

MGH Publishing Handbook

Michael Grass House
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About Micropublishing

Michael Grass House is a micropublisher focused on helping authors publish their books without wasting time, effort, and money.

If you're looking for a big publishing package, access to brick-and-mortar store shelves, fancy marketing gimmicks, and low royalties, you won't find those here.

But if you want to create a sellable fiction or nonfiction book at minimal cost with the highest possible profits—without paying for services you don't need—then consider Michael Grass House.

Advantages

Here are the many ways that Michael Grass House trims costs from the publication process to maximize your profits and sales.

- ▶ **Paper books:** Michael Grass House uses a print-on-demand printer linked with Ingram, the world's largest book wholesaler. There are no boxes of books in anyone's warehouse or basement. Books get printed only as they sell. Although this method results in a higher per-book printing cost, it reduces the high costs related to storing, shipping, returns, and waste.
- ▶ **Electronic books:** Michael Garss House uploads your book to Kindle and similar ebook venders. Costs to you are minimal. Although Kindle takes a large portion of the sale price of your book, the sheer volume of sales means you make a profit anyway.
- ▶ **Choice:** Authors can choose either paper publication or epublication or both. If they already have a cover design, they don't need to pay for another one.
- ▶ **Book covers:** Michael Grass House uses talented graduates from a design college. There are no templates, and all covers showcase the book's uniqueness. You get a great cover for a low price. Note that the cover designs focus on how the cover will look on the internet, not on how they'll look on the shelf.
- ▶ **Payments:** Michael Grass House uses PayPal. This reduces the costs of stamps, cheques, and envelopes. Payments are made quarterly, and MGH issues you statements showing your sales figures from the venders.
- ▶ **Amazon focus:** All Michael Grass House books are automatically available on all Amazon vender sites. There are no distributors to pay. If authors wish to order boxes of books to sell directly themselves, they pay only the printing cost (plus shipping and service fee). If authors would like their books available to brick-and-

mortar bookstores, they can indicate so in the setup process, but they should be aware that their profits will be lower due to higher wholesaler discounts and higher returns.

- ▶ **Updates:** Authors who wish to update or revise their books can do so at any time. Updates are as fast as uploading a new interior file. There's no need to try to anticipate what the market will want a year from now, since you can always change your book's content.

Selling Books for Profit

Most self-publishers and vanity publishers give their clients access to the entire world's book market. They list your book with distributors (at a high cost to you) so they'll supposedly show up on bookstore shelves all over the world.

But the reality is that they never will. You pay for access to those bookstores, but the bookstores themselves decide what they will or won't stock. Shelf-space is at a premium. So unless your book is a best-seller, then don't expect to see it at your local bookstore.

Moreover, brick-and-mortar bookstore sales involve significant costs to authors. If your book doesn't sell, the stores return it for full refund. You have no control over this process. The cost of these returned books is always *subtracted from your profits*.

So while you may think it would be great to have your book for sale everywhere, the reality is that the more places your book is stocked where it does not sell, the lower your profits.

Devoting energy to venues where you won't make many sales is a waste of time and money. Our book sales strategies focus exclusively on venues where your books will sell: where you get the best chance of sales and the highest profit margins. Those venues are all on the internet.

Why Focus on Internet Sales?

- ▶ **Cost.** Online sales are the most profitable option for new authors. Books get printed only when they sell. MGH authors avoid the costs of shipping, returns, low profits, and ripped covers from brick-and-mortar bookstores.
- ▶ **Buyer preferences.** Online sellers have low overhead costs, so they often sell books at deeply discounted prices. Buyers know this. For this reason, they tend to buy their books online.

- ▶ **Niche markets.** If you've written a nonfiction book is targeting a niche market, your buyers know that books on this topic won't be sitting on bookstore shelves. So they focus their searches online. If your book is available at the internet bookstores where these buyers are most likely to look for them, then you get maximum sales at the lowest cost, and they get the best price for your book.
- ▶ **Fiction sales.** Kindle and similar ebook venders now outsell paper book venders. If your book is fiction, its greatest sales potential is on Kindle.

Short-selling on Amazon

Short-selling is an option available for paper book sales. It allows you to maximum your profit margin by limiting your sales venues.

Short-selling means offering a lower discount to the wholesaler. Most wholesalers and distributors expect a 55–65% discount when they buy your book. They then sell it to the bookstores, who expect a 40% discount. Then the bookstore sells it to the buyers at full price.

For online booksellers, like Amazon, this 55% discount is excessive considering their low overhead costs. It gives them a massive profit margin that they don't need. Most of the time, they just deeply discount the price of your book, selling it for a super-low price.

That's great for the buyer, but not for you. Why give 55% off to the vender if the vender is just going to cut the price?

Here's a secret that few self-publishers tell you: You have the option of offering less than 55% to the wholesaler. You can offer as little as 35%, and Amazon will still carry your book. This is called short-selling.

Short-selling allows you to almost double your profits for the same number of sales. The disadvantage of short-selling is that currently only Amazon will carry the book at the lower rate. Does this affect the number of sales of your book? For most books, it doesn't. If people want your book, they'll order it from wherever they can get it.

Short-selling also allows you to avoid orders from brick-and-mortar stores. This may not sound like an advantage, but it is. Books on bookstore shelves have a six-week window during which they must sell. If they don't sell, the store rips off the covers and ships them back for a full refund. The costs are subtracted from your profits.

As author, you get to choose whether to short-sell or offer a full 55% discount.

Bargain-Pricing on Kindle

Kindle and ebook vendors now sell more books than all the paper book vendors combined. Paper is on its way out. So you can get it at the beginning of this trend by making your book available as an ebook.

As tablet and book-reader sales rise, more and more buyers are refusing to buy paper books. This is especially true for novels. Kindle owners are often voracious readers. If your book is a novel, Kindle may be the best place for it.

Of course, Kindle buyers want low prices. If you are willing to price your novel at 99 cents, then even as an unknown author, you have a good chance at selling thousands of books.

Kindle offers a profit of 70% on books priced at \$2.99 or higher, but only 35% on books priced at less than \$2.99. So if you're selling your book for 99 cents, you're making just 35 cents per copy. But because of the volume of sales available on Kindle, your low price can end up making your book trend in the sales figures. As it trends, more people see it, and because of the low price, more people buy it. As a result, you end up making more money.

Bargain pricing works well for novels on Kindle. But be aware that nonfiction books need to be priced at \$2.99 or higher to garner the respect of the buyers.

More recently, Kindle began running a library service. Readers pay an annual fee to sign out any books they want, provided the authors have signed up their book for this service. Authors get a fee when their book gets signed out.

As author, you get to choose how you price your Kindle book and whether you sign your book up for the library service.

ePublishing through BookBaby

BookBaby is an e-publishing portal for self-publishers that targets all ebook vendors (Kindle, Kobo, Nook, Sony, etc.). BookBaby is a good choice if you don't want the hassle of processing your profits through MGH and PayPal. It's also a good choice if you may want to change the price of your book in the future (e.g., have a low introductory price and then raise it once sales are well established).

BookBaby charges a setup fee of \$100 but no fees after that. Their prices for epub conversion and cover designs are high for the quality of service you get, so BookBaby is a deal only if you just stick to the basic service.

Direct Selling of Nonfiction Books

All MGH authors of nonfiction books are encouraged to do some direct selling. If you go to a conference or professional meeting, bring a box of books with you. Keep a box in the trunk of your car (carefully wrapped to protect it against wear and tear).

With direct sales, you keep all the profits. In the meantime, you raise your professional profile.

You can buy boxes of books at cost by ordering them through Michael Grass House. They'll be shipped directly to your address (or any address you specify).

Prices and Profits

Michael Grass House offers both print and electronic printing options. Your books will look good and be positioned for good sales. Consider which publishing program would work best for your book. (Canadian residents add GST.) Please visit www.michaelgrasshouse.com for current prices.

Mini Kindle Package

- ▶ simple cover design (no templates)
- ▶ all other features of the Kindle Package

Kindle Package

- ▶ professional front cover design
- ▶ ISBN
- ▶ uploading of files to Kindle
- ▶ your choice of retail price
- ▶ distribution to all Amazon Kindle outlets, plus iBooks, Kobo, and other ebook readers connected to Kindle
- ▶ inclusion on the MGH website with links to your personal website
- ▶ development of the Amazon Kindle sales page, including previews
- ▶ guidance in finding reviewers and preparing a basic marketing plan
- ▶ Note: Layout for books containing illustrations and complex layouts is extra.

BookBaby Package

- ▶ the same as the Mini Kindle package, except that you publish through BookBaby and get access to a wider range of ebook vendors (Nook, Kobo, Sony, etc.)
- ▶ BookBaby account set up in the author's name so that all profits go directly to the author to avoid service charges and PayPal fees
- ▶ Note that BookBaby charges a set-up fee of \$100

Paper + eBook Package

- ▶ professional cover design (no templates)
- ▶ ISBN and registration with *Books in Print*
- ▶ uploading of files with an on-demand printer
- ▶ your choice of retail price, including your choice of discount to wholesalers
- ▶ distribution to Amazon and other online vendors
- ▶ creation of a Kindle/iBook/Kobo ebook edition, including your choice of retail price
- ▶ inclusion on the MGH website with links to your personal website
- ▶ development of the Amazon sales page, including *See Inside*
- ▶ guidance in finding reviewers and preparing a basic marketing plan

Republishing, Paper + eBook

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- ▶ cover must match the exact dimensions of the new book.

Republishing, eBook Only

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- ▶ all other features of the Kindle Only Package

Optional Services

- ▶ **Manuscript evaluation for organization and focus**
- ▶ **Thorough substantive edit**
- ▶ **Copy edit**
- ▶ **Writing of the front and back cover copy**
- ▶ **Proofreading**
- ▶ **Layout**
- ▶ **Indexing**
- ▶ **Ghostwriting**
- ▶ **eBooklet creation**
- ▶ **Revisions and updates**
- ▶ **Development of an author website**
- ▶ **Development of a promotional video**
- ▶ **Book orders**

Your Profits

Instead of giving authors royalties, Michael Grass House simply passes your profits to you. Your "royalty" is not a set percentage of your cover price. Your profits depend on your choices for pricing, wholesaler discounts, and sales venues. Once you've made these decisions, we can tell you what your profits will be.

Please note that Michael Grass House charges a service fee of 10% of your profits to cover accounting, quarterly payments, and annual tax papers. This is a percentage of your profits, *not* a percentage of the cover price of your book, so it's a very minimal charge.

Example:

You have a 175-page 6x9 nonfiction book priced at \$20. For paper sales, you've chosen to short-sell it at 35% and restrict your sales to Amazon and its affiliates. For ebook sales, you've priced it on Kindle at \$3.99.

Amazon sales:

Printing costs are fixed at the POD printer (in this case: \$3.25).

The wholesaler will take 35% of the retail price (\$7.00).

$\$20.00 - \$3.25 - \$7.00 = \mathbf{\$10.75}$ (Total profit: **54%**)

MGH service fee of \$1.08 will be deducted from your payment.

Kindle sales:

$\$2.99 \times 70\% = \mathbf{\$2.09}$ (Total profit: **70%**)

MGH service fee of \$0.21 will be deducted from your payment.

Cancellation

At any time, you're free to take your book off the market or publish it through a different publisher. You can sell it from your website or get boxes of books printed at your neighborhood print shop. You retain control of your book at all times.

If you choose to cancel, there is a \$100 fee for taking down the books, assembling the relevant files (the final pdf's, plus the editable layout files), and sending them to you.

Please note that if you decide to reprint your book elsewhere, you will need to get a new ISBN number.

Payments to Authors

Payments will be sent out 90 days after the end of each quarter—after Micheal Grass House receives payment from the venders. You will receive an itemized statement by email showing your Kindle and Amazon sales.

MGH does not issue cheques for payment. Payments will be made via PayPal. Payments will take place within 24 hours of sending the statements.

Note that authors who publish through BookBaby will get paid directly from BookBaby.

Payments to Michael Grass House

Once you have determined which services you need, you will be requested to sign a simple contract that ensures your work is original and that you take full responsibility for any infringement of copyright. The contract does not bind you in any long-term arrangement with MGH.

A deposit via PayPal of 50% is required before work can begin. The remaining 50% is due on the day MGH uploads the files.

Marketing Your Book

In the old days, only major book publishers had the power to market a book. They owned the distribution channels and the bookstore shelves. There was no internet, so they got the word out through paid reviewers at newspapers and magazines. The industry created best-seller lists and book prizes to pump their products and gain media space.

However, few of these methods work anymore. Newspapers are dying, and the paid reviewers are largely irrelevant to sales. Reviewers have tended to be industry insiders, so they have generally earned their right to write reviews by writing what has pleased the publishers. Any notion of objectivity has been absent, so today the general public ignores these reviews.

Meanwhile, best-seller lists are gathering dust. These lists were only ever based on hardcopy sales, which only the wealthy could afford to buy. So book marketing was always slanted toward the preferences of the wealthy, leaving the majority of readers stuck buying what the elites wanted to read. Today's readers use the internet to sift past the marketing schtick to find the books they want to read.

As for the prizes, these have become nothing more than media events to raise the publishing industry's status. Nobody cares who wins book awards. Books that win book prizes rarely earn become big sellers.

Here are a few traditional marketing tactics that are now complete time-wasters:

- ▶ **Bookstores.** Bookstores are dying. Paper is on its way out. If people really want a paper book, they'll order it from the internet. Unless they're looking for a gift, people don't browse bookstores anymore. So while it may be possible to crowbar your way onto a bookstore shelf, this strategy is unlikely to increase your sales. It may even cost you, since all returns to the wholesaler get subtracted from your profits.
- ▶ **Sell sheets.** A sell sheet is a one-pager about your book (size, pages, summary, reviews, price, etc.) so that bookstores can order it. Most vanity publishers provide you with a sell sheet for your new book. But it's completely unnecessary in an internet-based market.
- ▶ **Bookmarks and fridge magnets.** Book marketers used to hand out gimmicks at book events to raise a book's profile. However, gimmicks are costs that don't lead to sales.

Internet and Viral Marketing

Today's readers are on the internet. They have Facebook and Twitter accounts. They follow trends. They look for deals. They read just as much as ever before, but they don't want to read someone else's choices.

Here are some tips for getting started with your book marketing:

- ▶ **Create an author website.** Free blogsites are available from organizations such as Blogger and WordPress. WordPress allows for fixed-content pages as well as blog pages, which is handy for setting up a page about your book. Include links that take the browser right to the purchase page or Amazon page. If you don't want to blog, then hire someone to create a simple website about you and your books. Readers expect to find information about authors on the web, so if you don't have a website, you may lose potential buyers.
- ▶ **Find blogger reviewers.** Many bloggers struggle to find content for their blog. Others like getting free books. Email popular bloggers in your subject area to request a review. Keep several copies of your book handy to mail to blogger reviewers.
- ▶ **Get your book listed on organization websites.** Many organization websites have a bookstore page. These pages merely link back to the Amazon page. For every click and sale launched from the organization's website, the organization makes a bit of money. So they're usually happy to list your book (once they've seen it).
- ▶ **Start tweeting.** Twitter seems like a bizarre internet tool for the uninitiated. But it can be very useful for authors. If your first readers love your book, they may try to find you on Twitter so they can follow you. In fact, they expect you to be there. So start a Twitter account and learn to tweet. Find people to follow. The trick to Twitter is to be genuine. If you try to use Twitter just to market your book, or if you try to create a phony persona just for Twitter, you'll fail. Followers expect you to be a real person. Twitter has a search function that allows you to search for your name or your book title in recent tweets. If someone tweets about you or your book, respond in a cheerful, warm, and lighthearted way.
- ▶ **Add a signature line to your emails.** Your signature should mention your book: e.g., Tom Smith, Author of *Ten Ways To Improve Your Book Sales*.
- ▶ **Freelance.** If you've written a nonfiction book on a niche topic, find magazines that specialize in this topic. Then pitch some freelance articles at the editor. You can take topics from your book and expand them into articles. In your by-line, mention your book. Freelancing helps establish you as an expert in your field.

- ▶ **Seek out speaking engagements.** If you've written a nonfiction book on a niche topic, contact organizations to ask if you could run a free workshop. Learn the art of public speaking. Once you've gained some experience as a speaker, you can become a paid speaker at larger conferences. Large conferences often include book sale areas.
- ▶ **Create a video.** YouTube is a great place to let potential buyers know more about your book. A video can be as simple as a camcorder recording of you talking about your book. Or it can be a montage of photos with music in the background as words flow across the screen. You can imbed your video on your website so that potential buyers can find it.

Seeding Your First Reviews

Amazon and Kindle reviews and ratings drive sales. Highly rated books (four and five stars) sell more copies than low-rated books. But your book can sit on the back page for a long time before it gets any reviews or ratings at all.

To speed up the process, you can ask your friends and colleagues to write your first reviews and give your book its first ratings. If you belong to a writers group, your circle of writers can help with these first reviews.

Stress that there's nothing deceitful about seeding positive reviews for a new book. You're not asking your reviewers to lie or pretend. You want genuine reviews to help the right readers find the book and decide if they want to buy it. Once buyers start writing their own reviews, those initial reviews will get buried. They just help get the ball rolling.

On the next page, you'll find some tips to give to your reviewers. Print this page and hand it to your reviewers when you ask for the review.

Writing a Book Review on Amazon

You'll need an Amazon account to write a review. If you've ever bought a book from Amazon, then you have an account.

Here are some tips for writing a review that's useful to both the author and the potential readers.

- ▶ **Honesty.** If you can't rate the book as a four or five star, or if it just isn't your type of book, then please don't review it. A lukewarm review will kill the book's chances at sales before it even gets started.
- ▶ **Zero in on the strengths.** Write about what shines in this book. What were the best parts? That's what potential buyers want to know. Avoid listing the weaknesses or giving the book four stars instead of five simply because "it's not perfect." Every book has weaknesses. You're not writing a literary critique, just a buyer's review. What's important is that it was a good read, especially a good read for the price.
- ▶ **Compare it to other books.** Fiction readers like to know what this book resembles. Does this book make you think of another author? Consider the style, storyline, main character, setting, etc. For example, "If you like Henry Dixon's murder mysteries, you'll love this one." Potential buyers have favorite authors, so linking this book to a popular author helps the book find its readers. Nonfiction readers like to know how this book fits in with other books on this topic. Describing what hole in the literature it fills will help buyers find the book.
- ▶ **Refrain from mentioning any personal connection to the author.** Some reviewers believe they should disclose their friendship with the author (e.g., "I've known Helen all my life, and she's the greatest."). But buyers become instantly suspicious of personal reviews. This kind of disclosure does a lot of harm. Don't mention any personal relationships with the author. Instead, just review the book as if you were a buyer.
- ▶ **Keep it brief.** Long reviews look artificial. Most people write no more than three to six sentences. Start with an energetic opener, list the best parts/aspects of the book, then recommend who might like this book. Finished.

Preparing Your Manuscript for Publishing

MS Word puts a lot of code into your document. To produce a clean book, you have to remove as much of the code as possible. This means removing extra spaces, tabs, indents, and returns.

Don't worry—Michael Grass House will add the formatting later.

Always check your manuscript thoroughly for consistency and correctness. An inconsistent book looks unprofessional. Once it's in print, it's hard to change.

CHECKLIST

___ My manuscript is in .doc or .docx format, single-spaced.

___ I have run the spell-checker and carefully studied those wavy green and red lines. (They're not there for decoration!) I have had at least one person proofread the manuscript for typos, extra spaces, and errors. I have had an editor check it for punctuation and sentence errors (recommended).

___ I have checked the chapter names to ensure that they're consistent. I don't have mixed styles (e.g., Chapter 1, Chapter Two). I have centred the chapter titles.

___ I have removed all double spaces. I have left only single spaces between sentences. (Use Find and Replace to get rid of double spaces.)

___ I have removed all extra line returns at the beginning and end of each chapter. Instead of Enter Enter Enter Enter, I have inserted a Page Break between chapters (Page Layout -> Breaks -> Page Break). I have started each chapter at the top of the page.

___ I have removed all tabs and indents at the beginning of paragraphs. Instead, I have used Paragraphs -> Special -> First Line. (Make it 0.3 inches to look good.) Note that for the first paragraph of a chapter (or section), there is no indent.

___ I have checked all my dashes. An em dash (Control + Alt + - (on the numerical keyboard)) is a punctuation mark that cuts into a sentence—like this (with no spaces). An en dash (Control + -) is a short line used in numbers, such as 2002–2005. The small dash on the keyboard beside the zero is just a hyphen for compound words.

___ I have checked my use of commas. In dialogue, commas always come inside the quotation marks. In items in a series (e.g., *dogs, cats, and birds*), there is a comma before *and*. There is a comma after introductory phrases or clauses (e.g., *The next day,*). If in doubt, look up commas on the internet to find the rules.

___ I have ensure that any three-dot ellipses (...) are three periods in a row with no spaces in between, and no spaces before or after.

___ I have avoided quotation marks inside quotation marks. They look cluttered and confuse readers. Wherever possible, I have used italics instead. (e.g., "Who just said *I want lunch?*")