

ACE YOUR EBOOK



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ACE YOUR EBOOK By Lee Schneider

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My Experience

The first thing you think about when you have a book like this in your hands is *I wonder if this guy knows what he's talking about?* Glad you asked. I've been writing professionally since the 1980s and self-publishing on Amazon and other platforms since 2015. I have self-published five nonfiction books, including one Amazon bestseller. My specialty is nonfiction. If you want to publish a nonfiction eBook or white paper, you have the right book in your hands.

If writing fiction is your passion, I can give you some advice there as well. Red Cup, the agency I own, has managed promo and marketing campaigns for novels.

In the chapters and sections that follow, you are about to receive the action steps you'll need to develop your book idea from a mere notion, to an outline, to a book published online for the world to read. In the world of writing, there it's exhilarating to watch your ideas take shape and a structure emerge, and to develop your thesis with other viewpoints from authorities and researchers. Along the way, I'll share my favorite writing apps and discuss how to format your book as a PDF, and for Kindle, Nook, tables, and other e-readers. We will go over your distribution choices and how to promote your book. I know you'll want to know how to keep the magic going after the glow of your launch day wears off. We will go there.

I won't hide the truth: It's a lot of work to write a book or white paper. Depending on how much you love writing, you will either not notice all that mental heavy lifting or else you will feel every word and pixel you write. In that case, you'll want to hire a freelancer or agency to do the writing, and you can put your final touches on it. For many who embark on projects like this, the work is its own reward. We like to express ourselves and we like to share knowledge. That sounds altruistic, and perhaps it is, but there are other good reasons aside from creative expression to write a nonfiction eBook or white paper. Let's get into them next.

Why Do This?

If writing an eBook or white paper is so much work why do it? Good question.

The most important reason to write your nonfiction eBook or white paper is to spread your knowledge and domain expertise. If you own a business, you want your clients and prospective clients to know how you think and to know what you know. If you are a consultant, you want people to understand what it takes to work with you. If you are running a startup or launching a new entrepreneurial venture, you want to educate your new user or customer about what exactly what services you provide.

Marketing is an important reason to write an eBook. What's more, it's a fun way to market yourself and your business. Some of us think it's a chore to self-promote. We even consider marketing a dirty word. Okay, but I've always countered that argument with this one: *If you really enjoy what you do and profit by it, what's wrong with telling others about it?* Writing a book is a wonderful way to gain clarity about your own vision for your work, business and passions. Nothing sets your mind in order, and helps you express your goals for your company, consulting business, or startup more quickly than building it out word by word, sentence by sentence, and chapter by chapter.

Another good reason to embark on an eBook is self-sufficiency. You don't necessarily want to rely on journalists to write about you, or podcast producers to call you, or Google AdWords to promote you. In the SEO game, what we call *organic traffic* is the most valuable. That's the traffic to your website that occurs when people search for your company name, your name, or keywords related to what you do. If they find you after they do that, it's a win. They're on your site. Writing a book and posting it online is one way to create such a pathway to your digital door. It's a way for you to become known and discovered. It's *yours* to distribute, profit by, repurpose, republish, or turn into anything you want.

Books you write can become lecture series. They can become podcasts. You can issue an audiobook edition. When you own the material, you have great creative freedom and marketing clout.

Building your network is another reason to publish a book or white paper. As I'll cover in a

later section, when you are creating material for your book, you have the option to turn to interviews, including other voices and building expertise and scope. You can interview experts in the field, prospective clients, or associates in your outer circle whom you would like to see closer to your inner circle. When you reach out to them and interview them for your book, it's a good exchange for both of you. They get to show off their expertise and reach a wider audience. You get the benefit of the depth that another viewpoint and voice brings, and you've made a new friend or developed a potential client relationship or business partnership.

How to Build a Better Client

There's an old expression in software development, "Don't make a better X, make a better user of X." When your prospective clients read your eBook, the experience should put them on the path to becoming better clients. Here's an example. Red Cup produces podcasts. When prospective clients come to me to discuss producing their podcast together, I want them to know a bit about podcast production and the value of it, so they are not starting the convo from scratch. I hope they've had a chance to read my [short guide to podcasting](#) or view one of my [podcasting presentations](#). If they have, it will put the initial conversation at a higher level. If they haven't, it's a great follow-up to our initial conversation to send them a copy.

What to Write About?

When you think about what your eBook should be about, you first have to ask **why**. *Why are you writing this thing?* The best answer is usually that you have some expertise that you want to share. In your work life, as you've developed your platform, as you've built your business, you've learned stuff. That information and experience is valuable to others.

Leverage Research That You've Already Done

I don't know about you, but at Red Cup we build lots of lists. We research trade magazines that are publishing articles about retail and wholesale. We build lists of medical conferences that our clients might speak at, keynote, or become panelists. We build lists of journalists covering wine, education, tech, and finance. We research podcast producers who might want to book our clients. Lots of lists, lots of research. If it all stays internal, it benefits us, of course, and clients, but nobody else really knows about it. We have a lot of information, expertise, and data to disperse. But it's in a silo, unless we do something about it.

You, too, have research you've done for projects, for clients, to develop your company and customer base. You've built something. With an eBook, you can leverage all that work that is internal and make it accessible. (A note to the lawyers out there: If the work is propriety, secret, or would damage the company, well, you wouldn't want to make an eBook out of that, would you? I'm talking about work product that you want to share, can share, and would benefit others.)

Consider also that the methods used to develop your research might be valuable to others. If you've built lists of clients by researching what software they use, you can tell the world about how you did it. Did you use platforms like emailhunter, sellhack, or Datanyze to build leads? Did you use import.io to scrape websites? Have you become a LinkedIn ninja lead-builder by using prospectify.io? Your insights will help others and build your credibility.

Teach Something — Because Generosity is Good

Giving away something of value might feel strange at first. About ten years ago there was a lot of talk about the value of a *freemium* offer. You would give something for free and hook

users into buying your paid offerings, programs, or plans. This is still a viable way to get attention and build an audience, but to do it effectively, you have to know what *value* means to you and to your potential clients and customers.

What is valuable? Back when original content was exclusive and difficult to duplicate, it had a different value than it does today. If you went to a bookstore and bought a copy of a rare book, or attended a concert where there was no bootleg recording allowed, you were participating in a singular experience. That concert was unique, never to happen again. *You had to be there*, you might tell your friends. There might be only a few copies left of that rare book.

With the advent of perfect digital copies that all changed. There are still rare books and must-attend concerts, but copies will do just as well. There will always be physical copies of books, but downloading eBooks from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, or Smashwords will serve. The digital copy has unhooked value from exclusivity. Just because you have the only copy of a book might not make it more valuable, and because many copies of a book are freely available, that might not make those books less valuable. The free flow of books also affects their pricing.

For eBooks, pricing on Amazon is pretty fluid, from \$0 to \$3.99 to \$6.99 and up. Many authors offer their first book in a series for free, charging for the next books in the series. (More on that in a later section.) If you are building a client list, offering your book for free is a good idea. Consider it a form of advertising. If you believe in karma, you will certainly get karma-points for giving away a book that will help others. Even if you're not all that altruistic, charging a low price for your eBook will make it accessible to other businesses and help them thrive. If you're building a business, or building a writing career, lower prices will "move more product" and increase your visibility in the market.

Prepare to Launch - Before You Start Writing

A Word About Fiction eBooks

I will cover nonfiction eBooks in more detail below, and most of this book focuses on that genre. Most of my eBook experience is in nonfiction, but I have managed promo campaigns for novels. If you seek an audience for your fiction work, eBooks are a great way to go. Here are a few tips to start you on your journey.

- **Research what is already working.** Look over the Kindle bestseller lists in fiction and you will see genre fiction jumping out at you. Romance novels, thrillers, mysteries, detective stories - those genres are the most popular and most likely to bring you the most success.
- **Category Is Everything** I will bring this up again in the sections to come in this eBook. Your category on Amazon is a make or break decision about discoverability on that platform.
- **Get a sense of the competition.** Some of those genres are quite crowded to work in, with thousands of books released. Your new book might get lost. Check out an app like [KindleSpy](#). It's a Chrome extension that grabs information about books selling in Kindle editions. Not only can you see what books are most popular category by category, but you can also see what keywords were used in their descriptions, how much revenue they are taking in, and their sales ranking. The best part of all this data: You'll get a sense of the competition. KindleSpy will give you a "green light" if your genre gets downloads but not so much action that your book will be lost in the shuffle.
- **Smashwords** Amazon isn't the only game in town. [Smashwords](#) is an author-friendly platform that is free to use. After you navigate their (sometimes challenging) formatting procedure, they push your book out to Barnes & Noble, Sony Books, the iBooks Store, Ingram, and more. They are more transparent about stats than Amazon, so you can see when prospective readers have

downloaded free samples of your book, and sales stats are also easily accessible. They aren't exclusive, so you can list your book on both Amazon and on Smashwords. You're also free to give out coupons so selected readers can receive discounts or even a free book.

- **Bookbub** Speaking of free books, Bookbub is an online meeting place for readers. Specializing in fiction, it's a good place to build a community around your work. For a modest fee of a couple hundred bucks (as of this writing) they will promote your free book in their newsletter, which usually results in strong download numbers.

Many of those tips also apply to nonfiction eBooks. Let's move on to how to launch a nonfiction eBook.

Get Your Nonfiction eBook Online

Your nonfiction book will find an audience online, but only if you are willing to let go a little. Here's what I mean: If you list your book exclusively on Amazon for a price, it might make you a few thousand bucks in royalties. If royalties are your metric for success, have at it. But let's consider some other metrics Influence, reach, and share of voice.

A well-promoted nonfiction eBook can win you some major *mind-space* in an online world that is crowded with information, ideas, knowledge, and yes, noise.

Exclusivity I touched upon this point earlier, but if you want reach, you have to be generous. When you launch your book, you might want to offer it for free for a day or so. This makes it easy for reviewers to download it, jacks up your rankings in Amazon, and makes you lots of friends. There is also a compelling argument for *never* offering your book for free. To make the call, you have to ask: *What do you want to get out of this?*

Your Goals If your eBook cost you a lot of money to produce - you paid researchers, writers, graphic artists, designers, and editors - giving it away might not seem like such a wonderful idea. To help make that call, you can use KindleSpy (mentioned above for fiction eBooks) to take the temperature of the market in your genre. Some eBooks are selling well at \$19 a copy, others at .99 a copy. Understanding the competition in your genre is a key element of your success.

Humans are strange animals, especially when it comes to paying for things. I've found that

raising the price of my eBooks can make them sell better. Perceived value is a big driver in a buying decision. If you price a deep, well-researched, authoritative book at .99, potential buyers are going to wonder what's wrong with it. If your skinny, written-in-half-a-day eBook is \$19.99, don't expect to move much product. Luckily, platforms like Amazon and Smashwords let you change your book pricing as much as you like. You can iterate your way to success.

The Marketing Storyline You will get more out of your eBook if you walk yourself through a marketing storyline. Often my marketing storyline looks like this for eBooks with production costs of more than \$2500:

- Promotional campaign including advertising, blogs and media advisory
- Free promo on Amazon for one or two days
- Contacting reviewers and asking them to write about the book
- Adjust pricing level with market testing
- Raise prices until sales fall off, then adjust
- After three months, list on Smashwords and other platforms
- Reissues, new editions, audiobook, and speaking gigs

I reissue my more successful eBooks as audiobooks, in paperback editions, and support them with live events like lectures and presentations. Since I have a fairly large financial investment in the book, I am interested in making some money back, as well as gaining influence and reach.

My marketing storyline is different if my eBook cost less than \$2500 to produce, or even was free to produce. (Nothing is free, of course, because your time spent writing has value. In this context "free" means that you didn't pay anyone else to write your book, and you did all creative work yourself.) If your book is being released as a PDF to give to journalists or prospective clients, or will be a giveaway to help people sign up for your mailing list, you have a different marketing journey. If your book will go up on platforms like Amazon or Smashwords at a cost of .99, it means that you are looking for reach and influence, not money. The book you are reading right now is that kind of book. I'm writing it to show my domain expertise and to inspire you to write your own eBook. You probably got it for free or for .99. Here is my marketing storyline for this book, which is costing less than \$1000 to produce.

- Produce the book as a PDF
- Offer the book for free as a downloadable incentive for mailing list sign ups
- Offer the book free to influencers
- Offer the book free to prospective clients interested in producing an eBook
- After six months or a year, offer a new edition.

Note what's missing in that marketing storyline: Amazon. For my six-month period, I want control over the book and I want to offer it exclusively to mailing list subscribers. After it has served that purpose and helped me build my list, I will seek a wider audience on Smashwords and later still, Amazon.

Make your marketing storyline your own, depending on what you want to get out of your eBook. It is always a good idea to build a vision for how the book will serve you and your company before you jump in writing it. Take a deep breath because that's just what we're going to get into next.

Writing Your Book

How to Find Material

What will your book be about? To answer that question, take a look around. Have you published lots of blog posts, recorded podcasts, or made presentations? Has that material aged well? You might be able to *re-purpose* some of your existing writings, recordings and presentations. Look for a theme among those materials. If one emerges that serves you, use it. We have a client at Red Cup who makes a treadmill that goes under your desk so you can walk while working. We helped develop blogs, podcasts and video presentations around UNSIIT's WALK-1 product, discussing workplace wellness, longevity, and health. When it was time to produce an eBook, we had nearly everything we needed to make it. The theme was already there in what we had already produced. Most importantly, the theme served the client's goals: To enter a larger discussion about fitness and workplace wellness.

Blogs are the easiest material to re-purpose. Presentations and podcasts might be more challenging. Here's a tip: If you have them transcribed by a service like Speechpad it will cost you about \$1 a minute. Speechmatics will use computer speech recognition to transcribe your files. The accuracy is lower than Speechpad, but so is the cost, at about \$0.12 per minute. Another option is Descript. It uses speech recognition and has higher accuracy than Speechmatics. It's a little more expensive.

Original Material

Let's say you are starting fresh, with no previous material to re-purpose. The first thing you need to do is send your inner critic out for a walk. Your inner critic is that voice in your head telling you that you can't do this, you aren't qualified, you've never written a book before, and that you lack the knowledge and experience to write about anything. You might know that voice well, or it might surprise you with its fierceness when you begin a project like this. Not to worry. It's part of what Steven Pressfield describes as *the resistance* to writing anything. (One of his best books is *The War of Art*. Worth a read if you find yourself struggling to break through the resistance that pops up to doing creative work.) You can tamp down the inner critic's objections

by trying to ignore him or her, which can work, but which requires a strong will. You can take another approach, which is to fool that critic. That's what I do.

I release all expectations about how good or bad a writer I am. I get out a notebook, a favorite pen or pencil. I seek a change of scene, going to a cafe, walking outside, getting myself moving. Sometimes I will dictate an audio recording into an app like Evernote or I will open Trello, a visual planning app, and start putting out ideas without judgement. It usually works, for two reasons.

First, by moving, walking, or changing the scene of where I usually work, I'm inviting fresh ideas and distracting my inner critic. Second, using modes other than writing get other parts of my brain working, so by speaking my book ideas into a recording app or moving cards around in Trello, there is a sense of creative freedom, of "just playing around" with the ideas of the book. My inner critic takes a break, I can creatively open up, and the initial ideas of the book get recorded or written.

Organizing Your Initial Ideas

The most important part of your book will be the cover. ("What??") Really. The second most important part of your book will be the title. This is the brutal truth of eBooks: For most people, your book will first show up as a thumbnail image on Amazon, Smashwords, or other platform. If you are offering your eBook as an incentive to subscribe to your mailing list you have more leverage. Your cover can be bigger. You still have to have a great title. Your title will be the first element that helps your potential reader get into your book.

There is another reason to focus on your title as an important element. Titles are promises. When you organize your ideas, they all proceed from the promise you make in your title. Choose it carefully. Change it during the writing if your goals change. Test it out on friends. When you zero in on it, have your initial ideas flow from it. In most eBooks that are free, people expect actionable advice. If you want your book to be read avidly, provide plenty of things for your reader to do. That means working in exercises, quizzes, and workbook-style sections. Provide ways for your reader to put your ideas into practice.

As you sort through what your book will be about, you'll want to consider *readability*. People are narrative animals. If you want to play at being James Joyce or your favorite edgy, non-linear playwright, have at it. But it is far more likely that your readers will crave a narrative

structure to what you write. If you don't put one in there, they will try to create one themselves. People are funny that way. Most of the time, they want to see one thing in front of the other in a linear fashion. With that in mind, let's look at some potential structures for your eBook.

* * *

Notes on Structure

How will you structure your book? The array of options may seem daunting, even infinite at first. But they are not. Here is a menu for you. You can't choose all of them, but you can mix two or more to present a successful narrative that will make your readers happy.

Personal story

The most compelling stories (for most readers) are personal. Let's call this one the **biographical** approach to your book. If you have a compelling personal story that includes some key learnings about your industry, work, or your life, telling it as a chronological tale might work well for you. If you choose this option, remember this: Telling a personal narrative doesn't mean you must **begin at the beginning and end at the end**. Most successful biographical movies start with a crisis point in the main character's life to set the scene and hook the viewer, and then after that they flash back to the beginning of the story. They do not begin at the beginning.

Collection of use cases

I have used this one myself often. Seek out examples of success stories and tell them one by one. Make sure that each story is a little different from the last. If you try to tell the same or closely related tale of success over and over, your reader will get bored. Think like a lawyer preparing a case: Each story is something like a witness, and each one will testify to a different point you want to make.

Anthology

This method has its genius because you get other writers to do your work for you. Ask friends, experts in the field, and colleagues to write up their take on your central thesis. Be sure that each story told illuminates a different part of the tale you are telling. Some publisher/authors take a mercantile view of this method and ask each contributor to pay a fee to have their chapter included in the book. I am not a fan of that approach, but you can certainly ask contributors to

buy you a nice Christmas present. If they refuse, you don't have to send them a card next year.

Curriculum

I used this structure for my first book, *Be More Popular: Culture-Building for Startups*. If you think of your book as a course given in book form, then it means you have some lessons to teach. How would your reader/student best grasp your topic? You might use a mix of some methods I've listed here, beginning with a short personal story to set the scene, salting in some use cases, providing exercises and workbook materials, and breaking down your thesis into a step-by-step process. In a book of this kind, you'll need to make it clear what the reader will get out of it, what steps he or she need to take to accomplish the goal, and what the payoff will be. The underlying assumption that the reader makes is *if I follow all these steps it will all be worth it*. Your book, should you choose this structure, has to make good on that promise.

Historical

Ugh, really? In my view, a historical treatment for a topic is an easy way out, because it gives you an excuse to present a list of supposedly significant things that happened, and all you are obligated to do is arrange them in a timeline. Historical story lines are best left to geniuses like David McCullough, Doris Kearns Goodwin, and Tim Wu.

Broaden Your Scope Using Interviews

Many successful eBooks are written from a single perspective - the author's. They are journeys of self-discovery, replays of experiences, collections of tips, tricks and use cases. Books of this kind can be powerful when the experiences replayed are high value and show off special expertise. The book you're reading right now is an example of a single-perspective book. I am sharing my knowledge with you. Many of my other books are not like this at all, however, because to write them I interviewed others and added their perspective.

Perhaps it's because I have a background as a journalist, or because I've made a lot of documentaries. I like to seek out a chorus of expert voices and include them in my books. I do this to round out my thesis or gain perspective on it. For *Chronicle of a Startup Town: Los Angeles* I interviewed startup founders who defined the ecosystem of the Los Angeles business world. I interviewed people who originated the coworking spaces that redefined what it meant to

work in LA. I queried investors and angels. Their perspective brought a lot to the book. I used the same method for *The Angel Playbook: An Essential Guide for Entrepreneurs and Angel Investors*. I got in touch with angel investors and venture capitalists and asked them about the investment climate. I spoke with CEOs who had benefitted from angel activity or who participated in startup incubator programs or business accelerator boot camps. I didn't pretend to know everything about the topic of angel investing, but I knew I could ask the right questions of smart people and build a good book.

Finding People to Interview

Where did I find all those people to interview? Two of the best tools for requesting interviews, known as *sources* in the journalism trade, are HARO - Help A Reporter Out - and ProfNet. HARO is a free alert service that goes out to journalists and sources alike via an email. If you plan to publish your book on Amazon, or will serialize parts of it as a blog or podcast, you can request experts to weigh in on your topic of choice. The way it has worked well for me is to write a short description of the kind of person I'm looking for and list a few questions I would like them to answer. Then I invite them to respond via email or to set up a phone call with me. If they email back, I have my answers right there and they are ready for the book straightaway. If they want a call, I use Calendly to schedule the call (another app like Timetrade would work as well) and ask their permission to record the call. Dialpad is a good app to use for recording calls, Uberconference also works well. Or check out RINGR. You can even set up Skype to record the call. (Before recording a call, you should notify the other person. It's common courtesy to do so, and in some states, it's the law.)

Transcribing those phone calls transforms them into material you can easily adapt for your book. Speechpad is a fast service that provides an accurate transcript at the rate of about a dollar a minute. You just upload your audio file to the platform and they have at it. Speechmatics is much less expensive, because the transcripts are done by natural language processing - in other words, by a bot. If you are willing to spend some time correcting those texts and adding punctuation, you will have yourself a usable transcript.

You don't have to record the conversations or transcribe them. You can take notes really fast as you speak to your sources. This works for some, but not for me unless I am typing along as fast as my interview subject is speaking. (If I take handwritten notes that fast I usually can't

read them afterward.). Transcripts allow me to get the quotes right, and since I'm not focused on typing, I can conversationally connect with the person I'm interviewing.

ProfNet is similar to HARO. You post a query for free and sources respond to answer your questions.

Both services will bring outside voices to your book, adding perspective and layers of expertise.

Add Research and Data For More Authority

No matter how smart, well-informed, or well-connected you are, when you write a book it's always nice to have a little help. When I completed my most recent book, about angel investing, I wanted additional depth and I relied on outside research services. Here are my recommendations.

KKL KKL Research Services, based in Seattle, WA, offers research and writing support on a job-to-job basis. You can request research backup for specific chapters you're working on or concepts you'd like to cover.

Wonder Another job-by-job service I use almost every week is Wonder. It is very good with list-building requests like "Give me a list of the top five organic food stores in the United States," or "What Fortune 500 companies have the best gender parity hiring practices?" I have also had success asking their researchers to write a short explanation of complicated topics, like equity crowdfunding. The researchers at Wonder are of high quality. You will pay about \$50 a request, as of this writing. You have to keep your requests tightly focused, but if you submit a diffuse request that is hard to understand, a research lead will get in touch and ask you for clarification.

Fancyhands For research that is not technical, I have had a lot of luck with Fancyhands. I ask for top-five lists of most influential bloggers on topics I'm writing about, or lists of conferences I might want to attend or which are relevant to the book I'm writing. Fancyhands will also shop virtually for you, seeking out the best deals on printer ink or the best bed-and-breakfast for your weekend getaway. Because of the *jack/jill of all trades* nature of the service, the researchers might not be knowledgeable about complex, insider topics. Your requests have to be fairly simple, achievable within 20 minutes of searching online. If it takes longer, they will

want to charge you for more requests. It is a subscription service, and a basic account is \$29 per month, which gets you five requests.

Upwork For longer-term research projects, Upwork might be a good fit for you. The key to success is being specific about your research request. I often set up Google spreadsheets with information to be filled in. For example, if I wanted to learn more about recent successful Kickstarter crowdfunding campaigns for educational games, I would set up a sheet that had columns for the name of the campaign, the amount raised, and the name of the campaign creators, with a final column for notes and contact information. I specify that I want my researcher to dig out at least ten campaigns, and direct the researcher to the Kickstarter site to search for this information, or a Kickstarter data-scraper like Kicktraq. You can set up your job request on Upwork to specify only applicants who are fluent in English, or have knowledge in your subject area. Since Upwork is the most remote of these remote options, sometimes jobs can go off course. It helps to keep your instructions clear, not assign too many tasks at once, or to stop the job if it is not meeting your needs.

Additional Support? Hire an Editor

If you find that you want more support than a per-job service can offer, you can always hire an editor for your book. My agency, Red Cup, offers those services, and Reedsy provides access to trustworthy freelancers.

What Writing App is the Best for You?

Writing is an intensely personal experience. Ask three writers what they use for writing and you will get three different answers about what's best, ranging from paper, to pixels, to a mix of tech and material goods. I do my best work when handwriting into my favorite Moleskine notebook using a pencil made in Japan or Germany. It's fun to be a pencil nerd, but the thing about writing an *eBook* is that sooner or later you have to transfer your work into the digital realm.

Ulysses was my writing application of choice for a long time, because I work on a laptop, an iPad, or even on my phone. All my drafts sync up no matter which device I pick up. It's very nearly a distraction-free work environment, with a look that you can customize at will. Best of all, it exports seamlessly out to Word, a PDF, HTML, and EPUB. This makes formatting your

eBook pretty easy. These days, however, I have switched to Scrivener, because it handles organization of my manuscripts better, and has more output choices.

Bear is another good choice worth investigating. It is lean and fast and makes it easy to organize manuscripts.

Any one of those apps will speed your writing process. You can move sections around, split out sections to make new chapters, add footnotes and annotations.

In the world of eBooks, many, if not all, roads lead to Microsoft Word for final production. If you are using the Windows version of Word, all of your formatting, including a table of contents, will easily transfer into the publishing platform of your choice. If you're on a Mac, you will need to do a little extra work to get a table of contents properly set up. On either platform, your footnotes and links will transfer perfectly from Word to your eBook format. (More on this in the formatting section, a little later on.)

Google Docs works well for eBooks with a word count up to around 20,000. (A general guideline is one page is 500 single-spaced words or 250 double-spaced words). If you are co-writing with an editor or co-author, or have to show your work to a client as you write, Google Docs might be the perfect option for you. All changes are updated instantly, and it's easy to comment on sections and share ideas. You can export right into Word for easy transfer into eBook formatting, including a hyper-linked table of contents. I've found that for books longer than 20,000 words, Google Docs gets a bit unwieldy and slow. Also, if you need to reorder sections of your book, Google Doc's outlining function isn't as elegant and easy to use as Ulysses' or Scrivener's.

It's Time For Production

Your Book Cover

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If all that is getting confusing, it's best to hire a designer. I've hired designers on [Fiverr](#) to design covers, and the results have been good. I can recommend the guys at [Pixelstudio](#). [Reedsy](#) is another resource for designers (and editors, as mentioned earlier.) [Upwork](#) is yet another resource for graphic artists and designers.

Before hiring a book cover designer be sure to ask for samples of their work. Be sure they are asking you questions about your book: your intended audience, your tastes, color scheme, and font preferences.

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Formatting Overview

Once you have your book in Word with a working table of contents, you are well along on your path to successful eBook formatting. The next step is to check the manuscript for consistency. Here are the critical elements:

- consistent font
- paragraph line spacing
- paragraph indents
- chapter titles style
- subtitles style

Running the book through an EPUB reader or through an iBooks app will let you see whether your spacing, fonts and styling are consistent. One of the reasons I use Ulysses is that I can split the screen, showing the work in progress on one side, and the EPUB version of the manuscript on the other. It's easy to make small corrections that way.

Formatting for Kindle: The Specifics

After you've checked everything, upload your Word doc to Kindle. The Amazon KDP (Kindle Direct Publishing) platform will convert it to a format called mobi, which is proprietary to Amazon. You can download the mobi file to check the formatting or look at it in an online simulator Amazon provides. There's even a spellchecker. If you've included rare or interesting fonts, you'll find that Amazon has converted them to more common fonts such as Times or Verdana. Some of the most common problems I've seen in this conversion process are inconsistent spacing and formatting. You might see pages breaking where you don't want them to break, or chapter headings that are in the wrong font. Sometimes it takes a couple of tries of running the manuscript through KDP's conversion process to get things looking right. The KDP help desk is good, but not particularly swift to respond to help requests.

Amazon will assign your book a free tracking number, called an ASIN (Amazon Standard Identification Number), which is used to uniquely identify your book. This is the only ID number you'll need for an eBook on Amazon's Kindle platform. Other tracking numbers include a UPC

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Listing your book for sale on Amazon is free.

Formatting for Smashwords: The Specifics

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A Word on Paragraphs

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Having a consistent style for paragraph breaks is necessary and adds to the professional look of your book.

Third-Party Formatting Apps

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and deliver versions suitable for Amazon, the iBooks Store, or Barnes & Noble's Nook format. If you don't have the patience to click through your manuscript to fix all the little errors that are introduced in the conversion from Word, then Vellum is for you. It's easy to use and delivers elegant results. If you are importing your manuscript from a Word file, the app attempts to set up a table of contents for you. Vellum is free, but you must pay to export your book into the three publishing formats. The way it works is you edit and format your book as much as you like in the free app, but when it comes time to export your book, you have to pay. As I write this, you unlock a single eBook for \$29.99. You can buy a ten-book license for \$99.99. An unlimited license to format as many books as you like is \$199.99. If you plan on writing a bunch of commercial books, particularly fiction, this would work well. I found the font styles a bit precious for nonfiction, but that's a matter of personal taste.

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-Lee Schneider

Creative Director and Editor-In-Chief at Red Cup Agency

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About the Author

Lee Schneider is Creative Director and Editor-In-Chief of Red Cup Agency, a communications agency based in Santa Monica and known for its work with educators, social activists, authors, and leaders in fitness and food. He is an instructor at the USC School of Architecture, teaching media for graduate-level architecture and design students. He is a prolific author; visit his profile on [Amazon](#) or [Smashwords](#).

Before starting Red Cup, he was executive producer of DocuCinema, a media production company that he founded and that created documentaries and series television for History, Discovery Health, The Learning Channel, ReelzChannel, Food Network, and Bravo. Early in his career, he wrote for *Good Morning America* and was a producer for *Dateline NBC* in Burbank. He has guest-lectured and taught workshops and classes at USC, University of Minnesota College of Design, Architecture for Humanity and Public Architecture.

His blogs are published in [Medium](#) and [500 Words on Thursday](#).

Factoid: Back in the 1980s, he was a writer on the iconic cartoon series *ThunderCats* and was Story Editor and writer on the cartoon series *SilverHawks*.