



Retailers and Distributors And the Required Files

Overview

This guide provides information on the difference between online distributors and online retailers. You will need to decide what format you wish to publish your book in – paperback, hard cover, ebook (digital book, such as kindle or epub). This determines the various files that will need to be generated. Included is a table with the various online distributors and the file format they require.

There is some detailed information on the various interior file types.

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Retailers and Distributors

And the Required Files

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The Main Online Retailers

Amazon

Amazon is probably the biggest, best-known online retailer. They sell books in print, ebook (their proprietary kindle app and readers use .mobi files), and audio books. For author's selling their books, there are two separate divisions – **KDP** (Kindle Direct Publishing) and **CreateSpace** (handles paperback books). CreateSpace requires the interior be in PDF format, specifically designed for the trim size of the book.

While you can now publish both print and ebook through KDP, there are distinct advantages to the author to continue to use CreateSpace for the printed book – able to order far less expensive author copies, for one. If you wish to publish both print and kindle versions with Amazon you will need to set up an account with each division. Refer to Dome Tree's PDF guides for details on how to set up these two Amazon accounts properly.

- CreateSpace Account Setup
- KDP Account Setup

As to ebooks, Amazon KDP will accept either an ePub file or the same file created for Smashwords. There are advantages and considerations for each method. One clear advantage is saving the time and cost of producing an ePub file, when the Smashwords file will do. The big advantage an ePub offers over a Word document is that there is far more control over how things will actually look. For example, the Kindle default for a chapter title is the same serif font used in the body. If this bothers you, then you will need to either upload an ePub or ask for your file to go through Kindle Create to achieve some control over formatting.

I personally have done both all three and will continue to use all three depending on how important appearance is to me. I find most authors are satisfied with the results of just the Word file.

Smashwords

Smashwords handles ebooks only, no paperbacks. They are an online retailer, selling ebooks, PDFs, ePubs, kindle mobi, and lrf files (Sony portable reader file). In addition to selling ebooks, they are also a distributor, sending your ebook to major ebook retailers and library platforms (the online version of public libraries, for example). You can read the details here (<https://www.smashwords.com/distribution>). The premium catalogue will distribute your book to Apple, Barnes & Noble, Scribd, Kobo, Inktera, and a multitude of country specific retailers such as Indigo in Canada. The advantage of using Smashwords is that they do all the work of connecting with hundreds of retailers, and track the sales. In terms of management, this is a real time saver.

You will need to set up an account with Smashwords while you're there checking out all the great places your book will be sold.



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IngramSpark

If you want a hardback cover on your book, then IngramSpark is for you! They also do a variety of binding types for paperbacks, and they distribute ebooks. IngramSpark will do print on demand (like Amazon KDP), make your book available to bricks and mortar stores, online retailers similar to Smashwords, and will also generate hardcover books. You can read the details here (<https://myaccount.ingramspark.com/> and click on *How It Works*). They also put your book in the database for the Espresso print on demand machines found in some of the larger public libraries and some university libraries. You go on the computer, choose your book, and the machine prints it on the spot, done in five minutes, and of a quality that rivals the quality of a paperback you buy at the drug store. There are specific dimensions they will accept, so if this is a route you wish to go, check into the options for dimensions if you wish a book from Espresso to look the same as a printed book from Amazon.

Overview of File Types

For authors interested in both paperback print and ebook, and the widest distribution possible, most go with generating the print files uploaded to Amazon KDP, and a carefully prepared Word document uploaded to both Amazon KDP and Smashwords (for ebook distribution through Amazon and all the other major distributors).

	Front Cover	Full Cover	Word File	ePub File	PDF File
Amazon KDP Paperback books		X			X
Amazon KDP Kindle ebooks	X		X or X		
Smashwords	X		X		
IngramSpark Print		X			X
IngramSpark eBook	X			X	

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Print Files

The manuscript is styled in a program called Adobe InDesign (the same application that is used to generate epub files). The work of styling is much the same as with ebooks. All of your styling will be striped out and new styles will be created and applied to all the text of your book. The styling and layout done for an ePub is about 80% the same as for print, so if you are doing both, there is a significant savings.

There are good typography guidelines that dictate how printed books are laid out. For example, the copyright page is on the left immediately after the title page, and new chapters should start on the right side.

I always include a few extra blank pages at the back. As you publish more books, you may wish to go back to your earlier books and add this information to the back matter. With the extra pages, you do not need to worry about having to add more pages to the back of your book and changing the width of the spine (as this may require producing a new cover).

When done, the file is exported as a PDF, using carefully chosen settings to ensure the least issues with Amazon, IngramSpark, or local printers. It should be noted that one PDF does not necessarily work for all printers. Some may have different inside and outside margin requirements. Therefore, the PDF file generated is made specifically to meet the requirements of your chosen printer.

eBook Files

eBook is a general term referring to any digital version of a book. Each distributor (companies that get your book out to a huge number of retailers globally) and retailer (sells directly to the public) has their own set of requirements and rules for how the ebook should be formatted. For example, Smashwords has an automated file review tool called the Meatgrinder. It can be quite persnickety. Yet, Smashwords is a great way to get your ebook into the largest number of retailers globally. They are a distributor and they are a retailer as well. Sales through Smashwords is one of the more lucrative options.

With the finicky review tools all distributors and retailers use, most authors choose not to do this prep work because of the frustration in trying to get it through the 'grinder with no issues. If the Meatgrinder (or other review tool) spits out your file, they give little information on what specifically is the problem. And that can lead to days of trying various fixes to resolve the issue. I once had a file spit out with the error note that the jpgs were causing it to fail. The problem for me? There were no jpgs in the file whatsoever. It's always easier to leave this work to people who have fought their way through the hazards and know most of the pitfalls.

To publish your book as an ebook, a carefully formatted Microsoft Word document may be required, like with Smashwords. They publish a 262 page book of exact requirements for how the document is set up and prepared.



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It is not for the faint-hearted.

Other online distributors require an epub formatted collection of files (see next section for details). IngramSpark is one such example. Amazon will take either a carefully formatted Microsoft Word document (can use the same one for Smashwords and Amazon) or an epub. Who you wish to publish with will determine what kind of file Dome Tree will generate for your ebook.

ePub Files

Preparation for print is done in the same application as ePubs. The styling and layout done for an ePub is about 80% the same as for print, so if you are doing both, there is a significant savings.

There are several programs, like InDesign, that will generate ePubs from a properly and fully styled document, but even with the best of them you will need to be able to crack the file open and know some code to correct common display errors that occur on specific devices. For example images and graphics often display too small. Fonts should not have any colour applied to ensure the reader can change to night reading. If the font is styled black then the text won't be seen against the black background for night reading. And any text that was formatted without a style totally bloats your book with additional lines upon lines of code. This will make your book a bigger download and take up more space on devices than necessary.

One thing that may sway you towards generating an ePub is that if you wish to use IngramSpark as a distributor, they require an ePub file for their digital books. While they do not sell books themselves, IngramSpark is an interesting option because they can handle printing, including printing a hardcover version of your book.

One final note about ePubs. And this is important. ePubs are a unique format and it must be opened in an application that is designed to display ePubs (like Sigil, Calibre, iBook). To try to open in anything else, is like trying to open a Microsoft Word document in a movie application. You will get an error because a movie application is not designed to display a Word document. It is exactly the same with ePubs. They require an ePub-specific application