

An Honest Look at the eBook Business

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An Honest Look at the eBook Business

By Jonni Good

Is an eBook Business Right for You?



I decided to write this article because so many people ask me how I go about writing and selling eBooks. You can see the three books I've written in the column on the right (all illustrated by my daughter Jessie Good).

As you may know, I've actually written 5 ebooks – two of them bombed as ebooks, so I turned them into web pages, and I still make a little money from them. You can see my two “failures” at <http://www.drawfluffy.com> and <http://www.Older-Dog.com>

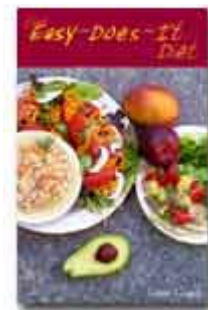
I've turned a very enjoyable hobby and a love of teaching into a nice second income. Someday it may be my only income. I'm not rich yet, and I don't ever expect to be, so if you're hoping I'll tell you how to make \$297,953.97 in the next three months, this is not the place for you.

My daughter added the ebooks in her portfolio, and landed a very lucrative job because she was officially a “published illustrator,” and I added my published writing experience to my resume, which helped me move into a very enjoyable position where I work. These “extra” benefits should not be ignored when you're considering writing an ebook.

But what is it really like? What can you really expect? Are you the right person for an eBook business? I hope my article will help you answer some of those questions.

Good reasons for starting an ebook business

1. You have an idea that you want to share with the world, and an ebook is the least costly, least cumbersome way to make it available to others. With a self-published ebook, you won't need to convince a publisher that your ideas are



["The Easy-Does-It Diet"](#)



["Weight Loss: How to Keep Your Commitment"](#)



["Weight Lifting for Absolute Beginners"](#)

commercially viable, and you won't have to work with an editor who insists on changes to your wording or content.

2. You need an extra income but don't want to get a second job and spend an extra 4 hours a day working for someone else, away from your home and family.

3. You want to contribute an income to the household without having to leave your children in the care of other people.

4. You're looking for a way to become completely independent of employers, so that you can eventually quit your job and have the freedom that comes with self-employment.

5. You want to create an independent lifestyle in a small town or outside of metropolitan suburbia. You dream about living where few conventional jobs are located, and before you can buy a home in the country you need an established business that doesn't rely on geographic location.

6. You're already located in a beautiful place and you want to stay there, but the latest economic downturn has made local jobs scarce or non-existent. If you don't find a fast solution for your money problems, you'll have to pack up and move. You're hoping this may be that solution.7. You may be looking for a business that can be started with very little initial capital.

8. You may have an interest in an arcane or unusual subject, and wish to find a way to contact others in the world who will understand your views and become long-distance friends, while looking to you as a published expert in your field.

9. You may want to be able to put "published author" on your resume.

Top reasons why this may not be the right business for you

To help you decide if this is the right business for you, here are some of the top reasons why some people would not fit well with an eBook business:

1. It isn't instant money. No matter what you read on the marketing gurus' web sites, you will not become rich overnight. For one thing, **you have to write a book** before you ever get started. And writing a book takes time, whether it will eventually be printed and sold in bookstores, or if it will be made available online.

Once the book is written, people have to find out about it. The search engines won't index your site until three to four weeks after you've submitted it to them, and if you have a lot of competition people may still have a hard time finding you. This business takes the same amount of time to become established as any other business – so if you need money for the rent next week, offer to paint your

neighbor's house or cut their grass. But go ahead and write your book, too. It could keep you from being desperate for money this time *next* year.

2. It isn't a hands-off business. You've seen the ads that say you can get up in the morning and see the money that has washed into your account overnight. This is actually true, especially if you live in Australia or if many of your customers happen to be on the other side of the world. But this business requires customer service, just like any other business. And marketing your book online takes steady, ongoing commitment. If you forget about it, your potential customers will never find you.

3. You will be selling something to people who have expectations that may not be met, no matter how hard you try to explain the nature of your product before the sale. There will also be people who can't understand your downloading instructions, or who don't understand their own computers.

4. There will even be people who panic just after they've ordered your book because they fear that they've been taken advantage of by some anonymous crook (that's you, of course) because their frantic emails are not answered seconds after they send them to you. If you have no patience with people, or if you don't have regular access to your email account so you can respond quickly to your customers, you'll be refunding most of your sales. Your relationship with your customers will keep you in business – it's no different from any other kind of business in that regard.

5. The internet is not a stable place for doing business. If you are used to following the rules, and having those rules remain the same from one year to the next, an internet business may be very uncomfortable for you. Not only does the technology constantly change, with new programs being developed on a daily basis, but laws and regulations change too.

The biggest change in the last year has affected the sending of mass-mailings to email accounts, in response to the deluge of spam that has been filling up our mailboxes. Because people have been outraged by the unscrupulous behavior of a few marketing companies and the unwanted emails take up so much valuable space on servers, it is becoming more and more difficult to get email newsletters to customers who have actually requested them. Next year, or next month, there will be more changes that affect this business. You have to be willing to accept change and be able to respond to it – or an Internet business will drive you over the bend.

6. You have to write a book. Ok, I know I already said this, but for some reason, some people forget this part. This, for me, is the fun part. In fact, I'm now sitting here listening to children squealing in the neighborhood swimming pool, the sun is shining, I have the day off, and yet I'm sitting at my computer writing this article. It would seem pointless if it wasn't obvious that I enjoy writing.

I'm not a great writer, as you've no doubt discovered, but I enjoy it. Many people don't. If you happen to be one of those people, there are some ways around your reluctance to sit down and write. First, you could get a tape recorder and talk into it as though you are talking to a friend. Later, you can transcribe what you've written or have someone else do it for you. You'll need to go back and clean it up so that it flows smoothly, but most of your work will be done for you.

Or you can team up with a spouse or other family member to share the work. Perhaps you enjoy a hobby or craft that you think you'd like to write about, and your spouse would love the challenge of figuring out the programs and processes for getting it turned into an ebook and selling it online.

7. You have to give people what they want, as opposed to what you want them to want, or what you're interested in. You may believe you just finished writing *The Great American Novel*, but can't bear to face the possibility of rejection slips from the publishing houses, so you'll take it to the masses yourself. But here's the catch – publishers take all the financial risk, and with eBooks the publisher is you. When you write an ebook, you are the one making the commercial and marketing decisions – you're the publisher, as well as the author. If you're new at it, you may make some initial mistakes.

Your potential buyers will let you know you haven't answered their needs by not buying your ebook. That doesn't mean you shouldn't write about what you love, but if your first attempt doesn't bring in the dollars you need, you will have to write another book that is more in line with the market. That also means you need to be flexible, you need to be honest with yourself, and you need to be willing to face some initial failure. After all, this is a business, and that's what businesses are all about, isn't it?

Start-up costs

- You do need a computer.
- You need Internet access, which costs from \$8 to \$25 a month for dial-up, and up to \$40 or more a month for cable. (I spend \$9.95 for my dial-up account, and it works just fine.)
- You also need a program that will compile your ebooks, which can cost from \$40 to \$299. (I'm giving away a free eBook that shows you free and inexpensive ways to turn your manuscript into a PDF ebook. Keep reading...)

- You'll need a domain name, which you can purchase for about \$8 from GoDaddy.com. This is an annual cost, and your domain name must be renewed each year.
- You'll need a hosting account so that your web site can be accessed by your customers, and this will cost from \$6 to \$20 a month. Again, one of the least expensive places to get a hosting account is GoDaddy.com. However, they offer few services, and you'll need to know what you're doing to use their servers. My dad tried their web creation program, but he couldn't get it to work, and the support was not as good as needed by a newby. Even though it costs a few dollars more, I strongly suggest WeDoHosting.com, a company in Canada that has excellent support, and almost immediate set-up. The prices are listed in Canadian dollars, so if you're from the States the price will actually end up being less. I've tried many different companies, and they are hands-down the best when it comes to support.
- You'll need a way to get your website loaded onto the host's servers, so you'll need an [FTP program](#), which can cost up to \$45 (although you can usually download a free trial version that works just fine). You can also use the FTP function of your [Internet Explorer browser](#). Your web host may also offer a file upload feature, which is usually very easy to use.
- You'll also find yourself being tempted by all the marketing books that promise to explain how to turn this small investment into a goldmine – and this can be an extremely expensive temptation. I'll get into this later.

Turning Your Ideas Into an eBook – the technical stuff

There are hundreds of Marketing sites and Marketing Gurus who will promise to teach you the 'Secrets' of making money on the Internet with your eBook – but there aren't any secrets.

Here's what you really need to do – check out the local bookstores and magazine racks and see what kind of books and articles the big publishers are buying. Find a subject that is obviously popular and then write an eBook about that subject.

Remember – you need a market in order to sell anything, and the big publishing companies know that. Learn from their experience! You have hundreds of different skills if you've lived any time at all, and one of those skills can be turned into an eBook that people will want to buy. But try to come up with a "twist" so that you have something new to offer your market.

That brings up the subject of fiction vs. nonfiction. If you have the *Great American Novel* swimming around in your head – fantastic. But in this case, I suggest that you pay your dues and send it to publishers, instead of trying to turn it into an ebook. Fiction doesn't sell well in ebook form, unless you're already a very famous author.

I suspect that the reason it doesn't work is that people find things on the Internet by putting a few words in the search bar of a search engine like [Google.com](http://www.google.com). A friend of mine in California has a delightful short novel that she self-published as a paperback using the services of [iUniverse.com](http://www.iuniverse.com). I built her website to show it off, at <http://www.oneleggedcricket.com>. But nobody ever finds it.

Unless the author is really well known, like Steven King, people won't put the author's name in the search bar. And if the novel, like Christine's, is about a grief-stricken young potter who regains her confidence in herself by striking up a friendship with an imaginary talking cricket – well, if people are searching for "grief counseling" they aren't looking for a novel. If they're looking for information about "crickets" or "pottery" they aren't looking for a novel. You get the picture.

If you have a novel, send it to the publishers. If they don't like it, and you've sent it out to at least 20 without success, then put it on the shelf and write another one. Pay your dues – you're a writer, and that's what writers do.

But if you have a skill that could be taught with words and pictures, and the skill would solve a common problem for a reasonable number of people who have credit cards, then you have what it takes to write an eBook that can sell. You don't have to be a great writer – you just need to be able to write in a way that people can understand what you're telling them.

Write your ebook on Microsoft Word, if at all possible. Or type or hand-write it and have a secretarial service put it on Word. You need to have your book in a format that computers can read. But don't ever try to sell a Word document as an eBook – you'll be giving away the store! Word documents can be shared on the Internet, but you can't secure them – anyone can change anything in the document, including the author's name.

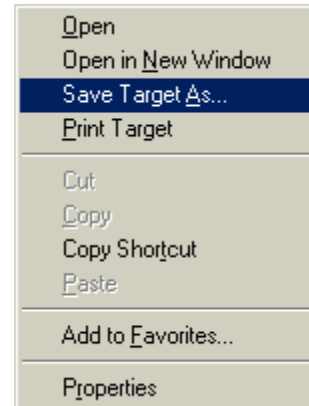
Once you have your book written (75 to 100 pages or more if it is all text, somewhat less if there are a lot of illustrations) then you need to turn it into a PDF document. The Acrobat Reader program is on almost everyone's computer now, and PDF documents (which are read by the Acrobat Reader software) can be secured so that people can't just copy and paste text and illustrations off the file. The PDF format is also prevents the spreading of viruses and worms because the program isn't built by Microsoft. And the documents print out on your buyer's printers exactly the way you intended them to - no surprises.

Adobe has an online service that will turn your document into a PDF file, called [Create Adobe PDF Online](#) which allows you to create 5 documents for free, and after that pay \$9.99 a month. Unfortunately, I haven't been able to get it to do what I wanted it to do, but you may have better luck.

There are also some programs that say they'll create a PDF document for less money than the [Adobe Acrobat program](#), which costs \$299.00. One of these less expensive programs is [Office Ready PDF Edition](#) by TemplateZone, which sells for \$39.95. I haven't used it, so I can't vouch for it - but it costs much less than the Adobe program and it comes with a money-back guarantee.

If you would like a free eBook that gives you more information and resources for creating PDF documents without buying the expensive Adobe program, click here for a free 16 page report called [5 Ways to Create PDF Without Adobe Acrobat](#).

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Speaking of kids and teachers - making money isn't the only good reason to write an eBook. If you have a talent or skill that is becoming somewhat rare or if you have personal experiences that would help children (or adults) understand the impact of events in the past, then by all means think about writing an eBook. Even if you have to give it away, you'll be contributing to the greater community. Teachers don't have big budgets anymore, and your eBook could be exactly what they need to make a lesson more interesting or worthwhile.

Putting your ebook on the Internet

Once you've figured out what to write about and you have your eBook typed up and turned into an eBook format, what do you do next? Well, you either build a website or you hunt around for an existing website that will sell your book for you. I highly recommend that you go with your own site. You'll be able to have plenty

of room on your own web page to explain what your book is about and why it will solve people's problems.

A short ad on someone else's page, listed among hundreds of other eBooks, is not going to give you much exposure. The two things you need in order to have a website are a host and the actual website design itself.

As I mentioned previously, I use several different hosts for my websites, and I've tried quite a few others that didn't work out for me. If I were starting over I would host all of my websites with WeDoHosting.com. They have answered every question I've ever asked, even the dumb ones - and they do it in a hurry. Because they're a Canadian company you even get a break on the exchange rate if you're based in the US - you can have a very nice site for less than \$10 a month with all the support you could ever ask for.

Now that you have a host, you need a web site. This is the tricky part - you won't want to take the time to learn everything you need to know about website programming and design, and you probably don't want to make too many mistakes in the actual writing of your sales page. When I was starting out I had to buy a ton of books about website design, and I made a ton of mistakes. Now there are a number of online companies that sell or give away templates, so you can just choose the look you want, type in what you want to say, add a picture or two if you have them, and upload your new site to your host.

Although there are a number of free templates that you can find by searching the Internet, I think the very best value is the [Push Button Letters](#) tool by Marlon Sanders. Marlon has been the leading online expert on copy writing since the Internet started - his new program actually helps you write a page that gets people interested in what you have to sell while also writing the HTML code that turns your writing into a web page. And the fill-in-the-blanks system is easy to follow - you'll learn how copy writing works just by using it a few times. It seems spendy at \$100.00, but what's the point of writing an eBook if nobody ever buys it?

You can also use one of the web hosts that offer built-in templates, and combine the hosting and design processes. If you're willing to take the time to create a full web site, with lots of pages, and you want help with marketing your website, too, most people recommend [Site Build It](#), which does just about everything for your (and it includes one of the most comprehensive marketing manuals you could ever find). The cost of the program includes a one-year hosting account, and your domain name, so it isn't really as expensive as it first appears.

However, if you just want to put up a one-page web site that shows off your ebook, you may prefer to use a web hosting service that offers templates and a web-building program as part of their service, such as [StartLogic.com](#).

Selling Your eBook

Now you're almost ready to roll. The last two things you need is a way to accept credit card payments online, and you need a marketing strategy. Even with a great sales page, you still need to help people actually find your site, or you'll be sitting out in the sticks with nobody coming to visit.

The credit card question is easy - sign up for a [ClickBank](#) account. It's the only rational way to go - they send you a check every two weeks, like clockwork, they have the best reputation world-wide, and their system is easy to set up. When someone fills out their secure order form they will immediately be taken to your download page. (You'll have to build a download page - there are technical things I can't teach you here. But it isn't hard.) Plus, it gives thousands of other website owners the opportunity to help you sell your book!

Marketing your book is the hard part. This will take far more time and aggravation than actually writing your book. And that makes sense - it's a whole lot easier to explain things to people than it is to get them to do something - and you probably aren't any more of a salesperson than I am. You are also working against the natural human instinct to distrust strangers.

For that reason it is important to create a real relationship with people. You do that by being impeccably honest, by giving them information for free that actually helps them so they know you aren't just in it for the money, and by creating an opt-in list that allows you to send out a weekly or monthly newsletter with more tips and information about your subject.

I won't get into the ins and outs of publishing an email newsletter, but you basically send an informative email out to people who have asked for one on a regular basis. This helps people remember you, and in time they feel they know you. Trust and relationships are what builds a business. You don't need a newsletter, but you do need to communicate with your potential customers. So be sure to answer every email you get, and quickly!

As soon as you even begin to think about going into the eBook business you'll start to notice how many Marketing Gurus want your money. They almost always have the "secret" to your success, and for some reason you can always buy their secrets for "only" \$97.00. That's a very expensive eBook. They can actually sell their books for so much money for the same reason that the people who got rich on the Alaskan Gold Rush were outfitters selling equipment and maps to the prospectors. The marketing guys know you want to make money, and they tap into your need, interest, or desperation.

I admit that I bought a whole lot of those books because when I was starting out I didn't have a clue what I was doing. I knew I needed help. But when I finally sat down and did my figures a few months ago I realized that I would have become profitable months sooner if I had not bought all those eBooks. I've now put myself on a "marketing eBook diet" - but I'm still tempted every time I read one of their sales pages.

One thing I highly suggest is that you pay attention to those sales pages, especially if you read one that makes you reach for your wallet. Put your credit card back in your pocket and then look to see what the writer did to make you trust him, or to convince you that what he was selling would fill your needs. You can learn by watching the experts, without spending all your money.

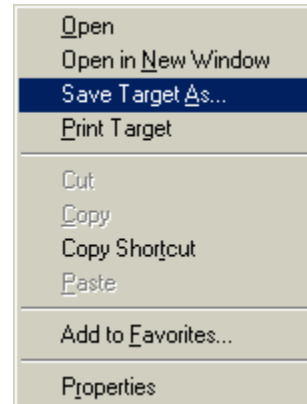
But you do need to know how the business works, and you obviously have to learn from someone who's already done it. Of all the eBooks I bought, the only ones I would ever recommend to a friend are the ones written by Jim Edwards, and a new ebook I've just purchased that was written by [Sean Burns](#).

I purchased Jim Edwards' book [33 Days to Online Profits](#) about a year ago, and I've done everything he tells you to do. I didn't get it all done in 33 days (I'm still working at it) but he gives you a simple, day-by-day plan that works. No other eBook will tell you anything that Jim doesn't explain thoroughly, and his eBook only costs \$29.00.

Jim also offers a free report called [A Case Study of 33 Days](#).

(To save the report to your own computer, use your **right** mouse button, and choose the "Save Target As" link from the pop-up menu. Then save the report to your desktop so you can easily find it.)

Even if you don't buy his book, (and you should - it is the foundation for any online business) you should still sign up for Jim's bi-weekly audio newsletter. This guy gives away a huge amount of information. You can find his sign-up form at <http://www.igottatellyou.com/>



Jim has another ebook that I highly recommend, especially if you are fairly new at writing for the public. The book is [Turn Words into Traffic](#), and it's a godsend for anyone trying to get a start writing for the web. One free software tool he recommends more than paid for the book for me – I use it constantly.

That's it. You will find in these ebooks everything that you can ever know about the ebook business and marketing online. Using just Jim Edwards' Case Study and Turn Words into Traffic, and Sean Burns's book Rankings Revealed, along

with the free newsletters they offer, and you will have all the “secrets” of this business. All other Internet marketing books just repeat what these two fellows tell you, (and most of them are far more expensive, by the way).

So, Are You Going to Get Rich?

Some people probably do get rich, especially if they find a niche market that has no competition. Or if they are able to spend full-time, plus their spouse's time, on marketing and customer service. For regular folks like you and me, who start the business in our spare time at night and on the weekends, it's reasonable to expect things to take a little longer, and to bring us a smaller income than we would get if we had more time to devote to our business.

I'm completely happy with the income I'm producing, which (now that I've stopped buying all those marketing books) has given me a 50% raise over the salary I make on my day job. I'm made the extra money I needed for a down payment for a house, (and remodeling it as well), and I've turned a very enjoyable hobby into a paying business.

I know that if I devote enough time to this business, I can be earn a good income before I retire within a year – which I consider essential the way the Social Security Trust Fund is going. Some people will do better than I have, and some people will never sell an eBook. It all depends on the same things that every business is built on - your willingness to learn everything you can, keep good records, stay motivated, and work on the business every single day.

If you decide this is a business that interests you - good luck, and remember to have fun. And drop me a note to let me know how you're doing! If you write an ebook and get it up on the web, let me know and I'll add a link to your website on The-Healthy-Family.com!



The-Healthy-Family.com

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