

Audiobook Production Process Overview

Written by Davis Sound, LLC, November 9, 2017

Who should produce an audiobook?

- If you are a serious writer who actively markets your books and you want a second income stream from your writing, audiobooks may be the perfect solution. Many independent authors with multiple books published have released audiobooks with great success. This is an ideal revenue generator for best selling authors.

When not to produce an audiobook.

- If you released a book, are struggling to find ways to market your book, and your book is not selling well, then you probably are not yet ready to jump into audiobooks.

Easiest way to release an audiobook

- Complete the audiobook production in cooperation with Amazon's Audible.com business unit. Audiobooks can be produced through the Audiobook Creation Exchange (ACX) system that links authors, producers, narrators, etc.
- Or, the audiobook can be produced independently and submitted to Audible.com through ACX.
- Davis Sound is an Audible Approved Producer and has extensive experience with ACX to handle either method of production.
- For those who want audio CDs produced for their audiobooks, Davis Sound works with The ADS Group located in Plymouth, MN to manufacture audiobook CD packages. Prices are available for anyone wanting to go this route.

There are two ways to produce an audiobook

- Pay-per-performance
 - o Rights holder pays for audiobook production costs up front.
 - o Once released, 50% of the audiobook revenue from Audible.com goes to the rights holder.
 - o Wide range of professional narrators available
 - o Davis Sound works exclusively on a pay-per-performance basis
- Royalty work
 - o No up front cost from rights holder for audio production
 - o A narrator will record their own audio in exchange for 25% of the revenue paid in royalty payments
 - o Rights holder gets the other 25% of audiobook revenue
 - o Very limited choice of narrators and usually less than professional audio quality (Few narrators have their own recording capability and are willing to work for royalties only)

How to calculate cost of producing an audiobook

- Determine your word count for the book
- Divide word count by 9,300 (target number of words read per hour)
- This gives the estimated number of finished hours for the audiobook

- Nominal cost for full production is \$300 per finished hour, but may vary depending on the narrator used.

Example

- A book is 80,000 words
- $80,000 / 9300 = 8.6$ hours for the audiobook
- $8.6 \text{ hours} \times \$300 \text{ per hour} = \$2,580$ for production cost
- This includes the cost for a professional narrator

Estimated Cost for Producing an Audiobook

Number of Words in the Book	Read Rate (words/hour)	Finished Book Hours	Production Rate (per hour)	Estimated Cost
20,000	9,300	2.2	\$300	\$645
30,000	9,300	3.2	\$300	\$968
40,000	9,300	4.3	\$300	\$1,290
50,000	9,300	5.4	\$300	\$1,613
60,000	9,300	6.5	\$300	\$1,935
70,000	9,300	7.5	\$300	\$2,258
80,000	9,300	8.6	\$300	\$2,580
90,000	9,300	9.7	\$300	\$2,903
100,000	9,300	10.8	\$300	\$3,226
110,000	9,300	11.8	\$300	\$3,548
120,000	9,300	12.9	\$300	\$3,871
130,000	9,300	14.0	\$300	\$4,194
140,000	9,300	15.1	\$300	\$4,516
150,000	9,300	16.1	\$300	\$4,839

Once the audiobooks is released, what factors affect the audiobook sales?

- Content of the book itself – A best selling print book will likely be a best selling audiobook if the narration is good. Likewise, a book that does not sell well will likely have low sales for audiobooks.
- Genre – Some genres are more popular than others. Authors who write in the “hot” genres will sell more audiobooks than authors who write in less popular genres.
- Marketing – Like with any product, more and better marketing will result in better sales. This will be true for authors, publishers, and Audible.com equally.
- Narrator – Choosing a great narrator can really make an audiobook come alive and get a lot more people talking positively about it. Poor narration can be a huge distraction to the success of the story.
- Series vs individual books – Authors who have series say they sell more series audiobooks than with singles.

To get an idea what authors experience with their audiobooks sales, Davis Sound polled several authors who have multiple books published and have had audiobooks released for at least one year. Here are some of their comments.

- Audible often promotes books. So if Audible promotes more than the publisher, audiobooks will outsell print/e-book sales. If marketing is done equally on both print/e-book and audiobooks, audiobooks sales can be anywhere from 15% of print/e-book to equal sales volume.
- Series books tend to sell better than individual books.
- With series, audiobook sales will be higher if all books in the series have been made into audiobooks. If a listener knows that all books will be released in audio, they are more likely to start buying them from the beginning of the series.
- Audiobooks have a longer life than e-books or print books. Audio sales will taper over time for a given title, but the taper is slower and doesn't drop as far as e-book sales.
- All authors polled with multiple books published find audiobooks a great addition to their income stream.
- Audiobooks are not as likely to get caught up in seasonal sales cycles.
- Audiobooks open up new markets from "non-readers" or people who are too busy to read.
- One author "suggested that authors take the idea of investing in audiobooks VERY seriously if they intend to write full time."

What drives Return On Investment (ROI)

- An author's ROI is based on the same factors as what drive audiobook sales
- An author will sell anywhere from 15% to 100% the volume of audiobooks compared to print/e-book sales
- Factors affecting that percentage
 - o How much the author or publisher markets the print/e-book book compared to the author's and Audible's marketing of audiobooks.
 - o How long the print/e-book has been on the market. Books that have been out in print/e-book format may see sales drop even though audiobook sales may be increasing.
 - o Is the book part of a series or a stand alone book (series will sell more).

Calculating ROI

- We will use 15% for this example, which is a worst case scenario.
- We will use the 8.6-hour book for this example. Note that the length of the audiobook will affect sales price and therefore affect the quantity needed to be sold to recover production costs.
- Rights holders get 50% of the audiobook revenue
- Audiobook will sell on Audible for \$20 (target price for 8.6-hour book)
- Rights holder gets \$10 per audiobook sale
- Cost for production is \$2,580
- The rights holder must sell 258 audiobooks to recover production costs. All sales after that are profit.

About Davis Sound, LLC

Davis Sound is an audio and video production company located in Hopkins, MN. Davis Sound specializes in audiobook production and is certified as an Approved Producer by Amazon's Audible.com business unit for audiobooks. Davis Sound has been involved with 25 audiobook projects since starting as a full time business in 2012. Davis Sound works with a wide range of voice actors to do the audiobook narration, or can work with authors interested in reading the books themselves. Narration is done in Davis Sound's professional recording studio. Marshall Davis, owner of Davis Sound, has been involved with recording studios for 35 years as both a recording artist and audio engineer.

For more information on producing your audiobook, contact Davis Sound at 612-968-3384 or by email at business@davisound.net.