



Alliance of  
Independent  
Authors

# The **Big** Indie Author Data Drop **2023**



# Researching Self-publishing: A View from Academia

My interest in self-publishing began when, as a young publisher, I read Dan Poynter's seminal *The Self-publishing Manual*, and found it to be both a perceptive analysis of the author's role, and an inspiration to me as a future publisher.

By the mid-2000s author-empowerment was taking off. In 2008 Mark Coker established Smashwords in the US, and was offering a guided-route to sharing content through e-books. Amazon KDP (Kindle Direct Publishing) launched in 2009. I began exploring the practical implications.

Having jointly set up Kingston University's MA Publishing in 2006, I was well placed to experiment with academic-testing ideas. I was quickly disabused. **"I'm going to give you a piece of advice. Stop talking about self-publishing. You are damaging your reputation. My wife has read 'Fifty Shades of Grey' and it's rubbish."**

That conversation is a flashbulb memory. I can still remember where it was delivered, by whom – and my thudding heart afterwards.

I argued back. Self-publishing was the fastest-growing industry-trend; this validated study. But the very idea of self-publishing, as opposed to scholarly peer-review, was anathema. It followed that any association was reputationally damaging for my whole institution, not just me. Dear reader, I did not give up.

I published *The Naked Author: A Guide to Self-publishing* (Bloomsbury) in 2011, with a foreword by Mark Coker. Based on one-to-one qualitative interviews with self-publishing authors and other stakeholders, the book launched at the same London Book Fair as ALLi, the Alliance of Independent Authors (2012).

I then offered presentations to literary festivals. Edinburgh and Cheltenham responded positively; Hay sent me my fastest-ever rejection.

I circulated a more detailed questionnaire, to three specific groups (customers of Silverwood Books, members of SE Authors, ALLi members). For its analysis, I formed an alliance with Jackie Steinitz, economist and data-analyst. We thought the outcomes relevant to any audience interested in the impact of self-publishing on stakeholders in the publishing pipeline, and published our findings.

In our first paper (Baverstock and Steinitz, 2013a), it struck us that self-publishers do not, as is widely assumed, have to manage the marketing and sale of their work. They may just be taking responsibility for ensuring that material of personal significance exists. Today, we understand that self-publishing is an umbrella term that includes both writers preserving material that matters to them, as well as the author-publishers who manage the marketing and sale of their (and also potentially other people's) books.

*The Guardian* asked me to write blogs and deliver a Masterclass. Invitations to speak arrived. I made a few observations. Firstly, the common assumption that self-publishing is only undertaken by the desperate, dim, or declining proved untrue; demographic analysis of our research populations consistently showed those involved to be busy, well-educated, professionally successful, and generally mid-life.

They also seemed happier than those traditionally published, maybe because they were often part of committed and generous author-communities.

Another discovery was that far from operating on their own, they were routinely purchasing publishing services. And because they were willing to pay for support they valued, rather than negotiate rates down, I thought this could have long-term consequences for traditional publishers.

Since then, interest has grown significantly. I have examined PhDs on self-publishing and attracted students of my own. My current PhD student, Holly Greenland, is building on my work on the personality of self-publishing authors, taking it in complex and new directions, including looking at the influence of personality, demographics and wider factors on author success. I'm very proud of her.

Looking back, I feel affirmed that what was so interesting to me as a young publisher has proven significant. No longer the kiss of death for a writing career, now having the gumption to self-publish marks authors with a badge of pro-activity. Rather than resulting in organizational infamy, my work now stands for the ongoing value of curiosity. Which is surely what research should be?

Today, with the launch of this collated research from the Alliance of Independent Authors, it's so exciting to see all this information coming together! The more we know about how indie publishing works, the more authors become empowered – and the choice of relevant reading material available to the public enlarged. Literacy and love of reading are powerful forces. More quality content, in more hands, being read more widely, are great goals for authors. I hope all this research gets the attention it deserves.



**Rev'd Professor Alison Baverstock,  
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University, UK.**

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For a longer version of this article, see:  
[selfpublishingadvice.org/academia](http://selfpublishingadvice.org/academia)

# The Big Indie Author Data Drop 2023



In Spring 2023, the Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi) commissioned a research survey into self-publishing author income: the Indie Author Income Survey 2023.

At the same time, ALLi also reached out to key indie organizations across the self-publishing sector for such data as they could provide. This provided the information contained below which we are publishing as the Big Indie Author Data Drop.

This summary offers extracts from larger reports, so that the reader can explore some highlights and follow up in more detail as needed.

ALLi intends to keep supplementing and updating this data collation.

See: [AllianceIndependentAuthors.org/facts](https://allianceindependentauthors.org/facts) to stay up to date.

# Why We Need Data

No industry should be without data. It helps the people working in that industry make informed decisions and people outside it understand what's going on.

For too long self-publishing has had only anecdotal evidence shared amongst peers. Now, through the Big Indie Author Data Drop the Alliance of Independent Authors is pooling the verifiable data we do have and sharing it within and beyond the self-publishing sector.

For those involved in self-publishing, we believe this report will give you valuable insights and confidence as to whether you are making the best choices for yourself, as a writer and publisher.

For those who outside the self-publishing sector, we hope it will showcase indie author achievements and demonstrate the growth and power of this increasingly viable route to readers.

## Staying Current

The Big Indie Author Data Drop will be updated regularly and shared as widely as possible.

Our goal is to make sure that anyone interested in self-publishing has access to a wide range of meaningful data and insights, linked to the original sources for further investigation.

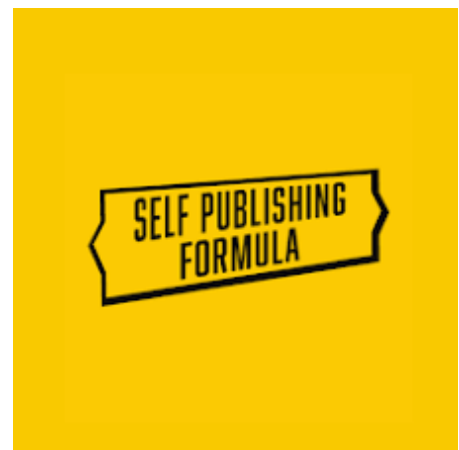


# Our Contributors

ALLi is grateful to everyone who helped to collate and compile the Big Indie Author Data Drop.

The organizations below contributed the most significant data and support but many additional organizations and individuals also assisted.

***Thank you to all.***



Written Word **MEDIA**



# Highlights



Key highlights from the data gathered as part of the BIADD.

- 1** Median self-published author income stands at \$12,759 and is growing by 53% (compared to traditionally published authors at \$6-8,000 and falling). **ALLi 2023**
- 2** Self-publishing has a reverse gender pay gap and LGBTQIA+ authors earn more than heterosexuals. **ALLi 2023**
- 3** 75% of book sales (fiction and non fiction) were part of a series, by both unit and \$. **Draft2Digital 2023**
- 4** Financially successful authors do three core things: they use professional editors, professional cover designers and they keep writing more books. **Written Word Media, 2019-2022**
- 5** The number of self-published authors making no money at all is dropping overtime, testament to a generous community who share advice and knowledge. **20Booksto50K, 2022**
- 6** More than 2,000 self-published authors have surpassed \$100,000 in royalties. **Amazon, 2022**
- 7** Not only are 39% of Kindle royalties going to indie authors, but their books are being rated by the readers as equal in quality. **K-Lytics, 2022**
- 8** Successful self-published authors don't have 'agreeable' personalities! **Kingston University, 2023**

# The Indie Author Income Survey

## Context

There have been many author income surveys (UK, US, Canada, Australia). They mostly show author income declining over time, and currently resting somewhere in the region of US\$6,000–8,000 (median), with Australia (with over 1/3 of the authors in the survey being self-published) doing better at US\$12,000.

## BUT

The data is almost always focused on author earnings from the traditional publishing model or mixes self-publishing and third-party published authors together. This is confusing and indie authors have often found questions irrelevant / hard to answer.

Therefore ALLi commissioned an independent, global survey of over 2000 self-published authors to get an accurate comparison. They were selected for spending over 50% of their working time on writing and publishing. This was partly so that the study would eliminate people publishing a one-off book for friends and family and partly to match to the ALCS UK survey (who used the same criteria) to ensure an accurate comparison.

**2022: Australia: National Survey of Australian Book Authors:**  
**US\$12,120 (A\$18,200), up 3% per year over 7 years.**

**2022: UK: Authors Licensing & Collecting Society (ALCS):**  
**US\$8,600 (£7,000), down 38.2% (in real terms) since 2018. Down 60% in the last 15 years.**

**2018: Canada: Writers' Union of Canada**  
**US\$6,990 (C\$9,380) down 27% since 2015, and 78% down on 1998.**

**2018: US: Author's Guild**  
**US\$6,080 down 42% from 2009 (\$8,000 in 2014 and \$10,500 in 2009)**

The Australian study had a higher proportion of self-publishing authors. 1/3 of authors had self-published a book, and 1/5 of authors had done so in the past year.  
Median (middle number of a sorted list, to give a more accurate number where significant outliers might skew results).  
Approx. US dollars conversion to give accurate comparisons.

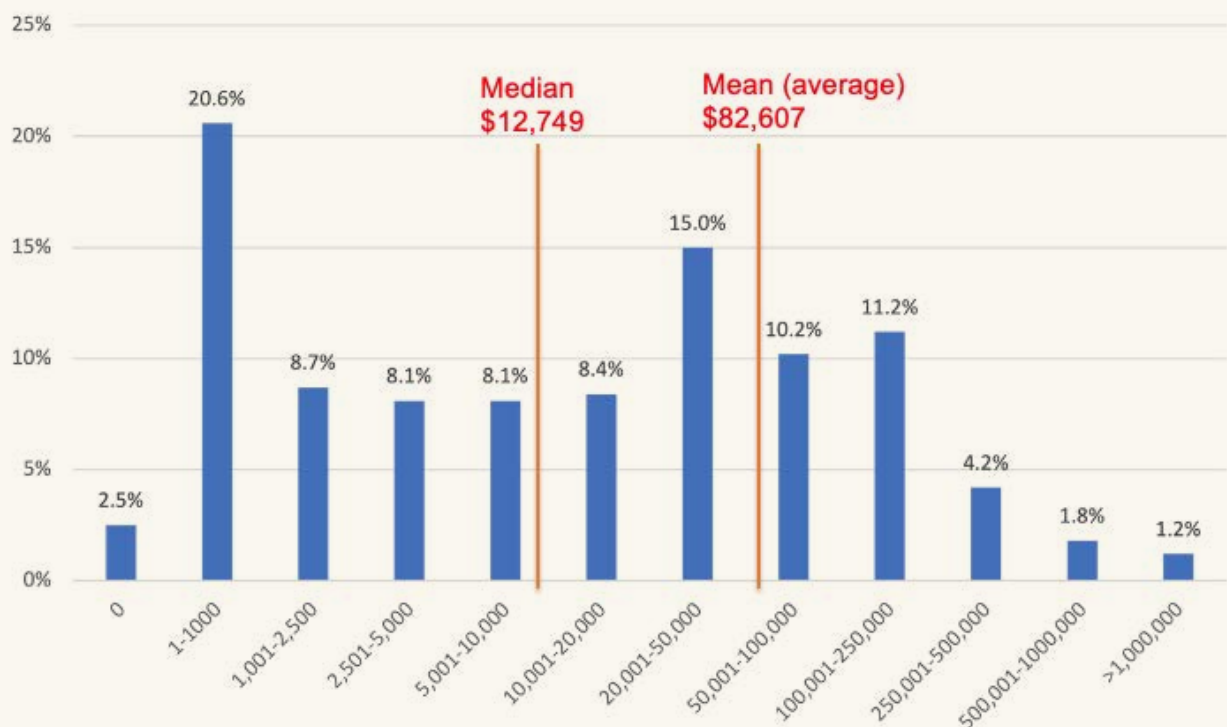


# Self-published authors earn more

The most important fact that emerged from the Indie Author Income Survey was that self-published authors were earning more than traditionally published authors and that their gross revenue was increasing 53% on the previous year, compared to (previous page) an range of \$6–8,000 and falling across the US, UK and Canada.

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: \$82,607 in 2022, a 34% increase.

The results were reported on with interest by trade publications Publishers Weekly (US) and TheBookseller (UK).

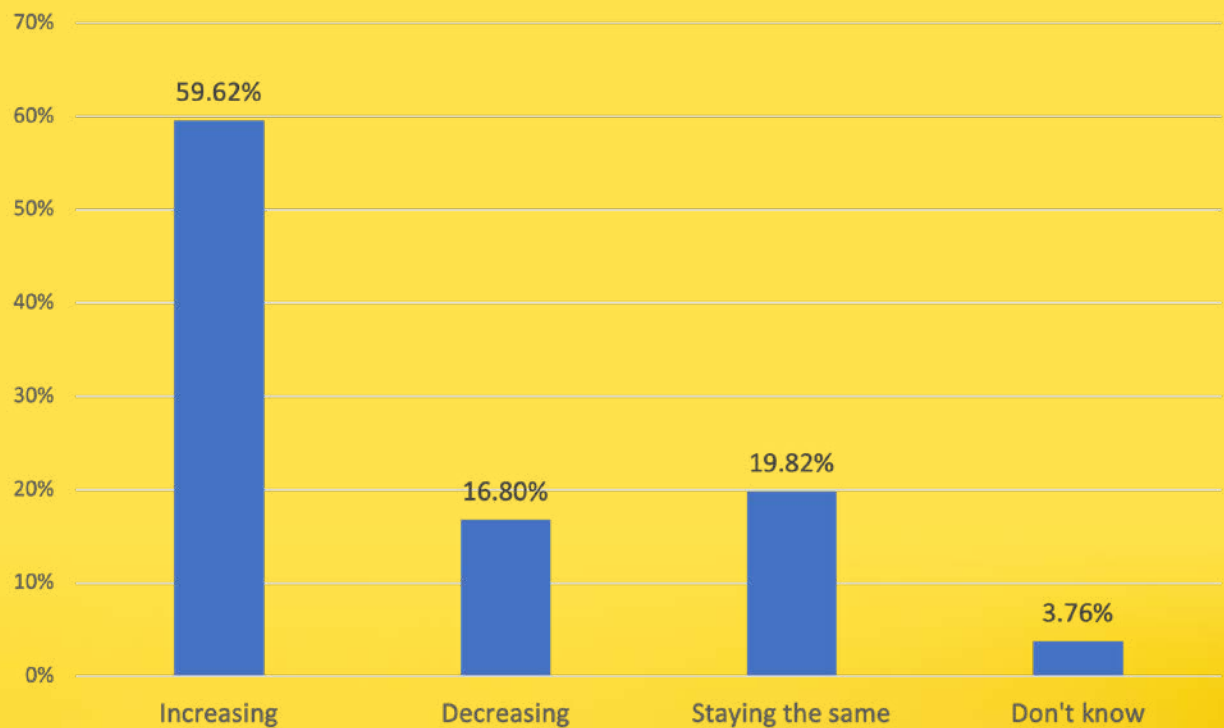


PUBLISHERS  
WEEKLY

THE BOOKSELLER

# Self-published authors' revenues are growing fast at 53%

Not only were the self-published authors earning more, their revenue was growing very fast compared to heavy decline in all the other author income surveys. 60% of respondents indicated that their self-publishing income had increased in the past year, and only 17% reported a decrease.

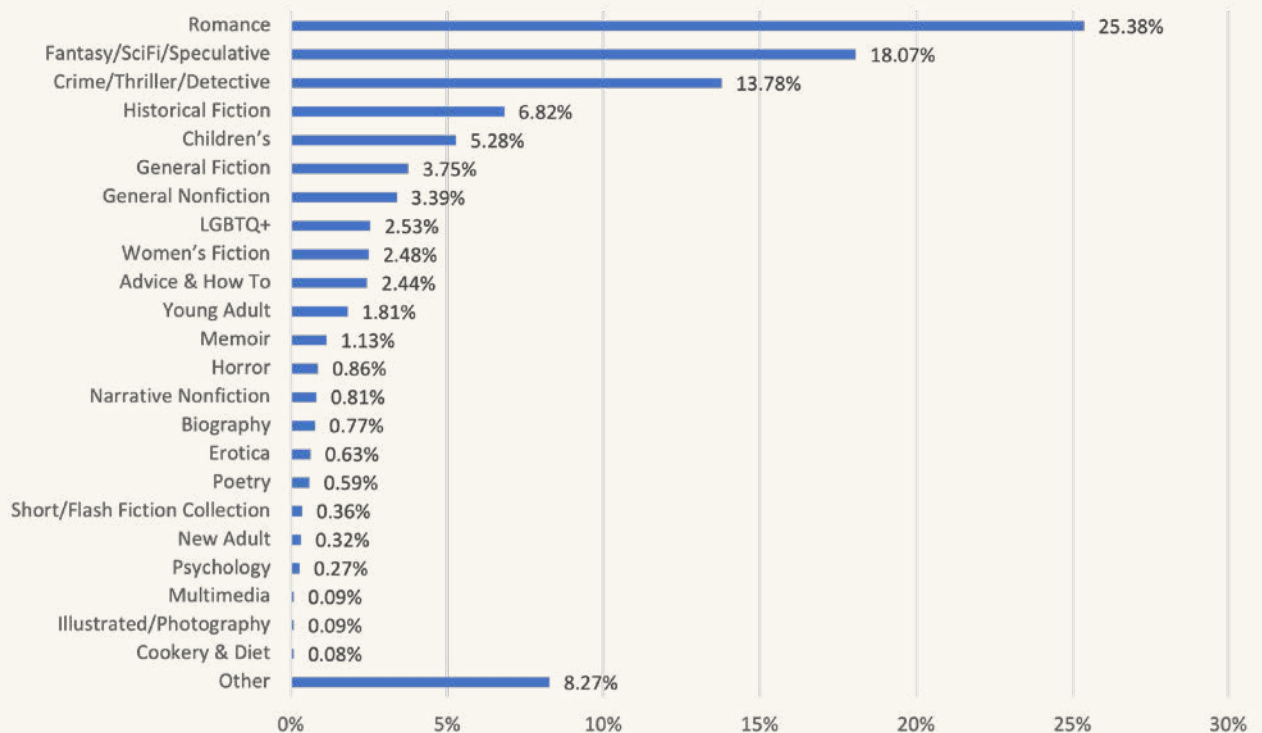


*'Don't know' responses included authors who had just made major changes to their business, such as going wide after a period of exclusivity.*



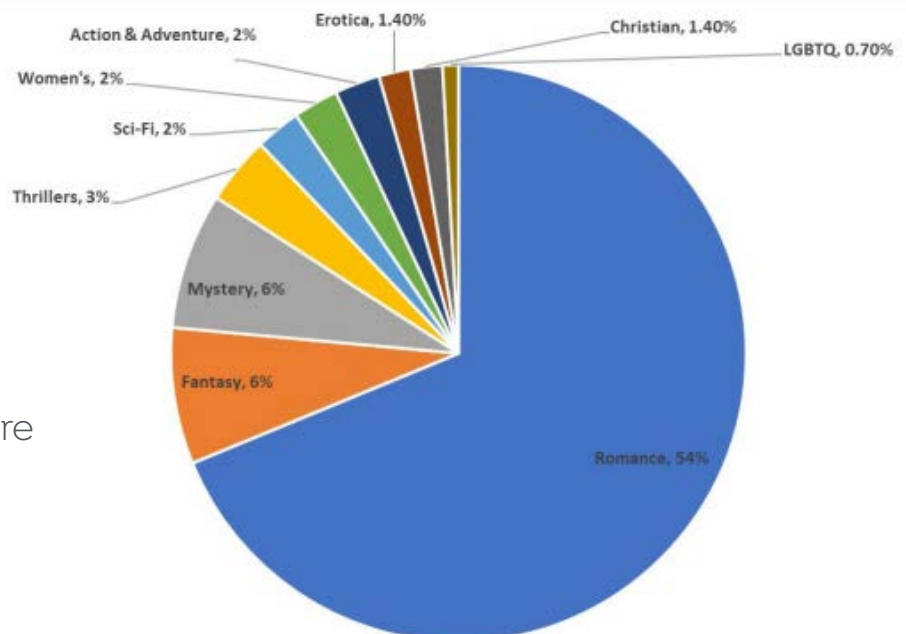
# The most popular genres remain steady

Authors were asked what their primary genre was and this data accurately reflected the sales data by genre from Draft2Digital.



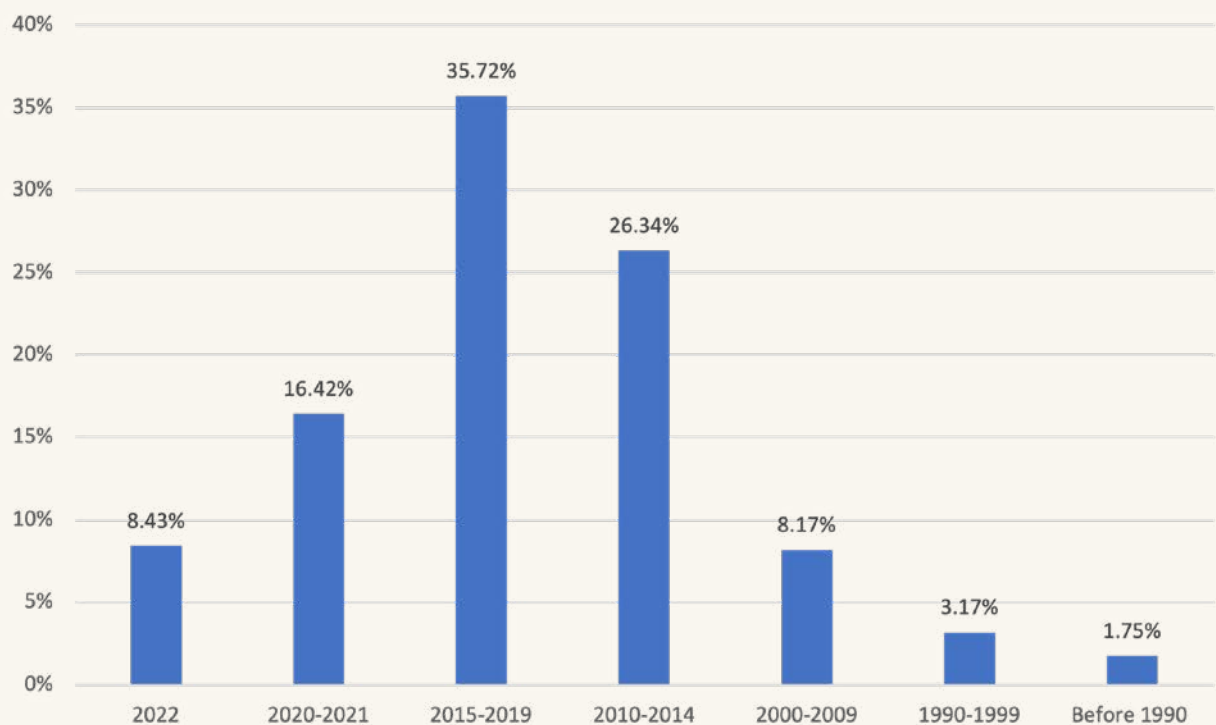
## The 10 Top Selling Genres:

- Romance
- Fantasy
- Mystery
- Thrillers
- Sci-Fi
- Women's Fiction
- Action and Adventure
- Erotica
- Christian
- LGBTQ



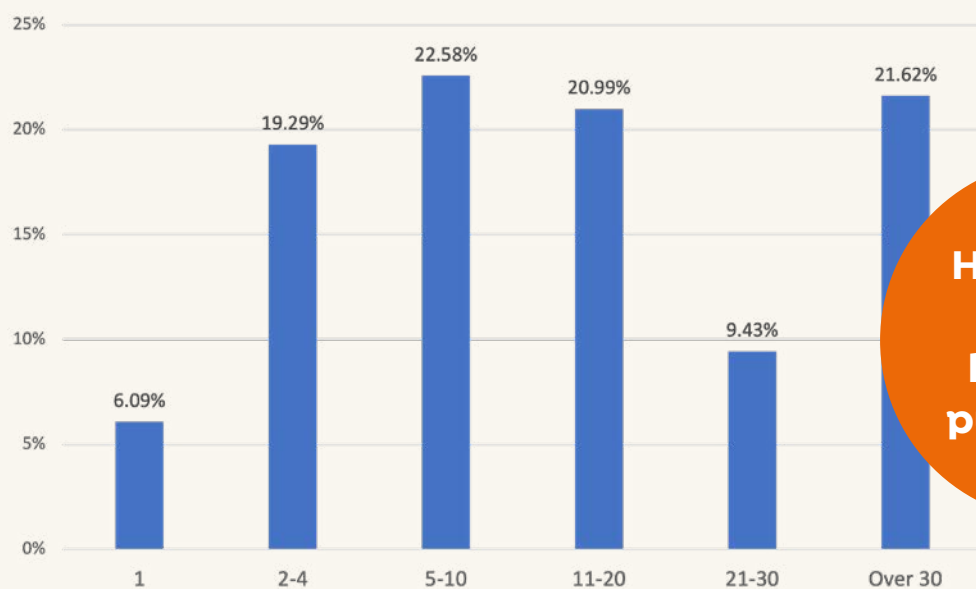
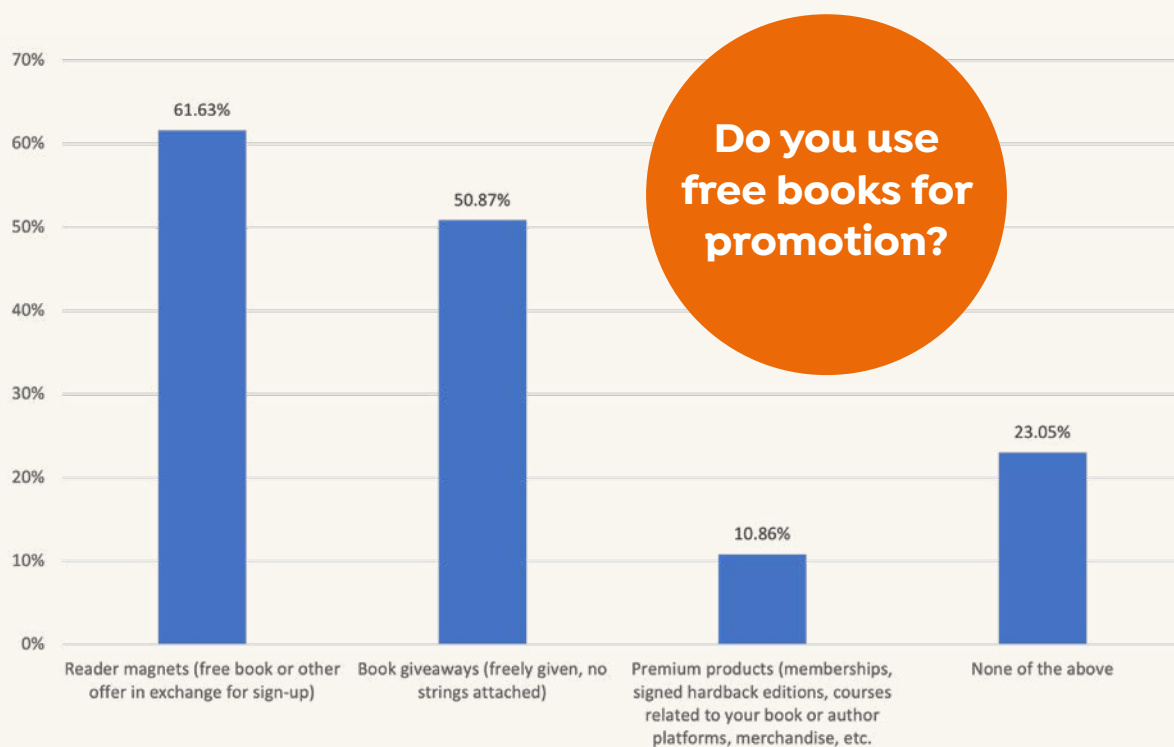
# A fast-growing community

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



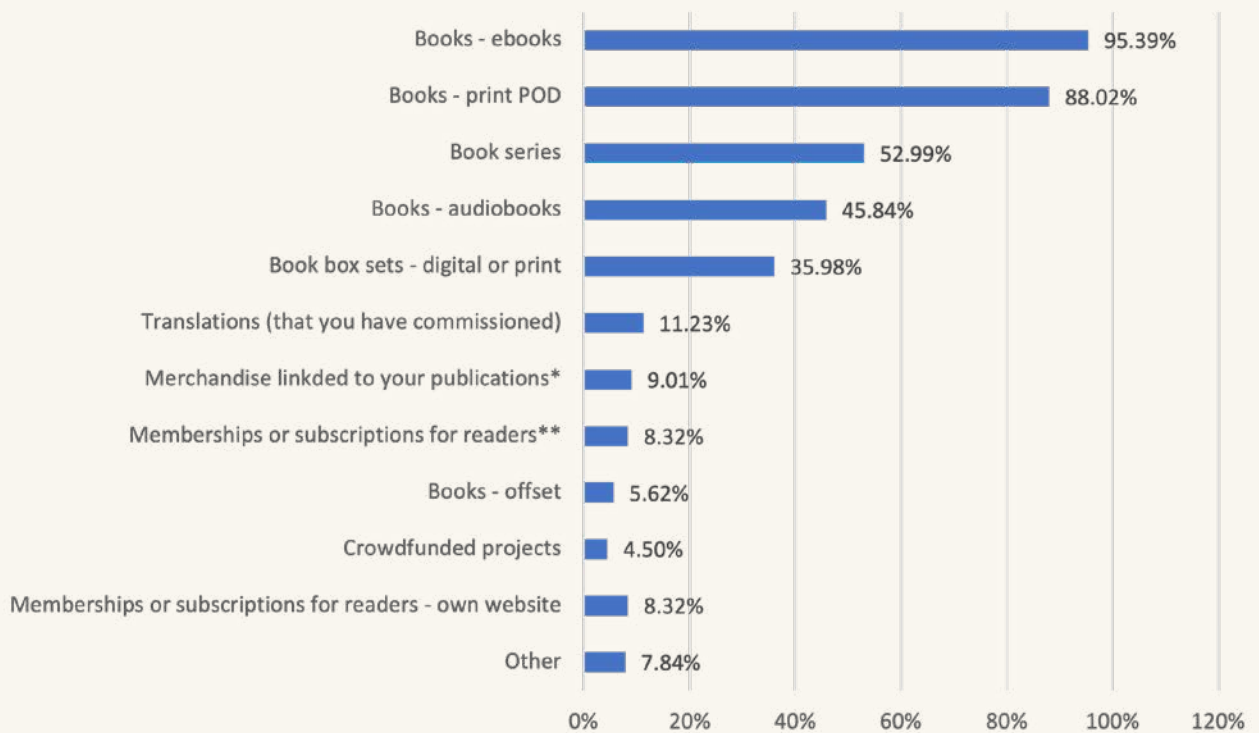
# What contributed to author success?

Closely matching data from Written Word Media (later in this report), self-published authors were both writing a lot of books and using marketing tools like reader magnets (a free book to encourage readers to sign-up to mailing lists).



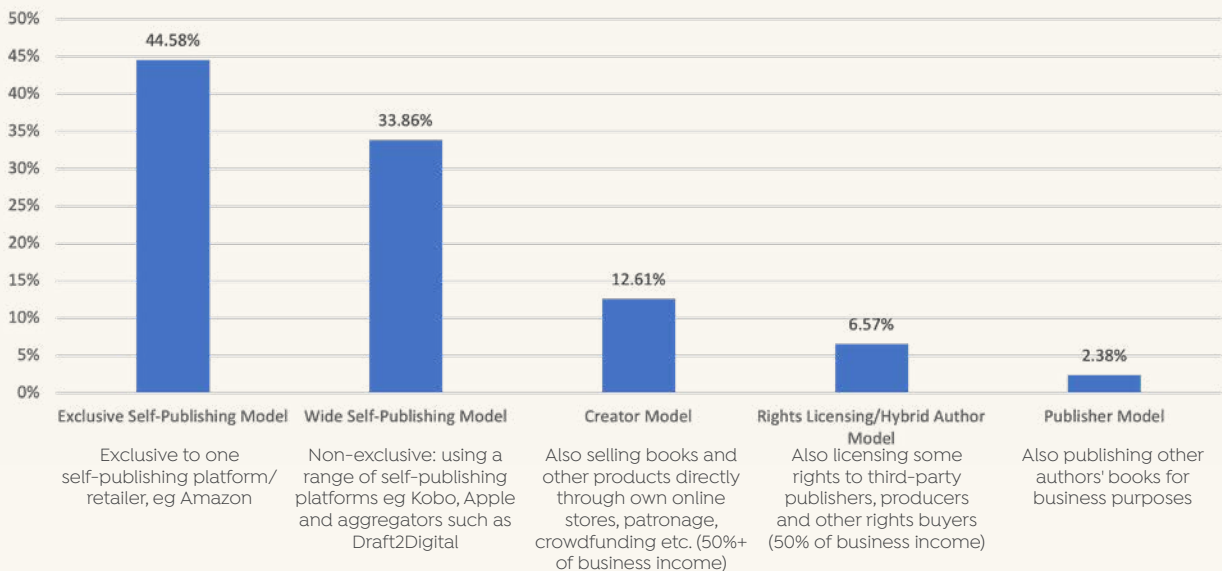
# Most of the money comes from the books

Although self-published authors showcased a range of business models, marketing approaches and a wide development of new formats and products, the majority of their attention and revenue was focused on books in various formats.



## Authors were choosing the business model that worked best for them

A variety of business models were being used, although it was interesting to note that direct sales were beginning to make a significant appearance.



# How the Indie Author Income Survey was carried out

The original survey was commissioned by ALLi, and completed by two analysts: **Thad McIlroy** is a digital publishing analyst and author, and president of The Future of Publishing, based in San Francisco. He is a contributing editor to Publishers Weekly, covering digital innovation and publishing startups.

[thad@thefutureofpublishing.com](mailto:thad@thefutureofpublishing.com)

**Steve Sieck** is an accomplished strategy consulting and market research professional with a strong specialty in business, professional, and academic markets for publishing and information services. His analyst consultancy is SKSAdvisors.

[steve@skсадvisors.com](mailto:steve@skсадvisors.com)

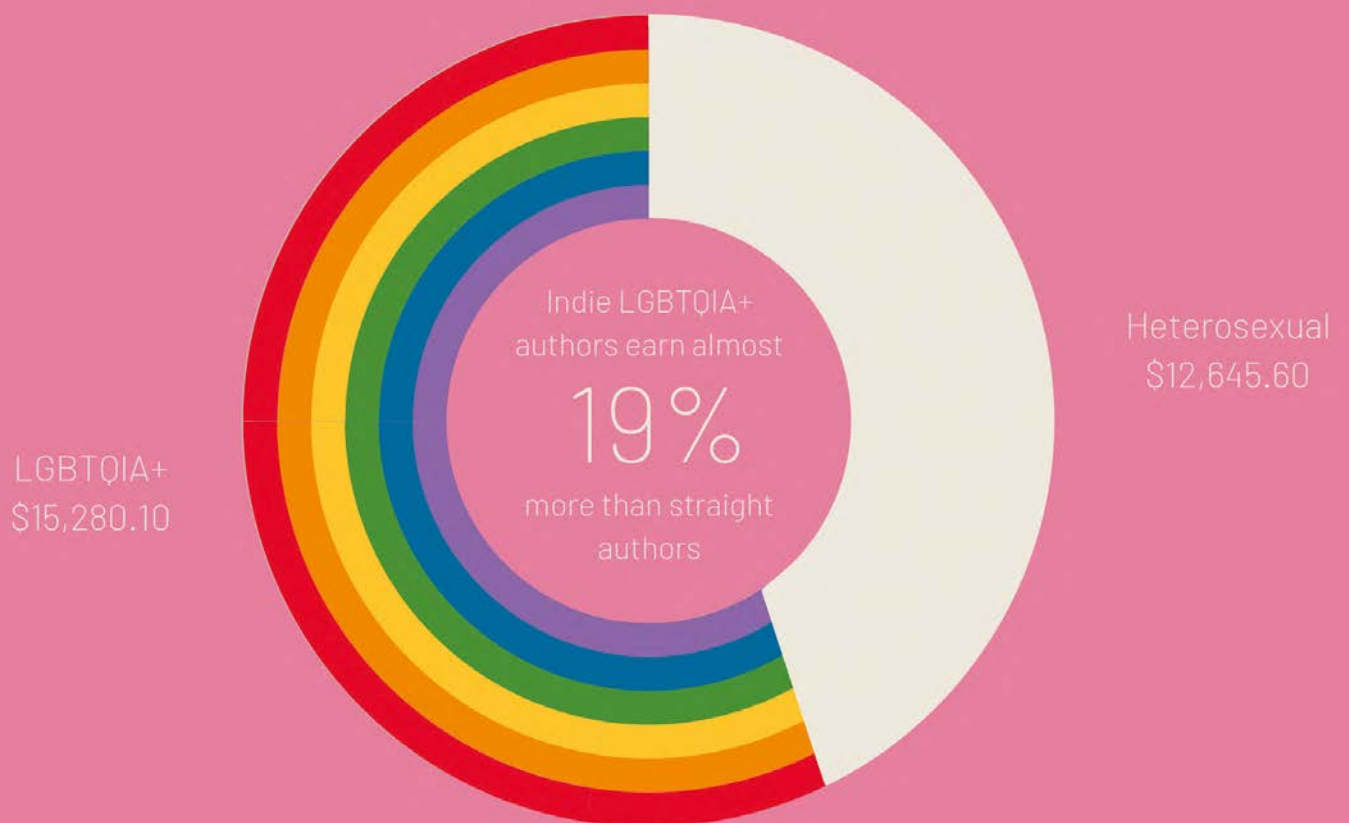
The second round of cross-category analysis was sponsored by the **Self-Publishing Formula** and carried out by **CREATE** (the University of Glasgow), who had previously carried out the ALCS author income survey. Over 2000 authors from around the world took part in the survey.

# Reverse Gender Pay Gap





# Excellent LGBTQIA+ diversity in self-publishing + reverse pay gap



# Surpassing expectations

*“More than 2,000 self-published authors have surpassed \$100,000 in royalties.”*

(Amazon, 2022)

[kdp.amazon.com](https://kdp.amazon.com)



100K

# Sales insights for authors

Reported from distributed sales through Draft2Digital to 19 different retail, library, and subscription platforms. Inclusive of sales reported for Jan 1st 2022 through to Dec 31st 2022

[www.draft2digital.com](http://www.draft2digital.com)



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1

**Write a series**

Books identified as being in a series (inclusive of fiction and non-fiction) account for 75% of all sales. This is both for unit and dollars.

# 2

## Get into libraries

Library sales are 11.3% of unit sales and 6.4% of dollars earned.

Library sales are up from 9.7 % in 2021 to 11.3% of units in 2022.

OCOU (One Copy One User) model accounts for 68% of library revenue

CPC (Cost Per Checkout) model represents 86% of all library units and 32% of library revenue

# 3

## Consider translation

Ensure your work is available in English... but also start considering translation

While the English-speaking markets take over 80% of revenue, new markets in translation are beginning to open up.

The US represents the largest % of sales for indie authors at 57.4% of dollars earned

The primarily English language territories (AU, CA, NZ, UK, US) account for 80.35% of revenue.

Sales in Germany (attributed mostly to Tolino) have grown from 2.12% in 2019 to 4.25% in 2022

# The making of a six figure author: what success looks like

Written Word Media carry out regular surveys to try and understand: what makes an author financially successful? By comparing ‘emerging’ authors with those earning over six figures, they have sought to understand what contributes to this success.

Money may not be the only driving factor for an author, but being able to make a living from your creative work is an important aspect of being able to undertake creative work in the first place, which may otherwise be swept aside by the need to pay the bills.

[www.writtenwordmedia.com](http://www.writtenwordmedia.com)

1

## 100k authors use professional editors

96% of 100k authors choose a professional to edit their books, and most Emerging Authors made the same choice (56%), but that still leaves a big portion of Emerging Authors who weren't using a professional editor.

2

## 100k authors use professional cover designers

Even in their 2019 survey, it was already clear that over 80% of 100k authors were using professional cover designers, way ahead of emerging authors at around 50%.

3

## Most authors at every stage do their own marketing

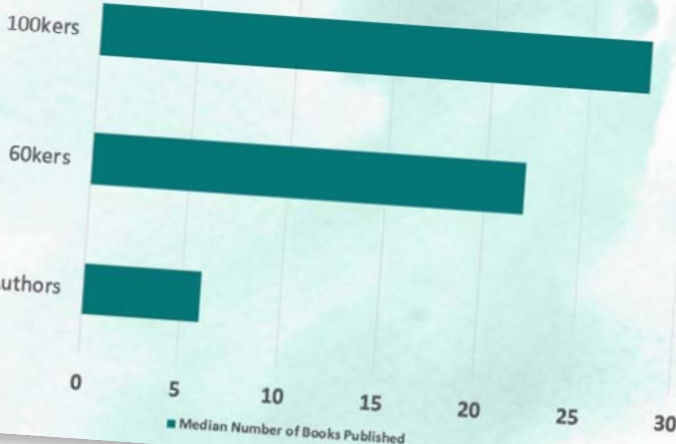
For both 100k authors and Emerging Authors, over 90% of them report doing their own marketing. 100k authors can hire some help. 45% of 100k authors reported having an intern or assistant to help with marketing.

# The making of a six figure author: three core behaviours

In the 2019 survey, three key behaviours stood out and these have not changed by much since then: that successful authors use professional editors and coverdesigners, and above all, they keep writing books

[www.writtenwordmedia.com](http://www.writtenwordmedia.com)

Median Number of Books Published



Who Edits Author's Books?



Who Designs Your Book Covers?




# The making of a six figure author: the latest data

Written Word Media's latest survey saw 1300 authors take part in Winter 2022.

Read the full report here:

[www.writtenwordmedia.com/how-authors-evolve-with-their-income](http://www.writtenwordmedia.com/how-authors-evolve-with-their-income)

How Author Behavior Differs by Income 					
Monthly Income From Books	Average Books Published	Average Weekly Hours Writing	% with most or all books in KDP Select	Average Weekly Hours Marketing	Top 3 Effective Marketing Tactics
Stage 1 \$0-\$249 /month	5	10	51%	5	Bookbub Deals, Promo sites, In-person events
Stage 2 \$250-\$499 /month	10	12	65%	5	Promo sites, Bookbub Deals, Newsletter Swaps
Stage 3 \$500-\$999 /month	23	20	62%	7.5	Promo sites, Bookbub Deals, Newsletter Swaps
Stage 4 \$1000-\$2499 /month	28	20	64%	10	Bookbub Deals, Promo sites, Facebook Ads
Stage 5 \$2500-\$4999 /month	28	20	57%	10	Bookbub Deals, Promo sites, Amazon Ads
Stage 6 \$5000-\$7499 /month	45	24	64%	13	Bookbub Deals, Promo sites, Facebook Ads
Stage 7 \$7500-\$10,000 /month	45	25	61%	17	Bookbub Deals, Promo sites, Amazon Ads
Stage 8 \$10,000+ /month	50	26	60%	13	Bookbub Deals, Promo sites, Facebook Ads



# Quality and quantity

Not only are 39% of Kindle royalties going to indie authors, but their books are being rated by the readers as equal in quality, which shows that indie authors value the quality of their craft and creative output as well as their business success.

[www.K-Lytics.com](http://www.K-Lytics.com)

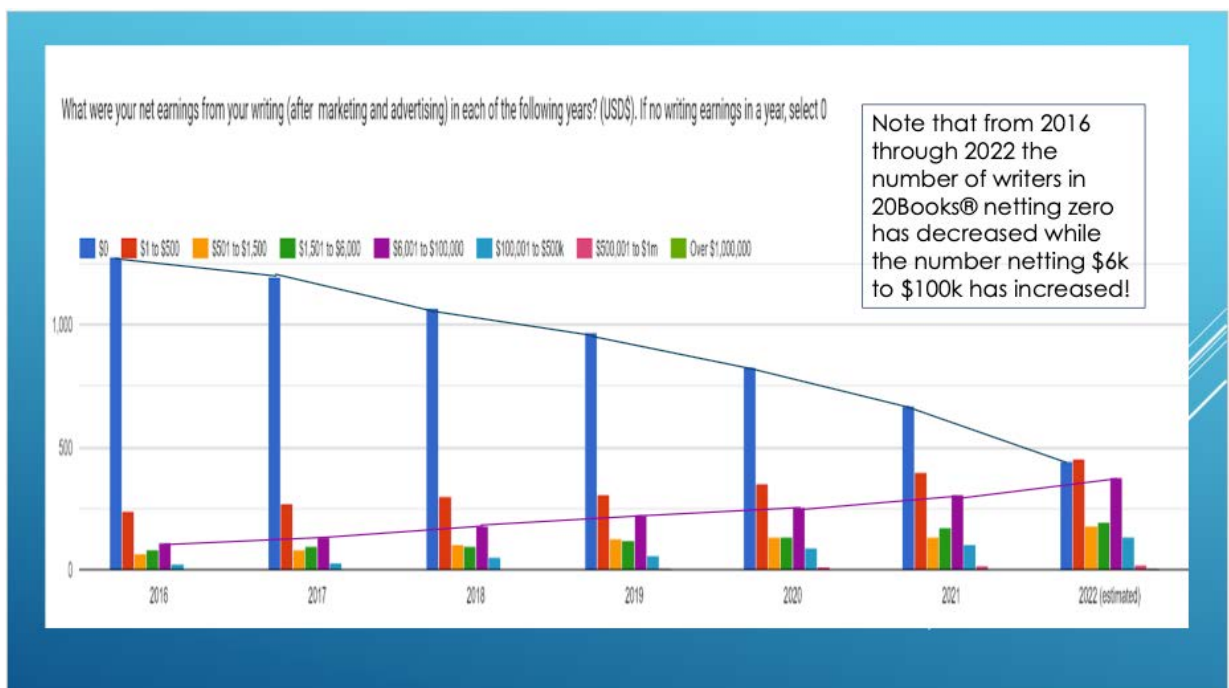


# A community that values sharing knowledge

20Booksto50K undertook a survey of their own Facebook community of authors in the autumn of 2022, with over 1800 respondents. It showed that, across multiple genres, the number of authors making no money at all from self-publishing was steadily dropping over the past six years.

This finding is testament to the indie community freely sharing its knowledge and also producing high-quality free and paid for education for authors wishing to enter the self-publishing world. It is notable in the community that authors will share very detailed and honest information about how they have achieved success, in the hopes that they will be helping another author do likewise. This encouragement to learn allows new authors to catch up very quickly with those authors who are more established.

[www.facebook.com/groups/20Booksto50k](https://www.facebook.com/groups/20Booksto50k)

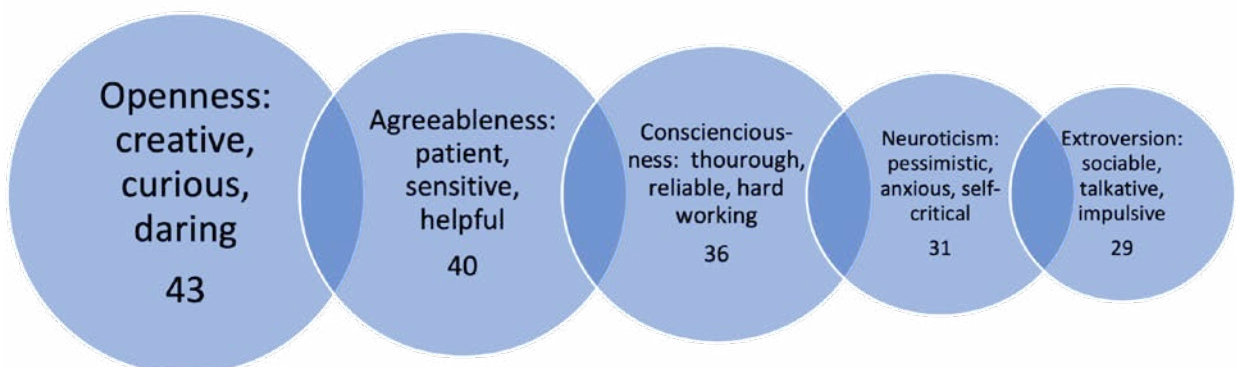


# Profiling the Self-Published Author:

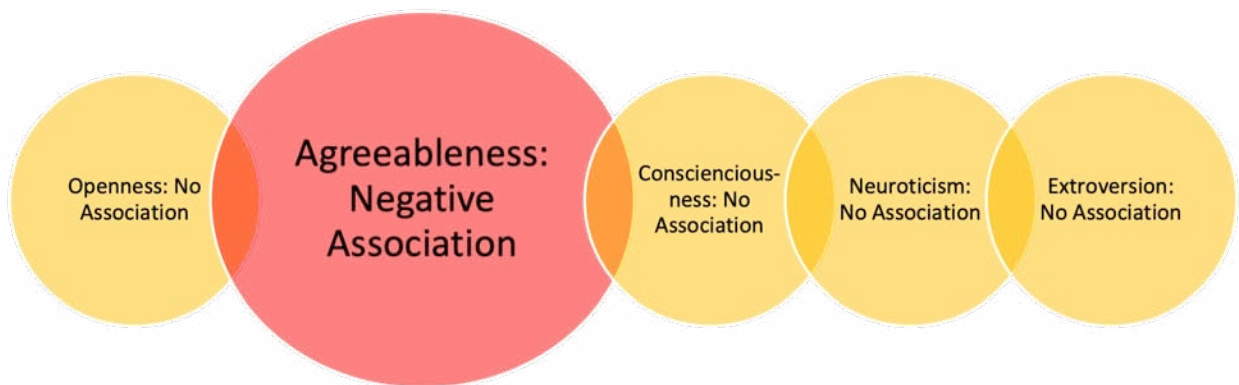
## What are the personality traits of self-published authors?

Currently in the final stages of analysis, this PhD study by Holly Greenland at Kingston University (London, UK) aims to answer the question: Do successful self-published authors share personality traits, demographics, or other characteristics and behaviours; and what implications might this have for authors and the publishing industry? Selected preliminary findings have been shared for this report, with more coming soon. Over 800 authors took part.

**The mean (average) Big Five personality trait scores out of 50 for self-published authors are:**



# Does personality influence the chances of commercial success?



Only one of the Big Five traits appeared to influence the likelihood of commercial success by self-published authors. Agreeableness had a negative association, suggesting the less agreeable an author scores, the more likely they are to rate as commercially successful.

What could this mean for self-published authors?

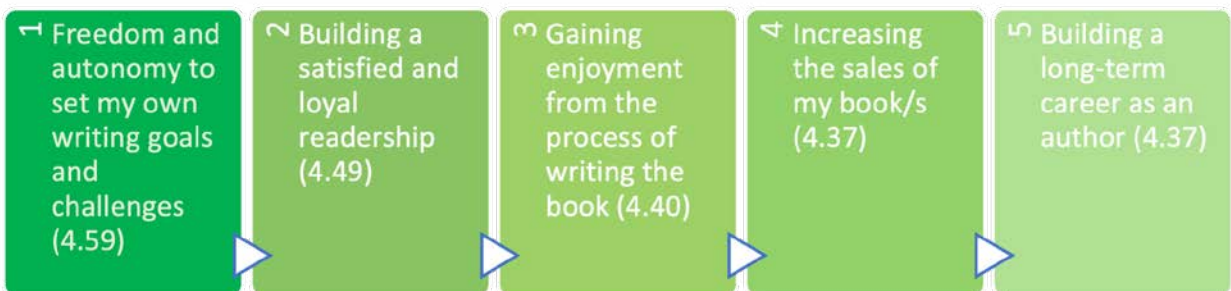
People rating low in agreeableness tend to show some or all of the following traits: frankness, sarcasm, stubbornness; and can be viewed as antagonistic or even ill-tempered.

While on the face of it, this may appear a partly negative quality, a low rating for agreeableness can also indicate someone who does not compare themselves to others or overly worry what others think of them. This independent mindset, coupled with the tenacity offered by a stubborn streak may give commercially successful authors the edge when it comes to the resilience and self-determination needed when going it alone.

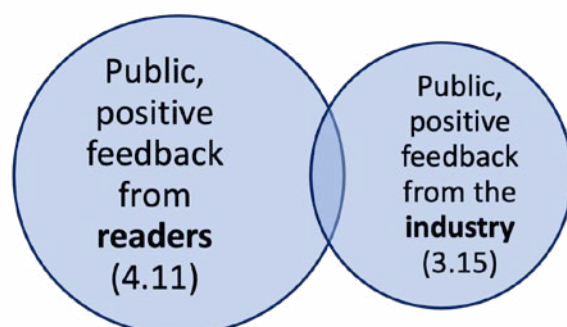
# Is it all about the money?

## Top five success criteria for self-published authors (mean rating out of five):

From a choice of 19 success criteria, the top three selected did not relate to money, sales or building a career, with “freedom and autonomy to set my own writing goals and challenges” rating the highest (mean rating out of five):



## Recognition and success criteria for self-published authors (mean rating out of five):



# How successful do self-published authors feel against their own success criteria?

## More results coming soon...

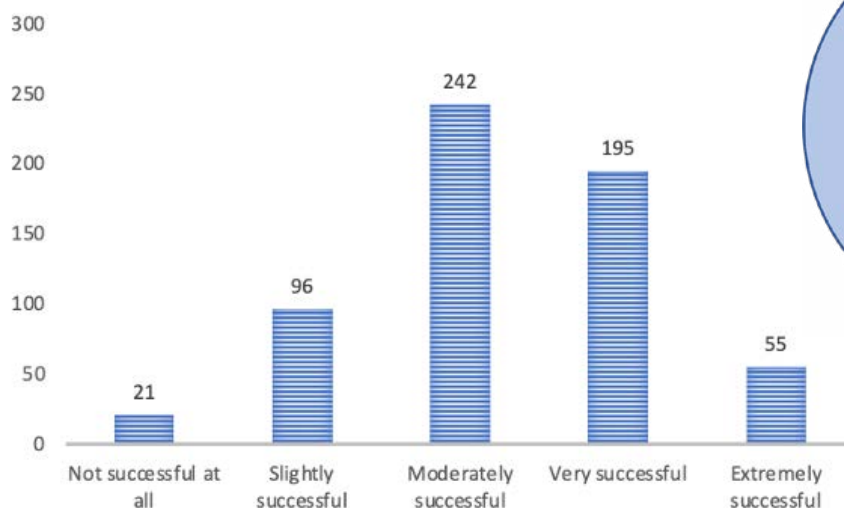
This study is currently in the final stages of analysis, with more data due to be released in autumn 2023 and spring 2024. The study explores the impact of personality traits, motivations, demographics, investment choices and other characteristics on the success of self-published authors. Initial results were first presented at the Kingston University Festival of Research, 20 June 2023.

## How was the survey conducted?

Data was collected from an online survey with over 800 full completions. It was distributed in autumn 2022 via author communities, including: ALLi, SPF, 20BooksTo50k and the Society of Authors.

Commercial success was defined as making a profit after investment, AND making enough or more than enough to live on. For more information, contact Holly Greenland. [h.greenland@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:h.greenland@kingston.ac.uk)

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Just **3.4%** felt 'not successful at all'

Whilst **41%** felt 'very' or 'extremely' successful

# Why are indie authors so invisible?

'Self-published' can cover everyone from a person who created a single book for their family to authors who have built a whole business on their writing.

Independent authors publish across a range of formats and platforms, including their own websites.

Many self-published writers do not use ISBNs so their achievements are under the radar.

This is why the **Big Indie Author Data Drop** is so important and why organizations across our industry have come together to offer insights.

## What Next?

We intend to keep gathering data: individually and together.

The **Big Indie Author Data Drop** is a great way of bringing together as much data and as many insights as we can, to benefit all authors, whatever their publishing journey.

Informed choices are the best choices.

# Did you know?

Indie authors today can self-publish in almost two hundred countries around the globe, in formats including hardback, paperback, eBooks and audiobooks.

Books by indie authors account for 30-34% of all e-book sales in the largest English-language markets, as reported in Publishers Weekly.

A study by FicShelf found that women wrote just 39% of traditionally published titles, but 67% of self-published titles.

All these major literary awards welcome indies: the Arnold Bennett Prize; the Arthur C Clarke Award; the Bord Gáis Energy Irish Book Awards; the British Book Awards; the Commonwealth Book Prize; the Rathbones Folio Prize; the Jhalak Prize; the Kitschies; the Lambda Literary Award; the Lindisfarne Prize for Crime Fiction; the Peters Fraser + Dunlop Young Writer of the Year; the Pulitzer; the Nebula Award; and the Romantic Novelists' Association Awards (the RoNAs).

Self-published author LJ Ross wrote the UK's second best-selling series OF ALL TIME (outranking Harry Potter!) and recently celebrating 8 millions books sold



# Want to join in?

If your organization has self-publishing data you can share with us, or wants to be part of our next Big Indie Author Data Drop, please get in touch.

[campaigns@AllianceIndependentAuthors.org](mailto:campaigns@AllianceIndependentAuthors.org)