The Independent Author Income Survey

Conducted for ALLi, the Alliance of Independent Authors

March 27, 2023
Contents

Management Summary
Introduction
  Background & Objectives
  Methodology
  Overview of the Respondents
Publishing Experience & Output
  First Publication
  Number of Books Published
Most Prevalent Genres
  Primary Genre
  Secondary Genre
Income
  Past Two Years’ Increase/Decrease
  Past Two Years’ Average Incomes
  Frequency Distribution of 2022 Incomes
Business Models & Income Streams
  Business Models
  Income From Published Products
  Services Income
  Income from Licenses
  Marketing Strategies
  Estate Planning
Demographic Characteristics
  Age
  Education
  Race
  Disability
  Gender
  Sexual Orientation
Management Summary

• ALLi, the Alliance of Independent Authors, together with consultants The Future of Publishing and SKS Advisors, conducted an online survey of self-published authors in February/March of 2023.

• The survey focused on gaining an improved understanding of self-published authors’ incomes and income-related strategies. Self-published authors were defined as individuals who had self-published at least one book and who spent at least 50% of their working time on writing and publishing activities.

• 41% of self-publisher respondents had earned more than $20,000 as authors during the past two years.

• The median writing and self-publishing-related income in 2022 of all self-publishers responding was $12,749, a 53% increase over the previous year. Average (mean) incomes skewed much higher: $82,600 in 2022, a 34% increase. Removing from the analysis the respondents with no income and those with over $1 million in income resulted in a lower average income of $65,482.

• Romance, fantasy/scifi/speculative, and crime/thriller/detective were by far the most prevalent genres in which self-publishers primarily were engaged, representing a combined 57% of respondents.
Management Summary (continued)

- Self-published authors derived income from a variety of products and formats, though books in mainstream formats comprised the main sources.

- Although most respondents derived no income from publishing-related services, between 8% and 13% reported income from services such as editing, speaking, teaching, and other freelance work. Few were deriving income from licensing their works.

- 60% of self-published authors had published their first books within the past 8 years, and 25% since 2020, indicating the ongoing vitality of this community.

- Over half of the respondents had published more than 10 books, and 20% had published over 30.

- Among demographic characteristics of self-published authors:
  - Two-thirds of respondents identified as cisgender females;
  - More than 90% identified themselves as 35 years of age or older;
  - 80% held an undergraduate or postgraduate college degree;
  - 11% considered themselves to be disabled; 86% were Caucasian/white;
  - Just over 10% identified as LGBTQIA+.
This project’s primary objective was to gain an improved understanding of the incomes and income-related strategies of self-published authors.

### Background
- ALLi, the Alliance of Independent Authors, is a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to foster ethics and excellence in self-publishing. ALLi empowers authors through member advice and community, surveillance of the self-publishing sector, and advocacy for independent authors. [www.allianceindependentauthors.org](http://www.allianceindependentauthors.org)
- ALLi identified a need to develop a better statistical portrait of the incomes and related activities of self-published authors writing in English – defined as those who spend 50% or more of their working time in writing and publishing activities.
- Such a statistical portrait can enable relevant comparisons with data from other, more “traditional” author surveys.

### Objectives
- The principal objectives of the survey included achieving a better understanding of self-published authors’:
  - Incomes and income trends
  - Publishing experience and output
  - Primary and secondary genres in which they write and publish
  - Business models and income streams
  - Demographic characteristics
Introduction: Methodology

ALLi worked with two consultancies, The Future of Publishing and SKS Advisors, to develop, field, and analyze the findings of a quantitative survey of self-published authors writing in English

• Extensive briefings and discussions were held to outline key project objectives and the best approaches for accomplishing them.

• The ALLi/consultant team developed the online survey questionnaire.

• ALLi drew upon its own resources and those of partner organizations to develop email lists and post the survey link on social media.

• The online survey was fielded from February 26 to March 10, 2023. No financial or other incentives were offered to potential respondents.

• The survey garnered a total of 2,539 respondents, of whom 2,261 (89%) met the qualification criteria. Of these, 1,843 (82%) completed the full survey questionnaire.

• The consultants have produced the analysis and findings presented in this document.
Almost 90% of the initial respondents to the survey met the qualifications to complete it; of those, 41% reported earning $20,000 per year or more from their writing and publishing over the past two years.

**Q. I have self-published at least one book and I spend at least 50% of my working time on writing and publishing activities**

- Yes: 89.05%
- No: 10.95%

**Q. I earnt $20K+ a year, in the past two years**

- Yes: 41.35%
- No: 58.65%

*N = 2,539 (All respondents)  N = 2,259 (Self-publishers)*
Introduction: Overview of the Respondents

60% of the respondents were located in North America and 21% in the United Kingdom, followed by Australia/New Zealand and Europe each representing about 8%

Q. My primary location of residence is:

![Bar chart showing the distribution of respondents by location]

Although the survey was of English-language authors, over 10% of the respondents were from non-English-first countries.
60% of the self-published author respondents had published for the first time during the past eight years (2015-2022), and a full 25% since 2020 – indicating the ongoing vitality of the self-publishing community

Q. In what year did you publish for the first time?

N = 2,218
Over half of the self-published authors had published more than 10 books, and 20% had published more than 30

Q. How many books have you published?*

*Note: Respondents were instructed that one book title in three formats should be counted as one title.

N = 1,887
Romance, fantasy/scifi/speculative, and crime/thriller/detective were by far the most prevalent genres in which self-publishers primarily were engaged, representing a combined 57% of all respondents.
The same three categories – romance, fantasy, and crime – were also other self-published authors’ most cited secondary genres.

Q. In what secondary genres do you write?
60% of respondents indicated that their self-publishing income had increased in the past year, and only 17% reported a decrease.

Q. Is your self-publishing income increasing or decreasing year on year?

- Increasing: 59.62%
- Decreasing: 16.80%
- Staying the same: 19.82%
- Don't know: 3.76%

N = 1,887
Median self-publishing income in 2022 was $12,749, a 53% increase over the prior year; the success reported by some authors raised the mean average income to $82,600 in 2022 – a 34% increase over the previous year.

Q. What was the gross revenue (before costs) brought in by your total writing and self-publishing business in your last financial year and the year before that?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Currency*</th>
<th>Last year</th>
<th>Year Before</th>
<th>Last year (US$)</th>
<th>Year before (US$)</th>
<th># of respondents</th>
<th>Annual growth rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USD</td>
<td>13,477</td>
<td>9,000</td>
<td>13,477</td>
<td>9,000</td>
<td>1,137</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GBP</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>9,725</td>
<td>6,077</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUD</td>
<td>24,000</td>
<td>16,150</td>
<td>16,034</td>
<td>10,786</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EURO</td>
<td>14,500</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>15,430</td>
<td>8,513</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAD</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>9,000</td>
<td>10,173</td>
<td>6,540</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZD</td>
<td>14,900</td>
<td>10,550</td>
<td>8,743</td>
<td>6,589</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (Weighted Average)</strong></td>
<td><strong>12,749</strong></td>
<td><strong>8,334</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,853</strong></td>
<td><strong>53%</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Currency*</th>
<th>Last year</th>
<th>Year Before</th>
<th>Last year (US$)</th>
<th>Year before (US$)</th>
<th># of respondents</th>
<th>Annual growth rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USD</td>
<td>88,500</td>
<td>73,100</td>
<td>88,500</td>
<td>73,100</td>
<td>1,137</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GBP</td>
<td>87,500</td>
<td>48,500</td>
<td>105,297</td>
<td>58,365</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUD</td>
<td>41,750</td>
<td>32,500</td>
<td>27,484</td>
<td>21,395</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EURO</td>
<td>20,136</td>
<td>11,031</td>
<td>21,460</td>
<td>11,756</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAD</td>
<td>85,539</td>
<td>81,674</td>
<td>62,195</td>
<td>59,384</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZD</td>
<td>29,500</td>
<td>21,000</td>
<td>18,083</td>
<td>12,873</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (Weighted Average)</strong></td>
<td><strong>82,607</strong></td>
<td><strong>61,694</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,853</strong></td>
<td><strong>32%</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Currencies with fewer than 10 responses (15 in total) are excluded*
The majority of respondents (56%*) indicated total incomes of $20,000 or less, while almost 18% reported income over $100,000 per year.

Q. What was the gross revenue (before costs) brought in by your total writing and self-publishing business in your last financial year and the year before that?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Range</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$0</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,000-$2,500</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2,501-$5,000</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$5,001-$10,000</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,001-$20,000</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,001-$50,000</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,001-$100,000</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,001-$250,000</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$250,001-$500,000</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$500,001-$1,000,000</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;$1,000,000</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Median ($12,749)  
Mean ($82,607)

N = 1,853

*This figure varies slightly from that reported on p. 6, probably a result of further thought when asked for a specific number in this separate question.  
2022 reported self-publishing income in $US
Removing the outliers from provided income estimates (i.e., respondents reporting no income or income above $1,000,000) had little effect on frequency distribution but did lower the mean average income.

Q. What was the gross revenue (before costs) brought in by your total writing and self-publishing business in your last financial year and the year before that?

Income: Frequency Distribution of 2022 Incomes (Eliminating Outliers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Range</th>
<th>Frequency Distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-1000</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,001-2,500</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,501-5,000</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,001-10,000</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,001-20,000</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,001-50,000</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50,001-100,000</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100,001-250,000</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250,001-500,000</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500,001-1,000,000</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Median ($13,000) Mean ($65,482)

2022 reported self-publishing income in $US

N = 1,774
Over three-quarters of self-publishers were using either exclusive self-publishing or wide self-publishing models, but other approaches were employed by some practitioners.

Q. Which of these business models most closely matches yours?

“You publish books exclusively with one self-publishing platform / retailer, e.g., Amazon.”

“You publish books non-exclusively with a range of self-publishing platforms and aggregators, e.g., Kobo, Apple, or aggregators such as Draft2Digital.”

“As well as using self-publishing platforms, you sell books and other products directly through your own website and/or other outlets, e.g., Shopify store, Kickstarter (50%+ of business income).”

“As well as using self-publishing platforms and/or selling direct, you license some rights to third-party publishers, producers, and other rights buyers (50% of business income).”

“You publish other authors’ books as well as your own (for business purposes).”
Self-published authors derived income from a variety of products and formats, though books in mainstream formats comprised the main sources.

Q. From which of the following products do you derive income?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Books - ebooks</td>
<td>95.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books - print POD</td>
<td>88.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book series</td>
<td>52.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books - audiobooks</td>
<td>45.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book box sets - digital or print</td>
<td>35.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translations (that you have commissioned)</td>
<td>11.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchandise linked to your publications*</td>
<td>9.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memberships or subscriptions for readers**</td>
<td>8.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books - offset</td>
<td>5.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowdfunded projects</td>
<td>4.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memberships or subscriptions for readers - own website</td>
<td>8.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7.84%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 1,877
Most respondents derived no income from publishing-related services; however, income from each of publishing services (e.g., editing), speaking, and teaching was received by more 10% of the respondents.

Q. From which of the following services do you derive income?

- Publishing services (editing, formatting, design, etc.) 13.94%
- Speaking and appearances 13.73%
- Teaching writing or publishing craft 11.34%
- Freelance work (other) 8.74%
- Referrals / affiliate marketing 6.09%
- Journalism - print, podcasting, radio, video/TV 3.50%
- Sponsorship or other influencer income 1.06%
- Freelance writing / copywriting 12.14%
- Other 6.31%
- None of the above 57.55%

N = 1,877
Few self-published authors were deriving income from licensing their works; among those who were, licensing English language rights to other publishers, and translation rights were most prevalent.

Q. From which of the following licenses do you derive income?

- English language rights to other publishers, at home or overseas: 11.76%
- Translation rights: 9.49%
- Merchandising rights: 1.32%
- Broadcasting rights (TV / film): 0.95%
- Dramatic rights (theatre or radio plays): 0.69%
- Other (please specify): 2.76%
- None of the above: 78.59%

N = 1,877
A majority of self-published authors were using “reader magnets” (such as a free book for sign-up) and/or book giveaways to attract readers.

Q. Which of the following do you use to attract readers??

- Reader magnets (free book or other offer in exchange for sign-up): 61.63%
- Book giveaways (freely given, no strings attached): 50.87%
- Premium products (memberships, signed hardback editions, courses related to your book or author platforms, merchandise, etc.): 10.86%
- None of the above: 23.05%

Self-publishers are evidencing considerable marketing savvy.
Only one-quarter of self-published authors reported having a will or estate plan covering their copyright or publishing rights.

Q. Do you have a will or an estate plan that covers the ongoing management of your copyrights/publishing rights beyond your lifetime?

![Pie chart showing 75.20% Yes and 24.80% No]
More than 90% of self-published authors identified themselves as 35 years of age or older, and 43% were 55 or older

Q. What is your age?

Demographic Characteristics: Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 18</td>
<td>0.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>0.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>8.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>26.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>23.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>20.04%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 1,876
Regarding highest education level completed, only 17% indicated secondary school or vocational training, with college graduates and postgraduates predominating among the respondents.

Q. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Demographic Characteristics: Education

- **Secondary education / high school**: 10.67%
- **Trade / technical / vocational training**: 6.29%
- **Undergraduate degree**: 37.92%
- **Postgraduate degree**: 42.99%
- **Prefer not to say**: 2.13%

*N = 1,875*
86% of respondents identified as Caucasian/White

Q. Please select the race group (physical ancestry) with which you most closely identify

- Caucasian / White: 86.08%
- Prefer not to say: 4.37%
- Black / Hyphenated-African / Person of Color: 3.25%
- Asian: 1.87%
- Bi / multiracial: 1.44%
- Hispanic / Latino: 1.39%
- Not listed: 1.60%

N = 1,875
11% of respondents considered themselves to be disabled, of whom over half cited “unseen” disabilities such as auto-immune disease, diabetes, asthma or epilepsy.

Q. Do you consider yourself to be disabled?

- Yes: 11.13%
- No: 88.87%

Q. Please select your challenge(s):

- "Unseen" disability (e.g., auto-immune...: 51.42%
- Neurodivergence: 33.02%
- Physical impairment: 28.77%
- Mental illness: 25.94%
- Mixed disability or impairment: 8.96%
- Cognitive impairment: 8.96%
- Communicative impairment including hearing: 7.08%
- Sight impairment: 6.13%
- Not listed/none of the above: 11.79%
- Prefer not to say: 3.30%

N = 1,877

N = 212
Demographic Characteristics: Gender

Two-thirds of the respondents identified themselves as cisgender female

Q. Please select the gender with which you most closely identify

- Cisgender female (assigned at birth): 66.36%
- Cisgender male (assigned at birth): 21.27%
- Gender fluid/non-binary: 1.57%
- Questioning or unsure: 0.27%
- Transgender male: 0.27%
- Transgender female: 0.05%
- Not listed: 4.77%
- Prefer not to say: 5.44%

N = 1,843
Almost 80% of the respondents identified as heterosexual or “straight” and just over 10% as members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Q. Please select the sexual orientation with which you most closely identify:

- Heterosexual / straight: 78.84%
- LGBTQIA+: 10.80%
- Questioning or unsure: 1.03%
- Not listed: 1.52%
- Prefer not to say: 7.81%

N = 1843
CONTACTS

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