ePUBLISHER GUIDE

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The definitive guide to electronic publishing for the RPG/Game Industry

Minion GAMES

MG 2001

ePublisher Guide

ePublisher Guide

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Preface

Welcome to the world of electronic publishing! The intent of this book and the supporting content included with this release is to give you a realistic look at what it takes to be an ePublisher.

The big allure of ePublishing is its easy low-cost entry point. You have no warehouse or shipping overhead costs, no need to deal with distribution chains, no employees save a few freelancers, no schedule to work on except your own, and an extreme degree of flexibility with products you offer.

Yet, it may not be as glamorous or profitable as you may first think. It may also be a lot more work then expected, especially if you choose to publish under an open systems license. Way too many people don't take these licenses seriously enough or even understand them. This can result in months of wasted work. We hope to help you navigate these waters and at the very least enjoy yourself along the way.

Though we do touch on the common issues regarding d20 System licensing, this is not a primer for that subject. We do plan to release an in-depth primer on d20 publishing at a later date.

Please keep in mind that throughout this document we are not to be considered a replacement for your lawyer or accountant. In no way should you ever assume we are giving you any sort of legal or financial advice. Be warned!

This document was written by many writers, both freelancers and publishers. Please excuse any change in writing styles as you read this information. We felt it best to get people with the most knowledge on a subject to speak directly to you.

Lastly, as a purchaser of this product, you're invited to a private forum to continue the discussion of the topics brought up here. We plan to have a panel of publishers monitoring this private forum. Simply ask for access by writing email to custserv@rpgnow.com

Thank you for purchasing our guide!

James Mathe
Minion Development Corp.

Foreword by Monte Cook

Two Years Ago. So there we were, sitting at our computers, waiting for the file to go live. The Book of Eldritch Might was a bunch of new spells, feats, and magic items that I'd tossed together. Neat things I wanted to share, with little aspiration of being a proper "book." My wife Sue and I just wanted to see what would happen if we put out an electronic product for sale through our website. I wrote, she edited, and together we struggled through the dizzying process of converting files to PDFs, and finding a way to sell electronic files online.

We'd released a free PDF of a variant ranger about a month or so earlier to test the waters. It seemed popular, so we were hopeful. Maybe we'd sell 100 copies of The Book of Eldritch Might. Was that too optimistic? Maybe 50. The ranger had far more downloads than that, but it was free. Would anyone out there actually pay for a PDF product?

Today. A fellow d20 publisher in a conversation about the market says to me, "When you got into the PDF industry, it wasn't very big yet, was it?"

"Industry?" I replied. "There was no PDF industry." I realized then and there that most people didn't start paying attention to PDFs until The Book of Eldritch Might came out. They simply don't know what it was like back then.

Two Years Ago. When I had the idea for publishing an electronic product, I looked around to see if anyone else was doing anything similar. I found a couple of companies doing for-sale electronic products, but they were maps and printable scenery for wargames. I found 0one Games, who'd released a massive d20 campaign supplement as a downloadable file for a fee, but (and I mean no disrespect to the folks at 0one, for they are truly innovators) I couldn't find anyone who'd ever heard of them.

They were all using PayPal to handle the transactions, which was a fine choice, but one that didn't satisfy me. PayPal was only one payment option on the web. I wanted something like Amazon.com or the thousands of other e-commerce sites that let you just pay by credit card or send a check.

I found one, but navigating through their interface to create a "storefront" was incredibly difficult. Plus we had a jury-rigged bit of software that would deliver the link to you via email. I only really knew about half of what I was doing. When it was all done, and the PDF ready to sell, we updated our website with the announcement and hoped and prayed. We weren't NASA and this wasn't the first manned space-flight, but it felt like it.

Today. Creating and selling a PDF is extremely easy now. Today, you can focus solely on the important things, like the content of the product. Of course, you also have to consider how to make yourself stand out among all your fellow PDF publishers and all their products. RPGNow launches multiple new products every day. It's all of a sudden a crowded market. Part of the reason it's a popular venue for publishers is that RPGNow makes electronic publishing extremely easy. And customers know to go there to find what's new and cool in the electronic publishing field.

Two Years Ago. When we thought about marketing when we started, we weren't really selling our product. We were selling the concept of PDFs. Electronic books? E-books? E-files? E-products? We didn't even know what to call what we were selling. We had a tag line: "Go PDF! It's the future of RPGs." It seems extremely ostentatious and grandiose, but, you know—I believed it.

Still, the biggest hurdle was figuring out how to even let people know the product existed. For that, we really owe a lot to Eric Noah. Literally within minutes of The Book of Eldritch Might becoming available, Eric posted a link to it on his hugely popular 3rd Edition News site. And, what's very appropriate (and, truthfully, not at all pre-arranged), Eric bought the very first copy.

Today. Is there a market for PDFs? That variant ranger I mentioned, as of this writing, has had around 50,000 downloads. Fifty. Thousand. But will people pay for electronic game products? Well, that night two years ago, Sue and I had our expectations blown right out the door. And what is more amazing, the book continues to sell to this day. That's just one more wonderful thing about electronic products that we hadn't even thought of: They're always in stock, always available. Unlike a print title, which sells through its print run (hopefully) and then is never seen again, The Book of Eldritch Might—and presumably, if the publishers wish it, every PDF that's come out since then—will always be available. Forever.

The Future. Electronic products continue to gain more and more acceptance among the mainstream gaming audience. They aren't just a stepping-stone to publishing "real" books, but a medium unto themselves. If, in two years, the market grows from literally nothing to an industry with dozens—if not hundreds—of new products each month, what better sign do we need that PDF products really are future of RPGs?

Welcome to the hub of innovation. Welcome to the future.

Monte Cook
Malhavoc Press
March 2003

Chapter 1:
Prepress & Planning

Passion is the root of the RPG industry. Most games and supplements are created primarily as a labor of love. Certainly, there's money to be made in ePublishing, but you're unlikely to get rich. Very few (if any) ePublishers can claim to do it as a full-time venture. The profit margin is too small for that, even for products that have a wide appeal to gamers.

In other words, don't quit your day job.

In fact, it's especially important for you to maintain another source of income, as you're going to need money to bring your project(s) to fruition. There's an old saying, "It takes money to make money." This adage definitely holds true for ePublishing. Without another way to generate cash your product will likely be doomed to mediocrity, at least from a presentation standpoint, unless you can do the layout, type-setting and artwork yourself.

The love of designing and publishing your own game should be your primary motivation behind leaping into the ever-growing ePublishing market. Otherwise, you may well be disappointed with the profits you make. Do it because you love it, not because you love money. This way, you're expectations will be met. After all, you will have a product out for others to enjoy, and if you happen to make a profit, then that's just icing on the cake.

And icing can sometimes taste as good as the cake itself.

Do the Research

Before you commit to a product, make sure you do a great deal of research. This cannot be stressed enough. Your own hard-earned cash will be going into this venture. Unless you have an unlimited amount of currency to toss around, you'll probably want to make the most of your product. Research is the key to doing this.

There are many factors you should research. It may seem daunting, but you'll find it's worth it in the end. Below, we'll discuss some of the things you should check into.

d20 and the Open Gaming License

Are you going to release a full-fledged game of your own devising or are you going to release a supplement to an existing game?

Prior to August 2000, this was fairly clear-cut; few companies provided material for games produced by other companies. Since the advent of the d20 System and the Open Gaming License, however, this has changed drastically. Companies both large and small have released an astonishing number of d20/OGL products in electronic and printed formats. There appears to be no end to this phenomenon in sight.

There are many benefits to hopping on the d20/OGL train. First and foremost, the d20 System is a widely known game line that has more support than any other in the history of RPGs. Such a great number of gamers plays d20 in one form or another that it creates a network for your own product. This fact opens the supplement up to gamers who are not otherwise interested in investing in a brand new game with an unfamiliar system.

Another large benefit is seen from a design standpoint. Designing a product for the d20 System eliminates the need to design and perfect full game rules from scratch because you can build upon a proven game system and go from there.

Of course, there are two routes you can go with d20/OGL products: You can either develop it as a supplement for an already-released d20/OGL game (most likely Dungeons and Dragons) or you can go one step further and construct a separate d20/OGL game of your own. This blurs the line somewhat between the "game or supplement" topic, but that's the nature of the beast.

With all the perks of going the d20/OGL route, it may seem as if there is no reason to publish a completely original game. This is decidedly not the case. For one thing, there is no small satisfaction in crafting a game from the ground up, as most game designers can attest to. Some designers equate publishing d20/OGL products to playing in someone else's

sandbox. You are bound to the terms set by Wizards of the Coast, without question. By publishing your own game, there are no limitations beyond those set by your own imagination.

Furthermore, not all gamers enjoy d20/OGL games. Some downright refuse to play anything bearing the d20 logo. It takes many flavors to satisfy a diverse crowd—and no crowd is more diverse than gamers.

Customer Demand

Before you start spending time and money on your product, you should determine whether there will be any interest in it.

Start off by going to appropriate online forums and/or e-mail discussion groups, asking if your idea has any real merit. Be prepared for some potentially harsh responses and try to filter out the people who are merely running off at the proverbial mouth. Pay close attention to the folks who offer logical points, even if these points aren't what you wanted to hear. It's been said a million times: You must have a thick skin in this business.

Another helpful method of measuring customer demand is to do a web search for the subject matter your product revolves around. If the game is to be set in a world devastated by nuclear war, check for sites using search words like "post-apocalyptic" or "end of the world." You can even search for sites dedicated to fiction of the genre/topic. Chances are that

if you find a large selection of these web sites, there's at least some demand for a game such as yours.

Of course, that statement isn't necessarily true in all cases. The game industry is a fickle creature with its own trends, fads and sways in popularity. Find out what games have been released in the milieu you've selected for your game and when they were released. If none have been released in recent years or have never been released at all, it can generally mean one of two things: there's not much interest in the genre these days or no one has thought about publishing a game like it in awhile (or at all).

If the former is true, you might want to think about either coming up with a new idea or putting a new twist on the existing idea in hopes that it will spark the imaginations of the gaming populace. If the latter is true, you may be tapping into something fresh and original.

The bottom line is to ask around. Don't be afraid to post a thread on a forum that asks why people think there haven't been any or many games of the milieu in question. The answers could be extremely illuminating.

Target Audience

Going into a venture without knowing toward whom you plan to gear the product toward is sheer folly. This plays an even larger role in marketing, but it all starts here, before you even begin designing the game or supplement. For example,

Roleplaying Unit Sales — 2003: 32% / 68%; 2004: 23% / 77%; D20/OGL License, non-D20/OLG
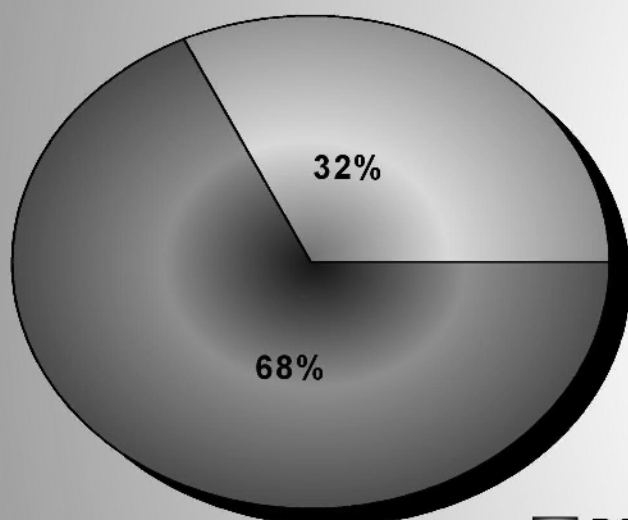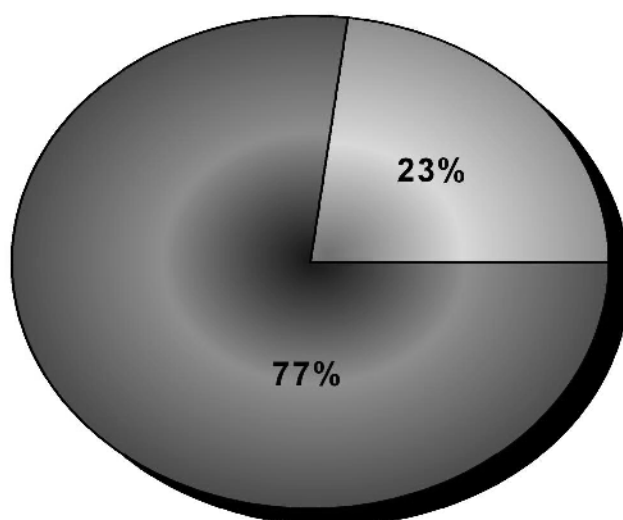
if you wish to aim the product at young gamers between the ages of 10 and 12, you should consider keeping the rules simple. If you wish to create a retro-gaming feel to the product, research some older games and learn what made them different from today's games.

This can be one of the most research-intensive aspects you'll come across. Do whatever you can to slip into the mindset of the target audience. Immerse yourself in it. Let's say you plan to publish a game based on the prime-time action shows of the '80s. Who's going to purchase this game? I think it's a safe bet that the majority of your customers will be males who were in their teens or twenties during the decade these shows first aired. Not all of your fan base will fall neatly into that category, but most of them will.
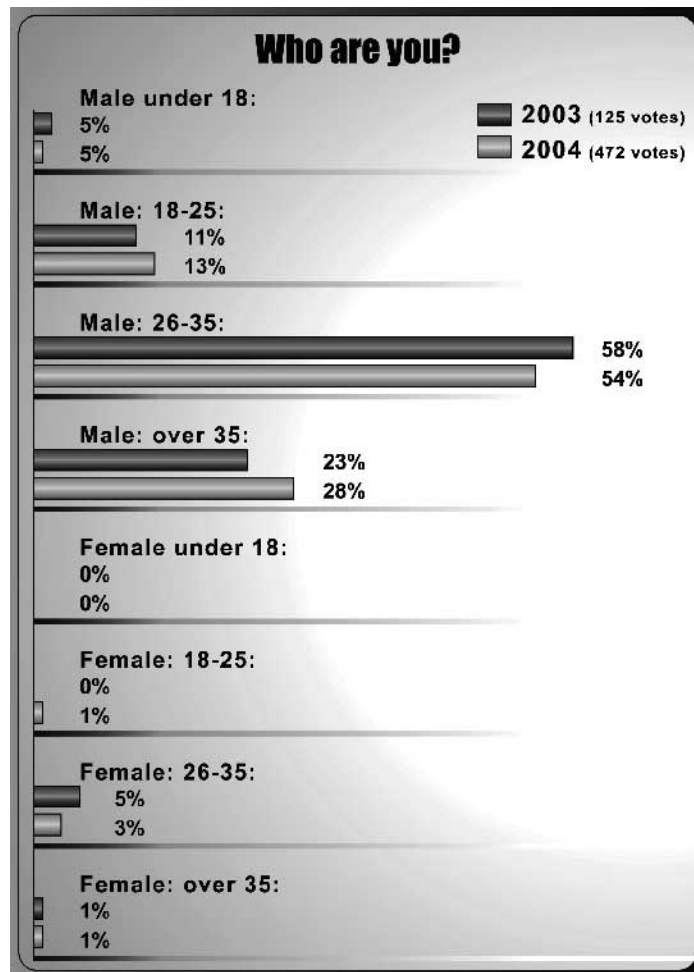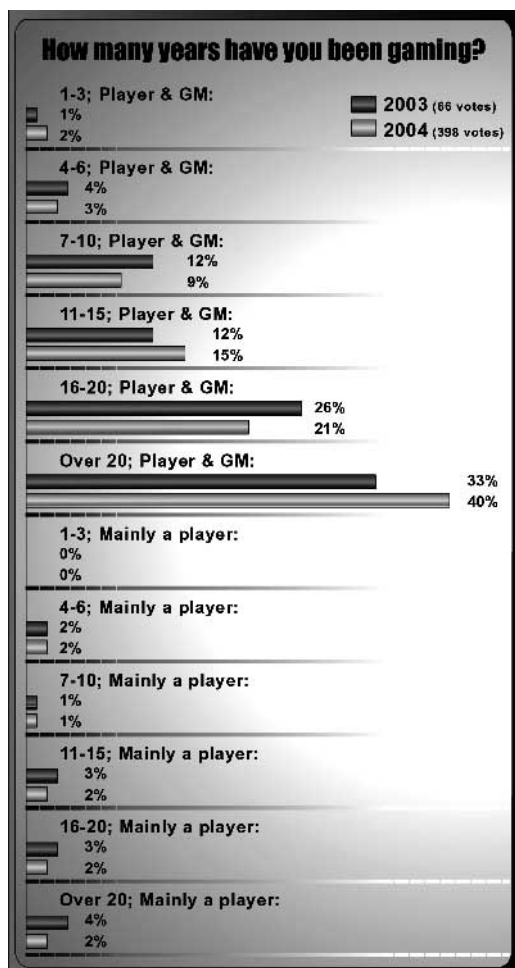
Knowing your target audience is crucial. Planning your product around that audience is even more crucial. Never lose sight of that fact.

Who are you?

Male under 18:
5% (2003)
5% (2004)

Male: 18-25:
11%
13%

Male: 26-35:
58%
54%

Male: over 35:
23%
28%

Female under 18:
0%
0%

Female: 18-25:
0%
1%

Female: 26-35:
5%
3%

Female: over 35:
1%
1%

2003 (125 votes)
2004 (472 votes)

How many years have you been gaming?

1-3; Player & GM:
1%
2%

4-6; Player & GM:
4%
3%

7-10; Player & GM:
12%
9%

11-15; Player & GM:
12%
15%

16-20; Player & GM:
26%
21%

Over 20; Player & GM:
33%
40%

1-3; Mainly a player:
0%
0%

4-6; Mainly a player:
2%
2%

7-10; Mainly a player:
1%
1%

11-15; Mainly a player:
3%
2%

16-20; Mainly a player:
3%
2%

Over 20; Mainly a player:
4%
2%

2003 (66 votes)
2004 (398 votes)

➲ Content and Page Count

The belief that bigger is better isn't always true in ePublishing. On one hand, a high page count adds to the inherent value of the product. More pages means more game material and let's face it, this is usually considered a good thing.

On the other hand, customers wanting to print the game may balk at the amount of paper and ink consumed in doing so if the product consists of a lot of pages. The added bulk may be appealing, but the extra expense isn't.

It's a double-edged sword, so place ample consideration into this overlooked aspect of ePublishing your product.

Unfortunately, there's no etched-in-stone rule for determining how many pages is right for your product. Generally speaking, once a product moves past the 100-page mark, some people grumble a bit. Upon reaching 200 pages, the grumbling becomes outright complaining. That said, there are plenty of successful ePublished games with 200 or more pages.

➲ Product Pricing

Determining a price for your product is even more tricky than deciding on the page count. ePublishing is still a relatively new concept. As such, no one has yet developed a solid method of placing a monetary value on electronic-based games; most publishers more or less play it by ear.

One suggestion is to base the price loosely on the page count. Charging $1 per 10 pages beyond the first 10 pages is about right. Again, this is merely a guideline, but it's a useful one nonetheless. Whatever you charge, it should be enough to help finance your next product, if you plan to release any more.

When selecting a price, don't make the mistake of underestimating the value of your product. A lot of time, effort and care will be going into your creation. That alone is worth something. By setting the price point too low, would-be customers might perceive it as a bargain bin product that wasn't able to sell well at a "normal" price. Not exactly a good image to establish.

At the same time though, you should avoid slapping on an enormous price tag. Remember, there's still a great deal of bias against PDF-based games. A lot of gamers want published books and will turn up their noses at PDF products, no matter how high the quality is. By keeping a reasonable price, you'll likely sidestep one of the barriers some naysayers have put up.

➲ Expected Costs

It takes money to make money. This simple fact should be kept firmly in mind when you set out to publish your creation. It doesn't take a fortune to get things up and running, but make no mistake—there are costs.

Artwork

The cover should be the single most spectacular piece of art in any product. Many people will judge the book by its cover, sometimes subconsciously, sometimes not. Placing lackluster (or outright bad) art on the cover will turn a lot of potential customers off to your product, regardless of how good the book itself is.

Expect to pay a decent amount of money on cover art, but it's a good investment. On average, you'll spend between $100 and $250 for a cover.
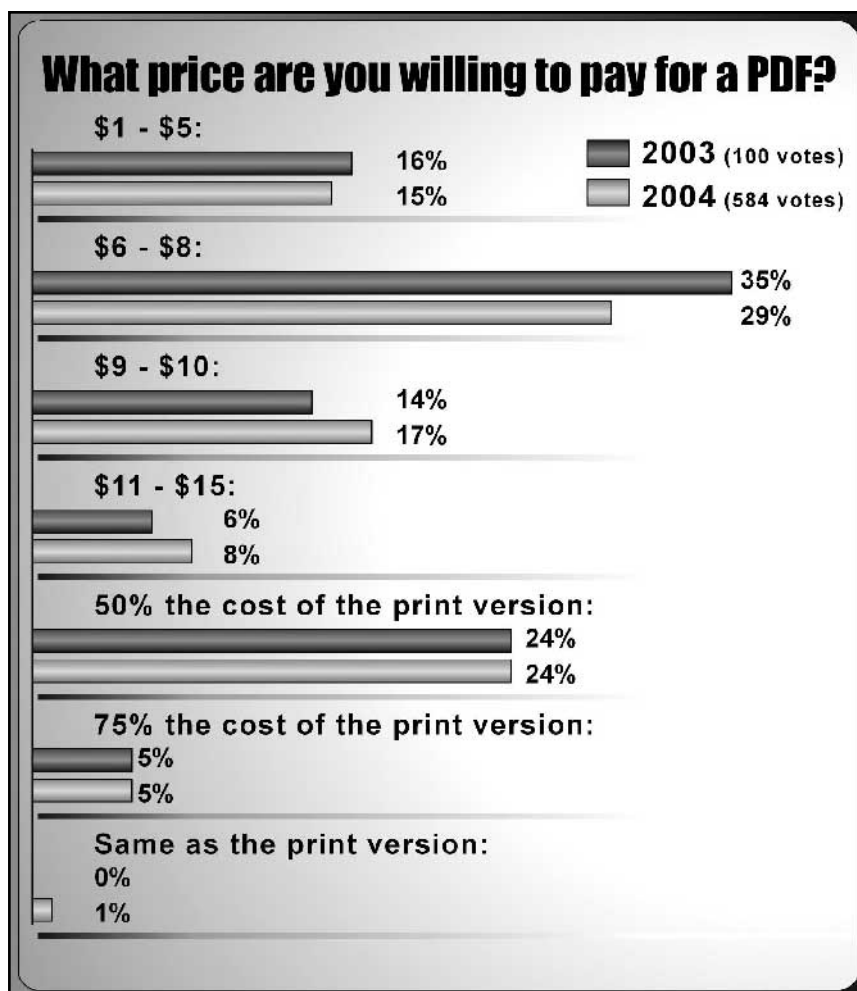
Interior art won't be quite as expensive, at least not per piece. The standard in the industry is anywhere from $20 to $50 for a half-page piece. Adept Press, for instance, offers artists a flat rate of $100, and the artist gives them however much art he or she feels that would be worth.

Interior pictures in a game or supplement act not only as a means to convey the setting/theme/genre, but also serve as placeholders. It's pretty easy to remember that, say, the rules for initiative are "on the page with the picture of the barbarian fighting the mud-beast." Plus, art breaks up the monotony of what would otherwise be an endless sea of text.

But how much interior art should you include? There is no right or wrong amount, but PDF products contain one piece of art per 3-5 pages. Depending on the page count, this could lead to a fairly sizeable wad of cash. Watch your budget and do what you can.

With all this talk about big spending, you're probably thinking that acquiring art is going to deplete every ounce of your funds. Truthfully, it will likely bite a chunk out of said funds, but there are ways to alleviate the costs.

What price are you willing to pay for a PDF?

2003 (100 votes)
2004 (584 votes)

Price	2003	2004
$1 - $5	16%	15%
$6 - $8	35%	29%
$9 - $10	14%	17%
$11 - $15	6%	8%
50% the cost of the print version	24%	24%
75% the cost of the print version	5%	5%
Same as the print version	0%	1%

First of all, look into using free clip art. There are numerous web sites devoted to supplying clip art. The quality of these images ranges from extremely poor to downright spiffy. If you take the time to filter through the weak stuff, you might actually find some real gems to include in your product. Similarly, you might want to look into stock photos, which are pictures intended for use in magazine ads, promotional flyers and the like.

The other method of obtaining free artwork is to seek out amateur artists hoping to break into the business. When contacting them, explain to that it's not a paying gig and that they would be contributing their talent to your project in return for exposure. I've offered artists the opportunity to write a small blurb about themselves to be included in the product. Typically, these blurbs will list the artist's web site address, contact information and a bit about their experience or training.

Amateur artists can be found in a multitude of places, but I've had a lot of luck finding them on comic book and cartoon fan forums. You'd be surprised how many artists would gladly contribute their work in order to get their names out there.

Another way to afford artwork is to pay the artist royalties. You'll need a clear contract before going too far down this path but, with the right artist and project, this method of payment can be beneficial to everyone involved.

For example, you contract an artist to complete ten interior illustrations and a cover, for which he will be paid 20% of gross. This means that if your PDF is priced at $5.00, for every copy sold you will pay the artist $1.00. If your contract specified that the artist would be paid 20% of net, and you're an RPGNow customer, the artist would be paid $0.75 for each copy sold.

As you can probably tell from the example, gross is the listed price of the product while net is the amount of money that you actually bring in. It's always best to work from net since that allows you to place a product on special without causing an accounting nightmare when it's time to pay the artist.

Frequency of payments can be anything you want (hourly, weekly, monthly) though it's recommended that you include this in the contract. For e-Publishers, monthly is recommended.

Layout

The layout of your product is arguably even more important than artwork. Without a nice layout, the game or supplement could be difficult to read, hard to navigate or just painful to look at. Some layout specialists charge per page, some charge by the hour and still others just charge a flat fee. Here are a few average costs:

Per Page:	*$1 to $5*
Per Hour:	*$20 to $50*
Flat Fee:	*$100 to $500*

Online Malls

The eMall is a relatively new concept that has played a significant role in elevating ePublishing to previously unheard of heights. The idea is a simple one really: a virtual store that sells PDF games. Offering your product for sale at these eMalls is a good marketing move. Having your product at a centralized location where gamers often browse around is never a bad thing and this is the primary service these new-fangled malls provide the budding ePublisher.

Nothing good comes without a price, however. E-malls make their profit by keeping a cut of the money brought in by each sale made through that venue. At the time of this writing, 20 percent is the going rate. It may sound steep (and it is), but many ePublishers feel the cut is justified by the services they receive in return.

Posting Calls for Help

There are several websites, mailing lists, and forums to help get freelancers and publishers together. See our reference chapter for a few specific links. When you're in need of help to complete a project you can visit these areas and post an open call for help. Here are some guidelines for what to include in your message to help you make an effective public post:

- Subject should include the type of work and that it's paid or unpaid. A tag stating the general subject of a thread can be helpful to other users. For example: [art], [writing], [editing].

- Freelancing Requirements: What type of work are you looking for (art, writing, editing, cartography, etc). Include a little detail about the skills required. Word counts or image DPI details should be included too. If work is to be done under a license, let them know which one.

- Brief outline of game setting or genre, style requirements and media for publishing.

- Brief outline of rates (flat or royalty), rights (ownership, reprinting) and deadlines (drafts, milestones and due date).

- Include a reference link to your website or details page for the product.
- Provide contact information in the way of e-mail, snail mail, and/or phone number. Also include any link to your submission guidelines page.

➲ Release Schedules

Deciding upon a release date for your project requires a touch of forethought. Planning ahead is a difficult thing to do, especially considering the roller-coaster ride that is ePublishing. Just when you plan for something, some manner of crazy and unexpected occurrence is bound to throw a monkey wrench into the works.

I would advise against announcing a release date until at least until after the initial design process is finished. Truthfully, it wouldn't hurt to wait for playtesting to be wrapped up. Playtesting is something you definitely shouldn't rush, lest you run the risk of releasing a sub-par product.

Once you determine a basic time frame, there are a few other things to factor in.

Conventions

Conventions, especially large ones, attract a vast number of gamers. A large chunk of these gamers bring along a fully stuffed wallet and are just itching to spend the contents. So then, could there possibly be a better time to launch a product? Obviously not, given that most major game lines and supplements debut at cons. This is no coincidence, I assure you.

That said, there is one potential downside to this approach. As I already mentioned, numerous other products jump into the fray at larger conventions. Smaller or less publicized products run the risk of getting lost in the shuffle. Of course, good marketing can negate this possibility or at least reduce the chances of it occurring. Marketing will be discussed later in this book.

Marketplace Timing

Most internet sales occur on Sunday nights and Mondays. Sunday night is big because this is when people have few real-life activities planned before the next workday. Mondays are good because many non-computer owners or people bored at work surf using their office computers. For whatever reasons, news releases and sales seem to be most effective if posted late Sunday or early Monday.

Don't be confused by in-person shopping habits. Unlike malls in the real world, internet malls do not see increased business on holidays. In fact typically there are fewer purchases during actual holidays. So don't be rushed to release something over a holiday as it's more effective to wait till people return from their family get together. Internet shopping tends to be a solo and self-oriented experience. In other words, people typically buy for themselves and shop alone on the internet. Even Xmas isn't a very large sales spike. Better to follow the trends of the gaming industry. In general spring and fall are the hot seasons. January and February are rather slow.

Inactive Periods

Keep an eye out for what is being released and when. If you can target a month that is lacking in new releases, you might be able to gain more of a market share than in a month overflowing with new releases.

➲ Format

PDF products largely dominate the ePublishing scene, but they're not the only option available to you. In this section, we'll examine a few of these options so you can choose what will work best for you and your product.

PDF

PDF is a format readable primarily by Adobe Acrobat reader, which is available as both a free and for-pay program. PDF files are great for printing, but not so great for screen reading. It supports bookmarking, full text search and hyperlinks, making it remarkably versatile.

HTML

HTML is the programming language used to create web sites and the like. While not as popular as PDF, some ePublishers swear by this format. Essentially, it's a web site with the game or supplement posted directly to it. HTML products are by far easier to read on screen than PDFs, but the format doesn't offer as many options in terms of layout (fonts and such), nor does it print out as well.

E-Books

A newer solution, but not nearly as prominently utilized by game companies, is the e-book. E-books are designed mainly to be read directly from the screen. This means that they generally don't print as nicely.

CDs

While this isn't a format in the traditional sense, it is a means of getting your product into people's hands. A document can be burned onto a CD and sold in stores or at con-

ventions. This is actually quite inexpensive and you can include all sorts of "nifties" such as character sheets files, bonus material and so forth.
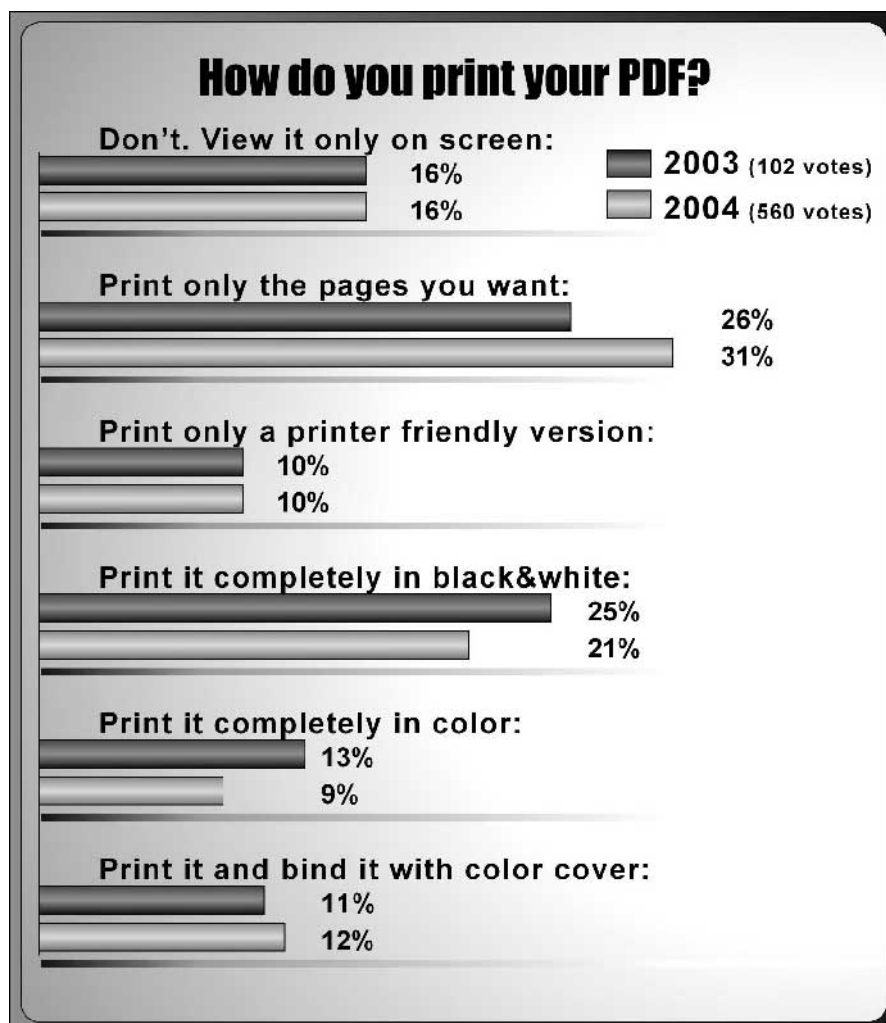
If you go this route, do not skimp on the packaging. Your CD will be competing for shelf-space with full-blown books. Books stand out better than CDs. One solution is to use DVD cases. They are larger and thus more easily noticeable. Normal CD cases will likely be relegated to the counter or some out-of-the-way location within a store rather than on the shelf where people look for games. DVD cases are large enough to fit comfortably on the shelves, standing shoulder to shoulder with the books.

I want to issue a word of warning: CD-based game products don't have a terribly good track record. Many retailers skip over ordering them outright and a lot of gamers balk at buying them. And as I mentioned previously, they often get overlooked in stores.

One possibility is to put freebie material on CD. Maybe a stripped-down trial version of your product (mainly if your product is a game rather than a supplement). It offers a great way to gain exposure, but does cost you money if you go too hog wild.

Print On Demand (POD)

Again, this isn't a true format, though I think it's worth discussing. Some printers specialize in "print on demand" (or POD for us lazy folk). This means that, as orders come in, you can have your PDF game created as a book and sent out. RPGnow.com recently began offering POD services to publishers, which is proving to be a great asset to ePublishers looking to dabble in print publishing as well. Currently, they charge 30 percent of your profit, but also handle fulfillment/warehousing.

How do you print your PDF?

	2003 (102 votes)	2004 (560 votes)
Don't. View it only on screen:	16%	16%
Print only the pages you want:	26%	31%
Print only a printer friendly version:	10%	10%
Print it completely in black&white:	25%	21%
Print it completely in color:	13%	9%
Print it and bind it with color cover:	11%	12%

Chapter 2:
Budgets and Staff

This chapter will help you understand and prepare for the costs involved in creating an electronic product. You may be surprised to find that most of the costs are the same as a print product, with the exception of the final print run and the extra tier of distribution.

We have included a wonderful budgeting worksheet from John Nephew (of Atlas Games) within this product's ZIP file. Don't forget to check it out.

At a glance, here are some minimum figures that we discuss more in-depth in this section.

So, using all outside talent, you will need at least $2,000 for your first year and first product. Most ePublishers tend to be writers, which means you can nix the "Writing" fee above. Let's first look at how you can raise money to start an ePublishing business, and then we'll look at where your expenses are, how to budget, and where to economize.

Typical Budget

Art:	*$25 per page, with perhaps 1/4 page of art for each 4-page spread*
Cover Art:	*$150*
Writing:	*$12 per page*
Editing:	*$3 per page*
$16.56 per page + cover	
48 page book:	*$945*
72 page book:	*$1340*
Marketing budget:	10%
Mall fees (sales):	20%
or Merchant Fees:	5%
Accountant/tax filing:	$250/year
Web hosting:	$20/month

Shoestring Budget

Writer:	free (it's you)
Artwork:	$20/page (starving artist); perhaps 1/4 page is used per 4-page spread
Editing:	$.005/word (a friend)
Layout:	free (you again)
Cover:	$50
Marketing:	$0
Sales/processing:	20%
48-page book:	*$144 editing, $170 art = $320, plus 20% to sell.*

➲ Funding and Investment

First, let's look at how to get money; from that you can make your initial budget. The first thought many people have is, "how can I get some investors?" The short answer is that professional investment simply does not exist for the RPG market, print or ePublishing.

Your first source of money is yourself. In fact, you will likely launch your business with money you have saved up.

You can potentially get a business loan, particularly from the Small Business Administration (SBA), a government office that helps facilitate such endeavors; however, these are very difficult to get for risky ventures—and publishing is considered risky.

If you do secure a loan, assume that you'll have to put up collateral from your personal life (the house, your retirement funds, and your first born), to insure against the risk. So, in effect it's much like a regular loan, and doesn't cushion you against loss of the business. If your business goes under you'll still be paying for it years later. Not a good idea.

Nonetheless, the process of applying for a loan is an excellent test of your business plan. Bankers are traditionally money savvy and riskaverse. Therefore, apply for a line of credit. This is not a loan, but more of "advanced approval" for money you can tap short-term in the future, if needed. First, this will provide you with a safety net for minor cash flow issues. Second, it means that you'll have a banker giving you feedback on your business goals—sort of like a free professional evaluation. Take their advice seriously.

So, we're back to starting with the money you have on hand. To this, we can add a common method of investment known as "Friends & Family." You ask friends and family to buy into your company, in return for some nebulous—yet specifically worded and contractually binding—promise, such as a share in your company or a promise of eventual repayment, "if you can."

One thing to boost Friends & Family investment is to offer perks. Credit in the books as "Thanks to" works wonders—everyone likes to see their name in print. Promise a free copy of everything you publish. Don't laugh; you'd be surprised how making it friendly and fun can get people to part with a few hundred dollars.

Finally, if you have any partners, require they bring cash to the table. When you incorporate (or form a partnership, or just hold a meeting and say "let's form a publishing house"), require that anyone who wants "in" has to bring $1,000 to the table, including you.

This may shock some people. In fact, some might be offended that they offered their time and you're also demanding money, the simple truth is you don't want help. You want people who BELIEVE in the business. People who want it to succeed. People who have a very real stake in it.

In short, you want people willing to back up their gung-ho spirits with money. If they aren't willing to risk $1,000 on a business venture, they don't have enough confidence in themselves or the venture; you're better off without them.

If they have talent and want to do work, you can happily hire them. However, don't make anyone a partner unless they're willing to split the work AND the financial risk. This isn't a business for dilettantes.

You also can work out barter to reduce your expenses. Trading services is a great way to cut cash needs. Even a simple "I'll design your web site if you lay out my book" can save you several hundred dollars. Here, you're trading your time for cash, though, and you'll be short on time, so be careful in time management.

Finally, you may be producing ePublishing products (such as PDFs) to generate cash, for funding a later print run. This sort of slow growth is a great way to safely enter a market. The success (or not) of the PDF will let you know how to scale your print run, and let you build up a fan base.

➲ Cash Flow

Your initial investment is, technically, debt that you have incurred in order to provide cash. This debt need not be repaid quickly (it's a long-term investment by yourself to yourself), but it should be tallied on your books as debt. If you are incorporated, this investment likely gave you back a certain number of shares in your company and likewise for any other contributors who chipped in.

Now that you have capital, it's time to use that money to generate even more. The cycle is thus:

- Have cash
- Spend cash to create and promote product, perhaps incurring debt
- Sell product to create enough cash to cover debt and have cash left over
- Repeat

At any time, you'll be tracking at least four numbers:

- Revenue (money coming in from sales)

- Expenses (including publishing costs, salaries, bills, and debt payments)
- Cash on Hand (used to pay expenses)
- ^a Debt (incurred in order to provide cash on hand)

Typically, Cash on Hand is used to cover Expenses; Revenue is used to increase Cash on Hand or reduce Debt; Debt is used to quickly boost Cash on Hand. It's like a twisted version of rock-paper-scissors.

If your Cash on Hand ever drops to zero, you have a cash flow problem. Without cash, you're doomed. You can't *DO* anything without cash except coast and hope something sells and pays you in 30 days. Cash allows you to meet monthly expenses and to produce new products.

Compared to cash, debt is more like a score for how well you are doing. Low debt means you're doing okay. High debt means you may be digging the business into a deep hole. Remember that debt exists purely to ensure that you have enough cash to operate and grow.

➲ Time Budget

Tasks in general should be solved the way most things are—triage and prioritizing. Triage is when you put things into three categories:

1. Stuff that will fail unless you do it immediately
2. Stuff that will probably do okay even if you don't get to it right away
3. Stuff that will fail even if you do it immediately.

Obviously, the stuff in group 3, you ignore—even if it's tempting. (Figuring out what will fail, well, that's hard. We'll try to talk about it as we go.) There, we've saved you one-third of your time already!

Prioritizing is what you do with the stuff that you have to do today. There are four categories.

1. Easy minor stuff
2. Easy important stuff
3. Hard minor stuff
4. Hard important stuff

You can take two approaches here, depending on your personality. The "Type-A business person" will do the Easy important stuff first, then the Hard important stuff; the minor stuff waits as time allows. The "feel good" type will do the Easy important stuff first, then the Easy minor stuff; it's easier and you see onging progress.

Looking back at your goals as a self-publisher, ask yourself, which is it? Do you want to run an effective business, or just have fun? Take your pick of the paths. Either way, we've again cut your workload in half because you'll never have enough time to do everything. So, you'll need staff.

➲ The Staff

Now that you're sitting on a tiny pool of cash, you need to staff up. We'll talk about minimum staffing here primarily, for two reasons.

The first is that labor is the highest cost for any business. As founder, you may be providing your services for free, but just multiply your time by a lowly $25/hour to see what you're providing. So, you'll want to keep staffing levels low.

On the other hand, if you're handling all the business stuff, you won't have time for creative work and vice versa. You want to have some staff on hand to ensure that products go out regularly and cash comes in regularly. So, you don't want to be understaffed (or running a one-person shop).

Ultimately, a good level to aim for is yourself plus 1-2 partners, plus using off-site professionals such as accountants and freelancers on an as-needed basis.

Office Staff (2 people minimum)

First, you need an accountant. This is likely not an in-house employee, just someone to handle your annual taxes, help with federal tax forms (especially for paying people), and to hit up with questions. Budget $250/year for this and you should be in fine shape. In fact, that's enough for a good accountant to set you up as a corporation for year one and more than you'll need for each subsequent year.

You'll need someone to do the books in-house, tracking expenses and handling banking—your bookkeeper. It's incredibly boring work yet utterly essential, so make sure the person doing it is good at consistent work. Accounting is not for "creative types" who work in bursts.

You also need a secretary. For the small start-up, that will probably be you. This is someone who keeps notes on business decisions, schedules necessary events like "go to Con" and "print book" and "pay taxes," and answers the mail and e-mail.

Add to this a web master, someone who will handle the technical end of your online presence. There are three parts to a web master, and you can assign different parts to different folks:

Technical: ensure the site is up and operating

Customer support: answer e-mails and queries and handle order problems

Content creation: put new stuff up on the site as needed

The publisher is, probably, you. This is the CEO of the publishing world, the person who charts the overall direction and makes the tough calls on what to print and what to kill.

For a small company or start-up, the founder usually takes the role of publisher/secretary/bookkeeper. The web master can have tasks split between two people, such as the founder and friend, for instance. If you want to be serious, you should have at least two people (not necessarily full time, and including yourself) to fulfill all these office staff roles. Plus, hire an off-site accountant.

Creative Staff
(3 people minimum per project)

It's easiest to describe the process of producing a work, from which we derive staff positions. First, a line editor decides on what the book should be about. The writer works with the line editor to produce "the product". Likewise, the artist works with the art director to complete "the product." A copy editor proofs the work. A layout person converts the words and pictures into an actual product. Usually, the line editor does a final look-over to ensure the book is okay, perhaps running it by the copy editor again. Then it's off to print (or eprint) and sell.

If you're doing all the above, congratulations. For a small company, the line editor and art director can often be just the publisher (you), but you need more than one person on your creative staff.

You also need an editor who is not the writer. It's also rare for someone to be able to do both professional-level writing and illustration, so it's likely that there will be three staffers responsible for each product, minimum: 1 editor, 1 writer, and 1 artist.

Sales Staff
(1 person minimum)

We discuss marketing and sales later; suffice it to say you need someone out there pushing your product somehow. For ePublishing, most sales work is handled by an external mall; warehouse and shipping aren't involved. So marketing is your main in-house priority.

In general, your publisher (from the office staff section) can handle the marketing task as well.

You can pay for an outside agency to handle this. This can range from booking a bonafide marketing agency—such as Tundra Sales (www.tundra-sales-org.com), Impressions Marketing (www.impressions.net), or Sphinx Group (www.sphinxgroup.com)—to simply paying a few extra percentage points of your sales to RPGNow.com or your other sales vendors to have them handle marketing for you. Even if you do that, though, you'll still have to coordinate and provide them with raw material, so there will always be a large degree of in-house marketing required.

Summary

So, there you have it. At minimum staffing, you need two office staff (one who handles marketing as well), and for any project, you need three creative staffers (two of whom may be your office staff people using a different hat). You also need to book a good accountant each year around tax time.

Make sure to let other people/channels do as much of the sales and accounting work as possible. Focus your energy on content creation and marketing because, in the end, no one else will make your products, and no one else knows your stuff well enough to market it like you can.

So, if you form a company with two partners, each willing to put up $1,000 and work at least part-time, your venture is off to a good start. You can then draft freelancers to help out. The most common freelancers used are writers, artists, and editors.

➲ Editing

Editing is often neglected, and well worth the money. There are two types you need: line editors and copy editors. At a minimum, you need an editor who is not the same person as the writer. This is because it's really hard to edit your own work, either for merit (what we're calling "line editing" of content) or proofing (a job for the copy editor).

Line editors make the work better by looking at the content. They examine the work as a whole, the big picture. Copy editors make the work better by proofing for grammar and style. They look at the text's structure and assures its adherence to standards, more so than meaning or the details. This also can include factchecking, a task that either editor should keep an eye on.

Good editors may be able to handle both roles. More frequently, the publisher may handle the line editing before handing it off to a poorly paid copy editor for proofing and factchecking.

Publishing a work that lacks good copy editing always results in unprofessional-looking work, with spelling and grammar errors and a lack of polish. This means lower sales and negative PR.

Publishing a work without line editing means you're rolling on a random results table for "what the writer delivered." This frequently results in work that may be brilliant, yet is hard to read or missing crucial bits. Again, this means lower sales.

➲ Freelancers

Freelancers are great. They are like fire-and-forget staff, people who you can toss at a problem and *poof* it's solved. But like a fire-and-forget missile, sometimes they explode prematurely and leave you cleaning up the pieces. Let's look deeper.

The major problem with freelancers, especially those you find on the Internet, is that many do not actually complete (or even start) the work. You have to keep a tight leash on your freelancers. Make them submit partial drafts on a regular basis. Setup a strict and specific timeline for submissions. Don't let that slip too much. It is our finding that about 50% of startup freelancers simply do not deliver at all. For this reason, it's actually worth the larger fee to pay for someone you know has references and completed work.

Freelance editors are almost a necessity. Rarely is there someone in-house disassociated from the creation process with free time available for editing. A good editor typically earns one-third what the writer did, or at least a penny a word for copy editing. In addition to editors in the RPG industry, local English teachers are often a handy resource for the occasional editing job.

Freelancing creative staff is a good way to produce work while you also are running a business. The primary concern here is reliability. Always plan schedules so you can reassign work at the last minute and still meet your promised publication date. Also, require a first draft early, so that you are certain the creator is *a)* on target and *b)* not procrastinating.

You can find freelancers via the:
RPG Freelancer's Guide (www.rpgfreelancers.com),
RPGFreelance@yahoogroups.com email list, other industry lists or groups, web forums devoted to the topic, genre lists, support lists for games, or by posting open calls on your web site. In general, eager newcomers work cheap but are of unknown quality, while industry veterans ask for more pay and also are of unknown quality—unless you hear someone speak of them specifically, you can never know if their previous work was "difficult" or not.

The best way to find writers and artists is to tap people who are regularly producing for free (doing a monthly column, illustrating a monthly e-zine, or similar) and hire them. As it's their first paying work, the low RPG industry rates are appealing to them, yet their free work shows they have some degree of follow-through.

Another good way to hire people is to accumulate a list of possible candidates then ask other publishers and editors at cons and trade shows for their opinions.

Or, take a chance and assign short pieces, working up to longer pieces as you build a steady stable of trusted freelancers.

➲ Royalties versus Flat Fees

Paying freelancers is always interesting. Two standard methods are "Flat Fee" and "Royalty". We'll add a third type that I will term as "Bounty".

Flat Fee

A flat fee is simply a single payment for a work. It can be per-word (e.g. "3 cents/word for a 48,000-word piece") or per-item (e.g. $1,000 for a 48,000-word piece"). The sum is paid in its entirety, and then that's that. It's very easy for bookkeeping, but tough on your cash flow since you have to pay out a large sum at once.

Three cents a word is either industry standard or darn miserable, depending upon who you talk to. One and a half to 7 cents a word is a typical spread of rates, depending on the publisher and the author's fame.

Royalty

With a royalty, the author foregoes a large up-front payment in return for a share of the profits. Typically they get a fraction of what they'd earn as a flat fee (say, 25% of the flat-fee rate), then X% of the revenue (or profit) of the book for as long as it sells.

For print books, that percentage is usually calculated so that the author makes about the same (or a bit more) as they would with the flat fee, if the entire print run sells. The author is gambling that the run will sell and, in fact, be reprinted; reprinting is where they score big.

For ePublishing, print runs are more nebulous, but you can use the same logic and base it with a print run being how many copies you typically sell of any product.

Note, as a freelancer, beware the use of net profits, as this is a number that can easily be made negative by writing off

many expenses. As a freelancer you have the most to lose in such deals, as the amount you're paid a royalty on is completely up to the publisher. This is especially a problem for print publishers who can write off constant reprints, but with PDFs, the publisher isn't going to tell you all his true costs.

The advantage of a royalty to the publisher is it requires less cash outlay up front. However, it's a hassle for the small publisher to track; you have to regularly tally individual book sales then cut tiny checks to freelancers. Thus was born...the Bounty.

Bounty

A bounty is like a royalty, but awarded at periodic sales levels. It's more suited to ePublishing than royalties, as it mimics a print run more accurately. Typically, a bounty is set at some per-word (or flat-fee) rate for the work. Then, for each N copies sold, the writer gets that same sum again.

For example, a Bounty contract might state: "The author gets 1.5 cents/word for this work. Further, for each additional 100 copies sold, the author receives a check equal to 50% of that original payment."

Bounties encourage authors to continue promoting their work past its initial release. They also are easy for publishers to handle in accounting, since a bounty level will only be reached a few times each year, if that. Like royalties, they reward authors whose works sell better.

So in summary:

Flat Fee: Easy accounting, risk is with publisher, publisher wins on reprints

Royalty: Annoying accounting, risk is with writer, both win on reprints

Bounty: Easy accounting, risk split between publisher and writer, both win on reprints

Advance

An advance is a payment made before any sales of the product are made. An advance may be any amount agreed upon by the publisher and the author or artist. It could be $1; $1,000; or more. The importance is that an advance represents royalties paid in advance of sales. Once the amount of royalties generated by sales of the product reaches the sum paid as an advance, any additional royalties *beyond* the advance are paid as per the agreement.

For example, let's say you've signed an author to write your book and you've agreed to pay her a $200 advance and 20 percent of the retail price of the product for every copy sold. For simplicity's sake, let's say the product is priced at $5, so the royalty is effectively $1 for every copy sold.

The publisher has already paid the author $200 in advance royalties, so the publisher doesn't need to pay the author anything else until 200 copies have been sold. Starting with the 201st sale, however, the publisher must begin paying the author $1 for every copy sold.

Any royalties paid in advance may be refundable if the product does not sell a sufficient number of copies to justify the advance or if the author backs out of the deal and never turns in a manuscript, assuming those terms are indeed in the contract.

Using our example above, if, after a year, the product had only sold 50 copies, the publisher may be able to require the author to repay $150 of the advance. (50 copies were sold, so the author keeps $50 in royalties.) Alternatively, if the author backs out of the deal or is otherwise unable to submit the manuscript as agreed, the publisher should be able to require all of the advance to be returned.

Guarantee

A guarantee is a payment made in advance and is a non-refundable payment. It may or may not be a royalty, but in no case can a guarantee ever be "refunded" to the publisher. A guarantee is just that—a guaranteed minimum payment.

Guarantees are much more common in licensing agreements in other industries. In fact, it's unlikely you'll ever encounter one in a contract in the RPG industry, but it's certainly something to be aware of, especially if you will be investigating licensing of intellectual properties from other (bigger) companies in other (again, bigger) industries.

Know Your Terms

Whether you plan to pay a flat fee or royalties, with or without an advance or a guarantee, it is crucial to understand the specific legal definitions of the words used in any contract you sign. Do not play it by ear or you stand a chance of losing rights (or more) that you never intended to part with.

Always consult an attorney when deciphering a legal document. Attorneys command a goodly retainer (generally $100-200 per hour), but this is much less expensive than filing for bankruptcy, destroying all of your hard work, handing over your intellectual property to someone else for free, and so on.

This is not to say that you cannot do your own homework. Please do educate yourself. It's an investment that will pay for itself time and again, for years to come.

Other Details

Lengths can be specified in words ("I want 48,000 words") or pages ("I want 80 pages"). Each page is about 600 words, but this number varies depending on how much artwork you use, how you lay out the pages, and even what page size you use.

Make sure the limits on length also are set. If you ask for 48,000 words and they deliver 42,000, is that okay? What about 54,000? In any case, payment should be based on what is published, not what is submitted. This way, wordiness is removed (saving you money) and extra requests are included (earning them money).

For artwork, flat fees can be per-piece (e.g. $25 per drawing) or per-page (e.g. $100 per full page of art). How much should you pay for art? The Graphic Artists Guild (www.gag.org) publishes a book with standard rates, typically ranging from $200-$600+ for spot illustrations. For RPGs, though, this is high: rates of $100-$150 per page of black-and-white work are more common. For RPG print books, cover art has ranged from $250 to thousands of dollars, depending on:

- The artist's fame

- Whether the piece is new or a reuse of an existing work

- How much the artist likes the work (i.e. did *THEY* contact *YOU*?)

- Other

Note, in any payment you must specify when payment is due: upon receipt, upon publication, X days after publication, etc. Typically, "30 days after publication" is a reasonable compromise between the freelancer's desire to get paid promptly, and the publisher's need to maintain cash flow by getting some revenue from the product before paying out all costs.

Other issues involve which publication rights you want (first use worldwide publication in any format is appropriate for ePublishing), and whether the artist or writer gets to keep/reprint their work. Advances (a portion of the payment up front) may be requested by "name" authors, particularly if you're a new publisher without a strong payment history yet. Kill fees (how much you pay if they finish the work but you cancel the project) should be there (at 20% of the original price, with rights reverting back to the writer). Late fees (if they are late in submission) can be added, or you can simply refuse to accept late work.

Finally, there is "work for hire." This means the creator cedes all ownership to the publisher (including copyright and reprints and, well, everything)—it's as if the publisher created the work themselves using the freelancer as their hands. Some creators hate these; others simply charge more if you require a "work for hire" agreement.

There is no such thing as a standard contract in the industry, but there is such a thing as "your standard contract." That said, we have included a set of contract templates within this document's ZIP file to help you out. Be sure to edit them for your own use and, of course, use them at your own risk.

Once you have a set of terms you're comfortable with, you can use it with all freelancers of a given category without having to negotiate each case. Look up "Form 1099" at IRS.gov for details on how to pay freelancers, and discuss with your accountant.

⮕ Product Pricing

For print, this is easy: look at the current books on the market and make sure sure your cover price is at least five times your total cost per book, or you'll never have any chance of breaking even.

For ePublishing, it's a bit more open. You still want to make the price be at least five times your total cost per book. Costs are mostly labor, not paper, though, so prices can be lower. The margin taken by sales channels is typically lower, too—20-25% in fees, versus standard print distributions of 60% discounts.

Remember, after selling the book, you have to deduct not only expenses for producing it, but also marketing costs. With marketing of 10% total revenue, and the uncertainty of how many copies will actual sell, it's a bit of a black art pricing a book.

In general, don't undervalue. While having the cheapest product out there may seem to be a good strategy, unless it matches your brand it's short-sighted. (Cheapass Games is an example of a company where cheap equals good branding. If being shoestring is not your image, however, avoid cheap because then it's just, well, cheap.)

Current advice suggests $1 for every 10 pages (above the first 10 pages) or about half the list price of an equivalent print book. This means a 48-page (short) book would sell electronically for $4-$5. Some eMalls have minimum checkout prices (usually $5 to allow them to cover their costs), so you may want to make your pricing easy for the customer to checkout. With that in mind, most PDF products tend to be $5.

An old trick is to use "just-short" pricing, i.e. $3.95 instead of $4, or, alternately, $4.95 instead of $4. The reason is that people tend to round down by habit, so it looks like a better price than what they actually pay.

Finally, look at how other people are pricing their products. The market is defined by the products out there. Set at "market rates," otherwise, you're either pricing too low (and earning less cash than you otherwise could) or pricing too high (and losing sales). An abnormally low price can actually discourage sales, as people will think cheap equals no value. Conversely, a high price can draw sales if appropriately marketed as an upscale item.

If you wish to set a price distinct from others, you are in essence using pricing as a marketing strategy. This is viable, but it takes more work and is most useful when you have other standard priced products, so you can compare sales numbers, to determine if the strategy is a success.
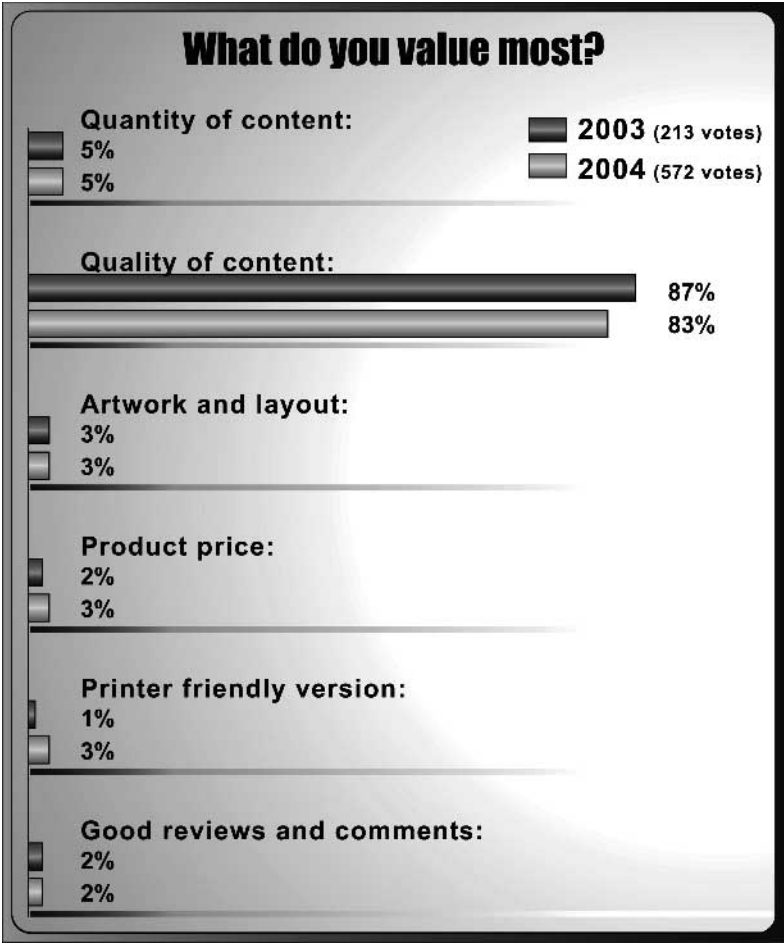
What do you value most?

	2003 (213 votes)	2004 (572 votes)
Quantity of content:	5%	5%
Quality of content:	87%	83%
Artwork and layout:	3%	3%
Product price:	2%	3%
Printer friendly version:	1%	3%
Good reviews and comments:	2%	2%

Chapter 3:
Legal

Publishing an RPG can be exceedingly difficult work, and represents an investment of both time and money on the part of all involved in the process. Because of this, most RPG publishers are keen to maximize the benefit they can receive from their game. With regards to ePublishers specifically, the bulk of the value of any particular game lies in the content and structure of the product, which constitutes intellectual property of the game producer. This chapter is concerned with ways that RPG publishers can protect their intellectual property rights, respect and honor the IP rights of others, and take the necessary steps to operate a functional and law abiding business.

The authors of this book intend to share with you, the reader, many of the standard practices and considerations of successful and established RPG ePublishers. Realize, however, that sharing this information does not constitute legal or accounting advice to you as a novice game publisher, rather, we encourage you to look upon the following material as a starting point; we hope to give you enough information so that you can have intelligent conversations with your lawyer, accountant, and other business advisers. At a minimum, we encourage you to consult an attorney to make certain that your choice of business entity is appropriate for you and to review any initial contracts or licensing agreements you choose to make. You also should talk to an accountant to make certain that all your business' record keeping and tax requirements are appropriately established.

Again, this document should not be misconstrued as official legal advice by any means. We highly recommend consulting an attorney before you embark on any business venture.

⮌ Your Company

Once you have decided to reap the financial rewards of RPG creation—even if your "company" is just you in the dining room with your laptop—you are functionally acting as a business. If you treat your business with care and attention from the start, you have a greater likelihood of managing your affairs in such a way that your company can thrive and grow. You also are more likely to avoid costly mistakes that can lead to legal or regulatory problems in the future.

Prospective RPG ePublishers should address the nature and form of their business before making any attempt at publication. For small RPG ePublishers, the choice of business entity typically ranges from simple sole proprietorship to partnership to the Limited Liability Company (LLC). There also are limited partnerships, Limited Liability Partnerships (LLP), S-corporations and traditional corporations, but since these entities are expensive to set up and difficult to administer, we won't be discussing them here. Each form of business entity has different advantages and disadvantages in terms of administration, owner control, tax treatment and liability exposure. Prospective RPG ePublishers should seek the advice of an attorney or an accountant to determine which entity is right for their particular business needs.

Sole Proprietorship

Sole proprietorships are easy to form and are the most common type of business organization both in the RPG industry and in the larger business world. Simply put, a sole proprietor is the individual owner of a business. Because the business itself is not a legal entity, a business that is a sole proprietorship does not exist apart from the owner.

Advantages of Sole Proprietorship

Sole proprietorships are popular because of their advantageous tax treatment, ease of administration and high level of owner control. As a sole proprietor, you can claim all of the business' profits and losses on your individual tax return. This is a huge benefit in that it avoids the double taxation faced by corporations, offers a potentially lower tax rate than the corporate rate and is relatively easy and inexpensive to file.

In terms of administration, sole proprietorships are significantly less cumbersome than other business entities. Starting a business as a sole proprietorship is easy; you just start doing business. You do not need to file special paperwork to start a

sole proprietorship. (Note, however, that you will need to obtain various city, town, or county licenses and permits, as detailed in the What You Need To Do section, below.)

Owner control of a sole proprietorship is also very simple and straightforward. You, as sole proprietor, have absolute control over the business because you are the owner. Since it is your company, you are the boss.

Disadvantages of Sole Proprietorship

Liability is the major disadvantage of sole proprietorship. As sole proprietor you are the boss, so any problems that the business encounters fall squarely on your shoulders. As sole proprietor, you are personally liable for all your business' obligations. If your company fails and your business cannot meet its obligations to its creditors (taxes, inventory, loans, contracts, etc.), your personal—non-business related—assets can be used to satisfy your remaining business obligations.

What You Need to Do

As stated above, starting a sole proprietorship is easy; you just start doing business. However, if you plan on using a business name other than your own name, you'll need to file a "doing business as" (DBA) certificate with either the Town, City or County Clerk of your principal place of business. This applies even if your company name is derived from your own, as in the case of something like "Stan Johnson Games," for instance. Depending on the extent of your RPG ePublishing activities, you'll also need to obtain various city, town, or county licenses and permits relating to occupancy, sign usage, zoning, etc. In addition to talking with a local business lawyer, you should seek assistance from your town hall or chamber of commerce.

Partnership

Unlike a sole proprietorship, a partnership consists of two or more people who function as co-owners of a business. Unlike a corporation, a partnership is considered to be an association of individuals rather than an entity with a separate and independent existence. This means that the partnership does not exist beyond the lives of the partners. With some exceptions, partnerships have most of the same advantages and disadvantages of sole proprietorships.

Advantages of a Partnership

Partnerships enjoy the same advantageous tax treatment and ease of administration as sole proprietorships. As a partner in a business, you will be taxed as an individual. This will allow you to avoid double taxation, file at a potentially lower tax rate and enjoy the benefits of simpler individual

filing. In some cases, from an administrative standpoint, you are not required to file anything before beginning your business, but this is not true for all jurisdictions, so check with your local state, county and city ordinances. As an added bonus, you share the workload and risk of your business with your partner(s).

Disadvantages of a Partnership

More than a sole proprietorship, partnerships are disadvantaged by liability and control issues. As a partner, you are personally liable for any wrong-doing and contractual obligations arising from your business—even when these liabilities result exclusively from the actions of your partner. Each partner is viewed as the other's agent and typically liability is shared for the improper or wrongful acts of the other partners.

While owner control in a partnership rests with the partners, much as it would in a sole proprietorship, keep in mind that all decisions concerning the business will need to be made with someone else. To avoid conflicts, you should consider creating a partnership agreement. This agreement between you and your partner(s) would lay out the ground rules for your business, such as duties, rights to profits and management decisions for existing partners, and rules governing entering or exiting partners. Even with a partnership agreement in place, however, you will not enjoy the same freedoms as you would in a sole proprietorship.

What You Need to Do

You and your partner(s) don't need to do anything special to form a partnership, although you should consider putting together your partnership agreement before you start doing business. If you plan on using a business name other than your own names, you'll need to file a "doing business as" (DBA) certificate or Certificate of Partnership with the County Clerk of your principal place of business. Depending on the extent of your partnership's RPG ePublishing activities, you'll also need to obtain various city, town or county licenses and permits relating to occupancy, sign usage, zoning, etc. As in a sole proprietorship, you should talk with a local business lawyer and your town hall or chamber of commerce prior to starting your partnership activities.

Limited Liability Company (LLC)

An LLC is a hybrid between a partnership and a corporation. In short, an LLC is an unincorporated company that exists as a creation of the various state legislatures. Consequently, LLCs can have slightly differing attributes depending on where the LLC is formed. The main attributes

of an LLC are that LLC members cannot be held liable for the acts, debts, or obligations of the company and the LLC may elect to be taxed as a partnership.

Advantages of an LLC

When you form an LLC, you get the tax advantages of a partnership, liability protection of a corporation, a healthy amount of owner control and the ability to raise capital through membership interests. In an LLC, you have the option of being taxed as a corporation or as a partnership. By electing to be taxed as a partnership, your business' income "flows through," avoiding double taxation and acting in essence as individual income.

Moreover, you can still retain the same level of managerial control over your business in an LLC that you would have in a partnership, but your actions, along with those of the other LLC members, would still be protected by the liability shield to the extent that you are generally not personally liable for the LLC's debts so long as your company is run properly.

Additionally, LLCs allow you to create, on a limited basis, various classes of membership interests, which are similar to shares in a traditional corporation. Although complex, this will allow you to generate capital for the operation of your LLC.

Disadvantages of an LLC

For a small RPG ePublisher, the major drawback of the LLC concerns the expense and complexity of administering your business as an LLC. Before you start your business with LLC status, you must register the company with the Office of the Secretary of State, generally in the state where you intend your business to be headquartered. Registering the company entails filing articles of organization, an operating agreement, and filing fees totaling several hundred dollars. Proper articles of organization and operating agreements are fairly complex and ought to be produced by an attorney or someone with substantial business experience.

In addition, your LLC might be required to hold annual meetings of members and/or file something akin to an annual report with the Secretary of State, depending on where you live. And should you choose to sell membership interests in your LLC, you will need to comply with complex SEC security regulations. In short, LLCs are intended for organizations that see a substantial amount of revenue on a fairly constant basis.

What You Need To Do

If you are risk averse or have significant assets, such as a house or spouse's income, that you wish to protect should your business fail, the LLC may be right for you. See your lawyer. Be prepared to discuss company name and address information, registered agent information (a contact person designated by the company to receive official correspondence from the state on behalf of the company), name and address information for each LLC member, items (cash, real estate or the IP of your new game system) contributed by each member, fair market value of each item contributed, accounting and record keeping methods your LLC will use, tax treatment you prefer for your LLC, and whom you plan to appoint as LLC officers. Bring your checkbook.

➲ Taxes, Accounting, & Recordkeeping

The only thing more certain than rolling numbers on a d20 is knowing that you will have to deal with a variety of tax, accounting and record keeping issues in your RPG ePublishing business. At minimum, each new RPG ePublisher needs to consider the following questions: How will I report my own income? How will I report wages I pay my company's employees? How will I report payments to freelancers? How do I keep track of all my business' transactions?

Owner's Incomes

Assuming that your business is a sole proprietorship, partnership or LLC electing tax treatment as a partnership, you will (hopefully) need to report income from your business on your federal and state income tax, in addition to whatever other sources of income you may have. Moreover, because, as the owner, you are self-employed, you will need to pay a Federal Self-Employment Tax, which is roughly the equivalent of what an employer would pay for your Social Security and Medicare benefits.

The Federal Self-Employment Tax is paid either annually or quarterly, and tax rates fluctuate based on your income level and frequent changes to the tax laws. Consult a qualified local accountant to assist you with federal and state income and self employment taxes. Alternatively, you can obtain information about your federal taxes directly from the Internal Revenue Service's (IRS) Business and Specialty Tax Line at 1-800-829-4933. The IRS is online at www.irs.gov .

Employees' Incomes

If you plan to hire full- or part-time employees to assist in the production of your RPG, you'll need to take care of several tax-related concerns. Before you hire employees, you should obtain an Employer's Identification Number from the

IRS by filing form S-4. You will find that this EIN, in addition to fulfilling your business' tax obligations, may be required for tasks such as establishing a banking account for your business.

Once you have an EIN for your business and you've hired employees, you will need to report wages and withhold federal and state income tax, as well as the employee's portion of federal Social Security and Medicare taxes, and pay the employer's portion of Social Security and Medicare, FUTA and state disability taxes. As an employer, you should not overlook the employer's portion of the tax burden, as well as any benefits you plan to offer, when determining the wages you will pay your employees. Again, to ensure that you have fulfilled your obligations correctly, consult a qualified local accountant to assist you with your employment tax concerns.

Freelancers and other Contractors

While heavy use of freelancers may cause your RPG production to suffer from inconsistent levels of quality or reliability, freelancers (and any other business contractors) are much easier to deal with from a tax reporting standpoint. The only thing your business is required to do is to report to the government any freelancer/contractor payments you make using IRS form 1099-MISC.

Even with this relatively simple reporting requirement, there are issues that you should keep in mind. In 2003, you do not need to report freelancers/contractors who are paid less than $600 throughout the year. More pressingly, the freelancers/contractors you hire must not be considered employees. Again, consult a qualified local accountant to ensure that your freelancers are not technically employees and that you are meeting the requirements for contractors.

Record Keeping

As discussed above, your RPG ePublishing business will require significant bookkeeping attention to monitor owner's, employee's and freelancer/contractor tax reporting requirements. Moreover, you will want to keep track of your business' income and expenses in order to take full advantage of any business expense deductions to which you may be entitled.

How can you keep track of it all? This really depends on your temperament—and finances. If you are the type of person who can scarcely get receipts and business records into a shoebox, let alone organize them, you might consider using a professional bookkeeping service. Just drop off your records and, for a fee, they will do the rest. These services are often combined with payroll services and can lend a stable, profes-

sional air to your business regardless of your organizational acumen.

We recommend that you keep a close eye on your finances and, thereby, the pulse of your business. Record keeping software applications, notably Peachtree Accounting and Quickbooks, offer easy-to-use bookkeeping solutions with varying degrees of analytical complexity and robustness. How you set up your system is up to you. At a minimum, your system should allow you to easily comply with your tax reporting obligations. Most importantly, be certain that you understand how your bookkeeping entries affect the financial well-being of your business. Follow the money!

There also are other low-cost alternatives to Peachtree and Quickbooks. MySoftware makes an inexpensive accounting program (MyInvoices), which retails for less than $50. There also are freeware and shareware accounting programs available on the web, which can be found with a quick search on a web search engine.

⇒ Copyrights & Trademarks

Copyrights, trademarks and patents are collectively known as intellectual property (IP), and are the most valuable assets of companies, particularly RPG ePublishers. When the product you sell derives its value from the content you provide, you are monetizing the value of your intellectual property. This is why it is crucial that you, as an RPG ePublisher, have a reasonable understanding of what your intellectual property rights actually are.

While the following sections are intended to help you understand the copyright and trademark rights this explanation is by no means comprehensive. If you have questions about your intellectual property, consult an attorney. You also can obtain information about copyright and trademark from www.copyright.gov and www.uspto.gov, respectively.

Copyright Basics

Copyright is a broad form of IP protection for the authors of "original works of authorship," including literary, dramatic, musical, artistic and certain other intellectual works. Copyright protection exists for both published and unpublished works. The owner of copyright has the exclusive right to do and to authorize others to do the following:

- To reproduce the work in copies;
- To prepare derivative works based upon the work;
- To distribute copies of the work to the public by sale or other transfer.

Monetary damages or injunctive relief can be sought against anyone who violates any of the copyright owner's rights. These rights, however, are not unlimited in scope. Titles, short phrases and format, for example, are not copyrightable. Another major limitation is the doctrine of "fair use." In the area of copyright protection, the doctrine of "fair use" and the concept of derivative works are both of particular interest to most members of the RPG ePublishing community.

Fair Use

The doctrine of "fair use" conveys the idea that there exist various purposes for which the reproduction of a particular work may be considered "fair," such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship and research. Copyright law establishes four factors to be considered in determining whether or not a particular use is fair: *a)* the purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes, *b)* the nature of the copyrighted work, *c)* the amount and importance of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole and *d)* the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work.

Because the distinction between "fair use" and infringement are frequently unclear and not easily defined, the prospective RPG ePublisher should consult an attorney before claiming fair use of the copyrighted material of another.

Derivative Works

A "derivative work," that is, a work that is based on (or derived from) one or more already existing works, is copyrightable if it includes what the copyright law calls an "original work of authorship," meaning that there must be some discernible new content added to the new work. Any work in which the editorial revisions, annotations, elaborations or other modifications represent, as a whole, an original work of authorship is a "derivative work" or "new version."

A typical example of a derivative work is one that is primarily a new work yet incorporates some previously published material. This previously published material makes the work a derivative work under the copyright law. In any case where a protected work is used unlawfully, that is, without the permission of the owner of copyright, copyright will not be extended to the illegally used part.

Only the owner of copyright in a work has the right to prepare, or to authorize someone else to create, a new version of that work. The owner is generally the author or someone who has obtained rights from the author.

What RPG ePublishers should know about trademarks

Trademark Basics
From www.BitLaw.com:

Trademark law governs the use of a device (including a word, phrase, symbol, product shape or logo) by a manufacturer or merchant used to identify its goods and to distinguish those goods from those made or sold by another. In the United States, certain common law trademark rights stem merely from the use of a mark. However, to obtain the greatest protection for a mark, it is almost always advisable to register the mark, either with the federal government, if possible, or with a state government. A mark which is registered with the federal government should be marked with the ® symbol. Unregistered trademarks should be marked with a "tm," while unregistered service marks should be marked with a "sm."

A mark is infringed under U.S. trademark law when another person uses a device (a mark) so as to cause confusion as to the source or sponsorship of the goods or services involved. Multiple parties may use the same mark only where the goods of the parties are not so similar as to cause confusion among consumers. Where a mark is protected only under common law trademark rights, the same marks can be used where there is no geographic overlap in the use of the marks. Federally registered marks have a nation-wide geographic scope, and hence are protected throughout the United States.

⮑ Dealing with Piracy

Regrettably, software and e-book piracy is a problem everyone has to deal with. Worse, there is little you can personally do about the issue other then to be vigilant and watch for copies of your products being spread around. If it makes you feel any better, know that most pirates collect things and rarely have the time to read/play anything they download. So, the majority of copies of your product that might have been stolen really won't impact your bottom line. Still, that is not to say you should make it easy on them.

In general, any copy protections that are attempted by publishers have resulted in more negative feedback from valid customers than it's worth in sales lost to pirates. As this chart shows, by far the most hated practice from publishers is turning off the ability to cut and paste from your document. Worse still is if you add a password protection on the PDF or other such thing.

The point here is don't worry about piracy, as there is little you can do about it, and it's not going to drastically affect your bottom line anyway. That said, it's still a good idea to do the following:

- Watch the newsgroup alt.binaries.e-books.rpg or alt.binaries.e-book for your book being spread around and post a response stating it's illegal if you do see it

- Use search engines that spider websites, like google.com and altavista.com and enter your product's name or filename. Check out the places it finds. Sometimes these amateur pirates will just post your product right on their web sites!

Methods for Hunting down Pirates

- Check e-mail headers for a mail server / ISP name. Get an IP address if you can.

- If it's a website hosting the product, do a "whois" at www.internic.com/whois.html to get their registrant and domain name server host contacts.

Write an e-mail to all the people involved plus one to "abuse@" and "postmaster@" and "webmaster@" all the domains involved. Explain the fact that copyright materials are being spread using their service and you expect it to be removed immediately.

Most of the time you'll get some lame excuse as to why they did it or didn't know, just ignore it and be happy it's down. But almost always the offending person will get a bit scared and shut the source of the problem down.

Ways to Protect Yourself

- Do not post your final product to a web page or ftp site for any reason, not even if it's password protected, as you have no way of stopping people from spreading the link/password, plus search engines can stumble on it and post it to the public!

- If you use your own software to deliver the book, make sure it supports a limited number of downloads in a limited timeframe or it will be abused.

- Offer value-added supplements and special coupons to only your verified customers (not all visitors to your site). In other words, encourage the reader to obtain a legal copy.

- Use an eMall that already has much of this built in.

- If you use a point-to-point chat/file software (ICQ, IRC, Kazaa, Morpheus, etc) to send your book to someone, make sure you write down their IP address. Use "netstat" command to get it during transfer.

- If you're overly anal and have time to burn, you could create a PDF with built in serial number so you can trace the source of a pirated copy. This only works if you're manually handing out individual copies. Still, it may be useful for the complementary copies you may send to reviewers or staff. Another trick is you can add data to the end of a PDF file without it complaining. You can create a text file with a serial number and then type this DOS command: `copy my.pdf+serial.txt new.pdf`.

In the end though, it will just take the help of all ePublishers to monitor these sources of piracy and report them when you find them.

Chapter 4:
Licensing

Most roleplaying games, at a very basic level, are variations on a common theme—people come together to enjoy one another's company and to test the effects of applying various scenarios and challenges upon a group of fictional characters, typically where those characters are in pursuit of a predefined goal.

While this technical description may suck all the beauty out of the art of game design, it does serve to highlight the notion that most games do approximately the same things. So when game designers sit down to produce something new, the first thing they might ask themselves is: Does this new gaming product fit within the framework of pre-existing games, or am I creating a new system from scratch?

If your preference, as an RPG ePublisher, is to exclusively release "house system" products wherein you created all rule mechanics and you have copyright and trademark rights to all characters, settings, and functions within your products, then you'll want to proceed to Chapter Five, since licensing doesn't concern you and licensing your product to others is beyond the scope of this work. (In a nutshell, see a lawyer.) On the other hand, if your product interacts with other existing gaming products that you do not own or control, then you owe it to yourself to become familiar with RPG licensing.

➲ Why License?

While licenses might be all the rave these days, you need to stop and consider the reasons behind your desire to license any set of RPG rules or campaign worlds. In general, a license is a good thing if it increases your sales or provides a means of greater visibility for your company. Here are a few examples of why someone would choose a particular license:

d20: You're choosing this license because your company wants to create materials that are compatible with the Dungeons & Dragons game. More importantly, you're crafting new releases that will appeal to the 2.1 million monthly players of D&D. This gives you an established sales base to build upon.

That's a very important consideration, and one that you should be aware of. You're trading an existing customer base for your ability to actually own a set of rules (and, presumably, a core group of loyal players that love your books). In other words, you can choose to have 2.1 million people who understand the rules behind your product the moment you launch it, or you can start out with a base of zero and build it up on your own.

Note that there are other considerations when deciding what rules system to use, such as how crowded the marketplace is, and how well the rules system fits with your game. Try and balance all of these factors.

Campaign Setting: So, you've been publishing game books and now you want to create your own world. But should you make one from scratch or license one from another company?

Making one from scratch means that you own everything. It's your baby, and you get to try and sell it as a computer game or movie, create novels, and do other things for it that will make you more money in the long run. The drawback is that you start out with zero customers, since no one really knows about your world yet. You should expect sales somewhere close to where you're selling your normal books.

A Licensed World: You might think that selling books made from Buffy, Farscape, Star Trek, or other properties would be a win-win scenario, and it just might be. Just be careful that you're choosing a property that would *a)* make a good roleplaying game, *b)* sell better than a release of your own, and *c)* be acquired on terms that would still make you money.

If possible, try to secure a license that allows you to pay on what's called the Brand Equity of a property. In RPG sales terms, the brand equity is the difference between what any product you produce sells versus one that carries the licensed world's name. You might not be able to get terms that good, but try and use Brand Equity as a means to reduce the royalty rate you might otherwise have to pay.

RPG Licenses in General

All existing RPG products are, to some extent, licensed. Copyright and trademark law, which vest ownership of the creative expression of a work in its creator and reserve the usage of certain words and phrases for a particular purpose, (see Chapter 3: Legal) are the foundations of the license, as they provide the RPG producer with the exclusive ownership of the game's intellectual property (IP). Game producers can then make agreements with others to incorporate certain aspects of the original game in new products, under conditions that the original producers themselves set.

So Big Bird, who owns the IP of an established game system called Yellow Feathers, meets Oscar Grouch, who wants to build The Slime Game using Yellow Feathers' game mechanics and terminology. Mr. Grouch will need to either:

1. Follow the terms Mr. Bird sets (typically restrictions on what and how Yellow Feathers may be used, some form of acknowledgment and editorial control for Mr. Bird, and some type of fee arrangement)

2. Negotiate for terms (Mr. Grouch may, for instance, pay a higher royalty in exchange for greater editorial control) *or*

3. Create a similar system that does not violate Mr. Bird's intellectual property rights.

Option three warrants further explanation. While trademark and copyright law protect the expression of creative ideas, they do not protect the ideas themselves. The upshot for RPG ePublishers is that, while you are unable to use the descriptive terminology of another game system, the operation of the game mechanics are legally unprotected, provided you do the work of coming up with your own descriptions of what those mechanics signify.

By way of example, and again with the help of Misters Bird and Grouch, assume that the Yellow Feathers system describes the attribute *LIFT* and determines its numeric value by rolling 2d6, resulting in a combined roll of 2-6 being *grounded* and 7-12 being *airborne*. Mr. Grouch needs this *LIFT* mechanic for his Slime Game, but is unable to reach an agreement with Mr. Bird. Even so, Mr. Grouch can legally use the idea, but not the expression. This will require Mr. Grouch to describe the attribute *TRYING TO FLY* and determine the attribute's numeric value by rolling 2d6, resulting in a combined roll of 2-6 being s*tuck in the slime* and 7-12 being *soaring through the smog*.

While the game mechanic—the idea—is exactly the same, Mr. Grouch has to provide his own description and labels—the expression—in a creative and non-infringing way. Of course, should this scenario in any way mirror your experience, we would advise you (and Mr. Grouch, for that matter) to seek competent legal counsel before attempting to ePublish your RPG.

Knowing that a license is not *required* to ePublish an RPG product, we might benefit from looking at the range of licensing options available.

RPG Licensing Options

RPG licenses, as noted above, are simply formalized agreements between two parties. As such, the forms these agreements take are as varied as the RPG products themselves. Nevertheless, RPG licenses usually can be distinguished by *a)* the level of exclusivity in making available a particular gaming platform, and *b)* the level of restriction placed upon parties entering into the license.

- None (house system only)
- Exclusive (Decipher's LotR RPG)
- Private non-exclusive (WEG's d6 system, Fuzion)
- Semi-open licensing agreements (Fudge, Active Exploits)
- Non-d20 OGL (Action! System, Prometheus)
- WotC d20/OGL system (D&D 3e, d20 Modern)

➲ Available Open Systems

The list of open systems available is constantly changing. Presumably it is only growing larger; as it is hard to "de-open" a system, but the original manufacturer of a system may no longer be a going concern. (Such is too often the case in the gaming industry.) The list below will be broken into two groups: "Open" Systems and "Easy" Systems.

Open Systems are just that, roleplaying systems with some sort of formal document that allows royalty-free production of supplementary material, usually with some sort of limits to protect the copyright and/or trademark(s) of the core rules (so that the creators can make money from the core rules, which will presumably sell better if there are lots of supplements out there). When a system is listed as having a certain number of supplements, this is only counting "for sale" items. Official or other web pages or free downloads are not included in these totals, and may in fact outnumber the commercially available items. Note that different people have different definitions of an "open system". We're using the description in the first sentence of this paragraph.

Easy Systems are regular, fully copyrighted and protected role-playing systems where the producer has indicated that

formal licensing is not going to be an expensive and restrictive matter. It may involve simple contracts, affordable royalties, low initial cash outlay, etc. This is far different than an open system, but still a viable option for someone wanting to get into game production.

The actual mechanics of each system are left to the reader to investigate, as system preference is always a subjective matter. These systems range from very freeform to very structured, so there should be something that meets your needs out there. If you are looking to use an open or easy system, our advice is to check out all the possibilities before deciding.

Open Systems: WotC OGL/d20

These are the 800 pound gorillas of open systems. Zillions of small game companies use both licenses for print and pdf products; it has a huge user base and backed by a company that isn't going south anytime soon. On the other hand, producing for d20 or the OGL means you are just one in a sea of OGL products, so it better stand out or fill an unoccupied niche if you hope to be successful. For reference, approximately 89% percent of the material available for sale at RPGNow.com is for the OGL/d20 system.

OGL

The open gaming license (OGL) is fairly straightforward and offers very few restrictions in exchange for you not using the term **d20** for marketing.

d20

A d20 product also falls under the OGL, yet also includes license to use the term **d20 compatible**. In order for your product to qualify for the license, however, very specific guidelines must be followed. See **Understanding d20 & OGL Components**, below.

Open Systems: Everyone Else

No other open system comes close to d20 in terms of market penetration and user base. D20 does not do everything well, so some people looking for open systems have to look elsewhere to find a system that meets their needs.

Action! System
Gold Rush Games (www.action-system.com)

Released under the WotC OGL, the core rules are available as a free pdf version and an expanded commercial print ($15) and pdf ($5) version. At the time this chapter was written, about three in-house and four third-party Action! System products were currently available with others in development.

Active Exploits Diceless Roleplaying
Politically Incorrect Games (www.pigames.net)

The core rules are available as a free pdf version with an inexpensive print version promised soon. At the time this chapter was written, about four in-house and three third-party Active Exploits products were currently available, with others in development.

Dominion
Dominion Games (www.dominiongames.com)

Straightforward license document. Free pdf version of the core rules.

EABA
BTRC (www.btrc.net)

Deliberately portrays itself as a d20 alternative. The game itself is $12 for the pdf (a print version is also available), and buying a copy of the game is the only real monetary requirement for using the license. Fairly straightforward license document. Includes full cover, page layout and table templates for making your own EABA-compatible materials. At the time this chapter was written, four in-house supplements and one third-party supplement under the open license were available with others in development.

Four Colors al Fresco
The Impossible Dream (woodelf.dyndns.org/alfresco)

A Renaissance superhero game released under the October Open Game License. No known commercial products.

Fudge
Grey Ghost Press (www.greyghostgames.com)

The original open system, the rules in pdf form are still free, with a commercial print version for $20. While a distant second to d20, it probably has the second-largest open system market share. They have a simple license, but it is not automatic—it is free, but you have to get it in writing from them. Thus, they have some control over the types of supplements that can be produced for the system.

Impresa Express
Politically Incorrect Games (www.pigames.net)

This is a free, rules-light open system in pdf format. At the time this chapter was written, no known commercial products were available, although one in-house product using a more robust version of the rules was.

Jazz
Brandon Blackmoor (www.rpglibrary.org/systems/jazz)

Jazz uses the October Open Game License and is available as a free download. No known commercial products.

Plain Label
Microtactix (www.microtacitx.com)

Simple, no-notification free license. Free pdf version of the core rules.

Yet Another Game System (YAGS)
Samuel Penn (www.bifrost.demon.co.uk/games/yags)

YAGS is a homebrew open system. Free pdf download. No known commercial products available.

Easy Systems

CORPS (2nd Edition)
BTRC (www.btrc.net)

CORPS was the BTRC house system when they were still exclusively print rather than exclusively pdf. There are two known licenses to other small game companies.

Basic Roleplaying System
Chaosium (www.chaosium.com)

Used in Call of Cthulhu and other titles, it is available for licensing. As with West End Games (see below), Chaosium's systems have a large number of gamers already familiar with the rules, thus making them more attractive to someone looking to play in a new world, but not wanting to learn a new system.

Clockworks
Clock Work Games (www.clockworksgames.com)

Licensing on reasonable terms available for those wishing to write for the Asylum, Spookshow, or Chosen backgrounds.

Dark Tortoise Productions
(www.darktortoise.com)

Formerly Demonblade Games, they are interested in selling or licensing their Shock Force: Battles in the Remnants of America, and GWAR: Rumble in Antarctica titles.

GURPS
Steve Jackson Games (www.sjgames.com)

GURPS was fairly easy to get a license to do limited electronic products (character generators, etc), though we couldn't find current information.

Fuzion
R. Talsorian Games (www.talsorian.com)

The Fuzion meta-system is readily licensable and was probably the first system that was designed to be spread around and used for commercial purposes by other companies.

Tri-Stat
Guardians of Order (www.guardiansorder.com)

Guardians of Order has their Magnum Opus licensing policy, which makes it pretty easy to get a license (of varying levels of permission) to publish using the Tri-Stat system. It's not free, though.

West End Games (D6, Masterbook)
(www.westendgames.com)

The various game mechanics (not world backgrounds) created by West End Games are available for licensing with few limitations at reasonable rates. They have the advantage of a fairly large existing user base and a large amount of previously published material. Several licenses to other small game companies.

➲ Web Sites of Note

The following web sites are worth perusing for information on new open or free role-playing systems:

pgs.freegamingassociation.org

Prometheus Gaming System. Open system in development.

www.homebrew.net/games

Free Game Systems. Not necessarily open systems, but game systems that are free downloads. There may be some overlap with the open systems previously listed that have free downloads.

www.freeroleplay.org/fringe

FRINGE (Free and Integrated Game Engine). Open system in development.

www.rpglibrary.org/oogl

The October Open Game License (OOGL). Includes discussion of copyright and open system issues.

www.openroleplaying.org

Open roleplaying information and resource site. Lots of useful links and discussion boards.

➲ Understanding d20 & OGL Components

The first the thing to understand about the OGL and d20 is that they are NOT the same thing! The OGL is a license created by Wizards of the Coast (WOTC) that publishers can use to release game material. It is an open license, similar, but not the same, to the way open source software is released. d20

(and the term 'd20 system') is a trademark of Wizards of the Coast (WOTC) and is NOT open. In addition to the OGL, WOTC has developed a d20 System license that allows publishers that follow a selection of guidelines to utilize the d20 System and logo to market their products.

The first step to understanding d20 and OGL is visiting WOTC's d20 site (http://www.wizards.com/D20). This is an essential portal to all things d20, not to mention providing links to the official license, guides, system reference documents (see below). It is also recommended that you join the OGL and d20 mailing list :

http://www.wizards.com/d20/main.asp?x=community

It's the single best resource for getting questions answered about the OGL and d20. The OGL and d20 License allow publishers to accomplish two main goals:

1. Create products that use the same game mechanics as popular WOTC games such as Dungeons & Dragons and d20 Modern.
2. Tap into the marketing power of the d20 System.

Depending on what you wish to accomplish with a product, you must adhere to the OGL and/or the d20 License. If your goal is simply to use the game mechanics (#1), then all that is required is that you follow the OGL. If you want your product to carry the d20 logo and connect it with popular WOTC d20 products, you need to follow both the OGL and d20 license.

The Open Gaming License (OGL)

Any company that wants to release content in an open manner can use the OGL, but more importantly, it's the license that WOTC uses to release their content (see The System Reference Documents, below). You can download a copy of the OGL at:

http://www.wizards.com/d20/files/OGLv1.0a.rtf

(also included in this release). There are several key elements to the OGL that publishers must follow:

1. All material that is derived from open material must remain open. If you use a spell, monster, or class, or even create a new one of your own, that material must remain open content.
2. You must clearly mark what content that is open and what content is closed. You can also identify elements as product identity, which protects those terms. Often used on trademarks such as "Setting X."

3. You must update the copyright notice portion of the license (15a), adding your copyright information as well as other copyrights from additional open content.
4. You must include a copy of the license.

There are several additional elements. The list is an overview of some important elements. You'll need to download and read the license yourself. As with any of the licenses we discuss, you may want to see a lawyer for a more legally accurate interpretation.

The System Reference Documents

Of course the main reason you want to understand the OGL is that you want to utilize the game material released under it by WOTC. These are called System Reference Documents (SRD). Currently, WOTC has 2 main SRDs: the standard SRD, that contains the rules used to create D&D 3rd edition, and d20 Modern SRD, that contains the rules used to create the d20 Modern RPG. These documents are a very convenient way for WOTC to release content with all their trademarks and product identity pulled out. When designing your products, you should use these documents as your reference and not the actual print products. Doing so ensures you will not accidentally use any closed content. You can download the SRDs here:

SRD
http://www.wizards.com/D20/article.asp?x=srd

d20 Modern SRD
http://www.wizards.com/D20/article.asp?x=msrd

The d20 License and Logo

Using the game mechanics for D&D or d20 Modern is nice, but if you can't legally claim d20 compatibility, it's not much use marketing wise. For this WOTC has created a license that grants publishers rights to use the d20 System logo, allowing them to tap into the market power of this trademark. The goal is to attract the hordes of gamers already familiar with the d20 system to your products. In essence, you can build upon all the marketing efforts of WOTC and other large publishers.

While using the d20 logo is a great marketing edge, you do have some additional restrictions on the type of products you can make. In order to use the d20 logo, you need to follow rules outlined by WOTC in their d20 System guide. You can download the d20 System guide and license here (also included in this release):

d20 License

   http://www.wizards.com/d20/files/d20stlv4.rtf

d20 System guide

   http://www.wizards.com/d20/files/d20guide.rtf

Of course this is the current version as of the writing of this. License updates don't see much publicity, so it's a good idea to check back every so often to ensure you're using the most up-to-date version. The license tends to be updated after a major change/addition to the SRD. Also, since the d20 License has the version number in the link that link is subject to change when an update occurs. I'm told they are trying to get the number removed from the link.

This d20 System Guide describes a set of rules for the correct use of the d20 System logo, and includes content restrictions on your products that use it. You'll need to read it completely, but here are a few key points that you must follow.

1. A minimum of 5% of the product must be Open Game Content.

2. You cannot describe a process for creating a character or applying the effects of experience to a character.

3. You may not include miniatures.

4. You may not use the term "core" book on your cover.

5. There are several places you need to place legal text.

6. No d20 product can be an "interactive game" as defined in the d20 System Guide.

Again, this is just a simple overview. You'll need to download and read the guideline thoroughly. It is your duty to do so. No one else is responsible to police your work or give you the A.O.K. Learn it and follow it; it is what you base your business on.

Other OGC Content

It's important to note that many publishers use the d20 logo. This means there's a lot of open content being released everyday. Before you spend lots of time developing new rules, you should investigate to see what rules are already out there that might solve your specific needs. You could save yourself development time. Keep in mind that if you use open content from another source, you'll need to append their copyright notice to section 15a. Everyone must be given proper credit for his or her work!

To d20 or not to d20

The d20 license requires the licensee to give up certain rights that would normally be possible under existing copyright law. However, copyright law is full of gray areas. By agreeing to the d20 license a publisher has some clear limits and terms, not to mention much less legal text to read. (My copy of the US copyright law is 252 pages.) Though you still may want to consult a lawyer for tricky questions, carefully reading the license should answer most questions.

D20 System Unit Sales 2003-2004

Category	2003	2004
Campaign Books:	3%	3%
High Level Adventures:	5%	4%
Low Level Adventures:	6%	5%
Creature Books:	7%	5%
City Books:	12%	8%
Spell Books:	14%	10%
Race/Class Books:	21%	13%
Source Books:	32%	26%
Equipment/Treasure:	NA%	6%
D20 Modern:	NA%	13%
D20 SciFi:	NA%	7%
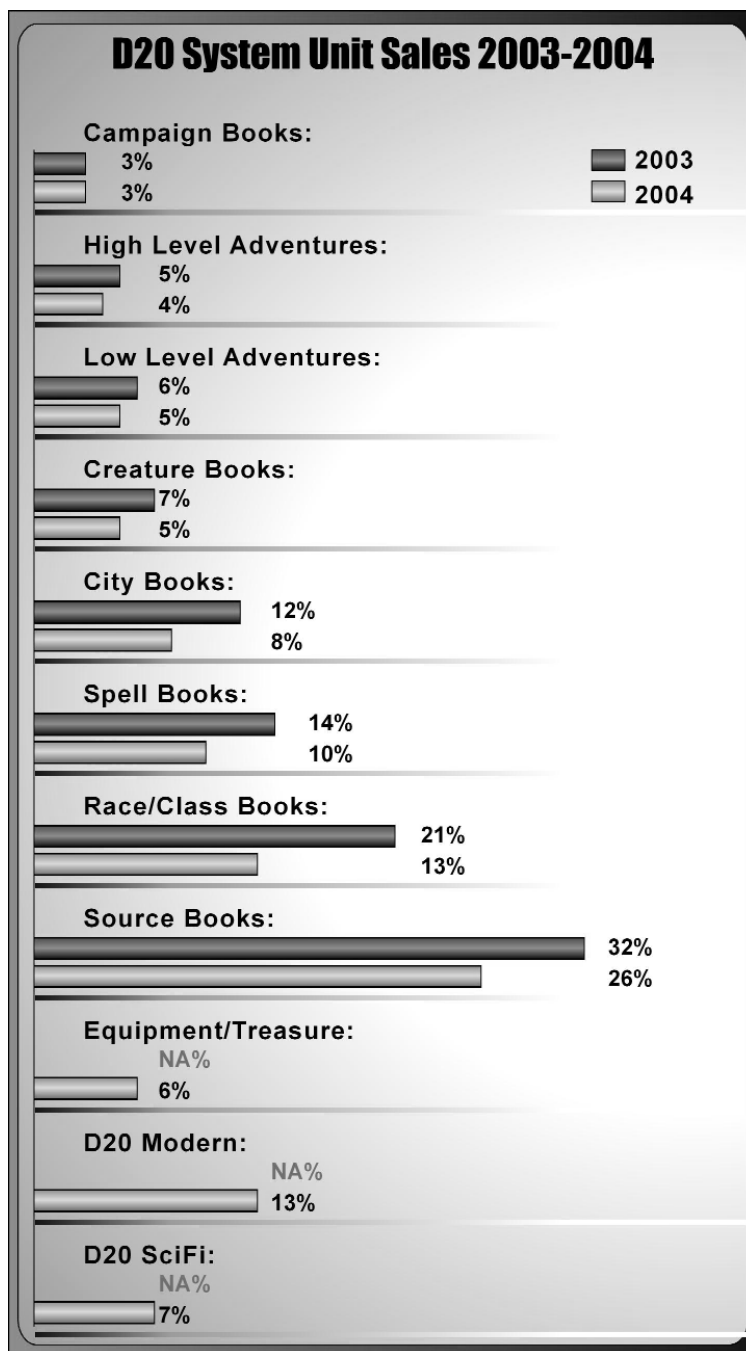
The license also protects you by requiring WOTC to notify you if they find a breach and give you time to fix it.

The advantages of the d20 system are:

- Marketing (you can identify your product with the d20 logo and as being for use with D&D)

- Ease of use (you could create a unique system or completely rewrite D&D in your own words, but this is fast and easy)

- No lawyers needed (if you're making your own system, referring to D&D without the license, or rewriting D&D in your own words you had better have a lawyer handy cause if you screw up it could hurt).

The main reason WOTC offers the licenses are for people who want to create D&D-compatible products without having to reinvent or rewrite D&D or hire a lawyer to determine which side of the law their product falls on. The license was written from this perspective and if you're looking to get something else out of the license your mileage may vary.

Wizards is giving away a lot of control with these licenses and essentially has opened up its successful game system for anyone to use. You can't blame them for having a couple strings attached.

Quick d20 Checklist

This is not legal advice. This is not sanctioned by WOTC. Nothing said here can guarantee you will be in compliance. Review your licensing issues with an attorney.

1. Is your product even covered by the OGL or d20 license?

2. Are you instead using the WOTC internet use policy?

3. Are you using material only from the SRD?

4. If not, where did you get it from?

5. Have you included the full text of the OGL in your product?

6. Have you updated your copyright notice (section 15) properly?

7. If you are using other companies' OGC, are you referencing that properly?

8. Are you avoiding restricted or copyrighted terms, such as "Dungeon Master" or "Dungeons and Dragons" or "D&D" or "Monster Manual" or "Dungeon Masters Guide"?

9. If you are making a d20 product, are you complying with the restrictions on the logo size?

10. Are you improperly indicating compatibility with any trademark?

11. Have you clearly designated your OGC?

12. Have you designated your Product Identity (if you intend to do so)?

13. Do you understand that profit has nothing to do with any of this? The license does not apply only to stuff that is for sale.

Notice that we simply raise issues rather than answer questions. This list is also not exhaustive. Just because you address these issues does not guarantee you will be in compliance.

Use the list this way: if you know what we mean by all the issues on the list you are probably on your way to understanding the terms of the licenses. If any of the issues we raise make you say "what are they talking about" then you need to spend some more time with the licenses.

Remember, the licenses include the OGL, the d20 System License and the d20 System Guide which is incorporated into the license. Sadly, there are many common violations. Most should not happen if people would just read the documents carefully. It is your duty to do so. It is not WOTC's or anyone else's job to point out your failures to understand the license.

The following is taken from the OGF-d20 list—general consensus was that this was sound advice, although the author of the following does not want his name attached. As always, make sure you use a lawyer.

"Some additional issues to consider:

1. Are you doing a notice as required in section 2 of the OGL? Such as "this product contains Open Game Content which can only be used under and in terms of the Open Game License contained in the Legal Appendix."

2. Have you updated the copyright notice properly as required by section 15 and 6 of the OGL? Including:

a. Using the "exact text" of the copyright notice for the OGL and the SRD.

b. Using the "exact text" of any OGC you may be using from other companies

c. Listing YOUR copyright information in the event you are distributing new OGC.

3. Have you clearly marked any OGC you are using and/or distributing?

4. Do you have any material you wish to designate as Product Identity, and if so have you designated that properly?

5. Are you limiting yourself only to content from one of the three sources? One of the most common mistakes is to use monsters from MMII or PI such as the Mind Flayer.

   a. Content from the SRD

   b. OGC content from other producers that has been designated as OGC (which requires you to mention them in your copyright notice)

   c. Product identity content and OGC you are creating yourself

6. Have you avoided the trademarks of other companies and avoided indicating compatibility with any such products?

7. Are you avoiding placing any limitations on any of the OGC, since the license provides in section 2 you cannot limit it.

8. If you are using the d20 logo and license you should also consider the following:

   a. Are you complying with the size limitations of the logo as detailed in the License and Guide?

   b. Are you refraining from altering any restricted terms defined in the d20 Guide?

   c. Are you refraining from detailing how to create a character and apply experience as detailed in the d20 guide?

   d. Are you making sure to include at least 5% OGC? Is it clearly designated?

You should answer "yes" to all these questions. If not, go back to the licenses and see why you said "no".

Those are some issues to get you started. This checklist, like the one listed earlier, is not a guarantee that you will be in compliance. They simply summarize some of the issues that I and others on this list have encountered and discussed."

Doug Meerschaert has also listed these as common violations to watch out for. Points to recall that many publishers forget, reprinted here with his permission:

The only WotC trademarks you're allowed to use are the d20 mark, and the trademarks "Player's Handbook" and "Wizards of the Coast" in specific phrases, that should only be used to point out that the PHB is needed. You may also refer to the d20 Modern Roleplaying Game and the Psionics Handbook by their full titles. You cannot use the trademark "Dungeon Master" or the trademark "Monster Manual." However, referring to these books by abbreviations or non-trademarked names (PHB/DMG/MM or Core Rulebook I /

II / III) isn't specifically prohibited. The d20 Guide even prefers the abbreviation "PHB" for Player's Handbook. Do not reference page numbers as that is a big common mistake that is forbidden in the license.

You must update the OGL's section 15 (copyright notice) with the exact text of every source. That includes, at the very least, the OGL, the SRD, and your own work.

The only WotC products you can derive from are, well, none at all. The SRD is open for use, but that's it. FRCS, the class books, and even DRAGON articles are off-limits.

Anything derivative has to be Open Gaming Content. You and your lawyer have to figure out how much leeway you want to take with what is and what isn't derivative. Were it up to me, all stat blocks, new rules, and new items that fit in the existing rules (items, spells, skills, feats, races, & classes at least) have to be OGC… or in other words, everything that you wouldn't have to re-write if you were making the game GURPS.

d20 ePublisher Guide

It is our intention to release a second volume of the ePublisher books series that covers the d20 System in more detail as well has several case studies of current d20 publishers with real numbers and written by current d20 publishers.

➲ Licensing How-To Guidelines

If you don't know, just ask. If there is a system you commonly play or like and you want to do some sort of supplementary material for it, formally or just as an article on your personal web page, ask the producer of that game. The worst they can do is turn you down.

Check the company web page for any sort of info on licensing or submission policy. Do a web search for other unofficial supplementary material. Even if they have no formal licensing policy, you should be able to get an idea of the situation by looking at those who have gone before.

Be professional and courteous. Clearly explain what you want to do in such a way that the game company representative can make a quick decision to say "no" or "maybe". They will probably never say "yes" right off the mark. The game you are wanting to expand on is their baby. They'll want to know that you will treat it right.

Andy Smith from Wizards of the Coast stated, "I cannot emphasize this point enough. If you have a question, ask us. We're not going to check products or give legal advice, but a polite and detailed e-mail will go further than you think. If

nothing else I'll remember that you were polite, which is better than me remembering you for the alternative." Their main legal contact point is legal@wizards.com, but that mailbox is always backed up. I might suggest sending it to customer service (custserv@wizards.com), they should be able to answer simple questions or see that it gets forwarded to Anthony or Andy, who have been a great help to us all.

Is the WotC OGL the only game in town?

No, it isn't. There is not even universal agreement among people as to whether it is truly an "open" license. As a result, there are a number of different open licenses out there, varying in their wording and complexity. The "web sites of note" paragraph has links to a number of them, and individual open systems previously listed probably have copies of their particulars available for download. If the rights and restrictions in an open license are important to you (and they should be), check out the various possibilities.

Common Mistakes

A license for a system is not the same as the license for a background. Just because a system is "open" doesn't mean you can do anything you want with it. Many of the open system licenses take this into account just to protect themselves. If you use "open system X" to produce a "Star Wars" roleplaying supplement, the dark legal side of the Force will come crashing down on you like a ton of bricks. If you actually had a Star Wars license and used copyrighted/protected d20 mechanics to produce your supplement, Hasbro's legal minions would likewise feast on your entrails. Make sure that you have the legal right to produce what you are producing. This applies not only to your system and game world, but also to the other tidbits. You don't want to use a Brom, Frazetta or Whelan piece of art you scavenged off the web as your cover, for instance. If you use quotes from other works, provide attribution and check out copyright law on the vagaries of such excerpts. If you mention a trademarked property (like we just did with Star Wars), then make sure any required ™ or ® are included and any other notices in the credits are there.

➲ Property License

Since you cannot just make a game based on your favorite TV show as it is copyright, you'll need to look into a property license. A property license such as from a novel, TV show, or movie can bring you a built-in customer base, but it's also a huge pain in the rear to get permission to use one. Since in most of this book we're assuming you're not on a big budget,

you may want to just pass this section by. It's a long and costly process with mixed results and benefits. Be prepared to bring at least $5000 to the table. Here are some of the basics to get you on track.

You have to understand that basically licensing queries are signals to the rights-holder that somebody wants to give them FREE MONEY, which they won't have to lift a finger to generate. In general they want to license.

1. Find the owners of the product identity. This may require doing some searching on the net and most likely picking up the phone to make some calls just to find the owner. It's ok to use the "contact us" link on the official website but rather, ask to be put in touch with the right person, don't get into any details. For authors it will usually be their agent. Corporations usually have their own licensing department. Some have outsourced license agents which will not be easy to deal with as they take a percentage and would rather talk to someone with a lot of money.

2. Call or write (don't email) the owners with a brief explanation of your concept/product. You'll have to come up with a proposal later, but wait till they show some interest first. Most likely that means talking $ up front with them.

3. Letter of Interest
    a. What kind of product you're going to produce for them and why they're going to buy it.
    b. The value of the license you are going for, by which I mean who's going to buy how much of whatever product you produce with it.
    c. Don't misrepresent yourself or overly bloat any numbers.

4. Proposal
    a. Get a lawyer involved.
    b. Details of what you want to do with their property. Remember that some of these people may not have a clue as to what an RPG is.
    c. Projections of what they are going to make off the deal. You'll need some market research to backup your expected sales figures.
    d. Most companies are going to want an advance or guarantee. This is an amount you pay up front to secure the license. This usually counts toward the license fees for the first year, but if you don't make that much, too bad they keep it.
    e. Propose a royalty percentage. This is the amount of your revenues from the licensed product that you are offering to pay them. This can be scaled or flat and the percentages are all over the board.

Typical (if there is such a thing) royalties are between 2-10%.

f. Detail the duration of the license of which most will be 1 to 3 years. The licensee may require some performance benchmarks to be met for renewal.

g. Specify what artwork and other materials (like still shots from a TV show) you will want or need to access.

Take a hard look at the license and the realistic sales you can expect from it. If when all is said and done you're paying more than 10% of your revenue for a license (spreading the advance out over the term of the license), you may want to reconsider your choice in doing it. Remember everything is negotiable.

Lastly, consider contacting some of the people in our industry that have negotiated licenses already and ask for input. I've found most people in our market are helpful and at least friendly.

➲ Licensing or Translating Your Game

Believe it or not there may be someone interested in licensing your game or world! There also are publishers in other countries (I know personally of one in Italy and another in Brazil) that might want to translate your game into their native language and resell it.

It may be a big ego boost to find out someone is that interested in your products, but wait a day or two and think it through before you reply. It's not always a matter of a new market for no cost. Mark Arsenault from Gold Rush Games offered up the following advice:

"Consider what you are licensing. Bear in mind, too, that a translation constitutes a separate copyright. For instance, Sengoku is copyright 1999-2001 by Gold Rush Games. If we allow someone to translate it into, say, Portuguese, and we don't buy the rights to the translation, that translated text becomes copyright of the person/company that actually did the translation, not GRG."

So in the case of a translated RPG, what you're actually licensing is not the rules or text of your own game, but rather the intellectual property (including the trademarks) of your game. And, in some case, you also are licensing the use of your artwork.

Speaking of artwork, do NOT give permission to use artwork in a foreign licensed book if you are not 100% certain that you have those rights to grant in the first place. If

you pay for "publishing rights" for the art, then you don't have the right to allow others to publish the art also unless your contract with the artist specifically states that you do.

When licensing foreign/translation rights, I would suggest requiring a royalty in the area of 1-3 percent of the cover price. Two important points, however:

Specify a rate in your native currency. (You wouldn't want the value of your license to fluctuate based on the exchange rates of any given day.)

Always get an advance. While I hate to say it, some overseas publishers are not reputable or trustworthy. It may well be that once the deal is inked and they have published the translation of your game, that you will never see an accounting of sales nor a single penny of royalties from them. Requiring an advance helps ensure that, at the very least, you will have received that money.

Ask the publisher which RPG companies' games they have done translations of. Then contact those companies and ask about their experience with the foreign publisher. Don't be afraid to ask what kind of royalties they are charging the publisher for comparison.

It also helps to separate the wheat from the chaff, in terms of which publishers are serious about wanting to license your property. If they can and will provide you with that $1,000 advance as part of the licensing agreement, chances are much better that they will also follow through with actually publishing the book, sending you regular sales reports and any royalties owed (once royalties exceed the initial sum advanced, that is).

The advance should be based on anticipated sales as well as the strength of the property—not based on how cool you think it is, how much you really love it, or any other ego-based emotional reaction, but on the property's strength and reputation in the industry and among consumers.

Chapter 5:

Design & Layout

As with any published product, design and layout will be a large part of your pre-production process. Unfortunately, it is the one area that many new publishers are least prepared for—after concerns of game design and writing, web hosting and preparation, there is often little thought devoted to the presentation of the product.

In some ways, PDF publishers are at a bit of a disadvantage in this area, since their efforts are unlikely to be seen until a consumer has already purchased the PDF. However, the publisher can provide a sample download, which is highly recommended for this very reason—give your design and layout a chance to sell the game for you, similar to allowing a consumer to flip through your book in the store.

➲ Choosing a Title

Never underestimate the importance of branding. Your product's title must immediately bring your product to mind for the consumer. It shouldn't be too similar to any other game product; otherwise there will be confusion between your product and any other similarly-titled product. You want the consumer to think, "I need to get *Swords Against the Dragons*." You don't want there to be similar titles on the market, otherwise your consumer may end up purchasing *Swords of the Dragons*, or *Dragonswords*, or even *Swords Against the Demons*.

Your first step in this process is to make sure that your title is descriptive and 'snappy.' Descriptive, in as much as it paints a clear picture of what to expect from your product, and *snappy*…well, that's a little harder to explain. A snappy title is one that has that undefined *something* that makes you think *COOL!* when you hear it. It's not something that can be explained…but like the old cliché about pornography: you'll know it when you see it.

Next, do a web search on the title, to make sure there are no other products out there with a similar title. You may also want to run a search through the United States Patent and Trademark Office web site (http://www.uspto.gov/) or the Library of Congress web-site: http://catalog.loc.gov/.

The fact that you should be aware of is that there is no copyright on titles. There is only one thing stopping you from using an identical title to another work. That one thing is trademark. A trademark is a word, phrase, symbol or design, or a combination thereof, that identifies and distinguishes the source of the goods of one party from those of others.

By indicating a title is a trademark, you *stake a claim* on that title (within your particular product category). You don't need to register a trademark—simply marking your title with "tm" is clear enough. However, registration makes any legal action involving the trademark much clearer and easier. Check the USPTO website for information about registration. (Currently this costs $335 per category registered.)

➲ Cover Art

Cover art is as important to e-Publishers as it is to their hardcopy counterparts. Your cover is your primary method of sales advertising on the site where your sales are generated.

You should expect to pay anywhere from $250 and up for a good piece of color cover artwork, perhaps less if you pay for the rights to re-use an existing piece of work. The amount you can expect to pay will be based upon the talent and experience of the artist—there are some artists who are very much in demand within the industry, and for good reason: they produce quality material, are professional to deal with, and produce within the allotted time frame. Such artists usually charge $1,000 or more.

By using a more *comic-like* cover you can significantly reduce the expense of your cover art. By comic-like, think of comic book covers. Most are colored line art. A quality line art illustration will cost between $75 and $100 depending on the artist. Coloring can usually be done by yourself (if you have an appropriate program and the necessary skills) or by a colorist for anywhere from $25 to $75.

Freelance artists can be found on almost any large RPG-related web-site. Look around, make announcements that you're looking for artists (and, most importantly, that you're a

paying assignment), and you won't have difficulty finding artists.

Make sure that the cover art suits the subject of your product (obviously), and that it also features a large enough *negative space* (portion of the picture containing no critical images) so that you can place the title graphic. For printed products that will be sold in stores it is recommended that this space occupy the top two or three inches of the image. Since you're an e-Publisher you can be a bit more creative in logo and title placement and, for example, can help establish a line identity by always placing your logo and title at the bottom of the image. Work with your artist to ensure that the *negative space* suits your exact needs.

⮑ Interior Art

Use black-and-white line art for your interior, and try to shoot for a ratio of one piece of artwork every four pages, at minimum. There are some sources of clipart that you can use (www.clipart.com is highly recommended as is the Larry Elmore clipart collection), but in general, you should stick to original artwork where possible, since clipart can be used by anyone—and the idea here is to stand apart from other products.

As of the time of this writing, standard rates for black-and-white interior artwork is roughly $100 per page, pro-rated, meaning that a half-page piece would be $50, a quarter-page would be $25,. That rate, as above, fluctuates depending upon the experience of the artist. There are two things that a publisher should keep in mind: one, all rates are negotiable until the contract is signed. You should negotiate until you arrive at a rate that both the artist and the publisher can accept. Two, you get what you pay for. If you only pay bargain-basement rates, you cannot expect masterpieces in return.

This is an area where many new publishers try to save costs. This is a mistake, because nothing makes a product look more amateurish than sub-standard artwork. If your product appears amateurish word will quickly spread and, almost always, consumers will spend their money elsewhere. In a PDF product, your art budget will most likely be the largest part of your production costs. However, as in all things, it takes money to make money—the money that you spend on quality artwork will be worth it in the end. In short, it's better to pay for less quality art or have none at all then to have amateurish artwork in your product.

Remember, PDFs can have color artwork on all pages without added cost. If you don't plan on going to print or POD, make use of some nice color artwork to spice up your PDF. Of course this would make it even more important that you provide a printer-friendly version that has the art turned off. Also, don't go wild with color—don't change your text color unless there is a very good reason to highlight something.

Something that is fun to do with products that contain monsters is to include a cut-out flat or 3-D paper miniature for the players to use. They can even   print them out a number of times. This is usually well received as not everyone has huge collections of miniatures. Try to be creative with your product and make use of the medium.

⮑ Interior Layout and Design

Now that you have artwork and a manuscript it's time to assemble the pieces into a finished PDF. We'll assume that you already have a layout program (see below for basic information on layout software) and have had some practice with the software.

Portrait or Landscape

You have two options when it comes to determining the page orientation of your PDF.

Portrait is the standard vertical page arrangement used in most books. Set your measurements to 8.5" wide by 11" tall for a portrait PDF. Portrait is best used when your document will be printed and read or used in a POD product.

Landscape is a horizontal layout that, while odd printed, looks great on-screen. Set your measurements to 11" wide by 8.5" tall for a landscape PDF. Landscape PDFs are designed for use on a computer monitor and while they can be printed out they are a little difficult for most people to use.

If you're ambitious you could always create two versions of your product so that people can read it on screen or print it out. This takes a considerable amount of work but your customers will appreciate the effort.

Master Pages

The first thing you'll want to do before importing text or artwork is to design your master pages. These pages (sometimes only one) show the basic graphic look of your PDF. Most layout programs allow you to edit and design your master pages and then, when you're finished, each new page added to your layout document will look like the master page. If your master page design has a graphic element across the top of the page, every page in your document will have this

same element. Master pages make layout easier since anything you want on every new page will be there as soon as you add the page.

The elements you'll want to include in your master page depend completely on what you want the product to look like. This PDF does not have space to go into all of the details of book design (which is essentially what you are doing) but we will address the basics. You should always feel free to look at other books that you like to get an idea of what elements you may want to add to your page.

The following elements should be included in your master page design:

- **Header graphic and/or type.** If you want a fancy scrollwork at the top of each page include it here. You should also consider including either the name of the product or the chapter title. The page number could also be added here but it usually works best in the footer.

- **Footer graphic and/or type.** Maybe you'd like a mirrored image on your page. Possible footer content includes your website address, author name, and the page number. Do not try to cram too much into the header or footer area. Usually one-half to one inch is all the room you need. Consider keeping content no closer than one-quarter inch from the edge of the page so that it can be printed by most home printers.

- **Background graphic.** You could always use a parchment background. Or a stone wall. Or even your product cover as a background image. The goal of this background is to add interest to pages that will have no art while not making the product difficult to read. Also, a background graphic will increase the size of your final PDF so if you use one keep it as simple as possible. Screen the image out to about 10% of the full color if using black, red, green, or blue. If using yellow or a similar color 50% screen will be fine. It's recommended that you do not use a background image until you get a little bit of layout experience under your belt.

- **Box design.** For boxed text you can either use a simple black frame or something a lot more elaborate (torn parchment, or maybe even a scrollwork that matches the previously mentioned header graphic). Boxes are to help set apart text that is supplementary to the main content.

- **Body text/columns.** The meat of your page is the columns that hold your body text. If you've chosen a portrait format, I recommend using one-inch margins on each side and two columns for your body copy. The one-inch margins will allow the PDF, when printed, to be bound easily with almost any home binding system. The

two columns make it easier to read your text (see Formatting and Font Tips, below). If you're using a landscape page you can use either two or three columns with anywhere from one-half to one-inch side margin.

Once you have your master page(s) ready it's time to begin the layout of your PDF.

Inspiration

If this is your first time doing layout and design you shouldn't forget to look at other books for inspiration. Look at not only game books that you like but also mainstream magazines and books. Text books are a good source of inspiration for an RPG PDF as are encyclopedias and other reference books. Do not simply copy a design but, instead, create something original that uses elements of several products that you like.

The Layout Process

Once your master page design is ready and your text and art are assembled it's time to combine everything into the final layout. Begin by importing all of your text into your layout program. This will give you pages and pages of text that, while there, isn't exactly all that exciting to look at. This is also your chance to get a rough idea of the number of pages your document will be. If the raw pour is 36 pages and you have 6 pages worth of art (not all full illos, probably mostly quarter page illos) you know your final document will be about 42 pages long.

Next begin importing artwork. Try to divide your artwork evenly so that it isn't all clumped at the beginning of the book, which would leave the end a bit barren. Use them in between chapters or next to relevant text.

From here it becomes an exercise in aesthetics. There are rules and guidelines to proper layout but these tend to fill vast volumes. For a condensed version of this information, see Various Considerations and Formatting and Font Tips, below.

Various Considerations

The body of your text should be in an easily readable font. Serif fonts, like those developed by the great newspapers (Chicago, New York, Times, Times New Roman) are easy on the eyes, and are designed for print. Sans-serif fonts like Arial or Verdana are cleaner, but tend to wear on the eyes in print—they tend to be used for online reading, like web-pages.

If you intend for your PDF to be printed, consider dividing the information smoothly, so that the customer can print

small sections as needed—especially important if you are releasing a large product. Keep graphics to a reasonable level, and make sure they are no large black areas, so as not to unduly tax the consumer's printer. These considerations need not apply to files intended for on-screen use, but for gaming, where most action will occur around a table-top with friends, printing is the norm, so keep that in mind.

Full bleed (a term indicating when graphics flow right to the edge of a page) is essentially useless in a PDF, given that most home printers (and even non-bindery commercial printers, like those at Kinkos) leave a small border of unprintable space around the borders of the page. Any elements you place there will be lost. Don't do it unless you plan to make a POD version or separate printer version. If you do use a bleed, keep it light and non-distracting. Let it add to your text not draw away from it.

As has already been mentioned, place your body text in columns. Columns break the text graphically and make even a page without artwork more visually interesting. It also lends readability to the text. Two columns are adequate for most uses. Any more than that and the column width becomes too small to be useful.

If you think of columns as graphical elements, it will also help you in the placement of artwork. In your page layout application, view the page from a distance (so that the text is unreadable), and place text and art as compositional elements on the page. Experiment and you'll be pleased with the results.

Formatting and Font Tips

Do not use more than 2 or 3 fonts in your whole book. While you may have the "2000 Fonts!" CD package anything more than 2 or 3 in a single product looks amateurish and is too distracting for the reader.

Use only fonts that are easy to read and avoid the hard-to-read display fonts. You want the fonts in your PDF to enhance the appearance of the product and not confuse the reader.

The classics always work. Using Times (or a version of Times) will ensure that your PDF is legible.

Always use 10 point to 12 point font sizes for standard body text. Only use 6 to 8 point for legal stuff, like that d20 license. If you're using a dedicated layout program (see Publishing Software, below) you have the ability to select a font size that is optimal to your needs.

Editor's Note: I use either Times or Palatino at 10.5 with a leading of 12. Leading is a technical term that means, simply, the space between the lines. Always set leading to a number higher than the point size of your type since that gives the ascenders and descenders of the font room to breathe.

Headings should be at least 2 points larger then body text and of a different font face then your main body. Here is a good place for that nice display font.

Editor's Note: A lot of the professionally-released products I have worked on usually have two to four different header sizes depending on importance. Check your outline for an idea of the number of levels of headers you will need in your PDF. I recommend using a bold-italic version of your body copy at two to three points larger for the lowest level header. You'll find it's easy on the eyes and helps the section to stand-out.

Interior artwork should always be placed so that it does not distract from the text on the page. The purpose of artwork is to enhance the writing, not overpower it. Wrap text around artwork that does not lend itself well to frames. (Text wrap is when type fits closely around an image.) If you are using frames use a consistent design and size.

Indent paragraphs, double space between paragraphs, and single space in a paragraph.

Editor's Note: Do NOT do the above if your text will be imported into a proper layout program. All quality layout programs give the user the ability to set text indents and space between paragraphs and such information should always be done in the master style guides to ensure a consistent look throughout the product. Submission from your writers should be in raw text or rich text format (rtf).

Use at least 2 columns of text in your document. The columns should have about 50-60 characters on the same line. Any more is difficult to read, as is any less.

Don't use color text, as tempting as it is. Keep your work text black & white.

Serifed fonts look great printed out, but suck for onscreen viewing.

Table of Contents and Indices

Every book needs a good table of contents, as a guide to the reader. An index serves the same function: clarity of navigation for the reader. You should include one or the other, and on longer documents, preferably both.

A good rule of thumb: The more detailed your table of contents is, the less detailed your index needs to be. It makes no sense to have the same fully detailed information appear twice in your document—it will needlessly pad the page count, and

the file size. In general, make your Table of Contents similar to an Outline—top-level information, by heading. Give the index for direct subject citations.

Acrobat also has functionality allowing for the creation of hyperlinked TOC entries, allowing the reader to jump directly to the page at the click of a mouse. This is useful for on-screen viewing and actually expected in today's products. So do it or face negative feedback in reviews.

Don't forget to use bookmarks as well. They are just as important if not more so then the TOC. People reading your book will like to jump around or directly to a point of interest. The bookmark system for PDFs allows this to happen without having to be on the TOC page. Therefore bookmarks are extremely useful and again, expected from all quality products.

➲ Publishing Software

There are a large number of desktop publishing software packages available: Adobe InDesign, Pagemaker, QuarkXPress, Microsoft Publisher, and more.

Here's a secret that most people don't talk about:

There really isn't that much of a difference between any of them.

A decade ago, there were some programs that clearly did the job better than others. However, as time has passed, the other programs have imitated the market leaders, and so now, most layout programs have identical functionality—the only difference appears in how their tools are structured, and their internal procedures.

The results are identical, although asking people their opinions about these software packages results in strongly-held opinions and fierce arguments—in a way, it's very similar to the standard computer Operating Systems argument. Mac people fiercely defend Macintosh, Windows people claim the superiority of Windows, Linux advocates defend their choice, etc…but largely, and they all do the same thing. It's just a matter of what you're comfortable with.

That said, there are two choices to keep in mind:

QuarkXPress is a popular choice, largely because it is the real-world publishing industry standard, and has been for a long time. If you're eventually planning on releasing as a hardcopy, and will need to deal with a commercial printing house, you may want to use this package for that reason. Though, as more printers move to accepting (some even encouraging) PDFs, this compatibility is less important than it once was.

Adobe products (PageMaker and the newer InDesign) merge seamlessly with the other Adobe products, including Photoshop (which is far and away the leader in image manipulation software), Illustrator (useful for creating logo designs and maps) and, most critically, Acrobat (for the creation of PDF files—although really, any layout program can be used with Acrobat, so don't worry).

Creating the PDF

Adobe's Portable Document Format (PDF) is the standard for electronic document distribution worldwide. A PDF preserves the exact layout and design of any source document—fonts, layout, graphics, etc., no matter what application and platform were used during creation.

PDFs can be read with a variety of software, notably Adobe's free Acrobat Reader, and can be created from any file with the Distillers found in the full version of Acrobat.

However, you don't need a copy of Acrobat to create PDFs. You can create a PDF from any Postscript file using freeware programs like PS2PDF on the web. You may also find a cheap alternative to Adobe with software from www.pdf995.com website. The Distiller in Acrobat is probably the best professional solution, though. Using the retail version of Acrobat you can print your document to a device called Distiller that acts like a printer but saves a PDF file as its output.

Check the reference chapter for more support and FAQ links for PDF.

How does one create a PDF file using Distiller?

Original document is typically written in a word processor like in MS Word or WordPerfect.

Graphical elements are typically done with Adobe Photoshop and saved as .JPG or .PSD or .TIF to be imported later. Images may at times require some tweaking for intensity and contrast (increasing both) otherwise they come out too pale in the PDF copy.

Then open your publishing program (InDesign or Quark XPress). Import the text without any formatting notations and then format and layout the text, incorporating the graphical elements and creating the tables on the fly (for Prestige Class progressions, etc). Lastly, adjust to prevent orphaned text on new pages.

Print, selecting Adobe Distiller as your printer. If you can avoid exporting as EPS file and print directly to Distiller it's typically going to create a smaller PDF file.

Editor's Note: Most newer applications include a *Save as PDF* option, which eliminates the need to print to a file, although it may use the Acrobat Distiller to process the PDF.

Open the new PDF document in Adobe Acrobat; add bookmarks, open options, document properties, etc. Import the cover in the front if you haven't already.

Save PDF.

Ceating Smaller PDF Files

Using the full version of Acrobat, launch the DISTILLER program. Start a new job inside Distiller by going to SETTINGS and JOB OPTIONS (CTRL-J) then under GENERAL set Compatibility to 3.0, click optimize for fast web view, and change RESOLUTION to 150. Then in the COMPRESSION tab, set the color, grayscale, and monochrome, images settings to "Average Down sampling" to 150 dpi for all images "above" 150 dpi. Set compression to automatic and Quality to Medium. Click compress text and line art at the bottom.

Make sure in the FONTS tab that you have Embed All Fonts.

Select SAVE AS and pick a name you'll remember for the settings.

Now, open your original PDF in Acrobat and select PRINT and then select the DISTILLER printer, but remember to change the settings so that it's using your new Job Options created above.

That should do it. You can play with the settings to get the best compression. Remember screens are only 72 dpi and most PDFs are only viewed on screen. 150dpi though is a good setting as the art on a typical printer will still look good.

How does one create a Postscript file?

Instead of printing your document to paper, you can tell your computer (Mac or Windows) to "print to a file." What this means is that instead of sending the PostScript code to your printer, your computer will write it to a disk file. Simply choose the file option from your Print dialog window, and follow the instructions there. Be sure, if given the option to select Postscript type 1,2 and 3 compatibility, which will allow for the distillation of a PDF, and be sure to include all fonts—otherwise your PDF will not convert correctly.

When you're done, double-check the PDF to make sure that it looks exactly as you intend. If it doesn't, try changing the settings and convert again—remember, you don't need to release your PDF until it meets with your satisfaction.

Standardizing your PDF distribution

Try to create a separate printer friendly version to distribute along with your standard version. This could just be turning off board art or any heavy/large images. Don't use thick black areas of any sort. Think ink conservation. Some companies even turn off the artwork - no real reason to reformat, just turn them off.

Try naming your files logically, such as INITIALS_MODEL_NAME.PDF Remember your products may be put on a CD with many other products so don't use very common filenames like "readme.txt" or "index.htm" unless they are in a sub-directory.

When zipping up your files, have all the files in a subdirectory that is your company name. That way when someone unzips your product it's neatly in a subdirectory and separate from the other products they ordered.

What do you DISLIKE the most about a pdf?

■ 2003 (66 votes)
■ 2004 (398 votes)

	2003	2004
Background and border art:	14%	13%
No artwork at all:	11%	13%
Overly large file sizes:	8%	5%
No bookmarks used:	11%	18%
Lock-out of cut and paste:	48%	37%
Colored text:	3%	4%
Shaded boxes or colored backgrounds:	6%	10%

Chapter 6:
Marketing

Why do you buy PDFs?

Reason	2003 (772 votes)	2004 (1365 votes)
They are cheap!:	42%	40%
Good resources:	29%	33%
Support the publisher:	12%	10%
Can't find them in print:	17%	18%

Let's first look at a basic principle of marketing. Though it may seem counter-intuitive, the reason people will buy your product is different than the reason you made the product. Yes, creation is entirely separate from actually marketing and selling the item. Fortunately, you're a roleplayer—now you get to play the role of the Customer.

There are two approaches one can take toward marketing. Either go where the customers are and convince them to buy your item (instead of someone else's) or create your own customers by convincing them that they need your item.

The first method involves pushing your product through existing channels. For PDFs your choices are 'web malls',

community forums, and 'your website'. The second method involves creating new markets, and we'll get to that in a bit. Ideally you'll take both approaches, but for reasons of time (you have none) and money (ditto), you'll likely focus on the first method, because it's easier. Not necessarily more lucrative, but easier.

Marketing is essential, but knowing which bits to cut (because they're long shots or because they're just too hard relative to their effect) is crucial. We're going to barrage you with a bunch of marketing outlets—you get to prioritize them and make a reasonable list that you can accomplish. Here we go.

➲ The Art of Pre-Press Hype

Pre-press hype is all about the timing of information release prior to the product hitting the shelf. It is an art, not a science. There is a fine line between spamming the gaming world, and building 'buzz'.

The AIDA marketing formula is:

• Attention (get the potential customer's attention)

• Interest (make them interested in your product)

• Desire (induce desire)

• Action (make them actually buy it—close the sale)

Pre-press is about getting people's attention, making them interested, and inducing desire. Every avenue in this chapter will factor into pre-press hype. We'll give you Aldo Ghozzi's (of Impressions Advertising & Marketing: *www.impressionsadv.net*) checklist for traditional game marketing.

1. Get website up.

2. Create and send out press release about game (people start going to site).

3. (Optimally) Start advertising 3 months prior to release ("Coming Soon").

4. Advertise "Now Available" on the (hopefully) 4th month.

5. Advertise "This-is-what-they-are-saying-about-X" for the 5th and 6th month.

6. From there, re-evaluate your marketing plan based off of consumer reaction. If the product is not selling, swallow your pride and move on to the next project.

Marc Veczina from Dream Pod 9 once gave this piece of advice. Have your first three products ready for release before you even announce you exist. Once you have to start doing marketing and promotion, you'll have no time to create or edit before your products have to be released.

For our pre-press, we're going to assume you do each item in this chapter. Build a website. Make a demo. Get some early reviews. Have news releases. Prepare ads and ad banners. Get online ads and banner exchanges going. Utilize UseNet. Prepare for Conventions. Visit forums. Set up an e-mail list. Get listed in directories and top sites. Join web malls and places to sell. Prepare freebies. Get featured in e-zines. Now go go go!

➲ Your Website

For a PDF publisher this is the most crucial task to do. It's easy and important.

Your Own Domain Name

Quite simply, get one. It should be easy to remember and not contain any dashes, non-alphanumeric characters, or odd abbreviations. If your company name is taken (and for new companies, choose a name that is not yet a domain!) choose a reasonable variant, or a name based on your primary game line.

Good Example: *Gold Rush Games is at, surprise, "goldrushgames.com"*

Good Example: *Wizards of the Coast has "wizards.com"*

Bad Example: *Wizard's Attic has "wizards-attic.com", but "wizardsattic.com" goes to a search site. Confusing!*

Consider also getting domains for each product line. Gold Rush Games (goldrushgames.com), for example, runs 'sengoku.com' for their *Sengoku* products. You can have these additional domains be sub-domains—pointing to subsections of your main site—instead of requiring yet another website to maintain. The advantage of this is fans of a game line will often just type the product name to get there. These domains are rather cheap at $15 a year and maybe $10-20 a month for hosting.

Standard Look and Feel

You'll need to figure out your 'look'. This is what says to your web visitor, "yes, I am still at this company's site". The look helps you 'brand' all your pages as being yours. It also helps visitors navigate because it provides uniformity and familiarity in their content-browsing experience.

Choose your site colors (complementing, not contrasting), just like choosing a football team's colors—pick 2 or 3 and stick to them. Include your logo. For an assistance in using colors investigate "color theory." Many books are available or search the web for some excellent sites that discuss the process of selecting complementary colors.

Every page should have a standard header that includes your company name and logo. You can add other items (indices, dates, quotes) as desired. Likewise, each page should have a standard footer with any trademark and/or copyright statements (the minimum information you should have) and a contact/help link.

Each page should also have your navigation tool whether it is an index, laundry list of links, hierarchal tree, or what have you. It's still just a 'table of contents' for that section or sub-section. Make sure it's always in the same place on the page (always the right column, or always in the header, or always at the footer, or always on the far left…probably in that order of design preference).

Subtract 'header, footer, and navigation' and you are left with 'body'. Here you can be creative. You can divide up the body into sections, or just plaster everything right into the middle. Each page can have a different body layout, as suits the topic. Since you are keeping to your standard header/footer/navigation layout with your standard colors, the 'body' is where you can be creative without confusion.

Get Right to It

Now for the actual design of your site. Your home page, the first place most visitors will see, should have *content*.

Not a flash animation.

Not a cool logo that they have to click on.

Not a teaser.

People ignore teasers and gloss—they want information and if you aren't going to provide it they'll just go elsewhere. You can stick all the fun stuff (images, animations, and Flash) inside your pages. But for that crucial home page, make it as clean and informative as possible. Changing information on your front page will help greatly with search engines rankings and spiders.

So get right to it. Make your first page have news. A simple news log or other way of inputting daily musings is handy. You can list new material you put up, conventions you'll be at, ideas you have, anything relevant to your product and your company. The idea is to let your website be a dialog between you and your customer.

Bad site attitude:

This is us. We rule. Every day, you will read this same note, because we can't be bothered to add anything interesting.

Good site attitude:

Hi again! We just got back from a con. We love you folks. Next week we'll have a new product. It's going to be a great spring!

Ideally, your site should update daily. At worst, update it weekly. If you can't update it weekly with something new, you will lose visitors (and thus lose customers).

Updates don't always have to be new support material or announcements of new products. A short essay or update on what you are doing is fine, and adds a personal touch. It also shows that you're actively in business.

Woes betide the website that has a 'What's New' section that hasn't been updated in a year. That says, "we're clueless." You want your customers to have a reason to visit you a few times each week, just to keep you at the top of their mind.

Easy Navigation, Basic Sections

Most sites have their front page, with "What's New." Product overviews. An area with support material or separate areas for each product line's support materials. Company information, often with contact information. A "frequently asked questions" area or "About Us" section. A set of useful links to other sites. A place to view products and, hopefully, buy things.

Past that, you can go nuts and have forums, chat-rooms, online gaming, reviews, areas where visitors can create content, reference sections, designer notes, columns, convention calendars, contests, and more.

News

You should have a "News" section. Likely it's a "What's New" on your front page, but perhaps you keep it as a separate section. In "News", you should mention:

- Any new product announcements, sales, or specials.
- Any upcoming appearances (convention or web chat).
- Reviews of your product that appears on other sites.
- Hints of upcoming products you are working on (serving the dual purpose of providing anticipation while also showing how hard you work).
- Info on new material added to your website.
- Staffing changes.
- Anything particularly cool or newsworthy.

Frequently Asked Questions, and Contact Us:

All sites should have some sort of "About Us" or "Frequently Asked Questions" page. This is the page a total newcomer could go to, to get basic journalism information like:

- Who are you?
- What are games?
- Where are your products?
- Why is this website here?
- How can I do stuff (contact you, buy things, meet other players, etc)?

The easiest way to handle this is to collect all the questions you get via e-mail or at Cons. Anything asked more than once should probably be written up for this section.

Also, have a "Contact" page that says how people can reach you if they have questions about the website, your submissions procedure, or anything else. If you don't accept submissions, state that. Finally, list (again) where folks can buy your games—they should see that bit of information a lot on your website.

If you don't make it easy for folks to contact you, you'll lose out on useful feedback.

Flash and animations:

Flash and animation are nice, but treat them like the movie loops at a museum. Put them in a separate area and have signs to them. People don't want to be unexpectedly slowed down with a movie download or flash loading when all they wanted was to buy a product.

Treat animations and flash like special events—mention their existence in "What's New", have links to them, play them up. But don't force people to wade through them while getting to where they were going.

The Sell

You have products to sell. Make sure visitors know that! You can feature products in multiple places. The subtle message of your site should be "We make great products—that you can buy", "we have cool games—that you can buy", and "we love gaming!…so we made some games that you can buy".

You should push product through:

- "What's New"/News
- **Product Listings**
- **Catalog for shopping**
- Links to product reviews elsewhere
- Extra material
- Demo stuff
- Rotating footer
- Everywhere else

We highlight "Product Listings" and "Catalog for Shopping," because you must have some form of this on your website. If you outsource your sales (to a mall, for example), you still need to have your own Product Listings.

At their most basic, a product listing is just the item title, description, size, and price. But this is your website—spice it up a bit! Describe the product—and include a sample. Have reviews or testimonials. Provide links between products (showing which ones work well with each other). Include some 'behind the scenes' commentary similar to that found in DVD movie releases—because customers/fans want more.

And make it searchable and browsable (via indices and search bars) so people have an easy time looking through your wares. If someone hears a rumor that your company makes a product called 'Giant Squids' they should be able to find that Giant Squid CCG quickly and without jumping through a lot of hoops.

Keep it clean, light on graphics, easily navigated, and simple. Then update it at few times each week. Presto, you have a great website!

⮑ Search Engines

Search engines will help bring people to your website. To get referrals from websites you need to get listed on them first. They need to know you exist. Do not be tempted to use these automated programs as they can get your site demoted instead of promoted. The best thing to do is to visit all of the main search engines and look for a "submit URL" button or link. These submissions can take a couple months to become active.

Getting a good ranking on these search engines is a tough thing to do, but important. There are two main methods to do this. First, you can pay for it. Using Overture (www.overture.com) will get you listed on the top of 75% of the web's search engines for about 10 cents or more (as you bid for key words). This is highly effective if your product is specific to some commonly searched phrases such as "prestige class." Since your product will probably be rather unique and may not have the budget for this sort of promotion, you have to take the long road. To get good ranking on search engines is an art we're not going to cover here. But here are a few tips:

- Get as many sites to link to your site as you can.
- Change your front page content regularly.
- Resubmit your entry every few months, but not more often or you'll be blacklisted.
- Include your key phrases on your main page inside your content.

➲ Importance of a Demo

Your demo is basically you, if you can't be there. It is the single strongest way to make a gamer into a customer. Therefore, you need to make your demo widely available—through your website, run by chosen fans at Cons, provided to customers who want to teach others. Demos are important, and come in four flavors.

- Intro Demos (to introduce people to the game)
- Full Demos (fans can run other people through)
- Standalone Demos (players can pick up and play themselves)
- Teasers (short previews)

Demos are not about how to play your game. They are about why to play your game—they are about fun. You shouldn't care if, at the end of the game, the players are clueless about the rules. You want to focus on the *a)* themes of your game and *b)* basics of competition and cooperation in play. We'll walk through making a demo to explain.

First, you make your Intro Demo. This is what you'll run at Conventions. You'll also make it available via your website, and to anyone who asks.

The Intro Demo should focus on the 'high concept' of the game. You won't explain the rules for this—in fact, you should probably discard most of the rules. People don't want to hear about your rules; they want to play your game. Call it a 'basic version' if this upsets you.

So make the Intro Demo simple in execution and brilliant in concept. Choose a narrow subset of your world, to keep it simple and minimize the rules needed. Pre-generate anything they'll need—characters, cards, stats, whatever. Go right into the play.

Explain any rules as they occur, not in advance. This way they learn through example, and the focus remains on the game itself. Similarly, minimize any die rolling or bookkeeping. In a demo, dice should only be rolled for dramatically crucial scenes.

Intro demos are not balanced. In fact, you want the characters to be able to do more than usual, to feel empowered. Later the gamers can sober up and read the rules, but the demo should _fly_. During the demo run-time, when in doubt, wing it in the player's favor and keep the action moving.

Bad Intro Demo:

Here is how to make characters. Here is how to run combat. Here is how to determine initiative. Here is how to read the card stats. Now let me explain what roleplaying is.

Good Intro Demo:

Here are some characters, with a 1-line summary at top. Now, you're all on the ship being tossed by the storm, when suddenly…

A variant on the Intro Demo is the self-run Standalone Demo. This is a version that people can print for themselves (online, or handed out at cons), and play by themselves. It differs from the Intro Demo in that you write *a)* a short introduction and *b)* a one-page rules sheet. Maybe, if you're very good, we'll let you go up to 2 pages in rules, but any more and your demo risks being ignored. Give them the minimum needed to play, and let the material (the Intro Demo) whet their appetite.

You will want to produce a "GM's Kit" for your Intro Demos so that anyone you recruit can run the Intro Demo at a con or store. This is the 'Full Demo' including a lot of the dirty secrets we mention above on keeping it moving. The Full Demo will, alas, be more boring to read than the Intro Demo, but that's okay. It's being given to the already-a-customer, so they can recruit new customers. So document your Intro Demo and keep this resulting Full Demo around as an internal document for when volunteers arise to help you.

So there our "Intro Demo" has turned into three products: the demo you run, the stand-alone self-running version, and the GM's Kit.

The stand-alone demo is a "lite" version of your game rules that can be handed out for free to get people to try your game system. Everyone likes free stuff and if it's actually usable all the better. Remember to play-test the lite version too!

Teasers are extremely important for selling online. A person in a game store can browse through a book. If it feels good, looks good, and smells good then they buy it. But a PDF has none of this when listed in an online store. Provide the customer with something to wet their whistle. Show them the quality of your book and layout. A preview can be literally just a table of contents plus a random page or two. I cannot stress enough how important this is to have one. RPGNow even allows for a special link to a demo for each of their products. Best of all, it's only a few minutes of work to take a couple pages and put them in a small PDF.

➲ Press Releases

Press release is where we discuss the channels you can use to promote. Many of the avenues are already covered in other sections—here we tie together how to actually create a release-worthy promotional item.

A press release is appropriate for:

- Product Launch/Announcements
- Showing off the Cover
- Providing Previews (of the detailed stuff)
- Events such as Demos
- Announcements of contests
- Appearances on places like Mortality Radio (www.mortality.net) or RPG-Radio (www.rpg-radio.com).
- Appearances at Conventions

Much of this will be pre-press hype, because you want to do the bulk of your promotion just before the item is available, in order to create initial desire. Then, you'll promote a bit while the item is still new and 'hot'. After that, it's time to focus your mighty promotional skills on your next upcoming product.

Writing Press Releases

This is easy. Keep it short. Avoid hyperbole. Don't use buzzwords like 'innovative' or 'new paradigm'. Make it official, crisp, yet personable.

A press release is formally structured as:

1. Standard intro: "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE"
2. Contact Info for more information
3. Headline/Catchy Title
4. Intro paragraph (start with "Location, Date—")
5. Meat—description of product, quote from company representative, reason why this is newsworthy.
6. Conclude with contact information and where to buy

And again, keep it short. Notice we have only 1 paragraph of hype—the rest is all business framing and contact information. This is because the point of a press release is not to tell all. It's largely a teaser, giving a narrow focus on the item (aka 'the point' or selling pitch) and enough framing to make it useful.

Bad point:

"After 16 years development, our innovative new software tool breaks new paradigms by empowering game creators with state-of-the-art technology."

Good point:

"The first tile-based dungeon utility for computers is now available, allowing GMs to quickly 'paint' a world."

Here's a note on headlines. You want them short but not too short. Studies show most successful headlines are over seven words long. Shorter is just too generic. About 100% of the readers read the first three words, only 70% read up to the seven-word mark—but most of them will continue past 7. "In for a penny, in for a pound." And really, you don't want 70% of the readers—you want all those who actually care about the release, to whom you can then try to close a sale. You want potential customers, not just 100% of all readers.

So craft titles with care. Try to keep it within 1 line (80 characters) for easy formatting and easy e-mailing, but don't go too terse. Anything long should go into your Intro and Meat paragraphs.

Bad title:

"New game tool is out!"

Better title:

"Paint a world and run with it with WorldBuildPainterX"

➲ Pre-orders

Another method to generate a bit of extra income, even during the development phase, is to offer pre-orders of your product. Basically, you charge your core fan group a fee (maybe discounted) directly (not going through any middleman) for a future copy of the book. This can work well with gamers, as they tend to not have a lot of liquid cash, and when they do get it they spend it quickly. So, if you lock in the sale early they are less likely to spend the money elsewhere. It also can help gauge true interest in your product.

Don't put too much weight on this process if you're a newcomer to the ePublishing scene, as most people will lack the trust needed to buy something from you sight unseen. If you have an established brand then this is a great way to get a bit extra money early on and keep a higher percentage of the revenue as profit. Of course, make sure you get your book out relatively on time or you'll burn yourself with a lot of bad publicity.

Ⓐ Reviews

E-publishing has a big edge over print when it comes to review costs. It's essentially free to provide a reviewer with a copy! Unfortunately, there's a downside: many sites don't review e-Published items, or lack a mechanism for handling e-Published items. It may sound easy to say "here's a free attached copy, please review it," but that can be a lot of work for some editors unused to handling such things. Many review sites have a lack of staff and time and too many products backlogged. Think of a way to get their attention and always ask first before sending them a copy.

Still, if it's cheap and potentially effective, do it. They are giving you free promotion (the published review) in return for getting some relatively easy-to-produce publishable material (i.e. a review).

1. Send a query letter first, to the magazine or site editor: "Would you be interested in a review copy of X for 1-3 reviewers of your choice? Shall I e-mail the files or send you a CD?"

2. Respond to editor's requests promptly, and almost always with 'yes'. The editor sets the terms—if you can't meet it, they usually don't have time to negotiate and simply will say 'no'. They are providing *you* with a service, after all.

3. If they like your company, try to set up an autoship, i.e. "I can send you a copy of our newest products before we release them, if you tell me which e-mail you want products sent to." Having established the relationship, it saves everyone time if you don't have to do a new query letter for each new product.

4. Don't shill. Don't write your own reviews of your own products under a pseudonym. Don't get your friends to review you.

5. Be stoic. If you get a bad review, consider it 'constructive criticism'. Do not respond to negative reviews in comment forums unless there is a concrete question—and then, always be humble. Only correct factual mistakes, never wrong opinions. Know the difference between opinion (even wrong ones) and facts. Facts include: typos, statistics, and attributions. Anything else being criticized is probably an opinion and thus not something to argue with.

Example 1:

Reviewer: "Game X has too many charts"

Bad publisher: "What? We only have 5, you clueless moron"

BZZZZ

Reviewer: "Game X has too many charts"

Good publisher: [silence, doesn't respond]

YAY!

Example 2:

Reviewer: "Game X lacks an index, the morons!"

Bad publisher: "Only morons need indices for 4-page minigames, loser."

BZZZZ

Reviewer: "Game X lacks an index, the morons!"

Good publisher: "Thanks for the feedback, we'll try to fix that for future releases!"

YAY!

If you must reply to a review, spin it positive. Thank the reviewer for taking the time to review it—hey, if they didn't take time to review it, why are you wasting time responding? Comment on an aspect of their review that you thought valid. Address the tangible fact that needs minor updating. Say goodbye. Go away.

Remember that a publisher replying to a review lends that review more credence than ignoring it would. A really lousy review will just sink on its own—unless you reply and give people a reason to actually pay attention to the poor review.

Mall Reviews (sales channel reviews)

Many online sales channels (especially malls) allow for customers to provide reviews or feedback on products. And all the above advice on replying to reviews still applies.

Yes, it sucks if someone trashes your product right there on the 'buy me' page. You must rise above the occasion.

Rising above doesn't preclude contacting the channel vendor, though. First, check out their policy towards negative reviews. Some will remove them if you can prove factual error ('no index' when there is one) or clear bias (typically, the person works for a rival or has a citable agenda, e.g. a past history of flaming your stuff in another public place). Make your appeal—then stand by whatever decision the channel vendor makes. Try once, and then let it stand.

Some sites put positive comments ahead of negative. If there are only negative, first, think about whether the comments are right. And, also, try to get some positive feedback put in by sending to your customer list a note something along the lines of:

"Hi, we've gotten some negative reviews on site [X], this is just a note saying, if you liked Product [Y], please feel free to go to site [X] and speak your own opinion! Thank you."

Working Your Network

While we already stated you should never have your staff or writers or play-testers or pets or anyone associated with the game shill for reviews, it's good policy to encourage customers to be happily noisy. If you can, on each sales receipt embed the footer message:

If you liked this product, feel free to review it on site [X] or site [Y] so we can get the word out!

If you have a customer newsletter, comment on any positive reviews found and ask folks to let you know if they've submitted a review to any publication so you can feature them in future newsletters.

This lets your customers know that you listen and it puts the idea in their heads that, hey, they could write a review.

Some reviewers like to focus on a specific company or line. Work with their editor to ensure that said reviewer gets a steady stream of your product for free. Similarly, if someone is freelancing (many reviews in different places) and gave you a positive review, approach them directly and ask if they'd like to be added to your 'comp' list (for complimentary review copies).

Make sure *NOT* to say *a)* that comp copies imply they *MUST* review each item, *b)* that only good reviews are desired, or *c)* that you wish to have any say on what they write. You're going to have to trust them, or else they really are a shill and eventually word of that gets out and you get negative PR, even if the reviews themselves provide good promotion.

Ultimately, reviews are a major avenue of promotion and advertising in this industry, and also the one area where you have the least control. Scary, but no one said publishing was for the faint at heart.

➲ Advertising Tips

As an e-Publisher, you have an advantage over print publishers. You can safely assume that all your customers have online access. Therefore, online advertising has a greater chance of success for you.

That said, we'll reiterate that you'll need to spend more time than money marketing your game. Since preparing a banner for a paid ad campaign, or for a banner exchange, costs the same amount of time, you should focus on marketing that minimizes costs—time and money, both.

Ads come in all forms and formats. Banner ads involve animation, print ads can be in B&W or color, search engine ads are all text, e-mail contact lists, and guerilla marketing can be all over the place. But there are a few tips that span all boundaries.

First, stay focused. A single ad should be about one thing, no more. Pick that thing and run with it.

If you have many things to say, take out many ads. It is better to do one concept really well, than to have a busy ad which is only partially relevant to each viewer.

Less is more. Make your ad succinct. For visuals, choose contrast and boldness over "lots of words." See our notes on Press Releases for an idea on how good copy flows.

Products often contain Unique Value Propositions. Your ad should reflect that UVP. This is what distinguishes you from your competitors. Your competitors may be:

- other RPG publishers
- other ePublishers
- other forms of entertainment

UVP should be positive. UVP is really what your product's 'brand' is. Your company brand will, for now, be less important in the ad than what you are trying to directly sell.

Each ad should also have an image it wishes to send. This doesn't mean an actual picture, rather, it's the message and feeling you wish to convey. If you think visually, come up with a picture (say, an icy lemon on a snow-covered mountain). If you're verbal, write out these intangibles in words. ("I want to convey that we are cool, elite, with a bit of color and whimsy and perhaps a little bite.")

Once you have your image, make the ad. When you're testing the ad on your test marketing group (or your coworkers, or your family, or your gaming group), get them to try to figure out your image. If what they say matches what you imagined, you're on the right track.

Finally, negotiate. For any non-automated system, i.e. dealing with a person, it's pretty easy to negotiate a 10-20% discount. Ask because you're a new customer. Or because you're a returning customer. Because you're buying a lot of ad space, or because you need a break because you're just buying a little. Everyone is special.

⮑ Banner Exchanges

Banner Exchanges are a form of advertising that is essentially free. You are trading ad space on your site in return for getting ad space on lots of other sites. RPGHost, the Great RPG Archive, and other sites help facilitate such trades among members.

Some trade organizations (such as the GPA, www.thegpa.org) put members' banners up on their site. Think of this as free banners, and go with it.

Related to banner exchanges are web rings. For a web ring, instead of an ad, all member sites agree to provide referral links (often in the form of a standard 'member of' banner) to each other.

Both systems share the same advantages (free, and get you good reach), and same disadvantage. The disadvantage is that you are providing an exit door.

Your website should only have one exit door, and that is "the door to purchasing my products." If you sell on-site, you'll have no exit door—happy customers following a sale should be shunted to your support material.

But, just as in-person networking requires that you give to get, banner exchanges and web rings are a nice compromise between "keep customers on your site" and "get stuff free." You can control the exits, to some degree.

Sharing among your competitors (an ePublishers' web ring or a banner exchange that includes competitors) has the advantage of giving you a shot at their customers, with the disadvantage being obviously the same in reverse.

Sharing among non-competitors (a general gaming webring, an exchange among many forms and formats of gaming, etc) has the advantage that you are probably the only one selling, thus no competition worries.

You have to weigh the pros and cons, but our recommendation is to use every such free avenue you can find. Your products already have to compete in the marketplace, so it's unlikely that you will 'lose' customers in an exchange. You are more likely to gain new customers, plus more customer sharing boosts overall e-sales and increases the market, since gamer dollars isn't usually a fixed sum.

Logistically, you should make at least one standard (468x60 pixels) banner that is under 20Kbytes in size, for use on any site that will take it. Banner exchanges, free banner ads, banner swaps, get that banner seen!

Having a standard banner on hand at all times is essential for catching opportunities. When a portal, sponsor, or fan site asks "hey, do you have a banner," you can send it to them and be instantly ready, instead of adding yet one more task to your 'to do' list.

Ideally, you should have at least 3 banners, to provide some variety. And, design new banners for new product releases, or just to add spice every 3 months for older products.

⮑ Pay-per-click Search Engines

Currently, the top search engine is Overture.com which gets your listing on a huge number of quality search sites,, such as Yahoo.com. These are very effective if you can identify your company or product by common search terms.

Another search engine to use bid ads is 'Google.com.' Their AdWords system is clever: you pay to get featured as an ad for specific words, as a bidding system. You pay more if people actually click through your links, but never more than your budget—which can start at $5. It's cheap, honest, and effective. This can be a bit touchy, though, as they remove links that don't get clicked often.

Yahoo.com uses Sponsored sites, again fairly straightforward, starting at $50/month. Infoseek.com uses Google. (Actually, a lot of sites use google now.) Other search engines let you pay to get higher search ranking (placement)—but this is a dubious practice that has earned them negative PR.

If you want to spend money, focus on the Overture or AdWords and related bidding concepts. The trick here is to choose focused words. You don't want to be seen by 10,000 people; you want to be seen by 10,000 potential game-buying customers.

So choose words that are directly relevant. Buying 'gaming' is useless; monopoly and mah-jongg players will ignore your sponsored link and you've wasted money. Buying 'RPG' will get you throngs of bored computer RPG folks, but at least it's getting closer. Buying 'roleplaying' will give you (if you publish RPGs) a closer fit; a board game person might score better with 'tactical.'

Finally, figure out your budget. You really don't want to spend a lot of money here. Search engine payouts are not the highest return on your ad dollar. You'd be better off improving your site ranking.

Improving site ranking generally means that you should: *a)* ensure your site includes common terms and keywords (i.e. gaming, RPG); *b)* be sure your site is well-linked to other sites (Google.com in particular uses the number of other sites that link to you as a measure of relevance); *a)* actually visit most search engines and ensure you're listed in their "list of sites to index." All of these are simple techniques that are part of operating a good site.

➲ Usenet Posting

Usenet is a huge 'legacy' item on the Internet, a pre-web set of discussion forums that is still incredibly active and useful. It's also flame-filled. So here's how to use it for promotion. We're going to assume you know about Usenet. (This isn't an internet primer here.)

First, figure out which group is appropriate to post promotion or press release material. Most RPG stuff is in the 'rec.frp' hierarchy; there are 'announce' newsgroups specifically for such things. Use them—and don't post those to the main group or you may get a lot of negative comments (flames). Try to post relevant replies to other people's posts, but always include your URL in your signature.

Focus—make sure the material is suitable for the group. If it's a group about Furry games, no point in sending stuff about your upcoming hard-SF game.

Next, guerilla marketing stuff. Here, you are promoting yourself (not your products). You want to establish yourself as an easy-going expert in the field, who happens to publish games (which are available via your signature). You are becoming your brand, on Usenet.

In threads about your product's genre, feel free to contribute. Include your four-line signature that mentions your name, your product, your product's tag line, and your website. Make sure your post has content.

Bad:

Our game does that

Good:

It's a tough call. Our game does it using 'X', but the other approaches you mention are interesting to consider.

Ignore flames. Really, some people just exist to flame. Only reply to positive posts. (See also our 'Reviews' section for tips on how to deal with factual flames.)

Realize that Usenet can be a big time investment. You have to first scout out a given forum, to get a feel for how people use it. Then you need to read it. Then you have to craft responses in a way that first and foremost promote yourself, and mention of your game is 'stealthed' into the signature.

Usenet can be a great way to get some promotion for free, or it can be a huge time-suck. So our recommendation is, if you find Usenet reading and posting fun, use it for promotion. If you're short on time and don't enjoy Usenet, devote your time to other avenues.

➲ Conventions

So just what should you do at Conventions? Bring a laptop computer and say 'lookie?' Well, no.

- Run games
- Bring CDs of your stuff to sell
- Provide flyers and catalogs promoting your stuff
- Print out samples to give away (1-page and 4-page flyers and demos) & 1 full copy.
- If you have any POD items, sell them and have a copy or two to leaf through
- Run demos
- Run demos

Yes, we listed 'run demos' twice. Read the 'demos' section to see why they are the single most effective method of converting 'gamers' to 'customers'.

The goal of Convention attending is, first, to promote the hell out of your product. Con-goers are the most hard-core of gamers. Anyone willing to part with several hundred dollars in hotel fees and game fees for a weekend is just the kind of person willing to invest a few tens of dollars into checking out your product. Snag them as a happy customer and you'll have steady sales.

Cons are also the origin point for much industry buzz, gossip, and hype. Said info rapidly filters out through the gaming community. So cons let you build the essential 'word of mouth' that sells games. (Young's Law: Games are sold by word of mouth.)

Go to cons. Preach to the choir. Sell to the converted. Let them carry your good word outward. Amen.

Now, about costs: It can cost a lot of have a booth at a Convention—several hundred dollars at least. So here's a rough pecking order of con promotion.

- Having free flyers on the flyer table. Cost=maybe $25 plus finding someone to drop them off. Return=iffy
- Running games and demos at Cons. Cost=travel + a few hotel rooms (admission often waived if you run enough). Return=excellent promotion and PR to a small group of gamers, possibility of customer conversion.
- Have a booth in the dealer's room. Cost=several hundred, but provides you with direct access to gamers and gives you PR value as being a 'serious publisher.' Return=good promotion to a large group of gamers, plus you get direct sales and instant customer conversion.

- Advertising in program book, stuffing bag, sponsorships, and other ad opportunities offered by the Con-goers. Cost=for large cons, forget it. For small cons, often negotiable (i.e. product swap for ad space is common). Return=good promotion, may make you seem bigger than you are, but often doesn't directly drive sales.

➲ Forums and Community

You should cultivate your fan base, since they make up the bulk of your customers. A fan can be someone who bought just 1 of your products (and loves and raves about it), or someone who avidly collects most of what you produce. Fans are noisy and opinionated and, hey, their current opinion (being your fan) is that you're great.

So talk to them, and provide a way for them to talk among themselves. The easiest way to access and enable a fan community is through web forums and e-mail list services. Fortunately, web forums and e-mail lists are also the easiest tools to get running.

List or Forum?

Should you run an e-mail list, or a web forum? The short answer is, run both. They please different people. And both are easy.

Local, or No?

A more serious question with web forums and e-mail lists is whether to host them off your own site (thus branding them and giving them official status), or off a portal site (RPGHost, Yahoo Groups, etc).

Hosting them off your own site gives you more control over policies and membership. It also makes them appear more official and thus more appealing to fans. And it's easy for fans to find, since it's run off your own website.

On the downside, you must have a fan-base already and it also means more bandwidth costs and more responsibility for servicing them. Forum building sounds easy and isn't hard to setup, but bringing people there on a regular basis is a huge challenge. Any downtime is also a pain for you, since you'll have to deal with complaints and bouncing e-mail as well as getting things fixed.

Hosting off a portal means no muss, no fuss. It also increases the potential audience through cross-forum or cross-list traffic. In this, people on (say) one list can browse or search the other lists at that portal, and thus have a greater chance of noticing your list.

On the downside, you'll have less control over list policies or operations, and are at the whim of the provider as far as Terms of Service for the forum or list.

As it happens, most people are less interested in where their e-mail lists come from, then where their web forums are. Having many web forums off of one site promotes cross-traffic and easier browsing, such as they do at forums.rpghost.com. Since e-mail readers handle most list issues, though, it's relatively irrelevant where an e-mail list is run from.

To choose, then, check for tools (provided by your web provider) then run the costs (for extra bandwidth). Then check the portal fees (if any) and terms of service. As with most things, we recommend that you use a portal instead of running these yourself, to save time and expense. But do your research first.

Whichever you choose, do make sure that fans can subscribe to the e-mail list and join the forum from _your_ website. Instructions to 'go to site X and do Y' are not enough; you need a simple form or one-click way they can, from your site, join up. Make it easy for them.

➲ Auction Referrals

One effective 'secret' marketing tip is using auctions to indirectly promote your product and brand. Most major auction sites allow you to post your own descriptions in which you can do some self promoting. Be careful though; at sites like EBay.com, you are not supposed to create general links to your site. Within the auction, you can still make a prominent ad about how this product and others are also available.

Presto, you now have an ad along with a product listing that will come up anytime someone searches for a game. Those that view your site will (if they lose the auction, as most must) know where to get your item. Just keep putting stuff up, and you'll get attention.

➲ Bid Links

About.com and RPGHost (target.rpghost.com) have a method of bidding on actual presence of links for listings your products on their pages. About.com ads in the roleplaying game channel start at 20 cents. The RPG Host Network displays its links on the front of many of its sites and are usually under 5 cents per click. Your mileage may vary, but it doesn't cost you more than $20 to find out.

➲ Directories & Top Sites

There are hordes of gaming portals. Some are large (RPGGateway.com, RPG.net, ENWorld.org), some are small (Wowee at sambal.net/wowee, the Open Directory Project at dmoz.org), and many disappear in a few years. So we'll keep this simple. List your site on the first three above.

Also, make sure you are listed in the main (not just gaming) portals, typically in the games/roleplaying category. Go to About.com, Look.com, Yahoo.com, Altavista.com, and Google.com at a minimum. Some charge for their listings. Yahoo is one that is worth the money. Also look into www.Overture.com for paid listings on many of these search engines.

Make sure you are listed with any trade organizations (The GPA, GAMA, Digital RPG) of which you are a member.

Then, hunt up thematic or fluctuating indices. Thematic would be doing a web search on, say, 'vampire roleplaying' to get your Gothic RPG e-publishing venture going. Fluctuating are sites such as RPGTopSites.com, which use categories and popularity rankings to keep things changing.

Once you've done this initial massive (and tedious) listing, relax. Since you listened to our advice and got your own domain name, you don't have to worry about changing or updating your entry frequently. Perhaps each year, around tax-time, have a fan recruit of yours go around finding new places to list you, but don't spend much time on this after doing the initial seeding.

The only exception to this rule is that, if any website asks you to join their directory, join it. Such requests are typically done as an open call on semi-pro industry lists. It's free and builds your exposure.

Finally, if you have time, check with other company sites and with webrings, to ensure you are listed with them. See also our section on banner exchanges and webrings for more details.

➲ Freebies

All through this write-up, we've discussed some freebies to create 'buzz'. Articles, behind-the-scenes peeks, and interviews show the company site of things. Demos give a good sense of the product.

Articles are a bread-and-butter type of freebie to toss out (as covered in 'e-Zines'). On your site, you probably want to get to more game-specific material.

Character Sheets are a basic. If your game uses character sheets, make them available via your website. If your game uses game boards, ditto. Anything a player might need to photocopy or fill out should also be available for printing off your website.

Sample Characters are a nice 'content' addition. Actual NPCs are more useful. NPCs that include a setting and a plot are even better. Or just provide some free adventures or full settings. Give people something to _do_ with your game. New creatures, threats, items, devices, settings and any new 'stuff' about the world increases interest in your customers.

If your game isn't an RPG, include rules variants or new tactical setups. Make it so visitors to your website get new ways to play with your stuff, thus making your items more valuable to them.

Character generators, as a web tool, are a dandy thing. Any organizing, designing, or other interactive tool is nice to provide. But, you'll have to support them, and all software is buggy. So only take this path if you have the time to support it, or else it'll backfire as soon as the first complaints roll in when you don't have time to fix things.

Errata for your published product actually count as a 'freebie' and make customers happy. Imagine that, your mistakes can be good PR. It shows you care—about the quality of your work, and about your readers.

As far as *WHERE* to provide free material, all of it should be available via your website. Then, some (but not all) should be available through other sites. Use it as a promotional lure.

Also, look for niche archives that can get the name of your game out there. Put character sheets on RPGSheets.com, so that your game is displayed along with others. Find a gaming art gallery like Elfwood (http://elfwood.lysator.liu.se) or RPGGallery.com and put some of your art there. Whatever you put, make sure it has references back to your site, either on the page displayed, or embedded in the printable item itself.

Any niche where you can show some of your best work, and lure folks back to your full website is a good way to get free advertising and exposure.

Consider writing articles and reviews for games other than your own. If you're a D20 System publisher, a few reviews of some of the core D&D books will attract completely new customers when they do a search for "Fiend Folio." If you post one new review or article each month you'll slowly build a loyal following that will, over time, become interested in your self-published products. Don't limit yourself to game reviews and articles that are linked directly to your own self-publishing efforts. By varying the content on your site you will gain a larger following of potential customers.

➲ E-Zines

Providing material for e-zines (or web sites in general) is a cash-cheap, time-intensive way of getting free promotion. To a large degree, it's similar to having reviews published but giving you control over the material. There are a few common items to provide.

Press Releases

Press Releases are covered in 'pre-press hype', and are a basic item to provide to e-Zines and websites. Make sure to query first (if they don't have a policy listed on their site) to see where they want their press releases sent. There's little worse than annoying an editor by 'spamming' unwanted press releases to their e-mail box.

Contests

Contests are a form of advertising. Therefore, the number of responses received is not always a measure of the contest value; rather, the publicity around the contest is just as important. For every person that enters, 10-100 people may have seen the contest and been intrigued.

As a result, publication of the contest end and results is crucial. Seen this way, contests are a 3-part campaign.

1. Promote the contest (and thus your brand)
2. Run the contest (and thus gain a list of e-mails of people very interested in your product)
3. Announce the results (and get publicity)

So, contests can be a good buy, if done with a large traffic partner.

Even though I said 'number of responses doesn't measure success', you do want to either maximize the number of response, or gain new content. Gain new content means that you are running the contest for publicity as well as to gain new material, e.g. "all entries become our property and may be published on our website", etc. You'll get a low response rate—not many folks take the time to actually create stuff for contests—but you do gain material.

Most contests, though, are about inspiring a large number of people about a game. The best model this author has seen was Guardians of Order's contest run on rpg.net, where they did a set of simple 'match the hero with their power' type questions. These involved no typing by the participants—just checking off boxes. They had rich visual content that was part of the contest (not just eye candy), making it engrossing.

The puzzle was simple enough that anyone could try it, but clever enough that everyone would feel challenged. And, the contest directly related to the source material. They got, I think, over 700 responses. That's not counting all the people that saw the constant front-page mentions of the contest, which built awareness for their upcoming superhero game.

They got good advertising value for their dollar—because it was nearly free! They used their existing art, rpg.net doesn't charge to run these things, and rpg.net helped make the web page for it for free, based on GOO's e-mail/text version of the question.

The only publisher costs were *a)* prizes (and core rulebooks as prizes build clients) and *b)* the time it took their staffer to communicate and work out the contest details with the website editor. So, contests can be a very, very useful addition to your marketing. Like most ads, you won't get a directly measurable sales number from it. It's very easy to think up a clever contest (treasure hunt, trivia contest, etc.) that falls flat, alas.

They are the epitome of the 'cleverness is more useful than cash' advertising approach. Spend the brainpower then do it.

Free Material

Source material, adventures, fiction. Essentially, 'articles,' stuff you would print in a magazine, can be sent to e-zines (after a query) for them to publish. Make sure to give the e-zine an edge—that the material is exclusive for them, or that they are getting it a month before you make it public on your website, or some other perk to encourage their editor to use it and use it promptly!

Insider Peek

This is where you discuss the creation or underlying concepts of the game. These are often fun to make. Ever want to tell people about the agony of your work? Well, be upbeat and write about the trials and triumphs in making your game. Go into technical details. Paint a picture of how creation works. Fans enjoy this, and people who want to be publishers love it. You can approach it as a lesson ("How to do X"), a travelogue ("How I did X, oh my"), or a post-mortem ("Lessons learned from creating X").

This can be subtly difficult. What's an interesting article? The stuff I usually like isn't necessarily what others like. I like scathing social commentary, humor that isn't gamer-referential, or stuff exploring new approaches in game constructs. But when I was chief column wrangler, I kept getting e-mails from readers who wanted more advice columns or GMing how-tos.

That's always a general problem—as a writer, how much do you go with your 'gut feeling' and how much do you go with the requests from the masses (who are your readers, but actually may not really know what they want and hence ask for 'the usual')?

In the end, just remember that the only sin in publishing is to be boring. You can inspire, annoy, provoke, evoke, emote, and elate. Whatever you write, make it connect with the reader and affect them. Good or bad, as long as you keep their attention, you'll get what you want from it.

Sneak Peek/Preview

Here is where you can put together a promotional bundle of information and artwork on an upcoming game, then offer it to a website to build buzz. Talk over with the editor what sorts of material and what formats they like. Make sure to emphasize that this is an exclusive for that e-zine. A sneak peek is useless if you give it to everyone.

Interviews

An interview is like an article, where you're letting the e-zine editor decide the focus. Interviews often have an insider, personable feel (relative to, say, an article). They are easy to run—one method is to tell the editor to e-mail you 10 questions and you'll e-mail back answers within a week. Quick, easy, fun.

Web Chats

You can arrange a webchat with sites that do that sort of thing. Truth is, webchats are useful for reaching a very small number of people, but you're investing a decent amount of clock time (typically, an hour) in it. The real value is in the e-zine/website's promotion of the chat.

Being in a chat helps you create a warm fuzzy image, of being accessible. It gets your name out there. It makes fans realize you are involved and care about the gaming community. And you get free promotion by the website for the upcoming chat. Compared to that, the actual chat (even if anticlimactic) isn't a worry. And when chats do go well, they can be fun to be in. So an occasional chat is definitely a useful tool in your promotional toolbox.

Release Features: essentially, a coordinated campaign with several of the above together for an upcoming item, so that you pretty much dominate the website during the campaign.

See also our 'Freebies,' 'Pre-press hype,' and 'Reviews' sections. Basically, if you create anything, you can use it to promote your game by working with an e-zine.

To get material into the e-zine, first find out if they have any submission guidelines. Most e-zines don't have formal specifications, but they do tell you which e-mail address to use to reach the appropriate editor. If there isn't a contact address, try 'webmaster@' for the site. Queries should be short and official without being patronizing. Make sure to have a call to action at the end—don't be passive.

Bad:

As a publisher, I deign to give you free material, if you give me lots of coverage.

Good:

We have a write-up on how we created our game, which I think your site readers would enjoy. If you are interested in running it or discussing it, let me know this week by e-mail, to '[your e-mail]'.

Building a working relationship with a given e-zine/site's editor can be a good thing, as it gives you a promotional channel through which you funnel material. Generally, you can do more complex promotions when you have a better relationship.

If you are sending a 'cold' e-mail to someone you've never contacted before, offering material ready-to-run works. If the editor and you work well, you can suggest things like "you write up a contest and we'll provide prizes"—a working relationship means more help on your promotions.

⮑ Print Ads

In general, ePublishers are ePublishers for one of two reasons:

- Their product works best as a virtual item
- They want to publish with low overhead (no print bills).

For the cash-poor publisher looking at ePublishing, well, just skip this section. Print ads are *EXPENSIVE*. For everyone else, read on.

You can book print ads in the general glossy magazines: Dragon, Dungeon, Campaign Magazine, and Games Unplugged. These reach a lot of people and are expensive.

You can book print ads in the mid-tier magazines: Knights of the Dinner Table, Dork Tower, etc. They are moderately priced and reach a decent number of people.

You can book print ads in small-press magazines and 'zines. These reach a handful of people and are cheap. Hmm…notice a pattern?

In the end, any print ad can quite simply be calculated at a cost in $dollars per reader. Small print magazines cost $X for Y readers; glossies cost $A for B readers. Do the math; work out the per-reader cost.

Then, figure out the marketing niche: which magazine or venue will reach people most inclined to purchase your products? An ad that costs twice as much but reaches fans of, say, your game's genre, is a better deal than a cheap ad to uninterested parties.

For any ad, you want multiple impressions—at least 3 or 4 successive issues with your ad. It's an ad truism: a single ad is money wasted. People need to see your ad many times before they will bother acting on it.

In fact, it's better to have a small ad (say, quarter page) appear 4 times, than to run a single full-page ad. Even if the full-pager costs the same and is in color and glossy, versus a quarter-page B&W, what you want is repeated exposure. That's the game here.

So here's an inexact formula for figuring out an ad's worth:

> $cost per reader
> x modifier for audience's relevance
> x 4
> x size bonus (whether that ad is full-page or smaller, color or not)

This number, inexact as it is, gives you an idea of the ad's worth. Call this 'cost per eyeball', where we're allowing for different eyeballs having different values.

Now let's guess at return. I use the "1% Rule"—multiply the magazine's readership by 1% (0.01) to get the number of folks who will actually notice your ad. Multiple *THAT* number by 1% to get the number of actual sales the ad will generate. So:

> Readership
> x 0.01
> = Promotion value

> Readership
> x 0.01
> x 0.01
> x $cost of your item
> = $sales generated

Some people use a '5% rule' (same as above, only using 5% instead of 1%). The nice thing about 1% is that you'll rarely lose money due to bad data. But you might pass on an opportunity (with 1% return) that a 2-5% return would make

viable, so 1% may be overly cautious if you have good cash flow.

Finally, you still have to see if you can afford it. Look up their ad cost for the size you chose. See if you have cash to cover it. And see if that cost is good relative to the sales generated. Not that the ad has to pay for itself—you are also getting overall promotional value, after all, and building brand awareness. But you want to be reasonable here.

So, figure out cost-per-eyeball. Calculate Promotion value. Tally total cost and subtract $sales generated to get 'Cost.' You now have two numbers: cost-per-eyeball, a sort of quality assessment. And cost (minus sales) per Promotional reach, a

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GU ad worth
 $450
÷ 10,000
x 3
x 4 months
= 0.54 or over 50 cents (good eyeball)

GU Promotion value
= 10,000
x 1%
= 100 people reached
x 1%
= 10 sold

GU sales generated
 $20
x 10 people
= $200

GU cost
 $450
x 4 months
= $1,800
- $200 in sales
= $1,600

GU cost per Promotion value
 $1,600.00
÷ 100
= $16 per potential customer

Dragon ad worth
   $1,250
÷ 60,000
x 1
x 4 months
x 0.75
= 0.0624 or 6 cents (good eyeball)

Dragon Promotion value
60,000
x 1%
= 600 people reached
x 1%
= 60 sold

Dragon sales generated
   $20
x 60 people
= $1,200

Dragon cost
   $1,250
x 4 months
= $5,000
- $1,200 in sales
= $3,800

Dragon cost
   $3,800
÷ 600
= $6.33 per potential customer

cautious sales estimate. Same concept, reached two different ways. Compare across magazines.

Example: *If Games Unplugged charges $450 for a 1/2 page color ad that reaches 10k people, and Dragon charges $1250 for a 1/3 page B&W ad that reaches 60k people, which is the better buy? Are they worth doing?*

As they use the same page size, the Dragon ad is smaller, so we'll say Dragon gets a slight debit of 75% value for ad size.

If you publish a non-D20 game, at say $20, GU would be easily three times as useful as Dragon.

So GU costs 50 cents per 'good eyeball' and $16 per potential customer (meaning each would have to actually buy 2 games before you're recovering costs). Dragon costs 6 cents per 'good

eyeball' and $6 to acquire a potential customer. Remember that's "potentially interested customers," so you'd need the bulk of them to actually commit to buying to recover the costs.

Note how some of this is guesswork (which magazine is 'better,' which size is better), but the bulk of it is driven by the two simple facts of the ad bill you'll get, and the magazine's readership figure.

Finally, though, look at those totals—$1800 to $5000 being spent on ads, with only a hope of recovery? That's fairly hefty, considering neither magazine focuses on e-publishing.

➲ Web Malls

At the time this section is being written, there are a few RPG-focused e-product malls tied to RPG portals. RPGNow is the easiest to join and the largest. It also has a strong d20 focus, pays out to publishers in a timely manner, does not require exclusive sales, and is free to list. Once one has significantly higher sales, then you may want to explore any exclusive options (if available) to get better marketing. As with any decision, go with the numbers (which sells more, which pays on time) and never sign away any extra rights or restrictions until the numbers make it a smart move.

RPGNow allows any publisher to join and administrate their account via the web. Hyperbooks.com has an old manual system that shows its age but lives on. SWreg.org sells downloadable software and keyed products for anyone who wishes to join. SVGames (svgames.com) provides online sales for a select group of companies at a much higher commission rate.

Over time, we expect more outlets will start allowing e-sales from specific 'partners,' as ePublishing becomes more common. Do be careful not to immediately sign with a single vendor, though, as several sell-through sites (such as Kaji) or transaction-handling sites (such as InstaBill) have disappeared in the past two years. If one site has an exclusive and starts to go under, your works may suddenly be out of print while you scramble to rebuild.

You could also sell through your own website, if you have software to handle it. You'd need the store software (modified to handle downloadable products), plus a way of handling credit card charges. Trust me, it's a lot more labor than it's usually worth. (**Editor's note:** I agree completely on this point—go with an already established sales site.) Going with the existing channels will give you a larger audience with less effort and a lot fewer accounting headaches. Some of the channels will even brand a mini-store for embedding into your site. This gives you the best of both worlds—direct sales from your website, but handled by someone else.

➲ Specials versus Purging

First, the positive Special. There are many kinds.

An "Older Item, Newer Price" is simply a sale, the simplest kind of special. This is handy if sales have dropped on an item but are still good enough to keep the item available.

Other sales include "Pre-release sale" or the "New Item sales"—giving a discount for a short time window to generate some quick sales. In general, though, this is short-sighted—your new product will have most of its sales occur upon release, so you want to maximize dollar return while it's hot, and use discounts only when things are flagging.

'Secret promotional sale' is a term we've made up to describe a hack in how many channels/vendors work. Many list sale items on the front page. Ergo, constantly rotating which items you have on sale means you can have a rotating set of items that are getting extra free front page exposure on the vendor. The goal here isn't the sale per se, it's the fact that sales get free 'cover space' on the front page.

By rotating items on sale, you can create an interest among bargain hunters. Many people always check the "on sale" bin in stores or web malls; therefore, having stuff always changing gives customers a reason to keep checking, and thus noticing your stuff. Rotating means it doesn't get stale. The downside? Some folks may think "I'll just wait until this product goes on sale"—and you know, that's not necessarily a bad thing if you can indeed eventually close the sale.

RPGNow has a Gold Vendor feature to allow you to distribute coupons for special prices on a product to only a select group of people. This can be used effectively to entice buyers of one of your products to try others.

Editor's Note: I try to have at least three products on "special" at all times. I find that special prices tend to help sell products that are not "on special" since someone usually clicks on a special price item and is then shown some of your other products. Most of my sales of an item "on special" always include at least one regularly-priced item. So don't put all your products on special all the time.

Enhanced Reissue

Always a nice way to do a special, this is a way to regenerate notice on a good product by making it better. The goal is typically to get fence-sitters (folks debating whether to buy it) to take the plunge. Often, large-scale enhancements can even encourage existing owners of the item to cough up more money for the new stuff, but this runs the risk of alienating said core customers if done poorly (i.e. "I felt forced to buy it again, just for 1 page of new material").

With e-publishing, you can often offer the Enhanced Reissue to existing owners as a 'diff' or add-on, thus assuming they still have their original product. This builds you good PR and helps convert "buyers" ('I bought this item') to "customers" ('I buy their stuff often'). RPGNow makes this extremely easy with their automated system for Gold Vendors.

Editor's Note: I make it a policy to always give previous buyers any updated version of a PDF. This is easy to do using RPGNow's "Gold Vendor" features and the customers really appreciate the added value of free upgrades. I can't count the number of times that customers have thanked me (through e-mail and on web forums) for providing them with a revised and expanded version of an earlier release. By making free upgrades available to all customers you turn a customer into a loyal fan who will tell everyone he knows about what great service you provide. I highly recommend making all upgrades free to your customers.

Compilation

Simply a repackaging of existing products in order to gain some promotional notice, to create a perception of enhanced value, or to reduce SKUs. It is related to the practice of purging. This is when you de-list and delete an item, essentially making it out-of-print. This is practical for items which are no longer performing—less than 3 downloads a month.

All have the advantage that customers will be able to focus on your better (or more relevant) products. You'll be able to focus on marketing the good-selling items, reducing your time spent per sale. Make sure you promote this as a last chance to buy sale.

That said, there are really four approaches to de-listing, listed here in our opinionated order of preference (worst to best).

1. **Just de-list it and it's gone,** *poof*.

   Err…not smart. Even a non-seller can have a remaining promotional or novelty value.

2. **Make it free.**

   You can always release older items for free on your website as a customer service. This often pisses off people who paid for it, though, so be careful. Freeing an item should either happen after a hiatus (i.e. making it de-listed/unavailable for a year, then releasing it for free), or by devaluing the free copy. Devaluing can include stripping out illustrations or only making the B&W version available, ostensibly 'to make it smaller and easier to download,' but also to ensure customers keep buying. You not only want to make sure not to

annoy previous purchasers, you want to ensure that folks buy your new stuff and don't think "heck, if I just wait a year I can get it for free."

3. Bundle it.

Take any slow sellers and put them into a bundle. What were once 10 space-sucking catalog entries (in retail, 'SKUs,' or stocking units) are now just 1 item.

Call it a "Classics Bundle." Bundle them into "Adventure Packs" or "Post-Modern Collection." Choose any approach; the goal is to reduce SKUs while adding a little sizzle to the thing.

4. Rotate it.

De-list it for now, and plan to re-release it in a year or two as either an 'enhanced 2nd edition' or 'classic re-release.'

This requires a bit of tracking, and a lot of thinking. If an item is a poor seller, a re-release won't really help. If the item was originally 'hot' then cooled down, though, a re-release (after a new group of customers discover you) could be wise.

Be sure to emphasize the re-release nature. Otherwise, people who bought it once might accidentally buy it again, and get annoyed when they read it. Plus, spinning the re-release in itself generates promotional notice. If it's a 'classic re-release,' add quotes from people who loved it the first time. If it's an 'enhanced new edition,' list all the improvements and new goodies involved.

You can choose which strategy to use based on sales number. A hot product that cools is great to rotate later, or to use as the 'showcase' item in a bundle with cooler items. Lukewarm stuff is okay as a freebie. Stuff that sank like a stone probably should be completely deleted.

Which do you prefer to buy: a PDF at halfprice OR the POD version at near full price OR the actual print version at full price?

PDF, adventures only:
1%
4%

2003 (89 votes)
2004 (494 votes)

PDF, pre-release only:
8%
4%

PDFs are prefered:
49%
53%

Print On Demand (POD) version:
4%
5%

Print versions are prefered:
37%
35%
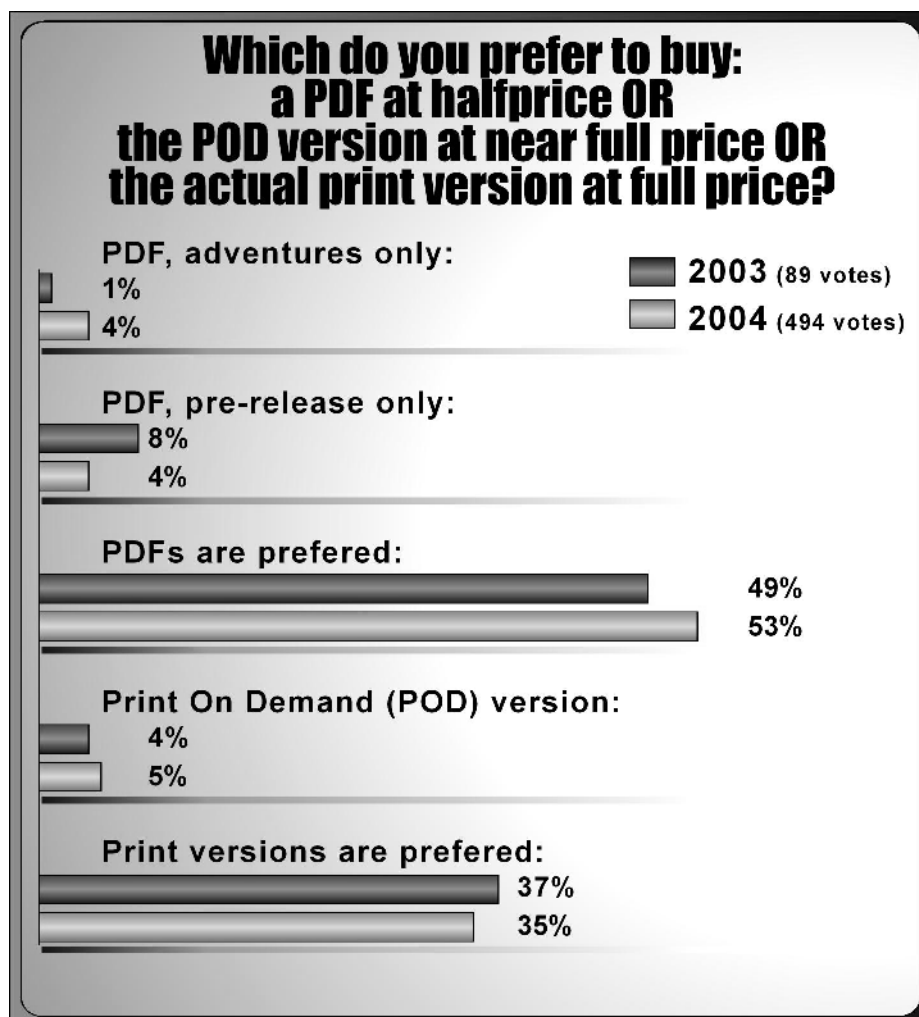
➲ CD Sales

CD sales are an interesting matter. Currently there is a need for them, for three main groups:

I. folks who have slow connections, especially overseas

II. folks getting a lot of stuff who don't want to download lots of little pieces—paying extra for a service

III. Compilations (e.g. "all of Series X from a company), i.e. an enhanced product

These blur: I and II are similar, and II and III are often similar. What you're selling is convenience and a better form factor.

So obviously, you should charge more for a CD than for just the raw products. How much is up to you. From economic theory, at a bare minimum, a buck per CD for media costs plus your time for burning (say, $25/hour for 10 minutes' labor in setting up and labeling afterwards) means a $5 minimum. And that's just your costs.

Obviously, the more on a CD, the more you can charge without alienating the customer. That's why Compilations are great; lots of material means a higher tag is easier to sell. $5 of games costing $10 on a CD is a rip-off; $50 of games costing $55 is not. Don't put too much on the CD though as most people will not want to spend $100 on a CD.

You can also bend this the other way; offer a discount for a bundle. If I can get 3 modules for $30 online (one at a time) or buy a CD containing all three for just $25, heck, I'll get the CD for convenience plus cost break. While this is viable, it's probably not good economically. Instead, you should bundle items *AS PDF SALES*, separate from the CD. So the 3-adventure bundle is $25 regardless of medium.

Some malls (like RPGNow) will burn a CD for customers as an in-house service; in such cases it's easy for you and requires no work, but you don't net any extra income. So even when such services exist, having your own special Compilations for sale is a good thing.

Burning your own is a pain—it's not hard, but it can get tedious and, with a low price margin, you'll be spending more unpaid time making CDs than making new content for folks. While the technology to do it is cheap, don't undervalue your time fulfilling these orders. Our recommendation: let someone else handle it unless it's a high-ticket item.

CDs do encourage sharing—it's still (even in the 'Internet Age') socially easier to loan someone a CD, than to mail them lots of big files. Sharing isn't necessarily bad, though. Most die-hard pirates will just burn your stuff to a CD anyway—

you providing a CD will not make it easier or harder for them.

Someone who shares a CD they bought still has emotional ownership of it; while the recipient may (heck, probably will) copy some of your stuff, the original owner will usually want the CD back. So do CD sales encourage piracy? Probably no more or less than having e-products available at all.

CDs also make good 'events.' Offer them for auction, or as a special promotion item, or for sale at Conventions. This lets them serve as marketing, getting notice of people who don't frequent the usual PDF-buying sites.

After all, your e-savvy customers are already using and satisfied by your existing channels. Use CDs to get the attention of new folks—customers who might be intimidated by the idea of virtual products and downloads, but to whom a nice CD full of goodies would be coveted. CDs thus can be a lure to get hard-copy-loving people to hold your product in their hands—the first step towards building them into steady e-customers.

Although *a)* Retail stores sell solid, tangible products and *b)* CDs are solid and tangible, we find that *c)* Retail stores aren't interested in CDs. A+B ≠ C. Retailers give many (valid) reasons:

• CDs are a different form factor from most products (books and cards) so they are hard to display

• ePublished items have too small a margin

• CDs can't really be browsed so they are harder to sell than a book (then again, some places shrink-wrap books!)

There are also more debatable points made:

• ePublished items have too small an audience

• ePublished items aren't worth selling due to quality

• CDs are easily pirated so I wouldn't be able to sell more than 1

• Most of my customers aren't computer-savvy enough to use them

• Online sales compete with retail, ergo, we won't carry such things

• ePublished items just shift the print costs to the buyer and thus are a poor substitute for books

Oddly enough, CDs sell well at Conventions. People at Cons *LIKE* walking away with tangible stuff. Plus, they are the only way to effectively sell an ePublished item at a physical Con. Even if you don't regularly sell CDs, you should consider selling them at Cons (perhaps as 'available only at Cons' special items!)

So make CDs available, ideally through your vendor(s) so you don't waste time filling orders. Bring some to Cons for sales. Then consider also making specific very large or very complete compilations available at a cost-plus price—think 'special editions'. Finally, use it to reach new customers by making CDs as promotion or limited-time objects of notice.

➲ Print on Demand (POD)

There are a fair number of people on the net that still would rather have a physical copy of a book in their hands. Large books (128 pages or more) are also very cumbersome to print out or read on the screen. Yet sending your product to a printer may cost you $1500-3000 for 1000+ copies, as its not much cheaper for fewer copies. We're assuming you don't have that amount of money at this point, so what can you do? That's where POD comes in. Print on demand is a fancy way of saying small print runs off a high quality laser printer that are then bound in a professional manner. Today's quality POD services are about 95% as good as the professional offset printers. With RPGNow's POD service, the covers don't get a glossy coating and some fading can occur with large black areas, but other then that they are very good. The beauty is that POD can be done, as its name states, in small batches on demand. So if you sell 2 copies this week, you can get just those or maybe just 10 printed up at a time. This is a bit more costly per book then traditional printing, but you're not stuck with any overstock! RPGNow offers a POD service to its vendors.

➲ Teaming with Publishers

Teaming with publishers can be as simple as using them to get in print, or as tricky as negotiating a license to put out an e-product supplement for their line.

In general, if a publisher approaches you ("I like your stuff, can we print it as a book?"), that's a good opportunity. Terms can vary, but you want to retain rights to the material (trademarks, copyright), and simply be 'outsourcing' or selling print rights to them for just that book or product line. Approach them like a service bureau.

If you want to publish supplements for another publisher's work, that gets into some of the legal issues discussed elsewhere in this book. First, though, make sure that they are willing to promote your product, as using their property has little advantage for you unless you can tap into their customer base.

Assuming you can, this can be fun and leave you with a job that is mostly creative, with their company handling a lot of the overall product line promotion. In short, they're taking over the bulk of your marketing—a good deal!

If you want to produce works for another publisher's line and haven't asked them yet, you need to make a pitch. It's easier to pitch an e-friendly publisher, so read industry lists and forums to get a better sense of which publishers aren't skeptical about ePublishing. If a publisher releases their own material electronically, that's also a sign that they might be approachable.

However, realize that playing in their world will mean you lose a lot of control over what direction products can take. Frankly, unless you've met the publisher and talked about it in person, and they were very comfortable with the idea, I'd recommend building your own independent product line or using an open standard (like D20). Otherwise, negotiating will end up eating a lot of your time.

Finally, some publishers may want to represent your ePublished work. In essence, you're simply an imprint or a freelance designer, and they take on the business end of things. As with any deal, look at the numbers and the cost in time. The three factors are: does it leave you with more time to create, do you still get a good percentage of sales, and can they market and sell the game as (or more) effectively than you can? If you get yes/yes/yes as answers, go for it. One 'no' means take a second look and start negotiating harder. Two no answers mean to ignore it.

In all cases, if you're working with another publisher, branding becomes an issue. Are your products branded as something from them or as something from you, or a hybrid? In general, you want them branded as the publisher's (for sales) and as yours (for your profit), so a hybrid scheme works best. Use the "imprint" model of book publishing, or the method in movies ("Fred presents a Wilma Production of a Barney story, produced by Betty"). Make sure your name gets in there!

➲ RPGNow

For over 2 years RPGNow has been selling digital game products and software, becoming the established leader in the market. Its electronic mall now offers more than 600 small press products (and 800 vintage TSR products), for over 80 game systems, including both out-of-print products from print publishers like Wizards of the Coast, Atlas Games, Pinnacle Entertainment, West End Games, Fiery Dragon Productions and Mongoose Publishing plus original (some exclusive) digital products from publishers like RPGObjects, Natural 20 Press and Darkfuries. With great market innova-

tions such as burn-on-demand CD's and Print-on-Demand hard copies, informative real-time reporting, and secure downloading, RPGNow offers its publishers a great service. Their website, www.rpgnow.com is available to customers worldwide through the internet.

The Process

The process to get involved is really very simple. RPGNow is only taking 25% of sales which includes marketing of your products as well as handling all the credit card processing and customer service for you. That leaves you plenty of room to price lower than print materials and still make more money, as most distributors are charging you for 60%. Of course we're not suggesting you drop your other distributors, we are only offering another market for you to take advantage of at an extremely low buy-in. Payments are made by check or Paypal on the 15th of the following month from the date of the sale, but only if they are more than $25. Full sales reports and customer mailing features are or will be available on the site in real-time.

Logistics

RPGNow does require a contract be signed to protect both parties involved. The sales site will also enforce some minimums on orders: there is a $5 min order total (for a customer), prices under $1 for individual products are frowned upon. The customer can't check out till they order at least $5. RPGNow is not a free file dump either, we expect every vendor to produce a for-pay product. If you only want to distribute your free work, please use RPGHoard.com instead.

Security

Your products are stored on our secured server in a directory that is not directly accessible by the internet and only valid serial numbers can download the product. Customers are allowed 3 attempts within a period of time to get their products. Your copyright and product security are of the highest concern to us.

Gold Vendor

RPGNow's standard vendor interface includes these options:
- Sales Detail Reports
- Customer Mailings
- Customer Sources
- Add/Edit Products
- Add/Edit/Delete Upcoming Products

RPGNow also has a vendor program that will allow for a much more functionality and help you build marketing strength. It's called our "Gold Vendor Program" and what this basically means is that for 5% additional commission you can take advantage of some great new features, cheap promotions, advanced customer tracking, and convenience options. Here are some of the options available:

Revision System

This feature will allow you to notify all purchasers of a product that a new version is now online. It will reset their download links to allow them 1 additional download. An e-mail will also be sent to each customer with your message and the new link to get the update.

Registration System

This feature will open a URL on your server and send POST data variables though to your cgi/program. It can then (optionally) take the response from your server and e-mail it as a registration code to the customer.

E-Mail Sales Notification

This feature will e-mail you customer and sales data the moment a sale of any of your products is made. It is helpful with the sale of virtual items or services such as ad banners or if you don't have an automated registration system to send out codes.

Complimentary Copies

This will allow you to send a FREE copy of one of your products to any e-mail address you specify. This is helpful for sending out review copies or for distributing final product to your staff or whatever you like. These copies are handled like a normal order but are at a price of $0.00

Press Release Mailings

Here you can send mailings out to news sites, magazines, product reviews, and some interested mailing lists. This is not SPAM as the people on these lists have the option to get off of them at any time.

Gold Vendor Banner Exchange

With this feature you can get some free exposure for your products on RPGNow by putting banners and buttons into rotation (with our partner sites and the main RPGNow site) that link to your RPGNow product page. This is provided for FREE for Gold Vendors.

RPGNow Button Exchange

This button will display at random with other Gold Vendor buttons on each page of RPGNow. This can help increase awareness of your product or a special you are running.

RPGHost Banner Exchange

The RPGHost Banner Exchange is used by over 800 gaming websites! Entering a banner here will place you in the "house banner pool" for the Exchange. 25% of the banners displayed on the Exchange are pulled from this pool.

Sales Thank You Notes

This is a feature that will allow you to send extra text in the e-mail that is sent with the download link to the customer. Good for reminding them of other similar products they might want, or your website resources, or just to say a personal thank you.

Sales Source Reporting

Using this technique you can track where your specific orders are being generated from. Sources like banner exchanges or web links or news posts can now be tracked.

Private Sales Coupons

Using this coupon feature allows you to pass a special private link to your mailing list, special friends, previous buyers, or whomever you like, to buy a particular product at an extra special discount price. This discount doesn't show up on our system specials listings, just becomes active when the customer uses the special link you provide them. You may have multiple coupons per product! If a sales source isn't provided, the coupon ID is used.

Remote Catalog

With this highly customizable tool you can display your products on your website. Using PHP or other such language that supports remote URL reads, you can display your product catalog in a variety of styles. Your products will come online instantly on your website when we add them to our catalog. No more updating your own website for product ID's and links.

Message of the Day

With the Message of the Day (MOTD) feature you can have one of your products randomly displayed (along with other Gold Vendors) on the top of the front page of RPGNow. This is great for highlighting older product to spark some interest or to just bring extra attention to a new release. Your product is displayed with a larger thumbnail size and a paragraph of text you can specify. It is rotated randomly with each front page hit. The front page gets more then 1000 visits a day, so even though you are not on the front page every time, you'll still get plenty of exposure.

Other Services

These special perks are only available to our Gold Vendors:

- 100K prime banner displays in the RPG Host Network for only $25 (savings of $75).
- Down-sampling to make your PDF's much smaller without loss of quality.
- Help with document conversion to PDF format.

Print on Demand (POD)

Through a volume discount at a quality instant printer they are able to offer to you (our RPGNow PDF vendors) a low quantity and low cost print on demand solution. RPGNow will warehouse the product and manage all fulfillment aspects for you. This is how it works:

Participation in the POD service is completely optional on a product by product basis. You control the price of your POD product. The worksheet on the website http://www.rpgnow.com/pod.php will help you choose the options and quantity of books you want to order. You must order at least 10 books at a time. All orders must be pre-paid and will not be deducted from earnings.

RPGNow will only sell POD product if you have already purchased the initial 10 copies for our warehouse. We will allow you to buy a limited number of your own books at cost.

RPGNow stores these POD products in the RPGShop.com warehouse and will therefore be able to offer these on the RPGShop.com web site as well.

RPGNow will continue to charge you your standard percentage off the TOTAL list price of your POD product. Sure that includes the costs of production, but they are offering that to you at near cost.

Our customers will pay a flat $3.95 charge for shipping Priority Mail to them.

RPGNow needs a high resolution (300dpi or greater) copy of your book to make a decent POD. The cover should be in a separate PDF with the front and back cover as well as the spine if you choose to use the perfect bound option.

This is great opportunity to get involved in one of the largest traditional role-playing networks and at little or no upfront cost. Gain access to this new market for your products. Increase sales as you continue to sell your products through normal channels.

RPGNow periodically spotlights some vendors in our full page ads in Dungeon magazine, Dragon magazine, Campaign Magazine, ENWorld Players Guide, United Playtest, Knights of the Round Table, Lejends Magazine, and a few online e-zines and demo CDs. This advertising, (alone a several hundred dollar value,) as well as banner exposure on our network, is offered for free to members of RPGNow.

Chapter 7:
Sales

Can you expect to make any money? How much should you invest in creating your publication? How much will you take home from each sale? All right, let's get down to some hard numbers to answer these questions.

The number of units you can expect to sell varies greatly based on where you sell and what you are selling, as well as your marketing plan. As of the writing of this document, only RPGNow.com offers the customer base and sales power to make a successful launch for industry newcomers without large marketing budgets. If you plan to do it alone on your own web site, your sales are going to be directly related to the amount of community support you can drum up and the amount of marketing you can do. Don't let a do-it-yourself ego or greed get in the way here. This can easily be a full-time job, so make sure you're prepared for that. Ask yourself if you're in this for the joy of creating the product or the business/marketing side. Spend your time wisely.

Since there are too many variables with selling product from your own website, and since most other eMalls don't come even close to RPGNow's performance, the following information will be based mainly on a publisher who chooses to sell through RPGNow.

Products fall under three major categories at RPGNow: *d20 System*, *Non-d20*, and *Non-RPG*. Of the roleplaying categories, about two-thirds of the sales are d20 System, so we'll also cover some specific sub-categories of d20.

The amount of product you will be able to sell depends heavily on these factors:

- Is it written or produced by a respected publisher or writer?
- Is it a d20 product?
- Is it a d20 sourcebook?
- Is it priced reasonably?
- Is it well supported or does it already have a fan community?
- Is the content timely and of appropriate length?

The more of these factors you can answer yes to, the better your product will sell. Here are some expected unit sales by type of product line, based on real RPGNow data:

SYSTEM NAME	2003 AVG/HIGH	2004 AVG/HIGH
d20 Fantasy	130 / 1130	112 / 1559
Campaign Books	42 / 230	52 / 397
City Books	266 / 1130	217 / 1559
Race Books	208 / 920	138 / 810
Creature Books	113 / 378	123 / 656
Sourcebooks	170 / 872	147 / 1193
Spell Books	222 / 864	150 / 1169
High-level Adventure	60 / 341	60 / 408
Low-level Adventure	45 / 274	43 / 429
Equipment/Treasure	—	104 / 579
d20 Modern	134 / 555	105 / 797
d20 Sci-fi	112 / 517	116 / 660
Non-RPG	38 / 689	32 / 1368
Card Games	6 / 6	16 / 51
Board Games	—	28 / 64
Software	67 / 822	63 / 1368
Accessories	—	67 / 884
eBooks/Subs	—	34 / 347
Miniatures Rules	—	36 / 125
Ads	—	24 / 142

SYSTEM NAME	2003 AVG/HIGH	2004 AVG/HIGH
Non-d20 RPG	20 / 475	42 / 640
Action! System	6 / 6	40 / 114
Action! System/d20 hybrid	83 / 130	87 / 198
Active Exploits Diceless	31 / 43	67 / 106
Dominion Rules	35 / 43	37 / 45
EABA	17 / 31	34 / 118
Fudge	43 / 77	45 / 195
Fuzion	12 / 19	97 / 191
Plain Label	32 / 44	67 / 125
WEG D6	17 / 17	38 / 116
Deadlands	—	54 / 223
M&M Superlink	—	138 / 470
Savage Worlds	—	108 / 231

As you can see from the above chart, unless you're extremely good or very well supported, your sales are going to be in the 100-300 units range. Also, less than 5% of the products on RPGNow sell more then 300 copies. So, make sure you budget accordingly.

➔ Release Schedule

As mentioned in the Marketing chapter, planning a strategic release schedule can have a significant impact on your sales. Specifically, when dealing with an eMall you'll need to keep a few things in mind:

- Front page exposure lasts only about a week or two.
- Plan to release a product every couple of months for the most exposure.
- Comments help sell product; encourage your buyers to leave them.
- New releases typically surge sales on older products.
- Hype about your product should start about one month before it's ready.

RPGnow 2004 Q1-Q2 Sales by Revenue

63.9% — Roleplaying
19.0% — Accessories
11.0% — Software
2.9% — Ads/Promos
1.5% — Mini Games
1.2% — E-Books/Subs
0.5% — Other Games

Legend:
- Roleplaying
- Accessories
- Software
- Ads/Promos
- Mini Games
- E-Books/Subs
- Other Games

RPGnow 2004 Q1-Q2 Sales by Units

71%
15%
8%
3%
1%
1%
1%
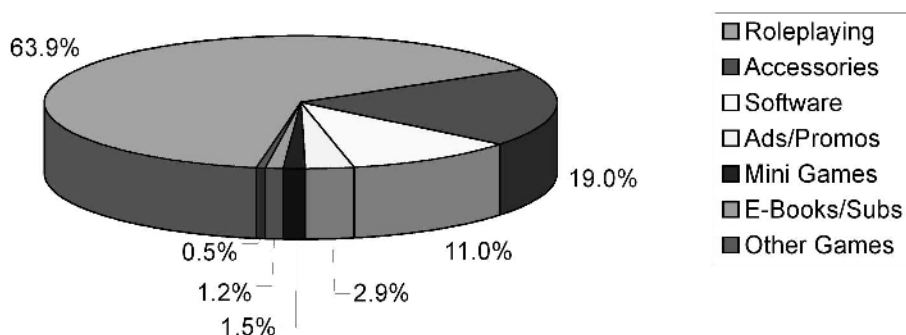
Legend:
- Roleplaying
- Accessories
- Software
- Ads/Promos
- Mini Games
- E-Books/Subs
- Other Games
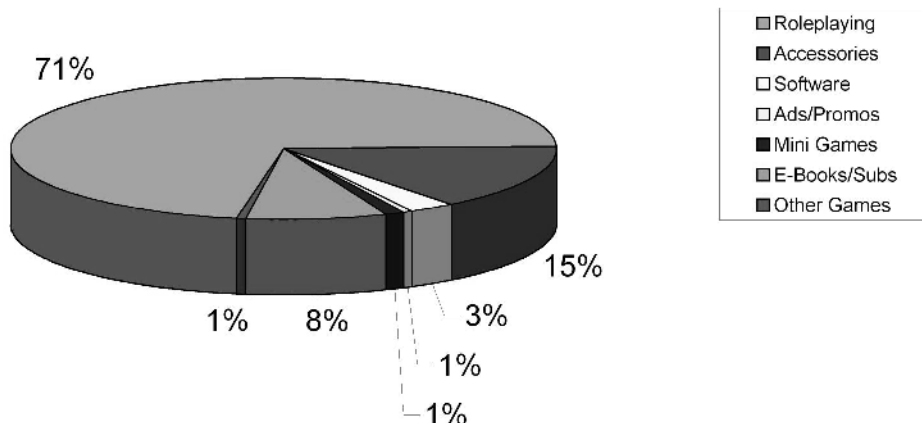
Once your product has been released keep in mind that you can use promotions, discount sales, contests, and new versions to continue to generate buzz. If you're selling on RPGNow you also can make use of the Gold Vendor features to mail your customers special coupons only good for discounts only to them.

➲ Life Cycle of eProducts versus Print Products

One of the best things about ePublishing is the fact that you don't have to dole out cash for printing. This is perhaps the primary reason for ePublishing's recent rise in popularity. Would-be publishers with great ideas but little funding can get a product out the door by throwing their hats into the ePublishing arena.

With traditional print publishing, when a product sells out, you have to either consider it out of print or go back to the printer, costing you more money. This is not the case with ePublishing because your product will never be out of print.

Better still, you can continually update the manuscript, taking errata into account. Updated versions can be offered either for free or for a very small cost to existing customers. The former is recommended.

A typical print publisher will usually see the vast majority of all its sales within the first three months and they will usually have to spend two to three months prepping the distributors and retailers for the release. The sales for e-Products will continue essentially forever, though at a noticeable decline from initial release until about one to five a month are being sold. There is still a noticeable spike relating directly to a release date or marketing push. eProducts sink quickly because the virtual shelf size is so small. Some products are evergreen (a term that means they continue to sell strong, i.e. products such as software or generic paper miniatures); others will have a limited window.

This is a good thing. Steady sales for your products continue for longer periods of time. Spikes in your sales numbers from eMalls also are very typical when you release your next product, even if it's not related to the first. This is mainly due to the fact that you're bringing more attention to you and your products with each release.

➲ Order Processing

Making a product is only the first step in the process of being an online publisher. You also have to worry about order processing: the charge and the delivery.

Manual Method

If you're doing it yourself, it's likely you'll be using Paypal for payments, and then when you receive the receipt in e-mail you send a copy of your product as an attachment in e-mail or set up a download link. Remember, not all e-mail clients can take large files. If your product is larger then 2mb it is best that you set up a download link. When you set up a download link, make sure it's in a password protected directory on your web server. If you do not set up a password then search engine spiders will stumble upon your file and post it to the public! By the way, searching for your filename on search engines is a good way to track down pirate copies.

Shop Software

There are some software packages available that can be set up to handle the sale of electronic downloads. The one that RPGNow and mall.rpg.net use is based on the osCommerce software found at www.oscommerce.com

What PDFs do you buy most?
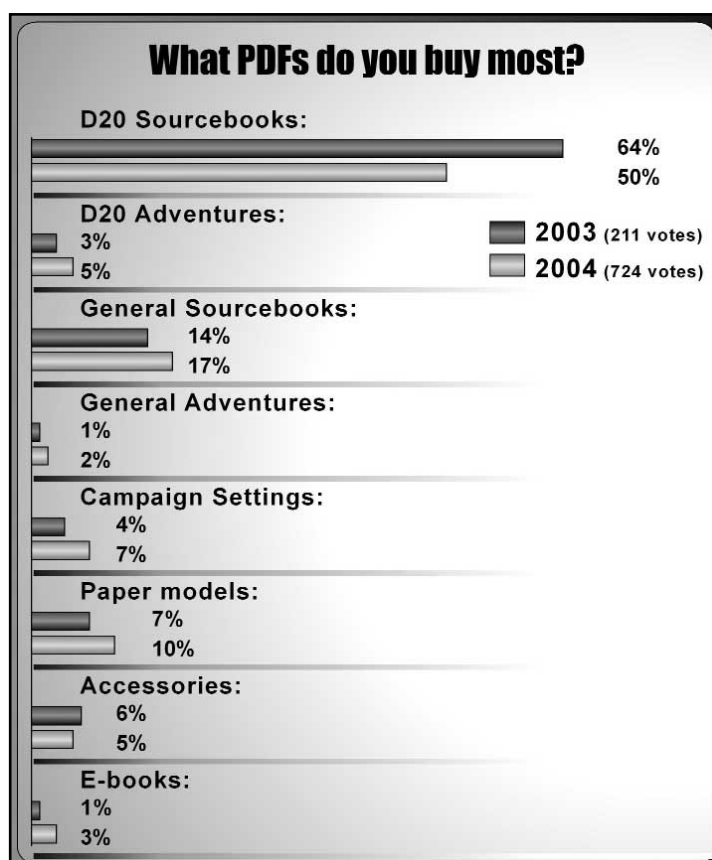
Setting up your own shopping system can be very time consuming and difficult to manage. You'll need a staff programmer for sure. You'll also need a server that allows you to run the specific language and database the software uses.

eMalls

Thankfully, the easiest, most reliable and effective way to sell your product is to place it at an eMall that already handles these types of transactions. You'll give up a bit of your sale profits (usually 25%), but you'll be able to concentrate on your products instead of customer billing and support.

Payment Processors

If you're going to sell online, you need to collect the money somehow. There are several ways to do this, some are very expensive, some are risky, some are just a pain…most of them take a share of your money (around 5%)

Paypal

Most independent-selling publishers use this method. It's easy to set up and doesn't have any set up charges other then a validation fee. There are two problems using Paypal as your only payment method: 1) only one-third of the PDF customer base has a Paypal account. 2) Paypal isn't as secure as you might think—there are many complaints about accounts being seized for no more reason then complaining customers. If you're going to use Paypal, remember to empty your account of money on a daily basis. You can read some more about this at some sites like www.paypalwarning.com or www.paypalsucks.com

Credit Cards

By far the most-used method of payment on the Internet is via credit card. Merchant accounts are very hard to obtain, though, and usually require personal guarantees and startup fees ranging from $100-$500. They also require some complicated software for posting the sale on secured platforms. Another big problem is fraud. Credit card fraud is out of control on the Internet and you'll need to verify every card owner, especially if it's overseas!

Checks and Money Orders

This is a nice thing to support, but it kind of contradicts the "get-it-now" attitude PDF buyers have grown accustomed to. Requiring someone to write a check and fill out a mailing envelope, only to wait days for their product, is not a good business model. Sure, you should accept at least Money Orders when asked, but we don't recommend you attempt to run your business on this payment method alone.

➲ Server & Bandwidth

Remember, to process an order you first must have an online presence and an eCatalog for the customer to browse. This can be done for about $20 a month in hosting costs or even at no charge, if you don't mind looking like an amateur using one of the many free server sites out there. Also, don't forget about bandwidth. If you release a free intro product, do you have enough bandwidth to distribute it? If you're going to get 1,000 downloads a month,, that could end up costing you some money to support the extra traffic. Usually, this costs about $1-$2 per gig per month.

➲ RPGNow and PDF Industry Growth

RPGNow has worked hard to promote the PDF industry in general and to grow its customer base. From free product offerings to full-page color ads in Dragon magazine to paid links on search engines, they have managed to secure their future viability in the ePublishing realm.

Average Units Sold and Maximum Units Sold
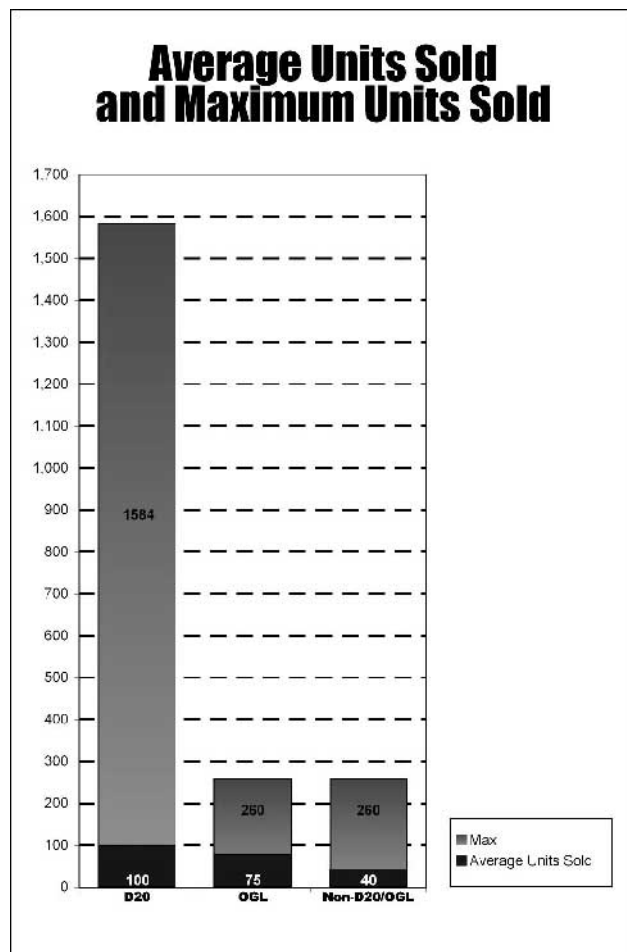
Chapter 8:

Internet Resources

➲ Publisher Forums

RPGNow Publisher forums	http://forums.rpghost.com/forumdisplay.php?forumid=8
EN World Publisher & Industry forums	http://enworld.cyberstreet.com/forumdisplay.php?forumid=66
RPG.NET Business/Publishing/Marketing forums	http://forum.rpg.net/forumdisplay.php?forumid=10
The Forge Publishing forum	http://indie-rpgs.com/viewforum.php?f=12
Writers and Editors Workshop forum	http://www.montecook.com/workshops.html
Mortality.Net Publisher forums	http://www.mortality.net/board/board.php?FID=28

➲ Discussion Lists

E-Publishers Mailing List	http://groups.yahoo.com/group/e_publishing
RPG Freelancers	http://groups.yahoo.com/group/RPGFreelance
RPG Announcements	http://groups.yahoo.com/group/RPGAnnouncements
RPG.net Freelance Writing	http://groups.yahoo.com/group/rpgnetwriters
D20 Business	http://groups.yahoo.com/group/D20Biz/
Open Gaming Foundation Mailing List	http://www.opengamingfoundation.org/mailinglist.html

➲ Layout/Design Forums

InDesign Talk List:	http://www.blueworld.com/blueworld/lists/indesign.html
Adobe	http://www.adobe.com
PDF FAQ	http://www.bepress.com/pdffaq.html
Free PDF Creation Software	http://www.pdf995.com
PDF Creation Checklist	http://www.pdfzone.com/resources/tips_techniques/101404.html
Planet PDF	http://www.planetpdf.com
Ghostscript Postscript converter to PDF	http://www.cs.wisc.edu/~ghost/
Serif Desktop Publishing	http://www.serif.com/pageplus/pageplus8/index.asp

➲ Freelance Resources

RPG Freelancers Guide   http://www.rpgfreelancers.com/index.html
RPGnet Freelancer Forum   http://forum.rpg.net/forumdisplay.php?forumid=12

➲ CD, POD, & Print Publishing

RPGNow POD Service   http://www.RPGNow.com/pod.php
Golden Pillar Publishing book design/POD printing   http://www.goldenpillarpublishing.com
eXpress.media   http://www.expressmedia.com
Lightning Source   https://www.lightningsource.com
Twin Soft CD Creation   http://www.twinsoftusa.com
Offset Printer List   http://www.wizards-attic.com/Printers.html
Cover 2 Cover by Mystic Eye Games   http://mysticeyegames.com/showsection.php?section=15&subsection=17

➲ Free/Open Game Systems

Prometheus Gaming System   http://pgs.freegamingassociation.org
Free Game Systems   http://www.homebrew.net/games
FRINGE (Free and Integrated Game Engine) http://www.freeroleplay.org/fringe
The October Open Game Licence (OOGL)   http://rpglibrary.org/oogl
The Open Gaming Exchange   http://www.ogexchange.com
Open roleplaying Resource   http://www.openroleplaying.org
Action! System   http://www.action-system.com
Impresa Express / Active Exploits Diceless   http://www.pigames.net

➲ Directories

RPG Gateway   http://www.RPGGateway.com
d20 Publishing Companies   http://k.webring.com/hub?ring=d20publishingcom
Wowee Roleplaying Index   http://sambal.net/wowee
Paper Model links   http://www.peterjvisser.demon.nl/links5.html
Chamber of Doors   http://www.realmsofevil.net/cod
D20 Publishers   http://enworld.cyberstreet.com/reviews/publishers.php

➲ Review Sites

EN World d20 Reviews   http://www.enworld.org/reviews
GameWyrd Roleplaying   http://www.gamewyrd.com
Electronic d20   http://www.electronicd20.com

RPG Reviews	http://www.RPGReviews.com
RPG.net	http://www.rpg.net/reviews
Pen & Paper	http://www.pen-paper.net/modules.php?op=modload&name=Reviews&file=index
RPG United	http://www.rpgunited.com
D20 Magazine Rack	http://www.d20zines.com
DMs Haven	http://www.dmshaven.freeservers.com/d20reviews.html
Jeremy's No Frills Reviews	http://www.geocities.com/nofrills_reviews/
RPGNow Downloader Monthly e-zine	http://www.rpgnow.com/ezine.php

➲ News Sites & Submission Links

RPGNews.com	http://www.rpgnews.com xiombarg@earthlink.net
EN World	http://www.enworld.org morrus@d20reviews.com
GamingReport.com	http://www.gamingreport.com gm@gamingreport.com
Mortality.net	http://www.mortality.net adlon@mortality.net
RPGd20.com	http://www.rpgd20.com dvvega@bigpond.net.au
Pen-Paper.net	http://www.pen-paper.net bobby@pen-paper.net
National Gamers Guild	http://www.nggnet.com news@nggnet.com
d20 Magazine Rack	http://www.d20zines.com S_Creech@d20zines.com
RPG.net	http://www.rpg.net press@rpg.net
Ogre Cave	http://www.ogrecave.com sven@ogrecave.com
RolePlaying Games at About.com	http://roleplaygames.about.com roleplaygames.guide@about.com
Gamers Inc.	http://www.gamers-inc.com news@gamers-inc.com
Fantasy Online	http://www.fantasyonline.net colin@fantasyonline.net
All RPG	http://www.allrpg.com albedo@allrpg.com
Uncle Bear	http://www.unclebear.com webmaster@unclebear.com
Devir	http://www.devir.com.br silvio.nexus6@devir.com.br
Internal Correspondence version 2	http://ICv2.com/search/search.html?q=Games

⮌ d20 System Links

D20 System Trademark License FAQ	http://www.wizards.com/D20/article.asp?x=dt20010417c
Open Gaming License FAQ	http://www.wizards.com/D20/article.asp?x=dt20010417g
D20 System Reference Document	http://www.wizards.com/D20/article.asp?x=srd
D20 Modern System Reference Document	http://www.wizards.com/D20/article.asp?x=msrd

⮌ Internet Marketing Tools

RPG Host Banner Exchange	http://www.rpghost.com/exchange
RPG Top Sites	http://RPGTopSites.com

⮌ Major Conventions

GAMA Trade Show	http://www.gama.org
GenCon	http://www.gencon.com
Origins	http://www.originsgames.com
Dragon*Con	http://www.dragoncon.org
RPGA Convention Calendar	https://events.wizards.com/rpgaweb/external/calendar.asp
Steve Jackson Games Convention Directory	http://www.sjgames.com/con
RPG Registry - Conventions and Events	http://www.rpgregistry.com/eventsearch.php

⮌ Associations

The Game Publishers Association	http://www.thegpa.org
Small Business at the IRS website	http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/index.html
The Academy of Adventure Gaming Arts & Design	http://www.aagad.org
Independent e-Book Awards	http://www.digitalstoryawards.org
Open Gaming Foundation	http://www.opengamingfoundation.org/
ISBN—International Standard Book Number	http://www.isbn.org
Small Publishers Co-Op	http://www.spco-op.com/
Free Gaming Association	http://thefga.com
US Small Business Administration	http://www.sba.gov
Copyright Office of the Library of Congress	http://www.loc.gov/copyright
US Patent and Trademark Office	http://www.uspto.gov

⮌ Hosting and Forums Services

RPGHost Community Forums	http://forums.rpghost.com
Rackshack server and site hosting	http://www.rackshack.net
Free Hosting at Tripod/Lycos	http://www.tripod.lycos.com

➲ Other Primers and Helpful Articles

Basics of Starting a Game Company	http://www.wizards-attic.com/Starting.html
The Indie Publishing Primer	http://acid-reflex.com/rpg/more.php?id=58_0_7_0
General eBook Authoring	http://www.ebookpublishingtips.com/articles.shtml
In My Not Very Humble Opinion	http://www.imnvho.com
Adventure Game Industry Market Survey Summary	http://enworld.cyberstreet.com/news/modules.php?op=modload&name=Sections&file=index&req=viewarticle&artid=35&page=1
Why RPGs are Not Too Expensive	http://www.seankreynolds.com/rpgfiles/rants/rpgsaretooexpensive.html
Paperless Gaming	http://www.fudgefactor.org/2003/01/01/paperless_gaming.html
Monte Cook's Line of Site: Getting Published	http://www.montecook.com/arch_lineos70.html
Monte Cook's Line of Site: Game Industry Etiquette	http://www.montecook.com/arch_lineos62.html
Downloading and Extracting PDF RPGs	http://www.gamewyrd.com/archives/pdf.php
Paypal Warning Sites:	http://www.paypalwarning.com
	http://www.paypalsucks.com
Ryan Dancy: D20 System & OG Movement	http://enworld.cyberstreet.com/news/modules.php?op=modload&name=Sections&file=index&req=viewarticle&artid=3&page=1
Complete Guide to Self Publishing	http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/1582970912/ref=ase_rpghostadveonthe/qid=1049830958/sr=8-1/ref=sr_8_1/104-1723667-6579160?v=glance&s=books&n=507846
10 Big Myths about copyright explained	http://www.templetons.com/brad/copymyths.html
Licensing how to	http://www.goldrushgames.com/howtogetalicense.html

➲ Interesting Message Threads

Expected PDF Sales	http://enworld.cyberstreet.com/showthread.php?threadid=30179
	http://enworld.cyberstreet.com/showthread.php?threadid=39824
Program used to layout game books	http://forum.rpg.net/showthread.php?threadid=12048
Free Art?	http://forum.rpg.net/showthread.php?threadid=26890
Licensing	http://forum.rpg.net/showthread.php?threadid=17985
Startup Costs	http://forum.rpg.net/showthread.php?threadid=3675
Editing	http://pub58.ezboard.com/fokayyourturnfrm11.showMessage?topicID=96.topic
Product Teasers/Demos	http://enworld.cyberstreet.com/showthread.php?spostid=586264
Starting a Website	http://forum.rpg.net/showthread.php?threadid=25247
Is it worth it?	http://www.indie-rpgs.com/viewtopic.php?t=4922
ISBN on PDFs	http://forum.rpg.net/showthread.php?threadid=32165
Protecting your PDF	http://forum.rpg.net/showthread.php?threadid=35176
Landscape formatted PDFs	http://enworld.cyberstreet.com/showthread.php?postid=759115
Price to content ration for PDFs	http://enworld.cyberstreet.com/showthread.php?threadid=15186
Length of PDFs	http://www.indie-rpgs.com/viewtopic.php?t=5637

Advertising PDF products	http://forum.rpg.net/showthread.php?threadid=39801
How much art should be in a PDF?	http://forum.rpg.net/showthread.php?threadid=41752
	http://enworld.cyberstreet.com/showthread.php?threadid=46584
Product Identity & Formatting	http://enworld.cyberstreet.com/showthread.php?s=&threadid=46581
Layout and Font Tips	http://www.indie-rpgs.com/viewtopic.php?t=3803

➲ Online Gaming Tools/Clubs

OpenRPG.com	http://www.openrpg.com
WebRPG.com	http://www.webrpg.com
GRIP	http://www.rpgrealms.com
kLoOge Works	http://www.kloogeinc.com
Screen Monkey	http://www.nbos.com
IRC	http://www.RPGWorlds.com
ICQ	http://www.icq.com/products
MS Messenger	http://messenger.msn.com
AOL Messenger	http://www.aim.com

Chapter 9:
Survey

➲ Publisher Survey

This chapter is meant as a reality check for the information we have given in the other chapters. Below you will find several specific questions about staffing, sales, and dollars spent, plus the answers to these questions supplied by the publishers at RPGNow. In our little survey, 28 publishers provided input. Graphical results from these surveys are also spread out across this book (as you may have noticed).

Note: Some of the materials contained here are time and market sensitive, so be aware that the time of this writing is winter/spring 2003.

Rates for Writers

There were five different answers to this:

Self Written
About one-third of the publishers don't pay for writing.

Cents per Word
About one-third of the publishers pay an average of 2-3 cents per word. A small percentage pay up to 5 cents.

Royalties
Several of the publishers who responded use a royalty system, usually about 25-50% of the selling price of the book.

Flat Fee
One or two publishers with larger products will offer a flat fee around $500-$800 for a 32-page book.

Barter
One publisher had used barter to pay for work being done by a freelancer. Usually, this is only effective if the publisher has some sort of advertising or promotion mechanism to offer.

Rates for Artists

Of course, the rates vary a lot if you use well known names, but the majority of our publishers use good quality (though not famous) artists.

The going rate for a 1/4-page black and white is $15-$35, with the majority right around $25.

Rates for a color full page or cover vary more. The most common range is around $150-$300. Some pay as much as $1,000 for their covers (not recommended for ePublishers or non-art collectors). The point is this: Good cover art can be obtained for $150 in most cases, if you're not requiring any exclusive rights.

In a few rare cases, the publishers (who I suspect were cash poor) reported using a royalty system that split 25%-33% of the book's price among all contributing artists. This is not recommended, as most decent artists won't even touch such a deal, not to mention the accounting headaches it causes.

Rates for Editors

The vast majority of publishers are self-editing. Not that I (or hopefully they) think this is the best of ideas, but I assume it reflects the low-budget nature of PDF publishing.

Most editors are paid per page at about $1-$2 per page. Some report as high as $3 a page or even one-half what the designers were paid. One publisher reported paying a flat fee.

Rates for Layout Designers

Much like editing, the vast majority of this work is done in-house. Layout is typically paid per page, though flat rate isn't uncommon. Layout artists can be had (quite literally, as they typically work for 30 times more) for about $1-$2 a page or $50-$100 per small book.

Rates for PDF Production

Since most publishers are at least partly creating their books themselves, keep in mind that the responses we got from this question were not including any of their time or free work

they got from contributors. As for cash that ePublishers were spending, it ranged from $150-$600, with the majority coming in around $300. Obviously, much of the work for a book had to be done cheaply or in-house to keep these costs so low.

First Month Sales Projections

Since there is a drastic difference in sales figures for d20 System and non-d20 product, we'll separate the answers we got.

d20 publishers typically see 75-200 units sold the first month depending on their reputation and the quality of content and reviews.

Non-d20 publishers typically see only 10-25 sold the first month. Obviously, if you're going to go down the non-d20 route, you'll need to work extra hard on your marketing to get the attention of the gaming public.

Six Month Sales Projections

d20 publishers typically estimate at double the first month's sales, or 200-400.

For non-d20 publishers, again it's much smaller, and varies greatly. Fifty to 100 is the average answer.

PDF Production Time

The average time to complete a PDF release was about 6-8 months.

Advice

We also asked our vendors if they had any advice or personal tips they'd like to share with our readers. Most responded with, "Make sure you're doing this for the love of gaming and not to get rich." In short, you're very unlikely to quit your day job as an ePublisher. Still, don't be too discouraged, it's not uncommon for an ePublisher to be earning several hundred a month in extra spending cash.

RPGnow Customers by Country:

- United States - 88,292
- United Kingdom - 8529
- Canada - 5089
- Australia - 2851
- Germany - 2844
- Italy - 1129
- France - 1075
- Spain - 1074
- Japan - 900
- Belgium - 864
- Sweden - 586
- Denmark - 508
- Norway - 446
- Netherlands - 440
- New Zealand - 438
- Finland - 436
- France - 392
- Austria - 287
- Switzerland - 260
- Singapore - 204
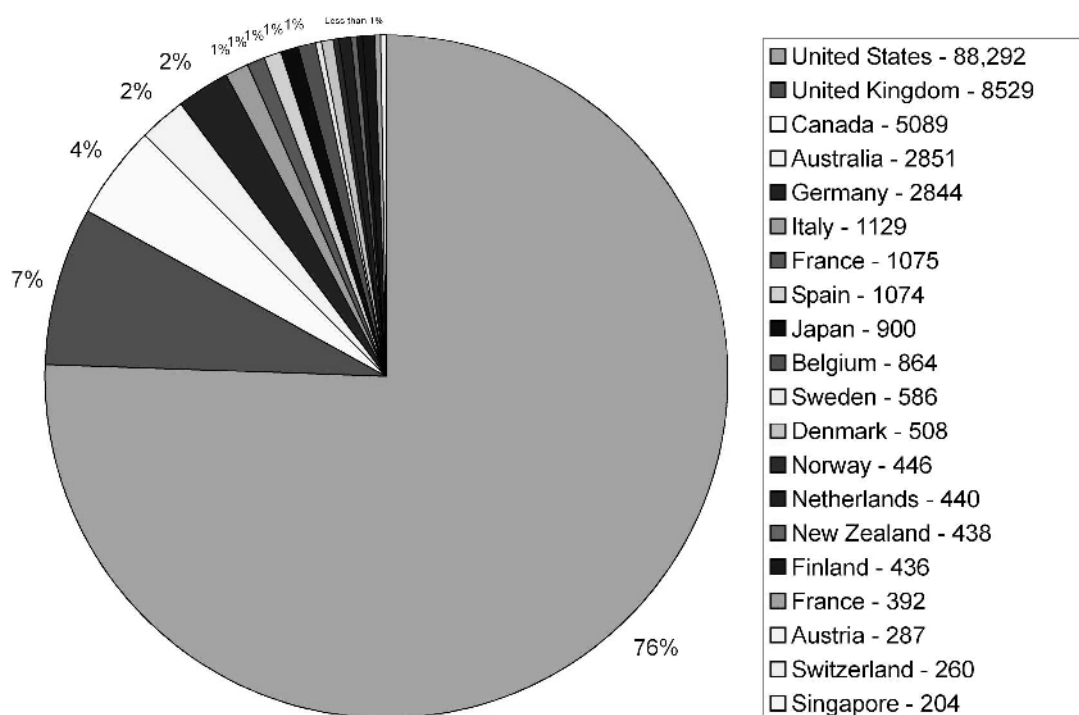
�| Customer Survey

During the writing of this book we placed a survey on RPGNow for our customers. We've included several bar charts with the questions and answers in the book for your review. In summary we have concluded:

- Most buyers at RPGNow are veteran players, as well as GMs, who have played 7 or more years and are males aged 26-35 years old.

- A large number of customers still want print copies of products. We all need to work to change this perception or their need for a physical book to be in their hands.

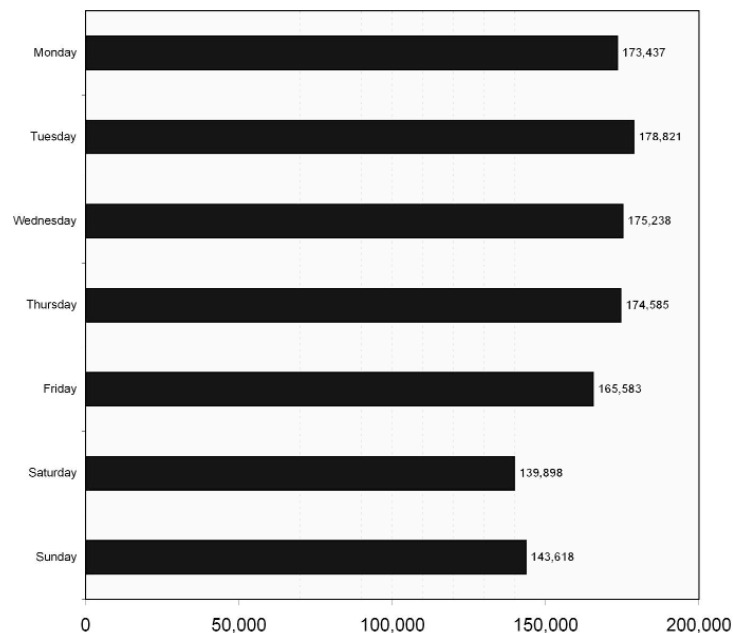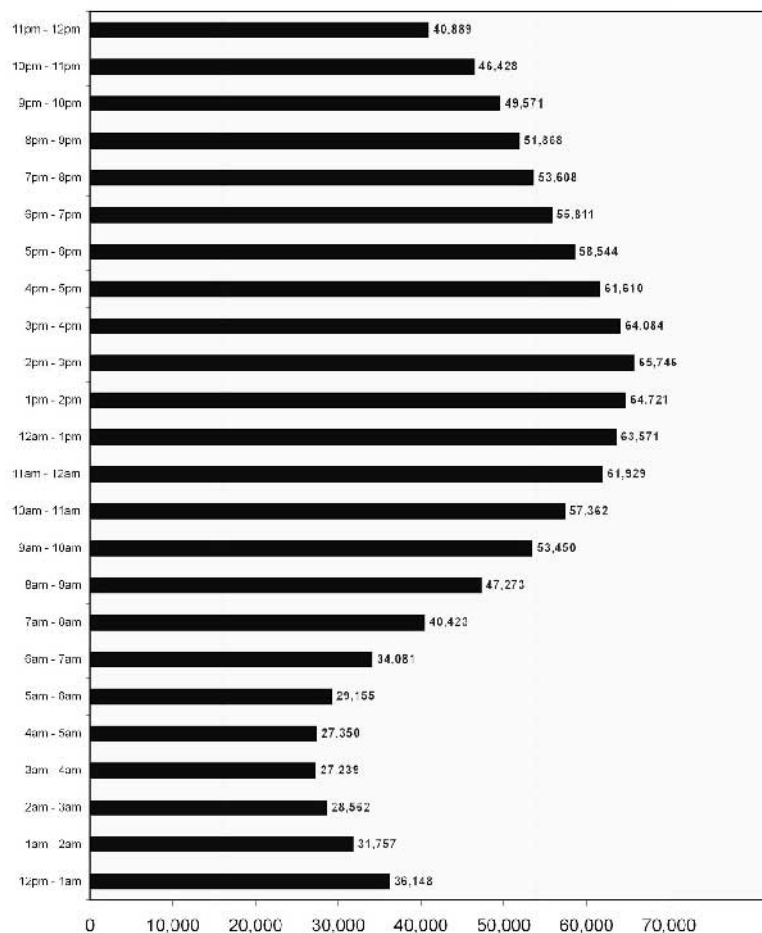- Two-thirds of customers pay for their e-Product with credit cards. One-third use Paypal, so if you sell at your own website and don't take credit cards you're likely loosing half your business.

- Most customers feel that a PDF shouldn't be priced over $10 and most feel that $6-$8 or half the print equivalent is about right.

RPGnow - Unique Visitors by Day

Day	Visitors
Monday	173,437
Tuesday	178,821
Wednesday	175,238
Thursday	174,585
Friday	165,583
Saturday	139,898
Sunday	143,618

RPGnow - Unique Visitors by Hour

| Hour	Visitors
11pm - 12pm	40,889
10pm - 11pm	46,428
9pm - 10pm	49,571
8pm - 9pm	51,868
7pm - 8pm	53,608
6pm - 7pm	56,811
5pm - 6pm	58,544
4pm - 5pm	61,610
3pm - 4pm	64,084
2pm - 3pm	65,745
1pm - 2pm	64,721
12am - 1pm	63,571
11am - 12am	61,929
10am - 11am	57,362
9am - 10am	53,450
8am - 9am	47,273
7am - 8am	40,423
6am - 7am	34,081
5am - 6am	29,155
4am - 5am	27,350
3am - 4am	27,239
2am - 3am	28,562
1am - 2am	31,757
12pm - 1am	36,148

- Customers typically print out the pages they want and usually in black and white only. Some never print, and a few print them completely.

- About half of the customers find out about your product from your website, the other half from regular visits to RPGNow.com

- Customers tend to spend about $5-$25 a month on PDFs. This would mean each customer probably only buys 1-4 products a month.

- Almost all customers value the quality of content over price, yet most customers prefer to buy PDFs because they are cheap and seen as good resources.

- The majority of shoppers at RPGNow are buying d20-based sourcebooks.

- Customers hate it when you lock up your PDF so they can't cut and paste. They also dislike the lack of bookmarks or artwork. They are not overly fond of background or border art, as it uses a good quantity of ink.

Chapter 10:

State of the Industry: 2005

The PDF industry has continued to grow with the expansion of the customer base, additions to the pool of e-retailers and growth of publisher sales. Trends have come to the surface over the year and proceed to push forward such as imprinting, print publishers embracing PDF as more than just extra cash and e-retailers looking for strategic partnerships with both PDF and print publishers based on bringing their customer base to the e-store.
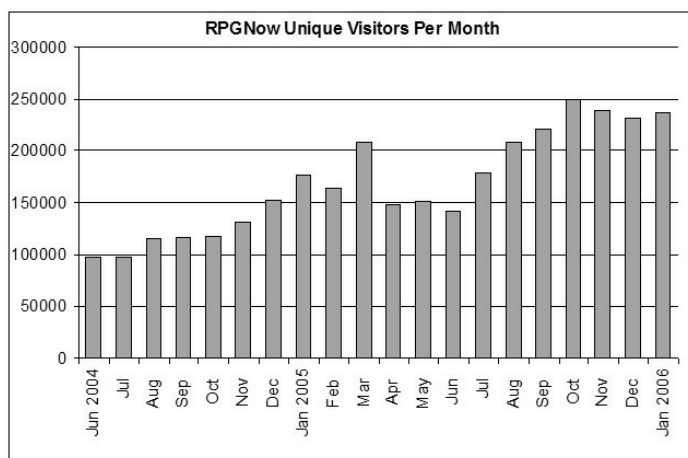
With all these changes, the market has grown to over two million dollars and more than 250,000 customers. The industry is well on its way to proving itself viable. In 2005, over 100,000 new customer tried PDFs for the first time. These new e-retailers have found the importance of the customer base, both the one that publishers bring with them and the one they have to offer a publisher. Some e-retailers have launched their stores to resounding silence thinking to cash in on the "craze" of the PDF market only to find it is far more important to spend time and money building their market presence. A lesson hard learned in a market that is expensive to enter.

To this end, a struggle has formed to attract traditional print publishers with their established consumer base. Competition amongst e-retailers will only become even more fierce as time goes by. Many have looked to lock in bigger publishers with exclusivity clauses. Some have attempted to use the fears of print publishers to push them to their stores. These publishers fear unsecured PDFs on the Internet will lead to rampant piracy. The attempt to use Adobe's Digital Rights Management schema was met with outrage by consumers. This eventually led to its rejection by publishers on sites that use DRM. A more acceptable protection schema seems to be the use of watermarking. With this process, the pages of the purchased PDF are stamped with the user's information making piracy easier to track. Still, as with any protection schema, it can be defeated by the determined person.

In 2005, a shift has occurred with the movement from short PDFs (PDFs between 5-20 pages) to a more regular release schedule. It is important to note that the release of regular scheduled PDFs helps to stimulate backlist sales. To some extent this is influenced by larger publishers and the release of their backlist. In other ways, it is an effect of regular releases by established PDF publishers offering subscriptions and scheduled releases. In yet another instance, the pre-release of print products as PDFs have offered a regular and anticipated schedule of books to feed the PDF market.

In the not distant past, the PDF was viewed as a competitor to the Brick & Mortar Local Game Store. The B&M retailer viewed PDFs as stealing the print sales of a product. In an odd twist, they even viewed PDF releases, ones that never saw print, as robbing the B&M store sales by depleting their customers' game money reserves. This perception seems to be changing. Some of the old guard still views PDFs this way but more and more local game store owners are seeing the market as complimentary to the print market of a publisher. Reinforcing brands and supporting lines can now bring people into their stores looking for core rules and material they wish to see in print. Beyond this, RPGNow is pioneering Print On Demand solution to traditional distribution. With their RPGNow Distribution Program, traditional retailers now have access to proven PDF titles. In the past, a retailer would need to do a lot of guesswork on what might sell in their store. Now, with this program, retailers have a leg up on understanding which titles will sell well for them. Small publishers get a chance to enter into distribution, often selling 200-300 copies, in the form of short runs. Technically, this is

called consolidation and is a service offered to distributors. Distributors then hold the product as they sell it to retailers who in turn sell it at their stores to their customers. True Print On Demand will take changes to the methods of distribution but has come much closer to the horizon than before.

So What Does All This Mean?

The 2006 year has a number of exciting opportunities for e-publishers. The introduction of so many new e-retailers into the market and their need to build their catalogs as well as their customer base makes it a good time to be a publisher. Understanding the effect on a business that being listed in several stores leads publishers to ask hard questions about

overhead of maintaining their products at these stores. As well, what the e-retailer brings to the market is an important factor for publishers to consider.

In addition, with all the print publishers now coming into the market, pressures will mount for comparable production values to print products. Many e-publishers meet or exceed these levels already but many of the more amateur publishers will find it harder to compete without a focused marketing plan.

The PDF industry continues to grow and build momentum in the larger gaming industry. More and more customers are accepting the format as legitimate and more than that embracing PDFs as the resources they are.

Steve Wieck on Pricing

This topic has probably changed the most in recent years and so deserves some special notice. Below is some insight from Steve Wieck at DriveThruRPG.com.
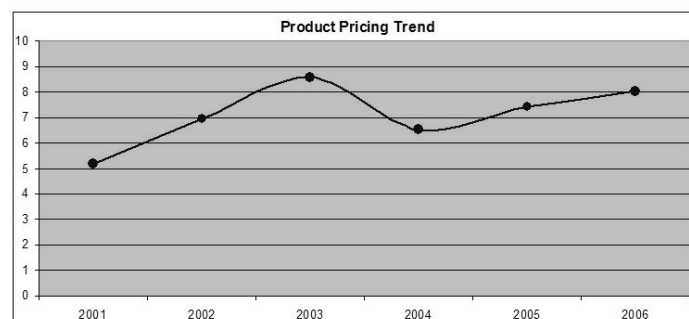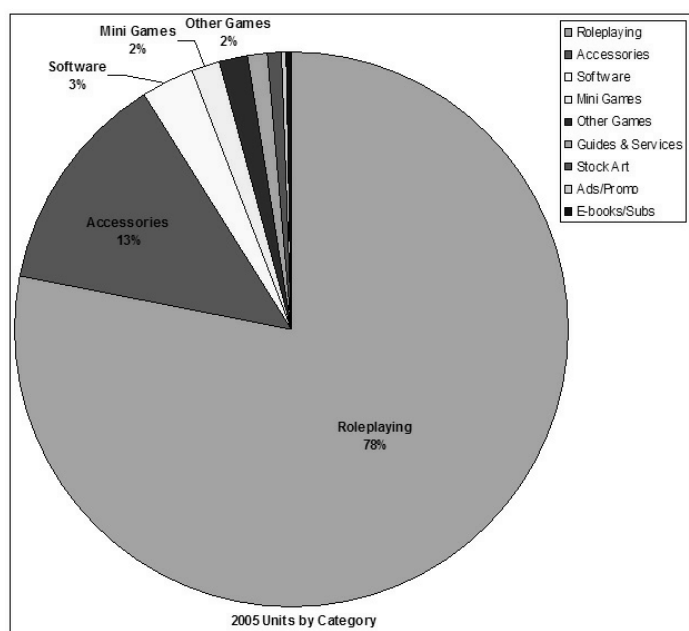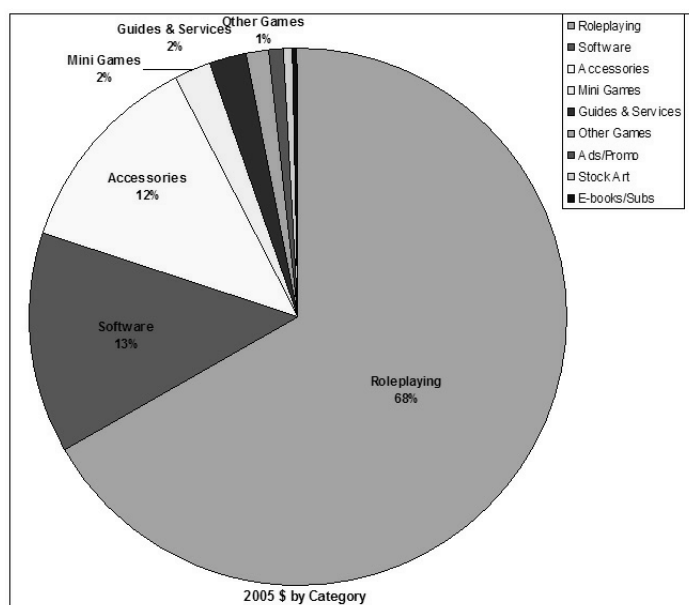
Data shared by DriveThruRPG from last year indicates that the price point on PDFs may not be as much of an objection to consumers as many originally assumed. DriveThruRPG offers many titles around the $20, $25, $30, and even $35 and higher price points. While the site average of Views/Sale is 33, the Views/Sale average for just titles priced $20 or over is 35 - not much different.

There's a lot of different viewpoints on what is the appropriate price for PDFs. From a publisher's perspective the answer is whatever price meets your objectives. Normally that's one of two objectives: *a.* Get noticed or *b.* Make the most profit.

Get Noticed

If your aim is to get a product noticed whether you're a new publisher or existing publisher beginning a new product line (or re-kickstarting an old one), you might consider a low price point to get into an impulse buy range. You might even consider making a free product if you can afford it in your marketing.

2005 $ by Category

2005 Units by Category

Most eMall sites allow publishers to offer free download products, sometimes with a few restrictions, sometimes not. DriveThruRPG offers a program which highlights a free release and gives it extra (free) marketing. Free can be a great way to virally market.

If not free, then impulse pricing is increasingly difficult in a crowded PDF market where many publishers have hordes of low-priced, short titles. Also, be aware that sites like DriveThruRPG have a minimum price of $1.99 on a PDF while other sites like RPGNow have a minimum purchase amount of $4.95 for the consumer. Generally speaking though a $1.99 or $2.99 price point is within the impulse range for consumers and pricing below those marks will likely not net you additional sales and may even tarnish the perceived quality of your title.

Make the Most Profit

An advantage to the PDF format is that you can change your price at any time and your next copy sold will be at that price. This allows you a lot of freedom to experiment with the classic economics price vs. volume curve to find your sweet spot of maximizing your profit.

One measure used by sites like RPGNow and DriveThruRPG to gauge your price point is Views per Sale. How many times is your title's catalog page viewed on average in order to get one sale. The site average at RPGNow is 54 Views/Sale and on DriveThruRPG is 33 Views/Sale. You can start by comparing your views/sale to the average of the site on which you are selling your title. If your title were seeing 100 Views/Sale, it would be an indicator that your price point may be too high, and it is stopping consumers from hitting the BUY button. Of course, there could be other elements of your product presentation that could also or instead be turning them off, but price point is a strong contender among the causes.

On the other end of the spectrum, if you're seeing 12 Views/Sale then your price point may be too low! Although you may sell fewer units if you raise your price
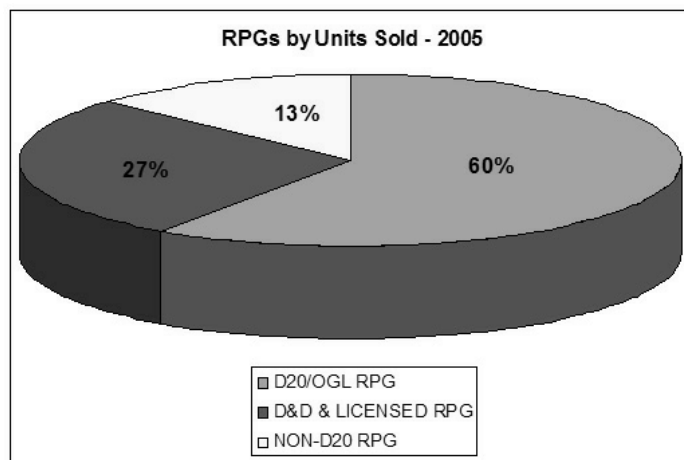
point, you could make more total revenue and profit by doing so. Many publishers fall into the trap of looking at unit sales more than total revenue. Also, we're used to products coming onto market and then, over time, becoming cheaper, not more expensive, but in fact prices get raised on many consumer items all the time (been down the cereal aisle in the grocery store lately?) as producers home in on the sweet spot of the price vs. volume curve.

The point is that digital delivery allows an unprecedented ability to fluidly change your pricing, don't squander the power of that flexibility.

Trendspotting

Trendspotting can be very useful to a publisher. Understanding the categories of products and how they are performing tells a publisher what direction they might develop new lines in and what niches might need filling. This should not, of course, be the complete decision making criteria but the graphs included here should help in the determination of your next product.

In comparing 2004 to 2005, we can see a subtle change in D20 units sold per product and non-d20. Where d20 dominated sales in 2004 it has slipped eleven units per product on average and non-d20 has gained nineteen units. The RPGs by Units Sold pie chart shows a loss of eight percent for d20 products from 2004 to 2005. This should not be interpreted as the end of d20 in any way, only a relaxing of a strangle hold that this genre had on the PDF market. By any interpretation, d20 is a strong choice for a product line in the PDF market.

Price of Products Sold

RPGs by Units Sold - 2005

Units Sold Per Product

Maximum | Average

	Software	D20	Guides/Srvs	Accessories	RPG non-D20
Maximum	2137	1768	1435	1218	831
Average	74	89	280	74	59

2005 FANTASY D20: $ by Category

- d20 Class/Race Books — 13%
- d20 Rule Book — 12%
- d20 Creature Books — 11%
- d20 Accessories/Aids — 11%
- d20 Campaign Books — 10%
- d20 1-6 Level Adventure — 8%
- d20 City/Location Books — 8%
- d20 Equipment/Treasure — 7%
- d20 Spell/Magic Books — 7%
- d20 GM Tools — 6%
- d20 7-13 Level Adventure — 3%
- d20 14-20 Level Adventure — 3%

Legend: d20 Class/Race Books, d20 Rule Book, d20 Creature Books, d20 Accessories/Aids, d20 Campaign Books, d20 1-6 Level Adventure, d20 City/Location Books, d20 Equipment/Treasure, d20 Spell/Magic Books, d20 GM Tools, d20 7-13 Level Adventure, d20 14-20 Level Adventure, d20 NPCs, d20 Traps/Hazards

2005 SCI-FI D20: $ by Category

- d20 Post-Apocalyptic — 30%
- d20 Sci-Fi Other — 22%
- d20 Space — 21%
- d20 Starships — 17%
- d20 Cyber — 8%
- d20 Mecha — 2%

Legend: d20 Post-Apocalyptic, d20 Sci-Fi Other, d20 Space, d20 Starships, d20 Cyber, d20 Mecha

2005 OTHER D20: $ by Category

- d20 Modern Generic — 28%
- d20 Military — 18%
- d20 Horror — 15%
- d20 Pulp — 13%
- d20 Modern Arcana — 11%
- d20 Western — 6%
- d20 Supers — 5%
- d20 Martial Arts — 4%

Legend: d20 Modern Generic, d20 Military, d20 Horror, d20 Pulp, d20 Modern Arcana, d20 Western, d20 Supers, d20 Martial Arts

RPGNow Site Statistics

It is often helpful to look at the trends of a e-retailer site in order to better understand what questions to ask other e-retailers when considering them. To help put these in contest, here are some RPGNow site statistics.

Over the past years, a steady growth of Australian and United Kingdom customers have added to the international sales seen on RPGNow. This has been reflected in the growth of the print markets for RPGs and may reflect a larger trend of a growing European and Australian RPG market.

- Windows — 92%
- Mac — 6%
- Unix — 1%
- Other — 1%

Legend: Windows, Mac, Unix, Other

Screen Resolution

Legend:
- 1024x768
- 1280x1024
- 800x600
- 1152x864
- Other
- 1600x1200
- 640x480

- Other 4%
- 1600x1200 3%
- 640x480 0%
- 1152x864 5%
- 800x600 15%
- 1280x1024 20%
- 1024x768 53%

Browsers

Legend:
- MSIE 6
- Netscape 7
- MSIE 5
- Other
- Netscape 4
- Netscape 3
- MSIE 4
- Opera 6
- AOL 4
- Opera 5

- MSIE 5 7%
- Netscape 7 23%
- MSIE 6 69%

Customers by Country

Legend:
- United States
- UK
- Canada
- Germany
- Australia
- France
- Brazil
- Italy
- Sweden
- Spain
- Other

- Sweden 1%
- Spain 1%
- Other 11%
- Italy 2%
- Brazil 2%
- France 2%
- Australia 3%
- Germany 3%
- Canada 6%
- UK 7%
- United States 62%

Sales by Country

Legend:
- United States
- UK
- Canada
- Australia
- Germany
- Italy
- France
- Spain
- Brazil
- Sweden
- Other

- Sweden 1%
- Brazil 1%
- Other 9%
- France 1%
- Spain 1%
- Italy 1%
- Germany 3%
- Australia 3%
- Canada 5%
- UK 8%
- United States 67%