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Tips: Self-Publish Your Books, Songs, and Movies Online

Finished with your latest masterpiece? New distribution channels let you make it available to the masses.

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It used to be that, to get your book published and in the hands of readers, you needed an agent and a publisher, each of whom would gobble up a significant portion of the profits. But the times they are a-changin', thanks to a bevy of recent online publishing resources that cater to renaissance persons who are overflowing with creativity and underflowing with cash. Here's a snapshot of the services available to starving artists.

Books: If all you want to do is send a printed version of the family cookbook to Sis, Mom, and Grandpa, you can. **Blurb** lets you create one-off hardbound print copies of your book--complete with dust jacket--for between \$30 (for up to 40 pages) and \$80 (topping out at 400 pages) each, with discounts for bulk orders. You start by downloading Blurb's free **BookSmart** book-design and publishing program (see **Figure 1**). When your tome is ready, you upload it for printing and receive your copy within a week or so. Blurb also offers your book for sale, but you get nothing out of the deal--the service's onerous contract grants Blurb all rights to redistribute your work.

Lulu gives authors a fairer shake. This online publishing service imposes no up-front costs. In fact, if you don't need a copy of the book for yourself, you'll never pay anything to publish through Lulu. The downside of the service is that you have to do all the book-editing and layout legwork, using your own software; you then submit your manuscript in layout form as a PDF, .doc, or .rtf file. You set the cover price and the royalty rate you wish to receive, and Lulu offers the book through Amazon.com, Borders, Barnes and Noble, and its own Web site. The service's extensive tutorials guide you through the whole process.

Audio: Lulu also lets you create and sell CDs, but a better place to sell them online is at **CD Baby**. For a \$35 setup fee, CD Baby will copy your CD, make a Web page for you, accept credit-card orders for CDs, and ship the discs to customers. CD Baby keeps \$4 per CD, or 9 percent of digital download sales, and it also partners with record stores and online services such as iTunes.

Video: Video-hosting services are all the rage these days--we analyzed several in September's "**Video Everywhere**"--but finding one that lets you sell your audiovisual production isn't easy. Google Video is structured to allow sales, but that feature is off-limits to ordinary users while the service remains in beta testing. By the time you read this, Blip.tv will likely allow users of its service to charge for video downloads, taking a small per-transaction fee of 10 to 15 cents, as well as a single-digit percentage of your selling price.

Charging for your video will greatly reduce its viewership. One way to keep your opus free and yet still cash in is by selling ads. Blip.tv lets you arrange for post-roll advertising--video ads tacked onto the end of your video--and splits the resulting revenue with you 50-50 (the proceeds are deposited to your PayPal

account). If you're getting serious about publishing your creative endeavors, revenue sources like these can help defray the costs.

When Publishing Online, Always Honor the Copyrights

Before uploading your creation, know whether you're legally entitled to. If you wrote it, it's yours. You can quote snippets of other people's work (with attribution) under the fair-use doctrine, but otherwise it's a no-no to post or sell copyrighted content. Most services eventually yank copyright-infringing items from their servers, and they may ban you from posting unless you desist. If it came from a CD, it's probably copyrighted. To find royalty-free "podsafe" music to use in your productions, choose songs that are in the public domain (primarily music and lyrics published before 1922 in the United States). To locate such content, visit the [Podsafe Music Network](#), [PodsafeAudio](#), or [Creative Commons](#).

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