



THE WAGES OF WRITING

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE AUTHORS GUILD
2015 MEMBER SURVEY

IN 2015, WE CONDUCTED OUR FIRST MAJOR MEMBER SURVEY SINCE 2009.¹

We used 2009 as the starting point to determine how the digital transformation has affected writers' livelihoods. In 2009, the e-book hadn't yet gained a foothold in the marketplace. In a Codex Group survey from that year, fewer than 5% of book buyers had purchased an e-book in the last month. By 2010, the industry knew digital change was on the horizon: increasingly sophisticated digital devices had begun to ignite unprecedented digital media demand and growth. The potential scope and intensity of that growth, while still somewhat unknown, was already viewed with uncertainty by many. Now, in 2015, the digital market seems to have stabilized, but only after massive expansion. In 2015, Codex found that nearly 50% of readers had purchased an e-book in the last month, a tenfold increase from 2009.

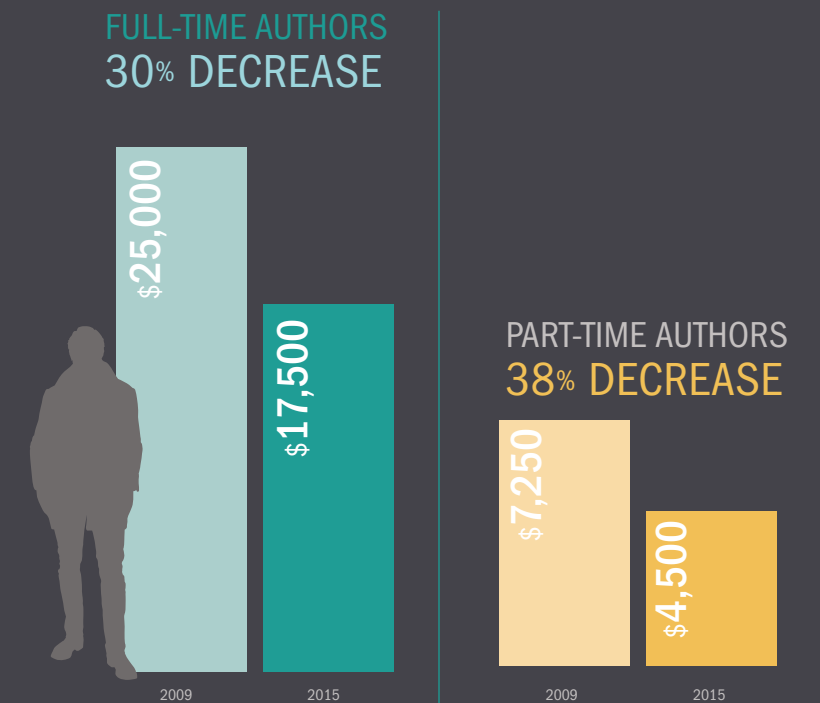
The main finding from the survey is that respondents' mean income is down significantly over this period. This is the result of a confluence of factors. Royalties for uses like course packs, excerpts and even full-text digitization, as well as library replacements, have dried up, thanks to the new "free" economy (where authors bear the costs while others freeride). The ubiquity of e-books means that online book piracy is a greater threat than it was in 2009. We've also seen major consolidation within the traditional publishing industry, which means less diversity among publishers and, with most major publishers now owned by multinational corporations, a tighter focus on the bottom line. These phenomena—combined with Amazon's strong-arming of publishers on its way to becoming an industry behemoth, leaving low e-book prices and the shuttering of thousands of brick and mortar bookstores in its wake—have made the business of authorship less profitable than it was six years ago.

¹ The 2015 survey was commissioned by the Authors Guild and conducted by the Codex Group, a leading publishing industry research firm.

² All comparisons are against the aforementioned 2009 survey, which was jointly commissioned by the Authors Guild and the PEN American Center and conducted by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research.

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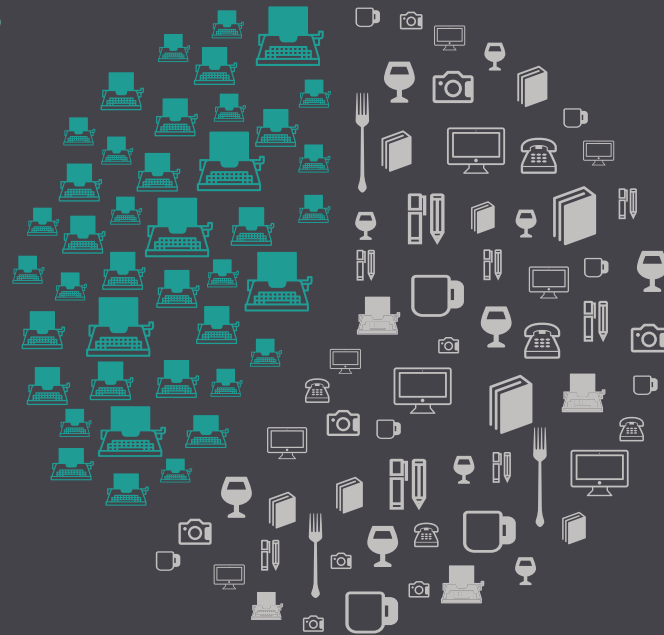
AUTHORS' INCOME IS DOWN ACROSS ALL CATEGORIES.



Writing-related income of full-time book authors dropped 30% since the 2009 survey, from \$25,000 to \$17,500. Part-time authors saw an even steeper decline, as their writing income dropped 38% over the same period, from \$7,250 to \$4,500.

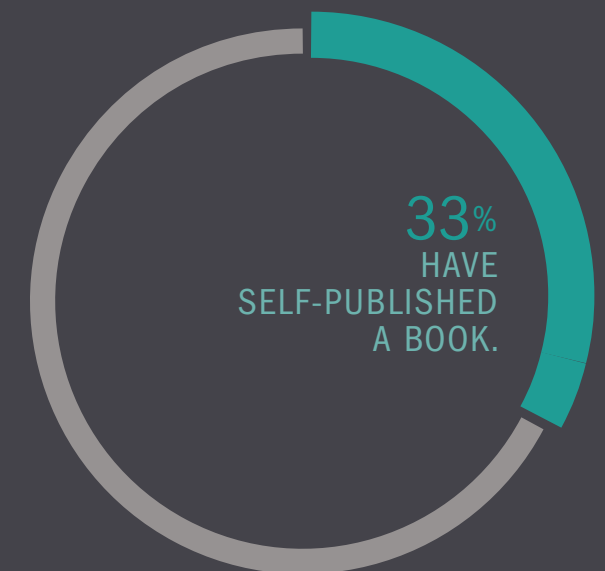
MOST AUTHORS CAN'T SURVIVE ON WRITING ALONE.

ONLY 39% OF AUTHORS SUPPORTED THEMSELVES EXCLUSIVELY THROUGH WRITING-RELATED WORK.



THE NECESSITY OF WORKING SUPPORTING JOBS CUTS INTO THE TIME AUTHORS WOULD IDEALLY SPEND ON WRITING PROJECTS.

AUTHORS INCREASINGLY TAKE A “HYBRID” APPROACH TO PUBLISHING THEIR BOOKS.

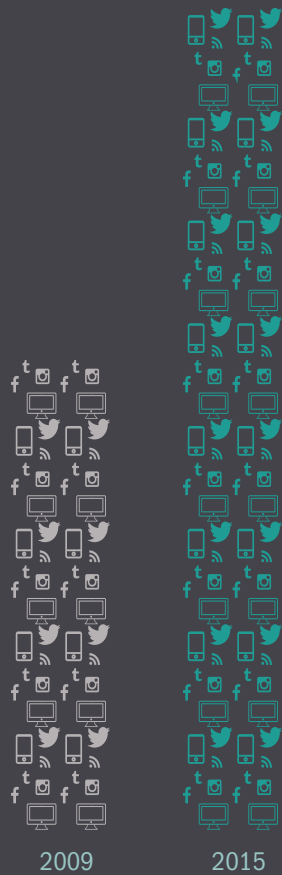


Of the authors surveyed, 33% have self-published a book. It appears that authors increasingly feel they have a choice of whether to go through a traditional publishing house or taking the indie route on a per project basis. And, we suspect, authors are starting to see self-publishing as an outlet for projects that haven't been supported by traditional publishing houses.

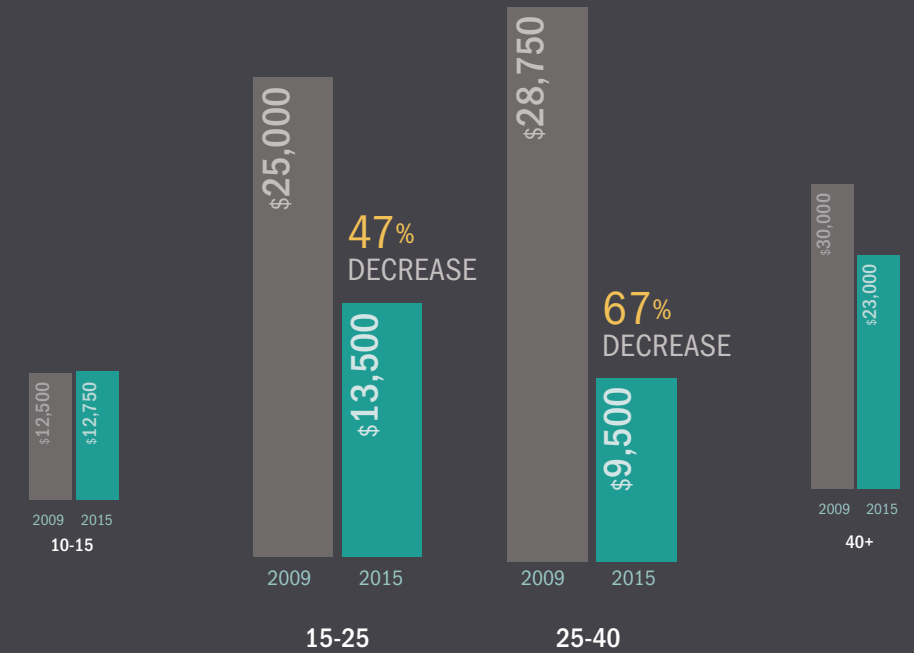
AUTHORS SPEND MORE TIME ON MARKETING,
LESS ON WRITING BOOKS.

FULL-TIME AUTHORS WITH 15+ YEARS OF EXPERIENCE
SAW THE GREATEST INCOME DECLINES.

AUTHORS' TIME SPENT MARKETING
AND COMMUNICATING WITH READERS
SKYROCKETED 59% SINCE 2009.



Traditional publishers' promotional budgets have all but dried up, and many publishing contracts now **REQUIRE AUTHORS TO MAINTAIN A WEB AND SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE.** Many authors, both traditionally- and self-published, have proven adept at using new technologies to connect with readers.



AUTHORS' INCOME WITH EXPERIENCE

The survey also shows, for full-time authors, writing-related income generally increases with experience: but when the market contracts, they see the biggest losses. In the new economy, it appears that experience isn't translating into rising income.

The picture's not pretty, but there are silver linings. The rise of hybrid authorship is an exciting development: authors can now have more freedom in choosing a method of publication and promotion that suits the needs of the specific book they're trying to market. And the opportunities for author-reader engagement are unsurpassed in the history of book publishing—even if this engagement competes with an author's writing time.

Nonetheless, when it comes to income, the results are not good. Authors should receive a more equitable share of the profits seen by publishers. And copyright law and policy need to be tailored to put authors' concerns at the forefront. With these survey results in hand, the Authors Guild will better be able to understand and explain the economic realities of authorship today.

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