

e-publishing

By Chris Cheng (Diploma in Teaching, UTS, 1981)

As an author of children's books published in the traditional print based process for more than 20 years I have seen changes ... but nothing quite as amazing as the advent of e-publishing. This has been a wonderful development especially for someone like me. Why? Because those titles that I poured my heart and soul into creating, and more than a few cups of coffee, that have disappeared from catalogues and even the library shelves, can now have a new lease of life.



Before the advent of e-publishing, once a book was out of print the rights for the title could revert to the author, but what could you do with it. It was rather expensive to take that book and republish it as a traditional book but now digital publishing has made it very possible – and the book will still be 'in print' for many years to come.

But epub is not just a way to see a new lease of life for my books. It is also a first port of call as there are now publishers (I work with **PaddleDuck Learning**) who only publish digitally. And it is similar to publishing a traditional work. You write then submit the manuscript and the publisher does the rest. There are still contracts (watch out for those) and the manuscript might still get rejected. But then you could find a publisher to convert it for you – digitally with just a little sleuthing and talking to the right people.

And then once a title is produced digitally you have to get it out there, and that can rely a lot on interacting with social media and more – but that is another article totally.

Currently we have **ebooks**, **enhanced ebooks** and **apps** all as part of the e-publishing world. In essence an **ebook** is the traditional print book being viewed in digital form on screen – *60 Classic Australian Poems* that I edited a few years ago will shortly be available as an ebook through the publisher. **Enhanced ebooks** do more than just have the words (and images) appearing on the screen. For example they might have links to secondary sources and even movie clips. And **Apps** (short for Application) is the book in digital form that allows the user to interact with the material – play a game, manipulate the content, maybe even colour in the pictures or record your own voice.

As an author with a considerable backlist, the past 18 months has seen my inbox being visited by a number of digital publishing companies offering to take my out-of-print titles and reproduce them digitally. I probably receive an 'offer' once a month, from both within Australia and further afield. The rights for my out of print titles have reverted to me so with just a little bit of work now they can have a fresh new look, updated information (as they were mainly non-fiction titles) and be made relevant for a new generation of readers.

But who to choose and who would I trust with recreating my works? It all comes down to a lot of detective work, and recommendations from professionals in the field. It really was much like it should be when sending out a manuscript to a traditional publisher. I asked similar questions to those I asked when I first started publishing *what is their track history, who have they published, how long have they been publishing*, (okay in the digital pub world this has a very short time period but you probably get my drift) and *how are they going to get my book out there*. You still need to be aware and do a bit of investigating.

In the same way that there are some companies out there charging thousands of dollars to create a book trailer when all you really need is a bit of computer skills and the right software (I love using Keynote and Garageband – my latest is for my new picture book Sounds spooky <http://www.sounds-spooky.com/movies/>) there are also folk who will charge a fortune for something that should not be. So do some research!

And as an author the financial compensation for e-publishing can be very impressive. It is important to remember that e-pub titles are generally very inexpensive (when compared to a traditionally published title) – some can be purchased for as little as a few dollars (even 99 cents). Now that might not seem much but if you are able to snaffle even a very small percentage of the consumer market then thousands and hundreds of thousands of 99cents make a whole lot of dollars.

My first foray into the digital realm was an App for my out of print title *Zoo you later* (the book went OOP quite soon after being published as changes were made in the publishing house). I was approached by the company to take my OOP title (do you have any? I was asked), so I negotiated my own contract acquiring most of what I wanted and then passed my manuscript into their hands. You can see it here: <http://itunes.apple.com/app/id373017053?>

There are a few things that I would change (like making the characters a little softer and including my web address on the closing credits – Marketing 101 argh – and adding other languages), and this will happen with the updated version of the App. And that is one of the wonderful features of the digital construct. Users can upgrade to the newer edition – sometimes at no (or very minimal) cost.

Now I also create content and source content providers for a **PaddleDuck Learning**, a digital publishing company producing Apps for toddlers.

I love still being published traditionally– seeing my name on people's bookshelves or kids reading my book while travelling to school (yes it has happened) is a supreme buzz ... but seeing my work published digitally and read and interacted with on an iPad, well that is a buzz too!

You can see what Chris is doing in publishing and e-publishing on his website (www.chrischeng.com) and the blog at <http://www.chrischengauthor.blogspot.com/>