

Ebooks and authors: The math of publishing doesn't add up

In [Math of Publishing Meets the E-Book](#) (*New York Times* , Feb. 28, 2010) reporter Motoko Rich considers mainly publishers' profits in her article about the current debate about the pricing of e-books versus printed ones. She does point out, however, that authors, earning 15% on a book that sells for \$26, would come away with almost \$3.90 after paying back any advances on royalties.

On my book, [Broken Patterns](#), published 15 years ago by Wayne State University Press, I made 7.5%...on each hardcover—which sold for \$44.95 (you can imagine how many I sold at that price!) and 5% on the paperback, which went for \$24.95. The book, on which I spent 12 years, went on sale a few years later...Used copies are now advertised at 11 cents...Well, you can do the math. (I can't bear to).

With a new book, [Ithaca Diaries](#), in the works, I've been thinking of self-publishing, this time around. But I read somewhere that self-published authors, using publishing on demand plaforms, sell on average maybe 25 copies—and you have to factor in the costs of marketing, editing and design.

In her *Times* article, Rich quotes [Anne Rice](#), the best-selling author of vampire books, as saying that authors have no idea what books cost or what profits publishers make. "For all I know, a million books at \$9.99 might be great for an author," Ms. Rice says.

Could be. (Hey, I was an English major—again, no math). But even I have figured out that if I had a day job, I shouldn't quit it, just yet!

—Anita Harris

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