

eMyths and eRealities

What follows in this section is Big Picture stuff – an overview of the issues to be discussed in greater detail in the Kit.

Let's identify 10 Key Myths first:

1. An eBook is an eBook is an eBook

It isn't. eBooks come in all shapes and sizes. An eBook can comprise text on its own, or it can conspire with images, sound, animation and even interactivity. What you can do with your eBook is limited only by your imagination. Or, if you plan to publish yourself, by your technical expertise.

2. One eBook Reader is much the same as another

Some are, some aren't. eBook Readers (i.e. reading devices) come in all shapes and sizes. The Kindle and iPad and a few others are relatively BIG. Smartphones like the iPhone are the smallest of portable devices, but, in their largest size, known as phablets, straddle the space between smartphones and small tablets. More and more Readers, as I'll refer to them from now on, are springing up to give consumers choice –and make the delivery of content more challenging for publishers.

Readers have varying amounts of real estate on their screens for displaying your content. Some can display landscape (wide) as well as in portrait (tall) format, essentially rolling with the content. So, if you like to create wide content like two page spreads, you may have problems viewing it on a Reader with a fixed portrait display. Or, it may display but the content may

be unreadable except for those with 100/100 vision (something like 20/20 but much more powerful!)

Most can now display in colour, older generations only in black and white.

Some can play audio and even movies, or connect to the internet, while others do only static stuff and connect to the internet just to take your money when you buy an app, video, song or book.

3. *Once you create a pdf, you have an eBook*

What's a *pdf*? How much time do you have to talk through this? Put simply, it's a cross-platform file format that lets your reader see your work just as you see it before it's published. In other words, what you see is what they get.

It would be nice if all eBook Readers accepted eBooks for publication in pdf format, but they don't. And even those that do may require you to send them a special kind of pdf for their Reader.

Some devices are tied to proprietary eBook formats. This is because certain companies – not to mention names – want to keep you hooked on their devices by ensuring that the books you buy only work on *their* Reader.

This means if you want your book to work on ALL Readers, you'll have to find a way to send the distributors your content in a file format that will work on each Reader. Or, more likely, you'll have to publish the same work in different formats suited to the major Readers.

And you thought it was going to be easy? Or at least not this complicated!

4. Is Conversion is a religious experience?

You may find yourself invoking God's name more than once while creating your eBook, but the *conversion* process has little to do with having your head dunked into water.

It means starting with an original *master file* and converting this into a format very close to what the Reader requires for displaying the fruit of your labour (or loins, if you're male).

Unlike the religious experience, eBook file conversion takes time, often as much time as producing the original master. There's nothing magical about it. You also have to *test* the file either on the Reader or via *emulator software* that pretends to be the Reader somewhere else, usually on your computer screen.

Like the religious version, eBook conversion is not for the faint-hearted, i.e. the technology-challenged people out there for whom using a remote control becomes an IQ test.

There may be a vacancy for priests in the digital universe, after all.

5. Anyone can publish an eBook

True, but you need to get at the eMyth behind the Myth. Anyone can publish an eBook, but the trick is to do it well. (Anyone can dance, but some people's rendition of the Samba looks more like a violent vertical seizure!)

Years ago, after personal computers were invented, everyone suddenly had access to 301 fonts and used each of them to create and publish a book. Soon we nearly ran out of ISBNs and the world was no better off for the extra books that had been published. *Edit* became a nasty four-letter word and *proofreading* was something you hoped your best friend had done for your book before telling you it was the best thing since sliced cheese.

Millions of books are available on the Kindle right now, but how many are worth reading?

We have a moral obligation to our National Library archives and time capsules everywhere to ensure that quality standards are kept up, so you should still lay your draft at the feet of an editor for advice, and a proofreader at the end of it all, before making an eBook of it. Your reputation as an author or publisher is at stake.

6. You design an eBook in much the same way as a print book

Up to a point, yes, but there are many twists and turns along the way in making it look as good as a physical book. You've already learned that the pdf file you prepare for print won't work on most Readers. You need to know what won't work in the Reader you're aiming to publish on.

For example, of the 301+ fonts available to you on your computer only a handful will display on many Readers. You need to know what these Reader-friendly fonts are and what size to use in your original to ensure a proper display on the Reader. A 36 point

title font, for example, will send most Readers ducking for cover.

Automatic features like page numbering, hyphenation and text placed in headers and footers will create special effects on many Readers, few of which you'll like. Extra line breaks and spacing between words in your original will cause chronic fatigue on most Readers.

7. It costs less to publish an eBook than a print book

Yes, once you reach the print stage. With eBooks there are no upfront printing costs, no transport charges, no hassle with Customs if you print overseas, no warehousing, no physical distributors – or most other costs associated with a physical product.

But *pre-publication* costs of an eBook can be greater than a physical book, especially if you want to distribute your eBook via a wide range of Readers (see Myth 4).

With a print book you have ONE master file to check, perfect and send to print. With an eBook, you could have several versions, each of which has to be checked, perfected, tested offline and online and then uploaded to a server where it *may* come out as you intended it.

So *post-publication* costs can also be greater for an eBook, especially if you're distributing your master to several companies, each of which have their own requirements, as we will see.

Just because a process is handled by a computer doesn't make it idiot-proof. Sometimes, quite the opposite is true, especially if we become complacent.

8. One size fits all

There are companies out there that will promise to do everything for you for free and get your eBook onto every type of Reader from a single file you send them. Yes, but what will you get out the other end?

eBook packagers like that may be well-intentioned, but none of them are charities. They depend on pushing large volumes of content through their system and getting it out there with a minimum of fuss. They may well have a 'muncher' that accepts any file type under the sun and then spits it out in multiple formats. But what it will look like at the other end may not be much better than what the dog spat out.

If you read the small print, or ask the right questions, you'll find out that the formats they produce through this automated process will work on most but not all Readers, and certain types of content may not work at all, e.g. books requiring a fixed spread format.

Never forget that *you* are the publisher and that *you* must take responsibility for what ultimately displays – or doesn't display – on the target Reader.

9. Once you publish an eBook, you just sit back and wait for the royalty cheques to roll in

If you've ever published a print book, you know what a myth this is, so why should it be any different for eBooks?

Nothing's changed. You still have to get your book noticed, reviewed, blogged about, 'liked' and 'shared'. You also have to chat it up online, get interviewed. You have to send out email circulars, make sure it's

listed on the key databases and high up on the search engines. Think in terms of a long-term *campaign*, not a one-shot launch. Keeping your powder dry over several months. Thanks to virtual launches, you may be able to host yours in your pajamas – more on *that* later!

If anything, it's more challenging promoting an eBook. The world is just warming up to the eBook as a valid alternative to the printed book. People still like their physical books. So you'll need to persuade them not only to buy your book, but to accept it in digital wrapping.

Your audiences will live well beyond your home suburb. They may not even speak your language. They are busier, more constantly bombarded with distractions than readers have ever been. How will they discover your work? And how will you convince them to buy it?

You can be sure that no one else will do it for you – unless your work is the one in a million that captivates people into spreading it by word of mouth.

10. eBook contracts work much like print book contracts

In some ways, yes. In many other areas, no. Conventional contracts are based on the notion of *territories*. You essentially lease your property to a publisher for a specified time and then have the right to take it back and lease it to someone else. If your work is commercial enough, you may be able to lease it to several publishers in several territories elsewhere in the world and make money from them as well as the original publisher.

But with eBooks, the notion of territory is mostly out the window. eBooks are *global* by their digital nature

rather than limited by geography, though some distributors may offer you the option to restrict the territories into which your eBook sells. It remains to be seen if the territories as we know them for physical books can survive the digital revolution.

Further, once published, eBooks have a half life approaching radioactive elements. It's hard enough to take down a physical book once it's on Amazon and outlets all over the world are offering it new and used at various price points. Can you imagine how hard it will be to dismantle once it's up on multiple Readers? Or to cut off supply, *when* the hackers get into your precious file and disable the digital rights protections? (You notice I didn't say *if!*)

The lawyers are working to counter that now. But the progress of legal evolution to meet the challenges of digital copyright and piracy will make *Bleak House* look like a sprint. In the meantime, all of us concerned about compensation in exchange for our creative output will have to be on guard. Very much on guard!

Got the Big Picture? OK, let's get down to the details!