

OEUVRELY

# A Catalogue of Strangers

*The data case for owning your reader relationships*

Published by Oeuvrelly — a service by Impellio Media Co.

From the team behind PublishersGlobal.com

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# What the Numbers Don't Show

You know how concentrated your sales channels are. You live with the terms, the payment cycles, and the returns. None of that needs explaining.

But those numbers hide a deeper cost — not in margin, but in data you never receive and relationships you never build.

| METRIC  | FIGURE | SOURCE                |
|---|--------|-----------------------|
| Print sales through the largest online retailer             | 50%+   | WordsRated, 2024      |
| US e-book sales through the dominant platform               | 67%    | Automateed, 2025      |
| US audiobook market held by the leading platform            | 63%    | Marketing Scoop, 2025 |
| Standard wholesale discount                                 | 55%    | Industry standard     |
| Customer data publishers receive from any of these channels | 0%     | Industry reality      |

That last row is the one that matters most. Across every sales channel — retail, wholesale, online — you receive no information about who buys your books. No email addresses. No purchase patterns. No way to say: "You bought three of our titles last year — here's a new one you'll love."

Your list may be beautifully curated. Your editorial investment may span decades. But you can't contact the readers who value it. Every new title starts from scratch.

A direct channel doesn't replace your existing channels. It adds the one thing they can't provide: a relationship with the people who read your books.

*"The publisher brand is being obliterated. You are buying a Kindle ebook — not Random House, HarperCollins, or Hachette."*

MIKE SHATZKIN, FOUNDER, THE IDEA LOGICAL COMPANY

# The Margin Maths

A \$15 paperback, two paths.

|                               | TRADITIONAL            | DIRECT SALE    |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| List price                    | \$15.00                | \$15.00        |
| Distributor / retailer cut    | -\$8.25 (55%)          | -\$0.00        |
| Payment processing            | —                      | -\$0.45 (3%)   |
| <b>Publisher receives</b>     | <b>\$6.75</b>          | <b>\$14.55</b> |
| Printing cost                 | -\$3.00                | -\$3.00        |
| Shipping                      | (included in discount) | -\$3.50        |
| Author royalty (15%)          | -\$2.25                | -\$2.25        |
| <b>Publisher net per unit</b> | <b>\$1.50</b>          | <b>\$5.80</b>  |

Figures are illustrative based on typical industry costs. Actual margins vary by title, format, and volume. Printing costs per Spines, 2025; margin ranges per Self Publishing School.

The per-unit difference is clear enough. But the real value compounds: direct sales generate customer data alongside revenue.

**\$750**

MONTHLY MARGIN VIA DISTRIBUTION

500 books/month through traditional channels.  
Zero customer relationships.

**\$2,900**

MONTHLY MARGIN SELLING DIRECT

Same 500 books — plus 500 email addresses.  
Each one a future sale that costs nothing to reach.

Over a year, that's not a margin improvement. It's a different business model.

*"The essence of the change brought about by digital was less about formats than the shift to the end consumer... Cracking that code of discoverability in this new digital world — that is the task for book publishers today."*

MARKUS DOHLE, FORMER CEO, PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE

## SECTION 03

# Direct Sales: What the Evidence Shows

Independent authors were the first to test direct sales at scale — largely out of necessity. What they've demonstrated applies at least equally to publishers with larger catalogues and stronger editorial brands.

## The data across multiple surveys

- **30%** of independent authors already sell direct; another **30%** plan to start in 2026.

Written Word Media, 1,346 respondents, December 2025; confirmed by Alliance of Independent Authors

- Among authors earning over **\$10,000/month**, roughly half sell direct.

Written Word Media, 2025

- Authors with **10+ books** who sell direct earn an average of **\$1,045/month** from direct sales alone — a 5x premium over those with fewer titles.

Kindlepreneur, 547 respondents, 2025

- Over **80%** of authors who sell direct maintain their own websites for that purpose.

PublishDrive, July 2025

That last statistic is particularly relevant for publishers. Individual authors — many working alone with limited marketing resources — are finding the investment worthwhile. Publishers have advantages authors lack: a backlist that rewards browsing, editorial curation, and infrastructure for managing multiple titles.

## The AI discovery shift

There's a timing dimension worth noting. ChatGPT has launched instant checkout in partnership with Shopify. When readers ask AI tools for book recommendations, those tools surface websites, shops, and editorial content — not marketplace listings.

Publishers without their own digital presence don't appear in these results. This isn't a future problem. It's happening now.

*"AI search brought up my Shopify stores, my website, podcast, and Patreon — but did not bring up links to Amazon. If you only have an author presence on Amazon, does it appear in AI search at all?"*

JOANNA PENN, THE CREATIVE PENN, JANUARY 2026

### SECTION 04

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## What a Direct Channel Actually Involves

Not just a shop. A connected system — each piece reinforcing the others.

### 01

#### Your catalogue, properly presented

The one place online where your list exists as a curated collection — series properly ordered, formats clearly presented, contributors fully credited. Built on ONIX-compatible structures so your data flows from your title management system to your website without duplicate entry. When you update a price or add a format, your site reflects it.

### 02

#### Reader relationships you own

Every site visit is a chance to grow your email list. Every direct purchase gives you a name, an email, and purchase history. Unlike social media followers, your email list can't be taken away by an algorithm change.

## 03

### Commerce alongside your existing channels

Direct sales don't replace distribution. They add a line with better margins, full customer data, and the flexibility to offer what other channels can't: signed editions, bundles, pre-orders, exclusive covers.

## 04

### Content that drives discovery

Reading guides, author events, editorial perspective — these give readers a reason to visit and revisit. They also make your site visible to both traditional search engines and AI discovery tools.

*"Amazon is no longer my biggest income source." He's been consciously moving his readers away from Amazon and moved those readers to his website.*

MICHAEL W. LUCAS, AUTHOR — AS REPORTED BY KRISTINE KATHRYN RUSCH, JANUARY 2023

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#### ABOUT THIS REPORT

Oeuvrelly created this report to help publishers make sense of the data around direct channels. We're a publisher website and commerce service by [Impellio Media Co.](#), built on nearly two decades of work with the publishing industry through multiple brands, including [PublishersGlobal.com](#).

If any of this resonated, we'd be happy to talk it through. Book a free 15-minute conversation — no pitch, no obligation.

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