

200 Ways to Make a Living as a Writer in the Digital Age

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Making a living as a writer: Is the glass half full or half empty?

- Print markets and revenues are declining.
- But people are reading more than ever, and
- More money than ever is being made from publication and distribution of written work!
- The issue isn't whether there is money to be made, but how the pie is being divided.
- More than ever, we can make a living as writers, if we are paid our fair share.

There is no “typical” writer.

- Most writers have multiple income streams, often from different business models.
- Different writers prioritize different ways of monetizing our work.
- There are more ways to generate revenue from writing than most writers realize.

Five dimensions of monetization:

1. Frontlist vs. backlist
2. Print vs. digital
3. Business models
4. Revenue sources
5. Publication formats

1st Dimension: Frontlist vs. Backlist

A writer has three main classes of assets which they can use to generate revenue:

1. Ability (labor power) to create new writing.
2. Rights (copyright) to your personal backlist.
3. Brand equity (reputation, fan base, etc.) in your personal brand.

2nd Dimension: Print vs. Digital

- ☛ Sales, revenues, and freelance rates of printed newspapers, magazines, etc. are falling.
- ☛ But people are reading more online and in digital formats, on computers, on e-readers like Kindles, and on their phones.
- ☛ If there's a chance to make up some of the lost print revenue, it's from digital sources.

3rd Dimension: Business Models

1. Employment
2. Independent contracting (can be similar to employment in some ways, e.g. monthly flat fee to write a blog or e-mail newsletter)
3. Freelancing (licensing to third-party publishers)
4. Self-publishing

4th Dimension: Revenue Sources

1. Sales (including *de facto* sales through all-rights “buy-out” contracts)
2. Wages and wage-like contracting fees
3. Licensing
4. Advertising
5. Subscriptions and memberships

5th Dimension: Publication formats

1. Printed publications

A. Books

B. Printed periodicals (newspapers, magazines, journals, etc.)

C. Short-form print editions (offprints, chapbooks, ephemera, worksheets, etc.)

5th Dimension: Publication formats

2. Digital editions and formats:

A. Web content (Web sites, blogs, etc.)

B. Apps

C. E-books and other downloads

D. E-mail (newsletters, etc.)

E. Videos, multimedia, and interactive digital formats (including games and instructional materials).

Many marketplaces for digital text:

- Each of these five dimensions of monetization is independent of the others.
- These modes of monetization are also independent of the genre of writing (journalism, fiction, instructional materials, etc.).
- A work can be monetized in multiple ways at the same time, and in different ways at different times – or in only one way.

200 ways to make money from writing in digital formats

2 frontlist (new work) and backlist (old work)
x 2 original formats: print and born digital
x 5 revenue sources
x 5 digital publication formats
= 200 ways to make money from writing
in digital formats

Trends in writers' revenues (obvious):

- Print → digital
- 3rd-party publishers → self-publishing
- Traditional “publishers” → new intermediaries

Trends in writers' revenues (less obvious):

- Frontlist → Backlist (inc. “re-mix” of own work)
- Long-form → short-form & “granular” text
- Fixed “editions” → dynamic publication
- Geographic segmentation → time-limited licensing

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