

## Transcript for Rob Siders

We covered eBook conversion and formatting information from Debbie Weil. We also have a detailed Q & A with Rob Siders of [52Novels.com](http://52Novels.com), he loves making eBooks professionally and has been for over a decade. He discusses editing and design of eBooks, as well as conversion and what he does.

**Debbie:** Hello, Beta Authors. Welcome back. We have a few minutes today before our guest speaker Rob Siders of <http://52Novels.com> comes on. We're going to get really down and dirty into what you need to know about eBook conversion and formatting – which are different things – and design, options, costs, what's involved, and what you need to know in order to make choices.

Before we do, I want to talk for a couple minutes about editing and what you might look for in an editor, and how you might choose an editor. Let me talk about how to find an editor that's right for you, right for your book, and right for your wallet. There is no one bullet proof way. I am getting a list of editors that I know enough about that I feel comfortable referring you to. I was speaking with another would-be author – in fact, it was Tim Grahl, who was supposed to be our speaker last week. *[Note: Tim Grahl rescheduled as May 3, 2012 speaker.]*

I asked him what he was doing, and he said something that I want you all to think about. He said he has a handful of potential editors, and he's going to send each of them a chunk of his short book that he's written – maybe 5 or 10 pages – and see how each editor responded to it. Based on the revisions or suggestions, the kind of feedback they give him, he plans to decide who to use.

So I'm going to throw that out there. I realize that you need some names to do that, but I know that two of the names should be someone from your network, and then I can supply another name or two. It's sort of a crazy idea, but it makes complete sense in one way because it's a very personable and delicate relationship to find an editor who can be very rigorous and yet have a light enough touch that they're not changing completely what you wrote, your rhythm, and what your voice is.

This is part of the process that is not as cut and dried as we all would like it to be. I certainly know that's true for me, and I think for most of you as well. I'm going to open everyone up and say that today is the second deadline – I'm sorry I forgot to remind you. The second deadline, April 19<sup>th</sup>, for submitting a chunk of writing or draft to me so that I can review it and give you feed back on.

I think there are three people who are on live right now, so I'm going to ask each one of you to tell the group one thing that you are doing that is really



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working for you to make progress on your book. Rather than have us talk about what are biggest obstacles and challenges are, I thought I would flip it around today.

I think it's helpful to all of us to hear about what does work. Mazie, is that you in Fairfield, Connecticut? Mazie, you go first and tell us one thing that is working for you. Whatever it is, if it helps you on your book.

**Mazie:** Breathing. I start to feel that I'm getting anxious, or that my head is going in a direction where "Oh, this is terrible." So I just stop for a moment. I really take in some deep breathes and let it out until my mind just stops all that nonsense, and then I can go on. Otherwise it just gets in my way.

**Debbie:** I love that, that's great. I think that's just so helpful. It's so true, there's this chatter of "I'm not sure what I'm saying, it's not good enough," and I love that help. I know that there are some book coaches that do some mindful meditation exercises. Maybe we should have you be leading us in one of those. That's not a bad idea, maybe we should think about that. Maybe next time.

**Mazie:** Mindful meditation is kind of an oxymoron, because mindful means that you're still engaging your mind. What I'm trying to do is the opposite. You just breathe and really focus on your breath so that your mind shuts off, so that when you get back to your writing, your mind can flow easily.

**Debbie:** I love that. Susan, is that you?

**Susan:** Yes it is.

**Debbie:** Tell us one thing that is working for you as you work on your short book. I believe you said that you're going to change to a different topic, didn't you?

**Susan:** Yes, there's one I've been working on for a while that I think is more important to publish quickly.

**Debbie:** Okay. Tell us one thing that is working in terms of your writing process that might be useful for everyone else listening.

**Susan:** This is the first time I've done this, but when I get stuck, I read what I've written out loud. Somehow that makes it easier to see where the problems are, and how to fix them.

**Debbie:** I think that is one of the techniques that Mark Levy suggests. He talks about printing it out and reading it out loud. One of his other tricks is to change the font and size so that you don't know that you're reading your own writing – such



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as changing the font from Arial to Times New Roman and to a different size. Susan, that's great. I really like the reading out loud. Kim, go ahead.

**Kim:** I guess my situation is different, but I'm in a more public place because I'm teaching a course that's related to the book. I end up talking in public with a PowerPoint of a fair amount of what I'm doing on the book. It represents a promise, a large number of people – when I shifted in terms of a title to a title that probably no one could understand, but perhaps some people would look up to, to a title that everyone can understand.

Some other things that you and I talked about, Debbie, that then became public in the course that I was teaching. It's inspiring to do that. You don't want to make it too obvious when you're possibly changing your mind about things though. If you're an academic leader, you have to act like you know what you're doing, even when you don't, I guess.

**Debbie:** That's so useful, and it's simple and straight forward but also brilliant. Commit yourself by talking out loud, and if you're not lecturing in front of a classroom like you are, it could be talking to a friend or to a colleague and doing the exercise that I've been asking you to do. “I'm writing a book about... And here's why... The title I'm considering is...” and looking in people's eyes and seeing what kind of response you get.

Even if you just say, “I'm working on a short book and the title is...” and if you don't get a, “Oh, that sounds interesting.” response – then you probably haven't found the right title yet. It's sticking your neck out there, and for some of us, it's scary. Other people don't really care. It can be a little nerve racking. Bill, can you give the others one thing that is working for you in the writing process of your book?

**Bill:** The thing that's working for me, and maybe I'm cheating a little bit on this assignment, but I've been writing this book for the last couple years through the blog posts that I've been writing for our blog. This book is going to be a compilation on some blog posts that center on a theme of changing leadership and how business and leadership has changed.

We've been writing about that for a number of years now. Basically the book is almost written, my challenge at this point is organizing them. I've got four buckets and I'm looking at putting these blog posts into, you might call them chapters at this point. Work in life just keeps getting in the way, so I just need to set aside some time and take what we've already written, and organize them in a coherent way.



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**Debbie:** Just imaging yourself working away there – what's the easiest step you can think of to organize what you've already written?

**Bill:** I've already kind of done that. What I need to do at this point is just busy work and setting aside some time where I can just sit down and take the blog posts that I have selected and put them together. They've already been written, but there needs to be some kind of transition between them to make them flow a little bit better. That's what I need to do.

**Debbie:** Don't build it up into a huge chunk of time. The next time you have 20 minutes, just sit down and do a little piece of it. I'm going to put you all on lecture mode because I can see that Rob has joined us. Rob Siders of 52Novels.com – he is joining us by Skype. Rob, are you there?

**Rob:** I am, can you hear me okay?

**Debbie:** Yes, you're loud and clear. We used the beginning of this hour to have everyone on the call talk for a minute. Let's dive into eBook conversion formatting and design. Rob is the owner of 52Novels, he loves making books and he's been making eBooks professionally in one capacity or another for nearly a decade, which is very interesting in itself. Rob, can you tell us briefly about the name of your company?

**Rob:** Sure. About 6 years ago I started challenging myself to read a book a week, specifically novels. I've always loved reading, and it's always been an important part of my leisure time, and I felt that I've been getting away from it. Coming into a new year, I don't make resolutions really, and that particular year I decided that I was going to read a novel a week – hence, 52 Novels.

I've actually completed that challenge for three years or so until my son was born in December of 2008. He was born premature by about 6 weeks, so my life got turned right side up at that point. I wasn't able to complete that challenge that year, I think I got through 46 books. It didn't matter, because I had a wonderful healthy little addition to my family.

I had long had the domain 52 Novels, and when I started making Kindle books and ePub files for other people, I had the domain and it loosely tied in with what I was doing with no real solid connection I guess. I thought it was kind of catchy so I maintained the domain name, and when I set up my business I stuck with 52 Novels.

**Debbie:** Well I love it. It's easy to remember, and I see this image in my mind and it's great. Let's dive right in here, because there are so many questions and details. What would you say is the most important thing for a first time eBook publisher



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to know about this conversion formatting process? Maybe you can start by distinguishing between conversion and formatting?

**Rob:** Sure. I think the most important thing to know is that you don't have to know everything. There are a lot of people out there who are in the service side of the industry like I am who have developed a considerable amount of expertise in a very short amount of time. The world is changing very fast for us too, in terms of publishing.

I find that the people who do what I do as cover designers and eBook designs – that's people who build websites specifically for authors and they're out there – they really have a handle on the trends and what's happening and try to stay out in front. Most everyone that I know in this business is very helpful and willing to answer questions.

Don't feel like you have to know everything. You've got experts who are willing to be your team. As far as the difference between conversion and formatting, there are tools out there where you can take your manuscript, press a couple buttons, fidget with some settings, and you have an eBook.

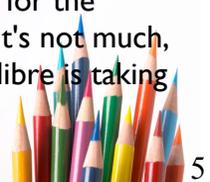
There are some really good tools out there that help people do that. However that's not exactly what we do. We take a manuscript and we break it down to its bones. There are a lot of things that someone can do with Microsoft Word or Apple's Pages where you spend a lot of time, format it, and make things look a certain way.

Meanwhile there's a bunch of stuff that's happening behind the scenes in those programs to make the front end look exactly the way you want it. For our purposes, we don't need all of that. We just need know what the headings are, what italics are, what's bold faced, what's bullet pointed, and those sorts of things.

What we do is we take a manuscript and we strip away all of the stuff that these other software programs add to make it pretty on the front end, and then we go back and add clean code behind the scenes that makes it do the exact same thing. The result is a cleaner file on the back end, which is going to help you once you publish because you've got a smaller file. A larger file size eats into your royalty. People don't always think about that aspect.

**Debbie:** Can you explain the larger file size?

**Rob:** Sure. Basically both Amazon and Barnes, they charge the author for the bandwidth required to deliver the eBook file over the internet. It's not much, we're talking pennies. But at the same time, if a program like Calibre is taking



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your Microsoft Word file and making a 1 MB eBook file, and I'm taking the same source document and halving that, that's still money that goes back into your pocket because of the smaller file size. Like I said, it's pennies. But hopefully if you guys are selling thousands of eBooks a month, those pennies are going to add up.

**Debbie:** I'm going to recap and see if I can speak the point of view of our Beta Authors. So, there is a program called Calibre <http://calibre-ebook.com/> where you put in your Word document, and it spits out what is technically an ePub file, and I guess it can also do a .Mobi. But what you're saying, and why I do recommend going with 52 Novels or another eBook formatting design company, is that it creates a lot of messy code that can result in problems.

Such as, the header's not looking right, or the margins are wrong, or the table of contents not being linked properly. All of which happens because of the code behind what you're looking at, when you're looking at either a Word document or an eBook like on your Kindle screen. The formatting piece is almost like design/formatting that you do, that makes it look better and also look good on every device.

**Rob:** Absolutely. One of the things that we do – I mention to other people that the conversion is easy, because it's a press of a button. But the design aspect that we bring to the service is what sets us apart from a lot of other companies who do what we do. Because we're taking a look at the genre of the book – we're taking a look at the brand that's being established by the cover or your website.

All of these things have an influence on the book as a marketing piece. Fundamentally, I think I mentioned on Joe Konrath's blog that I believe that your book is the centerpiece of your marketing effort. One of the things that we like to do is make sure that the presentation is elegant but also seamless.

We don't want to draw attention to the fact that your book was put together poorly, because that means we're not doing a good job. When authors see their eBooks for the first time, for the most part it's universal. Of course, we sometimes miss the mark, we're not perfect. But for the most part, people are just overwhelmed and floored at seeing their eBook for the first time.

That's a different sort of perspective, because this is your baby. By the same token, when a reader opens your eBook, things on such a small pallet – if they're done poorly, they stand out. And they stand out very brightly.

One of the things that I see frequently in books published through SmashWords, who I love by the way, but as a lover of eBooks and eBook designer I'm not so



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crazy about them. They're a distributor, you upload a Word document and run it through a conversion system and you have eBooks.

But one of the things that I see frequently and it all goes back to the formatting and the manuscript, often what occurs is that someone is formatting it and they want all of their chapter headings centered. One of the things that they forget to do is turn off the indents on that formatting.

So when you open up the eBook, that heading is technically centered but it's also centered with that indent. So it's askew by whatever the length of that indentation is. You might not notice it on a 8 ½ by 11 sheet of paper or on screen when you look at it, but when you load this thing on to a Kindle, it just shouts, "I'm off centered!"

One of the things that we can do in stripping all of that away from a Word document is that we can make something absolutely centered and we do that with the style sheet that we make for every single book. Almost every single book is different in some way.

**Debbie:** This is really important what you're saying, because I have now read enough eBooks – I just buy them like candy and you're absolutely right. If it's just right, you don't notice anything. But if something's wrong, it's really irritating and it could be the header or wrapping, or not having space between paragraphs.

This is interesting, and for everyone listening, this is what's confusing right now. We're getting a lot of conflicting advice. Newspaper articles and magazine articles, and blogs – there's two way of doing this. One is very easy, and it's all DIY. You can do it yourself through Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing platform.

It tells you how to do the Word document, your turn it into a .txt document, and you do this and that. Or you can do it via BookBaby. I don't know the quality of their work, though – and I think they also distribute. Or, we're hearing that it's not so easy.

For example, a novel wouldn't have a table of contents necessarily, but a business nonfiction book often would. Is it standard to have the table of contents linked? I don't always see that, and when I do see that, it's nice. Typically if you're reading on your smart phone, you can jump back and forth.

**Rob:** With every eBook, doesn't matter whether it's fiction or nonfiction, we include a linked table of contents for no other reason than it being very easy for us to do. I think there is a certain amount of consideration to the reader, and because these devices are a lot like books in many ways but unlike books in other ways – you have a paper book and you can flip to anywhere any time.



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Your navigational piece is right at the end of your fingertips at all times. It doesn't necessarily exist so easily in a lot of eBook readers, especially in the Amazon devices until recently. A recent update to the Kindle Touch added the ability to use an MCX file to navigate, so a linked table of contents is becoming less important with the Kindle.

It's a feature that the Nook devices have had for as long as there have been Nook devices. So if anyone uses the iPad as a reader, there's an icon at the top while you're reading that looks like a bulleted list. You tap that, and that brings out what's known as the MCX. That's an internal navigational table of contents.

It's basically the same principal that just got added to the Kindle Touch. It's becoming less necessary, but we still include it as a matter of best practice because you don't know what someone is going to be reading on, and having a way to get back to the table of contents easily is a good idea to make sure that it's there.

**Debbie:** Definitely. I have tried to quote “*flip through*” a Kindle version of an older published paperback, and I'm not even sure it had a table of contents and it was just a nightmare. You can't flip through very easily. Let me ask you a question that comes up a lot from the Beta Authors working on their book – let's just say they're writing in Word.

When you're writing in Word, what are the best practices for indicating a chapter heading, or subhead, or italics, because most of them are working on fairly short books and they want to have the file be in the right format when they pass it on to whoever is going to format it. What do they need to know about that?

**Rob:** I can only speak for the way that we do things. We're less concerned about the way someone makes something look in the manuscript. As long as your italics are italic, and your boldface is bold in your manuscript, it should be okay.

Things like seam breaks or changes in point of view, where typically in a print book you would notice a white space, hash marks, or dots – indicating those is very important. One of the things that we see, especially with a lot of people who spent a lot of time writing on typewriters – we'll get a manuscript where they've typed away at a line and they hit return when they come to the end of the line on the screen.

That causes a lot of problems, because that basically says “start a new paragraph.” It doesn't mean, “jump to the next line.” Microsoft Word is



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obviously going to wrap that line regardless, so only hit enter at the end of a paragraph.

Chapter headings, we're not so concerned about, because usually what we're doing to make sure that we set those correctly, we're searching for if you use "Chapter 1," we're searching "Chapter #" for all of them and we're setting a style on that.

If you use some sort of literary device, it's important that we can find those literary devices easy. We do a lot of romance books, and frequently in romance books we see that someone has sent a letter or email to someone else. Picking that out in some way is important for us so that we can make sure that we present that in a way that makes sense for a reader, once they're looking at the book.

The easier it is for us to find things like that, the faster our process can go. Oftentimes, it's just as simple as mentioning these sorts of things to the project manager when we do an intake. I assume that other shops are similar, but making sure that the project manager or the eBook designer knows about these things going in is important.

We can't stress enough that when you're dealing with these folks, make sure you keep your lines of communication open. That way, we see the book the same way you that you did. We're flying at this from a different angle, we're seeing your manuscript for the very first time and you've seen it for possibly hundred of hours, depending on how long you've worked on the book. Anytime you can give us a heads up is very helpful.

**Debbie:** So what I'm hearing is that for example, in a business type of book, you might have what I call a pull quote. It means it could be like a quotation, or a really short paragraph that you want to highlight. So what you're saying is that as long as it's clear what it is in the Word document, don't worry exactly what it looks like because that's what you do when you format.

It's funny, it's like this light has gone on and I'm seeing much more clearly what the eBook designer does and why it's design, and not just formatting.

**Rob:** One of the things we see often, especially people who do nonfiction – paper may not seem like it, but it's an extraordinarily expansive canvas compared to an eBook screen. We're talking about something that's really about the size of a 4x5 snap shot.

So putting a true side bar that runs along the side of the text may or may not be the best choice when it comes to bringing the manuscript to eBook format.



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simply because it's 2 inches. If you have a particularly lengthy side bar, stretching that sidebar over several Kindle page turns or Nook page turns can be a little problematic.

It just becomes a little difficult for the reader to follow along what's what, and if it splits and they have to go back to the text that it resides alongside... It just becomes difficult. Things like the iPad give us a little more flexibility and we can do some more fun stuff, but when we're talking about floating a strip of text alongside, we have to rethink how we present that information.

**Debbie:** Can you talk briefly about fixed layouts, which is, for example, what you can do for the iPad. Talk about what that means and the opportunities that offers, and I think you cannot do fixed layouts for the old Kindles.

**Rob:** That's correct. Amazon recently created its own advanced format, incorporating a lot of the things we've been able to do with ePub for quite some time. The iPad actually developed their own version of a fixed layout, which is a modification of the ePub spec. They came out with that early last year.

Fixed layout is essentially a way for us to design precise pages within an eBook. It's not something that I recommend for books that have more text than graphics. I only recommend fixed layouts for things like comic books and children's picture books, things of that nature.

A typical business nonfiction publication, even with charts and graphs – a regular Kindle eBook or ePub file will work for that just fine. In most circumstances, it's probably the best solution. Let's say that someone were putting together an eBook version of a brochure.

That's a perfect example where you might have full images that come together at the center of the page, that sort of thing. Or images that cross over that center gutter. If you've ever seen iBooks, turning it to landscape view, it actually looks like a book is open with the center gutter of the book there. The fixed layout will let you cross over that faux strip that makes it look like the book is opened to those pages.

It's really done by bringing two images together and having them meet at the middle. But it gives the effect that it crosses over, and it's actually pretty nice. I've done a couple of those, one of them was a four part graphic novel that was 400 pages in print, and the artist had several full bleed pages so it was a lot of fun to see those come together and fire it up on the iPad to see how it was.



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**Debbie:** Okay. I think everyone is getting this. You just don't need that, and if you do want to distribute via Kindle – which I recommend as the first step, because you can read everything on a Kindle eBook – don't wedge yourself to that.

Rob, please talk about illustrations and graphics because there is a lot of concern over that. Can they be included, and how does that work for a .Mobi or a simpler ePub file?

**Rob:** They certainly can. We have always recommended that if a book needs images, that they should be included. Don't make them second class status. If they belong in the book and they enhance the book, then they should be there. It used to be that the first edition Kindle only allowed eight shades of gray or something like that.

They didn't look all that good. The second generation Kindle improved to 16 colors of gray and it improved dramatically. There are things we can do to image files – say we have a snapshot of someone, we can manipulate that and optimize it for Kindle display.

It's not something you would ever notice when you look at it on a computer screen, because it's actually a better quality image than what you see on most websites. But it's done in such a way that it helps pull out the gray scale as best as possible. We don't even convert these images to gray scale, we use full color.

**Debbie:** That's what I was going to ask. To clarify that, if you're reading on the older Kindles you are going to see gray scale. So it's going to be in gray, in the E-ink look. But the same file can be formatted so that if you're looking at it on the Kindle Fire, it's in color, and even the subheads could be different colors.

**Rob:** Absolutely. We don't recommend using some colors – red has some issues when it's on E-ink. But obviously it shows up just fine on the Kindle for PC app. But on E-ink, red has a tendency to dilute itself a little bit. But yes, we can make things different colors.

I had an author about a year ago who wrote an experimental novel, and included in the novel was a recreation of a Wikipedia page. We went to the detail of making sure that each of the foot notes in the Wikipedia entry were clickable to foot notes that he wrote for the Wikipedia entry, but if you saw them on Kindle for PC they would appear blue.

So we went to that exacting detail. If I remember right, I think I actually even color sampled the exact blue that Wikipedia uses, and made sure that was included in there. It was a detail that we didn't need to have happen, but it was



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important for the way that this particular author wanted to present the book, so that's what we did.

**Debbie:** Interesting. What about specifying fonts? Serif versus sans serif – are there standards for what you read on Kindle?

**Rob:** Sure. The Kindle itself has always been fairly limited in its own font support. The Nook has been better since its inception. If you were to buy a Kindle Touch or a Kindle 4<sup>th</sup> Generation or just the basic model, it would come on board with just three font choices for the user to select. But overall, its font support has been lacking.

Until recently, we can't specify a font for Kindle because it would just ignore it and give you a default font. One of the things that the new Amazon format KF8 has allowed is font embedding which is kind of nice, but can be unpredictable.

It's something we do as the next tier of eBook design services that we offer. But specifying even sans serif versus serif for Kindle, forget it. It just doesn't happen. At least, not universally across. The Kindle Touch recently got an update, it can now play KF8 files, but specifying a specific font is still not possible.

You can do serif or sans serif, and in fact, the default display for KF8 files on the Kindle files is sans serif. The only thing that I caution against though, as a designer I get the idea of wanting to say, "Here's how I think my book should look."

At the same time, I worked in a software development environment long enough to understand that when it comes to using software and hardware, giving the end user enough choice to be able to customize the display or how they use the device or software as much as possible is more important than what my aesthetic sensibilities say.

We don't specify to render something in sans serif for the Kindle Touch, the default is serif. The user has no way to change that. There are a couple of choices on board that the user can change, but we have to declare sans serif as default so that they can go through and use the condensed serif, it turns off the ability for the user to customize that.

I think from a usability standpoint, that's terrible. Simply because, I have personal reading choices – I like my size to be this particular font size – and if someone goes through and overrides that choice, I get a little irritated. So we try to back off that as much as possible.



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For folks who want the upgrade with embedding fonts, we say, “We’re not going to embed a font for the body text.” That’s off limits. Let someone do that on their own, if they like something different. We’ll do a chapter heading, because it’s nice to make it stand out against other eBooks. But the type choice for the body text belongs to the user.

**Debbie:** I know certainly for those of us who need reading glasses, the ability to pump up the size of the font is fantastic. Let me ask you about the different devices. There’s the .Mobi file for the Amazon devices, for all the different Kindles. Then there’s ePub, which is a format for Nook or iPad, Sony, etc.

Since you are designing the files for all these different eReaders and platforms, what are you recommending to authors? I’m sort of holding the line and saying, “We’re trying to get something out quick and have it be as widely available as possible, and I’m going to recommend that you start with Kindle because you can read a Kindle book on almost any device.”

What are your thoughts about that, and also having the file formatted for Nook and distributing it to Nook, Sony, Kobo, etc. I realize you’re not really in the distribution, but since you work so hard on the files, what is your feeling or experience on that?

**Rob:** I guess it requires a little bit of backing up. A little bit of history on the Amazon format – the Mobi Pocket Format was actually developed in the 90s by the people who made palm pilots. It was a way for them to display readable content on palm devices and later, palm phones. Amazon bought Mobi Pocket, seeing how it could be used to make eBooks for a device that they were planning to make.

But the format itself, until KF8 at the end of last year, had not evolved at all. Inside each file is basically a mini self contained website that has your book on it. The code itself that powered that was internet circa 1998.

**Debbie:** Interesting. Then that’s what it is, HTML code.

**Rob:** Absolutely. Amazon’s not porting the KF8 support for the old devices, so we kind of have to live between these two worlds. So when we step into a project, I hate to say that we find the lowest common denominator but we have to think about a way to design it so that the consistency between an ePub file and a Kindle file is roughly the same.

Designing for the KF8 format adds an entirely new wrinkle, because not only is the KF8 format for the next generation and it does a lot of things that we can do in ePub, those things are closer together, but it also allows backwards



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compatibility for users who are not yet on an eReading engine. The desktop apps, or hand held devices that can display KF8 correctly.

We're developing with one foot forward and one foot back, so that everyone has an experience with this particular book that makes sense. We throw in some of these advance things where we can and when it makes sense, but at the same time, we also think that there should be a consistency of experience that someone who has an iPad shouldn't be getting all the whiz bang stuff, unless that's the author's vision.

We've had some authors who have said specifically that they want to include some multimedia things in something specifically for iPad iBooks app.

**Debbie:** Given all the complexity and the nuances and changes that you're enumerating, what about these really low price conversion formatting services like BookBaby.com? What are you getting? Is it hit or a miss?

**Rob:** To tell you honestly, I don't know. My suspicion is that they've hired very low cost labor, which may be over seas. Or they're using a lot of automated conversion tools. I couldn't tell a BookBaby produced book if someone handed it to me, unless they told me or if I saw something. Most of the books I buy these days are ones published by the big publishing houses or a small press, or author books. I find more than anything I'm buying books by the authors that we work with.

**Debbie:** Good, that's what we're all about. I know cover design is not exactly in your preview, but obviously you know about it and see it. It's something of extreme interest as the Beta Authors are thinking about getting their books out there. Do you have any recommendations on design tips or best practices in cover design, because I know there is something about the file.

You see the file and you might see it in low resolution, high resolution, black and white or color, you might see it on a tiny smart phone screen, etc. I know you know something about cover design, so can you share a little bit about that with us?

**Rob:** People come to us and ask what the size of these things should be. With self publishing – unless you've got lots of money to burn, which most of the authors we work with don't – we typically tell someone that if you had your cover in a dimension of 6x9, especially if you're only doing eBooks, that's 600x900 pixels, then that's fine.

It's going to display nicely on a website and it will display great on an eBook file itself, and it will look great on one of the desktop apps. As long as the file itself is



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a decent enough resolution, a 6x9 size will be fine. There are some artists out there who have taken to offering multiple sizes of the same cover, because there are actually different dimensions in the Kindle and Nook e-ink devices.

If done correctly, when someone opens the cover on their Kindle devices, the cover image fills that screen exactly. I think it's a nice presentation. The cover is great when you're trying to sell your book. Once someone has bought your book, the cover is less of part of the equation. I don't think that once I've started reading a book on my Kindle, that I've gone back to the cover, ever.

**Debbie:** I understand what you're saying.

**Rob:** The one thing that I will say is that there are places in this process where you can save money. Two specific places where I recommend people do not try to save money, that's a cover designer, and an editor. Spend money to have someone edit your book, and spend money on a cover designer.

I really am a big believer that this should in fact be DIY. I'm thrilled to death that not everyone wants to undertake that, it puts food on my table and sends my son to preschool. So thank you, but at the same time – if someone needs to save money on what I do, then I'm all for that.

We have lost probably 30 authors who have figured out how to make their own eBooks, and I have no problem at all losing a customer for that.

**Debbie:** I love your attitude. We have a few minutes, I'm going to open the line to see if anyone has a quick question. Does anyone have a question for Rob that we didn't cover?

**Kim:** The Apple iBook and the apps for that, isn't it remarkably different from the others? And there's a substantial chance that you work on it for a long time, and that Apple rejects the actual product that you created?

**Rob:** I have done some playing around with iBooks, I think it's a fantastic software. It's not something that we offer as a service to authors yet, I think there's a possibility for that. But you're correct – because of the license terms that iBooks Authors has established, it's basically the payment for it being a free app.

But the license terms are such that yes, they could in fact reject the out put into the iBooks store. The thing is, they can do that now anyway. There have been a couple reports in the news that people are submitting eBooks with links to Amazon, and Apple is finding those and getting them out of the pool.



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By the same token, SmashWords will do the same thing. If you want to link to some other eBook retailer that isn't SmashWords, they'll reject you and ask you to fix it. I've had authors come back, they developed a theme where someone is reading something on their Kindle in the book, and SmashWords has rejected that because it references the Amazon product.

I understand their point of view, I think they're concerned about themselves selling something that mentions Kindle than they are because of the so many retailers, that they don't want to jeopardize the relationship they have with those other organizations. Each of those organizations has their own rules on that too. They changed that from reading something on the Kindle to reading something on the eReader, just so that it's generic.

**Debbie:** That's a great point. Rob, we're going to stop there because we always stop at the top of the hour. For everyone listening, I just saw the first business book published for iBooks, that's Nancy Duarte's *Resonate*. She's a fantastic person as well as being a presentation expert. Here's the link to her new multimedia book: <http://itunes.apple.com/us/book/resonate/id517154732?mt=11>

It means she can only sell that eBook through iBooks. That may be the most important thing, that you cannot sell it on Kindle. So Rob, thank you so very much for your time and your expertise.

**Rob:** It was my pleasure, thank you for having me.

**Debbie:** I will make sure that your various links are embedded in the transcript. Thank you all so much, for everyone else – you will hear from me on Facebook and email, and until next week – take care, everyone.

**Group:** Thank you, bye!

