

How writers monetize words:

The marketplaces for writing in digital formats

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There is no “typical” writer.

- Most working writers aren’t making a living from our writing.
- Most writers have multiple income streams, often from different business models.
- Different writers prioritize different ways of monetizing our work.



Four dimensions of monetization:

1. Business models
2. Revenue sources
3. Digital publication formats
4. Frontlist vs. backlist



1st Dimension: Business Models

1. Employment (inc. creation of works for hire)
2. Independent contracting (can be similar to employment in some ways, but is not subject to work-for-hire laws or employment rights including wage and hour laws, unemployment compensation, and collective bargaining)
3. Freelancing (licensing to third-party publishers)
4. Self-publishing



2nd Dimension: Revenue Sources

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



3rd Dimension: Publication formats

1. Web content (Web sites, blogs, etc.)
2. Apps
3. E-books and other downloads
4. E-mail (newsletters, etc.)
5. Movies, videos, electronic games, and virtual reality experiences (e.g. use of a work of fiction as the basis for plot, characters, dialogue, etc.)



4th Dimension: Frontlist vs. Backlist

1. Creating new works (frontlist)
2. Generating revenue from rights to older works (personal backlist)



Many marketplaces for digital text:

- Each of these four dimensions of monetization is independent of the others.
- These modes of monetization are also independent of the genre of writing (poetry, 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 a Living as a Writer in the Digital Age:

4 business models

x 5 revenue sources

x 5 digital publication formats

x 2 types of works: new works and old works

= 200 modes of monetization of digital text



Practical implications of the diversity of marketplaces for digital text:

- Statistics, industry analysis, and business plans
- Procedures (copyright registration, identifiers, cataloguing and indexing, etc.)



Policy implications of the diversity of marketplaces for digital text:

- “Fair Use” and other exceptions and limitations (example: “Controlled Digital Lending”)
- “Market Failure” vs. market choice (example: “Orphan Works”)



Trends in monetization of text (obvious):

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



Trends in monetization of text (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 (issues for “caching” and archiving)



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