.29% earned \$25,001 - \$50,000
6.72% earned \$50,001 - \$75,000
6.72% earned \$75,001 - \$100,000
5.88% earned \$100,001 - \$250,000
5.88% earned \$250,001 - \$500,000
3.36% earned over \$500,000

Of the 92 respondents who (also) write **New Adult Romance**

38.04% earned \$0 - \$10,000
11.96% earned \$10,001 - \$25,000
6.52% earned \$25,001 - \$50,000
9.78% earned \$50,001 - \$75,000
7.61% earned \$75,001 - \$100,000
11.96% earned \$100,001 - \$250,000
11.96% earned \$250,001 - \$500,000
2.17% earned over \$500,000

Of the 17 respondents who (also) write **Inspirational Romance**

58.82% earned \$0 - \$10,000
17.65% earned \$10,001 - \$25,000
5.88% earned \$25,001 - \$50,000
11.76% earned \$50,001 - \$75,000
5.88% earned \$75,001 - \$100,000

Of the 58 respondents who (also) write **Non-Fiction**

72.41% earned \$0 - \$10,000
10.34% earned \$10,001 - \$25,000
6.90% earned \$25,001 - \$50,000
5.17% earned \$50,001 - \$75,000
3.45% earned \$75,001 - \$100,000
1.72% earned over \$500,000

Of the respondents who have been **self-publishing less than a year**

Self-Publishing Survey Results 2013

76.02% earned \$0 - \$10,000
12.67% earned \$10,001 - \$25,000
4.98% earned \$25,001 - \$50,000
2.26% earned \$50,001 - \$75,000
.90% earned \$75,001 - \$100,000
1.81% earned \$100,001 - \$250,000
.90% earned \$250,001 - \$500,000
.45% earned over \$500,000

Of all respondents who earned \$0 - \$10,000 in 2013

66.86% earned more self-publishing
13.26% earned more with traditional publisher
7.78% earned more with a digital-only or digital-first publisher
12.10% earned more with other (eg full-time job, part-time job)

Of the digital-first published authors who earned \$0 - \$10,000 in 2013

58.62% say their bestselling books are part of a series
36.21% say their bestselling books are not part of a series
5.17% say they haven't written a series

36.17% say they have made one or more books in their series free
63.83% say they haven't made any books in their series free

Of the NY or traditionally published authors who earned \$0 - \$10,000 in 2013

47.06% say their bestselling books are part of a series
50.00% say their bestselling books are not part of a series

30.43% say they have made one or more books in their series free
69.57% say they haven't made any books in their series free

54.41% have 1-3 self-published books up for sale
33.82% have 4-7 self-published books up for sale
8.82% have 8-11 self-published books up for sale

Self-Publishing Survey Results 2013

34.85% have 1-3 traditionally published books out
25.76% have 4-7 traditionally published books out
9.09% have 8-11 traditionally published books out
9.09% have 12-18 traditionally published books out
19.70% have over 18 traditionally published books out

42.50% made more self-publishing in 2013
57.50% made more with traditional publisher in 2013

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS BY RESPONDENTS

I included some comments by the respondents in hopes of better capturing their opinions and personal experiences.

“My debut self-published title in March hit the USA Today list for 2 weeks, but since then, none of my releases have hit any bestseller list. Still, I consistently earn between \$25,000 and \$100,000 a month from total books across all formats (amazon, B&N, iTunes, etc). My year-end gross was just over \$460,000.”

“Self-publishing has been an amazing experience, and given me the kind of financial and creative freedom I only dreamed about when I was with NYC publishers (for YA).”

“Self published reissues of titles previously published with traditional publishers have earned me about 5 times through ebook sales than they did originally in paperback.”

“My first book was published on Amazon on November 17th, 2013. My second book was November 20th, 2013 and I published the novella December 1st, so I had books available for only 6 weeks in 2013. In that period, I earned around \$8500 from these 3 books.

“Have not published any other way so far. Have only made a small amount of money so far. I enjoy writing, but figure the odds of me quitting a day job are virtually nil”.

Self-Publishing Survey Results 2013

“My first indie book came out in Nov and has sold beyond my expectations, averaging 30-35 sales per day thus far. I am published with a digital first publisher and am contracted with Harlequin for 2 books that will be released in late 2014. I have made more in the 7 weeks of indie publishing than I did on the advance of one Harlequin book. If sales continue in this vein and with 2-3 more indie books planned for publishing in 2014, leaving full time work is planned in 2015”

“I have two pen names, and I've never hit NYT or USA Today. Even without that, I've been making enough money to fully support myself through self-publishing since I received my very first month's royalties.”

“I self-published my debut mystery/thriller novel 4 months ago, selling 15,000 copies since then. I've been the #8 overall bestseller on Nook, and the #44 overall Kindle bestseller on Amazon. I just released a second book last month. Right now, with both priced at \$3.99, I'm on a \$100,000/yr+ sales run rate. Yeah, self-publishing has enabled me to quit my day job and write full time. I expected that. I didn't expect it to happen so quickly.”

“Income from self-publishing varies from \$35 to \$600 a month for e-editions (always highest in October and February and lowest in July and August) and I also I average \$2,000 a year just in print editions.”

“It's not all that it's made out to be.”

“I earn a few hundred dollars only annually from writing.”

“I'm very happy with my progress with Self-publishing. I've done more in 18 months on my own than in 8 years of trying to entice someone in Traditional Publishing to publish me. It's hard work, but very rewarding.”

“Self publishing has enabled my husband to quit his job.”

Self-Publishing Survey Results 2013

“Self-pubbing has allowed me to pay off medical bills and put one of my children into private school. Even an extra part-time income can change one's life:)”

*“My NY income is a lot more than my self-publishing income *right now*. But I only published my first self-pub in July, and then I followed with 2 more. I do have a freebie short story, but it's not related to my series. As I get more books out in the series, I expect my self-publishing income to equal or exceed my NY income.”*

“Still making under \$500, but has gone up a little each year as I write more books. Having a back list gives more income. Moral of the story, keep writing.”

“My books were out for 18 months before I was approached by a digital first imprint of a NY Publisher to release them again under their name. I got \$3500 for each book, which was what I had made to date with each book. Now they have a fresh start, and I'm going to Venice. I had no long term prospects of these books taking off with time, the sales were dwindling. Now I've had NY experience in edits, have doubled my income, and can add NY Pubbed to my moniker. So there is a type of success (as I see it) your survey didn't cover--I wonder if a future question to the effect of "did selfpubbing open new career doors." I've known self pubbers who became cover artists, formatters, editors, picked up an agent (i tried--that did not work. even with a backlist and an offer on the table, agents did not want me! OUCH!) or something like this--I was approached by them.”

“I would never stop traditional publishing, but have found self-pub good for weird little non-mainstream projects.”

“Now that I have an entire series out, my sales have exploded. In November and December of 2013, I've made more money self-publishing than I have since I first published in August of 2011”

“I've made about \$8,000 from July until now. Just wanted to add a specific figure because the 0-10K bracket seemed broad. Thanks!”

Self-Publishing Survey Results 2013

"I have never had a free book and may never do it. I don't believe in giving my work away for free."

"I'm not sure if self-publishing is viable anymore. If you had asked me a year ago, I would have said "Yes! Self-publishing all the way!" However, something happened in the middle of last year when Amazon made some kind of major change to their algo. Now I'm only making about 1/5 of what I used to make with self-publishing. I'm thinking about going the traditional route for my next book."

"I make average \$500 a month with self publishing. On release months I might make 4 x that."

"I have a negative net income for my fiction projects in 2013 and expect about the same income in 2014, so I'm not sure if you want to count this. Have grossed a bit over \$100, I think, maybe almost \$200."

"I have a perm-free NOVELLA as a loss leader - it is imho the reason that I earned 46k in 7 months- it is NOT however related to a series - it is a contemporary romance that directed sales to another CR - that directed fewer but significant sales to my WF."

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