



**F**or indie authors as well as traditionally published authors who have retained their audio rights, now is the time to expand to audiobooks—the fastest growing segment of the publishing industry. According to the Audio Publishers Association (APA), audiobook sales in 2016 totaled more than \$2.1 billion, up 18 percent over 2015, and unit sales were up 34 percent. Of the 50,000 audiobooks produced in 2016, 77 percent were fiction, with the most popular genres being mystery/thriller/suspense, science fiction/fantasy and romance. Among the weaker performers, children’s fiction made up only 10 percent of the market.

### IS AUDIO RIGHT FOR YOU?

Audiobook sales are growing, but that doesn’t mean they’re for everyone. If you are traditionally published, read over your contract(s) or talk to your agent regarding audio rights. If your publisher holds them, it’ll be up to them whether or not they want to exploit them (though you can certainly make your wishes known—best done through your agent, if you have one). If the rights remain yours, then the decision to pursue the format is yours, too. And if you’re self-published, of course, it’s wholly up to you.

Certain types of books perform better than others in audio format. Investigate yours: Look at how flooded the bestselling audio lists are in your category, whether or not the same handful of bestsellers dominate there, and how many titles are performing exceptionally well. For example, Troy Juliar, chief content officer with RBmedia, says romance readers are huge consumers of digital storytelling. “They download a lot of e-books, consuming two, three or four a month sometimes. We’ve begun to see audio listeners in the romance category consume audiobooks almost at the same level.”

Joanna Penn, a bestselling independent author with 23 books across genres, from thriller to nonfiction, has created audiobooks for most of her titles. “If you have a book that is selling well in e-book format, it might be worth doing in audio as well,” she says. “It is an investment, but you can reach readers who consume in different ways and expand your readership. This is particularly effective if you have multiple books aimed at the same target readership.”

As with other areas of publishing, a platform is an early key to success—and the stronger your platform in other formats, the better your chances of succeeding in a new one. “It’s all about finding an audience,” Juliar says.

“[For] self-published authors who have already proven they can do that or are on their way to establishing a toe-hold with a good group of enthusiastic fans, their chance of success in audio dramatically increases.”

## WAYS TO CREATE YOUR OWN AUDIOBOOK

It's easier than ever to create and release an audio-book do-it-yourself style, and new platforms spring up regularly. (Just this past summer, for instance, e-book distributor Draft2Digital and audiobook company FindawayVoices partnered to launch a new service that helps authors create and release audio editions.) Here's a look at some of the current leaders in the field:

- **ACX** is an Amazon platform that offers an indie audiobook service similar to that of self-publishing an e-book through Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP). You can narrate the project yourself, or hire a voice artist. Once created, these audio titles are distributed through Audible, Amazon and iTunes.

With ACX, publication requires a seven-year commitment, with your choice of agreements. Exclusive contracts get a higher royalty payout (40 percent of retail sales), but the audiobooks can't be published on any platforms apart from Amazon/Audible and iTunes. With the non-exclusive option, the royalty is lower (25 percent of retail sales), but authors can sell through whatever venues they wish. There's also a royalty-share option, popular among those with smaller budgets, for which the narrator/producer and the author split the 40 percent royalties 50-50, with an exclusive arrangement but no upfront costs.

A standard contract with ACX includes 25 free codes to share with reviewers or use in promotional giveaways.

- **RBMEDIA** is one of the largest audiobook publishers in the world, with more than 32,000 titles across traditional imprints as well as its own annual audiobook production. The company publishes curated content and then sells it on the RBmedia direct-to-consumer platform, audiobooks.com, and a branded library platform, RBdigital.

Tantor Media is one of six imprints at RBmedia, and 30 percent of its list is self-published genre fiction. “We have a team of six to eight editors who are scouring the self-publishing environment [at Wattpad, KDP

and elsewhere in search of] authors who would be viable on audiobooks,” Juliar says. Those scouts look for e-books priced from \$3.99–5.99 with high reader engagement, strong sales and positive reviews. (Authors may also query the imprint directly, reaching out to Juliar at [tjuliar@recordedbooks.com](mailto:tjuliar@recordedbooks.com) or Ron Formica at [ron@tantor.com](mailto:ron@tantor.com).)

Tantor Media's standard publishing agreement grants the company an exclusive, renewable license for at least seven years and includes industry standard royalty rates and an advance against those royalties that varies on a case-by-case basis. The company incurs all the production and marketing costs, draws upon an established talent pool for narration, and handles the post-production work in-house.

- **LISTENUP AUDIOBOOKS** helps authors produce and distribute their own audiobooks. In 2016, ListenUp partnered with Canadian-based e-book platform Kobo to offer special discounts to Kobo Writing Life authors interested in turning their e-book content into audiobooks.

## SPOTLIGHT ON AUDIBLE

Amazon's branded audio subscription service, Audible, both produces and distributes listener-oriented entertainment, including audiobooks. “With the ubiquity of smartphones and smart speakers, more people are listening to audiobooks at home on their sofas, in their kitchens, while gardening and exercising, and on their commute,” Audible Executive Vice President and Publisher Beth Anderson says.

“In 2016, our customers around the world downloaded almost 2 billion hours of programming. On any given day, Audible listeners average about two hours of listening to Audible content.”

Authors with an eye on the platform need to keep in mind how readers buy books through Audible. The most popular Audible subscription includes one credit each month that can be used toward the purchase of any book at any price. For those subscribers, additional books can be bought at a discount of 30 percent. Listeners tend to use that credit for books at a higher price point (i.e. full-length traditionally published novels), meaning novellas and other forms of short fiction may find less success on the site.

## EXTRA EAR CANDY

- The Audio Publishing Association ([audiopub.org](http://audiopub.org)) offers industry-specific education and other resources for those serious about audio publishing; membership dues for individuals begin at \$165.
- Self-publisher Rob Dircks offers a solid tutorial on recording your own audiobooks: [robdircks.com/yes-you-can-record-your-own-audiobook-heres-how](http://robdircks.com/yes-you-can-record-your-own-audiobook-heres-how).

David Markowitz, head of strategy and partnerships at ListenUp Audiobooks, explains that ListenUp IndiePub ([listenupindie.pub](http://listenupindie.pub)) was developed as a way to extend to independent authors the same services they offer to major publishers and traditional authors at a reasonable cost. “When an author comes to us to record a book, they can be assured that the finished product will be of the highest quality and that they’ll get to be a full collaborator in the process,” he says. “ListenUp distributes to every audiobook outlet in the U.S., both retail and library, as well as a number of outlets overseas.” On average, authors can expect to pay around \$2,500–3,000 for the finished product. There are no upfront costs for distribution (unless you’re using them for distribution only), and authors receive 80 percent of the royalties for each sale after the respective platform has taken its cut (Audible, for example, takes 25 percent).

- **DIY** is an option for those looking to maintain control over the entire audiobook process, rather than turning it over to professionals. Rule No. 1? Quality counts. “Seventy-five percent of audiobook listeners sample a book before they purchase it,” Markowitz says. “So, if the narrator isn’t very good or the audio quality is lousy, that can make a big difference.” In addition, leading audiobook retailers have certain recording standards that must be met, such as file size specifications and volume level requirements, for the book to be carried.

Authors can rent a sound studio and hire a narrator, or consider investing in the necessary equipment (microphones, a soundproofed room and editing software) to record and edit the audiobooks on their own. This option isn’t for everyone and requires knowledge about sound

editing in order to create files that meet retailers’ technical standards.

The author is responsible for all the production costs as well as the distribution. Aside from Audible, DIY authors can look into a distributor such as Big Happy Family Audio ([bighappyfamilyaudio.com](http://bighappyfamilyaudio.com)) or Author’s Republic ([authorsrepublic.com](http://authorsrepublic.com)) to get the finished product to market.

Costs vary; professional narrators’ rates begin at about \$150 per finished hour and range depending on their experience and popularity. On average, an 80,000-word novel ends up being about eight finished hours of audio. It takes about six hours of recorded and edited content to create one finished hour.

Penn prices her audiobooks, which she sells on Audible and iTunes, based on length: Her novels average \$17.95, with shorter fiction around \$6.95 and box sets around \$21.95, and her nonfiction ranges from \$4.95 to \$19.95.

“I make back my audiobook costs in about three months for nonfiction, and since I retain the exclusive rights, the rest is profit,” she says.

## HOW TO REACH MORE LISTENERS

Penn—who literally wrote the book on this kind of marketing, *How to Market a Book*—offers up therein a few suggestions specific to audiobooks:

- Include links to your audiobooks on your website along with audio excerpts.
- Pitch sites that specifically review audiobooks: [audiobookboom.com](http://audiobookboom.com) and [audavoxx.com](http://audavoxx.com) are two to try. Book- or genre-oriented podcasts are another way to reach listeners: See if you can land some interview spots.
- There is evidence that a spike on BookBub for an e-book promotion will also spike audiobook sales.

“Authors should really be thinking about ways they want to use audio to entice and engage new readers,” Markowitz says. “Write some extra material that can only be found in the audio version, [or] consider recording an interview with the book’s narrator (many of whom have big followings).” **WD**

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