

Digital publishing is still in its early days. Although most authors are aware of it as a possibility, it is, for many, a daunting prospect. This document is intended to clarify a few basic concepts.

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Digital publishing An overview

- A little background
- Different formats of ebook
- Digital Rights Management
- Distributors & distribution options
- Self-publishing



A little background and a few technical terms

Devices for reading digital publications

“Publishing: the act of turning the author’s intellectual property into a saleable product that generates an income.”

David Brawn “The Author”

Dedicated (e-ink) readers and tablet computers are very different beasts

There are two main types of device that can be used for reading ebooks: dedicated e-book readers, including Kindle, Nook and others, and tablet computers such as the iPad or any iOS device, Kindle Fire and Google Nexus.

Dedicated e-readers use electronic ink (e-ink) and only display in shades of grey. In many respects, these e-ink devices imitate paper: unlike a computer screen, they don’t emit light, but rely on external ambient light. This means that their screens don’t suffer with glare and reflection problems when used in bright light as happens with many digital devices. These readers are specifically designed for reading books; they may have limited web connectivity, but the reader doesn’t have the distraction of incoming emails, Facebook messages and tweets.

Tablets have additional functionalities and high quality, full-colour screens; they are much more versatile than e-ink readers and can even replace a laptop computer in many situations. Unsurprisingly, they also make excellent ebook readers, able to cope with a range of ebook enhancements as well as being suitable for multimedia books and applications, which are particularly popular for children’s books, educational books, newspapers and magazines.



Tablets can replace computers in many situations

Different formats of ebook

The technology of digital publishing has changed rapidly and a number of different book formats have arisen, some of them tied to specific devices. Some of these formats have already been superseded, while others are now recognised as standards.

Not every ebook format can be read on every kind of device, which is where it begins to get complicated. In the following table, we have listed a few of the most common formats that we work with in Tantamount, as well as some notes about each. These formats cover all the main devices a reader is likely to come across. Depending on the project, each manuscript we edit may be re-formatted and versions produced for any - or all - of these standards.

Adobe PDF

For most of us, the PDF is the most familiar digital publishing format, but it hardly ranks among the categories of ebook. When they first came into being, the big advantage of PDFs was that they retained their format when passed from one device to another. Now, though, this becomes a problem, as the text will not reflow to fit small screens. Many devices that are used to read ebooks have a much smaller screen than a typical computer monitor, which means that reading a PDF can become an unpleasant exercise in zooming and scrolling left and right.



Digital publishing

No two books
are the same:
different formats
are appropriate for
different books

Standard epub

Today, epub is probably the most common format for digital publications and can be read on all kinds of dedicated e-readers, tablets and smartphones, as well as on laptops and other computers. Unlike a traditional book, the text of an epub does not exist as a series of pages, but is instead a more fluid unit which reformats itself, flowing to fit the screen of the device it is being displayed on. A standard epub book may also have other limited functionalities that an ordinary print book cannot have, such as a linked index or glossary and links between pages or external links, but it is still very much a traditional book.

Enhanced epub

Enhanced epubs take advantage of the multimedia potential of the digital world to include video, audio and interactive elements that complement the text content of the book. Because the technology is changing so quickly, not all these functionalities will work on all devices, but if the book is correctly produced, most devices will simply ignore content they cannot process and the reader can still enjoy the book, albeit in a simpler form.



Fixed Layout

Some books are not suitable for the fluid text flow of the epub format - no poet is happy if the layout artist changes his poem's line breaks! - and some texts, particularly non-fiction and children's books, are written to work in blocks of information that must be preserved. Fixed-layout ebooks (available for Nook, Kindle and iOS devices) are the answer to this problem, allowing the full functionality of an enhanced ebook, with the control of layout and design demanded by this type of work.

Mobi/Kindle

This is a specific format of ebook, comparable to the standard epub format, that was created to be read on any of the different Kindle models. Most other devices, including tablets, computers and smartphones can also read these ebooks by using special software.

Apple iBook (multimedia)

As we have seen with the epub format, the basic elements that are used to enhance an ebook are audio and video. There are, however, many more possibilities that take advantage of the full potential of the digital medium. The Apple iBook format allows a range of multimedia elements that enrich traditional text content to provide an enhanced experience for the reader. Because of its versatility and huge potential for creativity, this is an ideal format for children's and educational books.

iBooks are distributed via the Apple iBookStore and can only be read on iPads, not on other devices.



Digital publishing

DRM

DRM protection
is optional

Digital Rights Management (DRM) is the system that encrypts a file to stop multiple copies being made illegally. When an ebook is downloaded, it may be locked to the user's registered device or otherwise restricted. Different ebook formats have different DRM systems, and encrypting is optional.

Distributors & distribution options

Once an ebook has been created, it must be distributed. This can be done via the publisher's, the author's, or any other website, or through the main online bookshops such as Amazon and the iBookStore. Different distributors allow different formats and most have an approval process during which they check compliance with standards and some copyright issues, etc. Some distributors require a preview or free sample of a book be made available so the reader has a better idea of what they are buying.



Digital publishing

Self-publishing

Even simple
(non-enhanced)
text content should
be improved by
editorial review
and professional
presentation

A lot of authors choose to self-publish their book as they see digital publication as an easy option. But, in general, authors are not editors, and nor are they graphic designers and technical experts. Many self-published manuscripts can benefit from rigorous editing and professional design to raise them from being the equivalent of simple photocopied and stapled manuscripts.



Digital publishing



Tantamount's international team of professionals boasts over a quarter of a century of experience in areas including graphic design, publishing, IT and language training. Now we are working to push the boundaries of the evolving space where technology and tradition, image and language meet and interact.

We are proud to offer our expertise in design, education and digital publishing to clients of all sizes, from individuals to professional associations to multi-national publishing houses.

Take a look at our [creative portfolio](#) and visit the [Tantamount website](#) to find out more about us and about our projects, and check our blog for more technological tips and news for writers and publishers.

authorbranding



The concept of author branding spans three important areas: publishing, visual design and marketing. At [authorbranding.co.uk](#) we harness state-of-the-art technology to empower indie authors to discover the right tools and formats for their work so they can develop and present a clear, coherent and consistent brand image.

We can help you give your writing a professional edge. Working with us will allow you to focus on your writing while we deal with all your digital, editorial and design needs, saving you time, money and headaches.

To learn more about the importance of a coherent, unique and professional image, check [authorbranding.co.uk](#), where you'll find full details of our services for authors, artists, publishers and businesses.