

Direct Sales & Author Storefronts

Top 5 Least Expensive Ways to Sell eBooks & Paperbacks Direct

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Keeping more of your money means selling straight to your readers. This handout ranks the five cheapest ways to do it, shows exactly what each one costs, and, just as important, explains how paperbacks actually get printed and shipped when you never touch a box.

Why Bother Selling Direct?

Two reasons, and only one of them is about money.

- **You keep more per sale.** Amazon pays 70% on ebooks only inside the \$2.99 to \$12.99 price band (since July 7, 2026); step outside it and the royalty drops to 35%. Sell the same ebook from your own store and you keep roughly 88% to 92% after fees. On print, you still keep more per copy, though print and shipping costs trim the gap.
- **You own the customer.** A direct sale gives you the reader's email and permission to contact them. A retailer sale does not. For long-term author income, that mailing list is worth more than the extra royalty.

Honest caveat: no storefront brings its own traffic. You bring the readers; the platform just takes the payment and hands over the file. If you have no email list or audience yet, that is the first job, not the store.

Every Direct Sale Has Two Moving Parts

Keep these separate in your head; most confusion comes from mixing them up.

Part	What it does
1. Storefront + checkout	Shows the book, takes the payment, and (for ebooks) delivers the file. This is the platform you pick below.
2. Fulfillment	eBooks: the file downloads instantly, no cost, nothing to ship. Paperbacks: either you print and mail copies yourself, or a print-on-demand partner prints and ships each order for you (covered on page 3).

The Top 5, Cheapest First

Ranked by what it costs a low-volume author to start and run. Every option below also charges **payment processing** on top of its own fee (see page 3). Prices verified July 2026; always confirm on the platform's own pricing page before you commit.

1. Ko-fi

Free to open. A friendly "support me + shop" page. Cheapest all-in for a first sale.

Cost to start	\$0. No monthly fee, no listing fee.
Fee per sale	5% platform fee on shop sales (0% on tips), plus payment processing. Ko-fi Gold at \$12/month removes the 5%.
eBooks	Yes. File delivers instantly at checkout.
Paperbacks	Yes, but you pack and mail them yourself. No built-in print-on-demand link, so print copies mean a trip to the post office.
Best for	Testing your very first ebook, or selling signed copies to a small, loyal audience.

Watch out	Not a merchant of record, so U.S. sales tax is your responsibility. Storefront features are basic.
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2. Payhip

Free to open, and the one budget platform that can print paperbacks hands-free.

Cost to start	\$0 on the free plan. Plus is \$29/month, Pro is \$99/month.
Fee per sale	Free plan 5%; Plus 2%; Pro 0%. Payment processing applies on every plan. Upgrading pays off once monthly sales pass roughly \$970.
eBooks	Yes. Secure instant delivery, with download limits and PDF stamping.
Paperbacks	Yes, hands-free. Payhip connects to Bookvault (print-on-demand), so a print order is printed and shipped for you automatically.
Best for	An author who wants one low-cost store for both ebooks and print without learning a big platform.
Watch out	Handles EU and UK VAT for you; U.S. and other sales tax stays your job.

3. BookFunnel

The author community's standard for ebook delivery. Digital only.

Cost to start	First-Time Author \$20/year; Mid-List about \$100 to \$150/year; Bestseller about \$250/year. (Plans updated February 2026.)
Fee per sale	No per-sale platform cut. You pay the flat annual fee; the payment happens through your own checkout.
eBooks	Yes, and it does this better than anyone: it detects the reader's device and walks them through loading the file, and its help desk answers their tech questions, not you.
Paperbacks	No. BookFunnel delivers ebooks and audiobooks only. Pair it with a print solution for paperbacks.
Best for	Reliable ebook delivery and reader magnets, bolted onto a checkout like Payhip or Shopify.
Watch out	It is a delivery tool, not a full storefront. The \$20 tier does not collect email addresses.

4. Shopify Starter

A real, if simple, store for \$5 a month. The most flexible for print.

Cost to start	\$5/month (\$60/year).
Fee per sale	5% transaction fee when you use Shopify Payments, plus card processing. No per-item listing fee.
eBooks	Yes, with a free or low-cost digital-download app added to the store.
Paperbacks	Yes, hands-free. Connects to Lulu Direct or Bookvault (print-on-demand), which print and ship each order for you; no inventory.
Best for	An author ready to build a small branded shop selling both formats, and to grow into it.
Watch out	Starter is a lightweight store, not the full Shopify site. A little more setup than the others.

5. Gumroad

Free to open, but the highest cut per sale. Its trade-off: it handles your sales tax.

Cost to start	\$0. No monthly fee.
Fee per sale	10% plus \$0.50 per direct sale, plus card processing; roughly 13% to 15% all-in on a typical sale. Sales through Gumroad's own Discover marketplace cost far more (30%).
eBooks	Yes. Instant delivery, with the option to let readers pay more than the asking price.
Paperbacks	Physical products are supported, but you fulfill them yourself; no built-in book print-on-demand.
Best for	The absolute fastest setup, and authors who want the tax paperwork taken off their plate.

Watch out	It is a merchant of record, so it collects and remits sales tax and VAT worldwide for you. That convenience is why the fee is higher.
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Making Paperbacks Work Without Boxes in Your Garage

This is the piece most "direct sales" talks skip. You do not need to buy a garage full of stock. **Print-on-demand (POD)** partners plug into your store; when a reader orders, the partner prints that single copy and ships it straight to them. You never touch it, and you keep the retail price minus the print and shipping cost.

Partner	What it plugs into, and why it matters
Lulu Direct	Connects to Shopify, WooCommerce, and Wix (plus a free API). Prints locally to the buyer, so a U.S. reader gets a U.S.-printed book, which cuts shipping time and cost. Handles paperback, hardcover, and large formats.
Bookvault	Connects to Shopify, WooCommerce, Wix, and Payhip (plus a free API). Same hands-off model, with special-edition options (foil, sprayed edges). UK-based with growing international printing.
Already on IngramSpark?	Its new "Share & Sell" links (U.S. accounts) give you a QR code or web link for direct print orders. Not a storefront plugin, but handy for newsletters, social posts, and signing tables.

The budget takeaway: to sell paperbacks hands-free on the cheap, pair **Payhip (free) with Bookvault**, or **Shopify Starter (\$5) with Lulu Direct or Bookvault**. Both give you a paperback a reader can buy while you keep writing.

The Fee Everyone Forgets: Payment Processing

Almost every platform above charges its fee *on top of* a card-processing fee. These are industry-standard and not a platform quirk. Typical U.S. rates (confirm current numbers on each provider's site):

Processor	Typical rate	Note
Stripe	about 2.9% + \$0.30	The default on most creator platforms.
PayPal	about 3.49% + \$0.49	Familiar to buyers; slightly pricier per sale.
Square	about 2.6% + \$0.10 in person; 2.9% + \$0.30 online	Good for selling at festivals and in-person events.

Quick example on a \$4.99 ebook: on Ko-fi or Payhip's free plan you keep roughly \$4.30; on Gumroad, roughly \$3.50. On a \$16.99 paperback printed by a POD partner at about \$4.50, after platform and card fees you might net around \$10 to \$11 before any shipping you cover. Numbers are approximate and move with price and processor.

At-a-Glance Comparison

Platform	Start cost	Fee per sale*	eBooks	Paperbacks	Best for
Ko-fi	Free	5% + processing	Yes	Yes, ship yourself	Cheapest first sale
Payhip	Free	5% free / 2% / 0%	Yes	Yes, hands-free (Bookvault)	Both formats, one store
BookFunnel	\$20/yr	Flat annual, no cut	Yes, best delivery	No, digital only	eBook delivery layer
Shopify Starter	\$5/mo	5% + processing	Yes (add app)	Yes, hands-free (Lulu/Bookvault)	A real branded shop
Gumroad	Free	10% + \$0.50 + proc.	Yes	Yes, ship yourself	Fastest setup; tax handled

*Payment processing (roughly 2.9% + \$0.30) applies on top of the platform fee for every option except where the platform is a merchant of record and folds tax in. Gumroad handles your sales tax; Ko-fi, Payhip (outside EU/UK), and Shopify Starter do not.

Legal Quick Notes (Not Legal Advice)

- **Sales tax:** if your platform is a merchant of record (Gumroad), it collects and remits tax for you. If it is not (Ko-fi, Payhip, Shopify Starter), you are responsible for figuring out and remitting sales tax. A tax professional is worth one consultation [here](#).
- **International and VAT:** selling to EU or UK readers can trigger VAT. Payhip handles EU and UK VAT on digital goods; check each platform's tax page before you sell abroad.
- **Basic store policies:** post a short returns policy, a shipping note (or "digital, no shipping"), and a one-line privacy note saying you will not sell their email. Most platforms give you a spot for these.

Is It Worth It? The Honest Bottom Line

For ebooks, yes, almost always: the margin jump and the email address you capture are both real. For paperbacks, the win is smaller once print and shipping are counted, so treat print as a bonus and a nice thing to offer at events, not your main income.

If you want the cheapest possible start today: open a free Payhip store, deliver ebooks through it, and connect Bookvault when you are ready to offer a paperback. Total cost to begin: nothing.

Resources (Check Current Pricing Yourself)

- Ko-fi pricing: ko-fi.com/shop
- Payhip pricing: payhip.com/pricing
- BookFunnel plans: bookfunnel.com/pricing (and the plan update: blog.bookfunnel.com/2026/new-plans)
- Shopify Starter: shopify.com/starter
- Gumroad pricing: gumroad.com (see the fees / help pages)
- Lulu Direct: lulu.com (Sell Direct) | Bookvault: bookvault.app
- Payment processors: stripe.com/pricing, paypal.com, squareup.com

Prices and features verified July 2026. Platform pricing changes often; always confirm on the provider's own page before deciding.