SAMPLE

Making Money with Kindle

How Real Authors Turn Amazon Self-Publishing into Income — the Royalties, the Rules, and the Math That Actually Matter

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Free sample: Introduction & Chapter 1

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About This Series

This free sample contains the Introduction and Chapter 1. The complete book contains the full contents above.

Introduction

In late September 2026, a small publishing operation ran the full Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing gauntlet for real: four ebooks published in a single week, two print editions submitted behind them, a series page live on the store, an author profile claimed, and a multimedia A+ Content campaign designed, built, rejected by an automated keyword filter, repaired, and approved. Every number in that sentence — every royalty rate, printing cost, submission limit, and blocked keyword — was learned the hard way, by an operation that logged its own failures as carefully as its sales.

This book is what that record became. It is the manual the operation wishes it had on day one.

Making money with Kindle is not a mystery, but it is a system, and systems are unforgiving of improvisation. The royalty bands pay 70% only inside a price range and 35% outside it — a structure that turns one cent of list price into a 45% royalty swing. Print books pay a flat 60% minus a printing charge that eats short paperbacks alive below $9.99. The store limits how many new titles an account may create each week, per format, and tells you this only by silently refusing to save. The submission flow fails quietly in a dozen ways. The free marketing machinery — series pages, author profiles, A+ Content — is generous to publishers who build all of it and invisible to publishers who build none.

None of this is secret. All of it is scattered, half-documented, and expensive to learn by accident, which is why the income distribution in self-publishing looks the way it does: a long tail of publishers who treated the store as a slot machine, and a small professional class who treated it as a system to be worked.

The chapters ahead follow the money through the whole system. What the platform pays and what it charges, and the worked arithmetic of real prices. How to choose what to publish when the goal is a catalog rather than a lottery ticket. How the product is actually manufactured — manuscripts, covers, files, metadata — and how the submission gauntlet is run without losing books, weeks, or the account. How pricing is staged, held, and repriced without whiplash. What the free marketing stack contains and how the campaign built every piece of it. Whether Kindle Unlimited's sixty-page-per-dollar subscription pool beats selling everywhere at once, and how to decide. And, at the end, the honest ledger: what a professionally run catalog launch actually earns in its first weeks, and the operating rules the campaign adopted after paying for each of them.

This is a work of business journalism built from two sources: Amazon's published terms and the public record as of September 2026, and the documented experience of a real publishing campaign — ten titles, two formats, one operating system, every failure mode written down. Where a number comes from the platform, it is stated as the platform's published rate. Where it comes from the campaign, it is stated as what actually happened. Nothing in between has been invented, because the truth about this business is interesting enough: the machine is fair, the math is public, and the money goes to whoever runs the machine on purpose.

Chapter 1: The World's Biggest Bookstore and Its Long Tail

Kindle Direct Publishing, or KDP, is Amazon's self-publishing arm. It is the machine that takes a finished manuscript from an author's computer and places it into the same store that sells books by the largest publishers on Earth — the Kindle ebook store, the Amazon print catalog, and by extension every Amazon marketplace from the United States to Japan. There is no gatekeeper, no agent, no editorial board, and no invoice. An account is free. Publishing a book is free. Amazon makes money when the book sells, which is the single most important structural fact about the platform: the company's interests and the author's interests point, for once, in the same direction.

That alignment is why KDP matters more than any other self-publishing channel. Kobo, Google Play Books, Apple Books, and Gumroad all run credible stores, and a later chapter argues every serious publisher should be on several of them. But Amazon dominates the English-language ebook market to a degree no competitor approaches, and its self-publishing program has quietly become one of the largest publishers in the world by title count. When a handful of people with a spreadsheet and a work ethic can launch a working publishing house in an afternoon, the store they launch into is Amazon's.

The scale is worth internalizing, because it cuts both ways. The Kindle store holds millions of titles, and a meaningful share of what reads as "publishing" in 2026 is, in fact, self-publishing: genre fiction, specialized nonfiction, how-to guides, and the long tail of books that traditional publishing never wanted and never missed. The store is so open that a first-time author's biggest problem is not access. It is being found.

Before the mechanics, the honest headline. Most self-published books earn very little money.

The data on this is consistent and sobering. Industry surveys put the median self-published author's annual book income somewhere below $1,000; the Alliance of Independent Authors' 2025 income survey, which skews toward committed, professional authors, still found a median of only about $13,500 per year. A 2025 Written Word Media survey found that a large share of authors earn less than $100 per month from their books. The income distribution is a textbook power law: the bottom half of authors earn under a few hundred dollars a year, the top ten percent earn in the tens of thousands, and the top fraction of one percent earn six and seven figures. The average, dragged upward by the superstars, is a meaningless number.

This is not an argument against publishing. It is an argument against the wrong business model. A single book, launched and forgotten, is a lottery ticket. A working catalog — multiple titles, systematically produced, cross-linked, and maintained — is an annuity. The difference between the authors earning nothing and the authors earning a living is rarely talent. It is almost always catalog size, publishing cadence, and how deliberately the store's free levers are used.

This book follows that distinction the whole way through, because the campaign it documents was designed as a catalog business from day one: a fifty-book series, published in weekly windows, priced deliberately, and built to compound.

Strip away the jargon, and KDP pays an author through exactly three mechanisms.

Per-unit royalties. A reader buys a copy — ebook or print — and Amazon pays a royalty. For ebooks this is 35% or 70% of the list price depending on the price band. For print books it is 60% of the list price minus Amazon's printing cost, or 40% on the Expanded Distribution channels. Every pricing decision in this book flows from those percentages and the bands they sit in.

Page reads. Kindle Unlimited, Amazon's subscription service, pays authors from a shared monthly fund — about $70 million a month as of mid-2026 — at a per-page rate of roughly four-tenths of a cent. Enrollment requires ninety-day exclusivity. Chapter 9 works the math in full.

Adjacent income. The store listing itself is an asset: it sells the author's other books, it sells services, it sells a newsletter, it sells whatever the author is actually in the business of selling. Many successful nonfiction authors make more from the business behind the book than from the book itself.

Everything else — advertising revenue share, A+ Content, series pages, Author Central — is plumbing that exists to make those three flows bigger. It is free plumbing, which is the theme of the marketing chapter: Amazon gives self-publishers marketing infrastructure that a trade publisher would have paid a department to operate.

Most publishing books are written from the outside: a survey of the industry, a stack of other people's anecdotes, a chapter of caveats. This one is written from inside an operating campaign — a small publishing operation that, in the final week of September 2026, ran the full KDP gauntlet for real: four genre ebooks published in a single week at $0.99, two print editions submitted in the same window, a series page live on the store, an author profile claimed, and an A+ Content campaign designed, built, rejected, repaired, and approved.

Every number in the chapters ahead — every royalty calculation, every print cost, every blocked submission, every silent failure — comes from that campaign's own records, cross-checked against Amazon's published rates and the public record as of September 2026.

The campaign's opening results were ordinary, which is the point. Nothing in this book requires a bestseller. What it requires is the same thing a corner shop requires: knowing the margins, respecting the rules, stocking the shelves steadily, and not confusing enthusiasm with a plan.

If this book compresses to a single sentence, it is this: Kindle publishing rewards operators, not authors — the money follows people who treat the store as a system to be worked, not a stage to be admired from.

Everything else is detail.

End of free sample. The full book is available at putrabooks.github.io