



Alliance of
Independent
Authors

The Indie Author Income Survey 2023

About ALLi

Founded in 2012

A global not-for-profit membership association for self-published (indie) authors.

Our mission is to foster **excellence and ethics in self-publishing**.

We do this through membership benefits, vetting publishers and publishing services, and community education through books, blogs, podcasts and more.

We also **campaign** to support indie authors within the wider industry.

Why an author income survey?

- There have been many author income surveys (UK, US, Canada, Australia)
- They all show author income declining over time, and currently resting somewhere in the region of US\$6,000-8,000 (median), with Australia doing better at US\$12,000.
- BUT
- The data is almost always focused on author earnings from the traditional publishing model or mixes self-publishing and third-party published authors together. This is confusing and indies have often found questions irrelevant / hard to answer.

We need data

- Accurate market data is core to good decision-making for all businesses.
- Having accurate data allows us to strive for ethics and excellence in self-publishing.
- BUT...
- Indie sales are hard to register: multiple sales platforms are used, both online and off, and some books are not given ISBNs

We needed to ask the authors directly.

The set-up

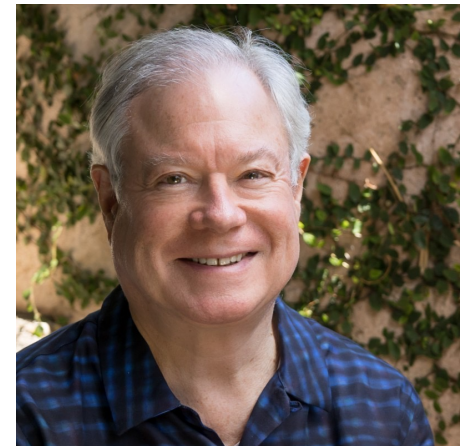
- A survey focused *only* on indie authors, written for them.
- 20 questions, but quick to answer: indie authors (especially successful ones) are busy!
- Participants were those whose primary occupation was publishing (defined as spending 50% or more of their working time on writing and publishing activities)
- Third-party analysts used for independent, objective evaluation of results

Research Analysts

Thad McIlroy is a digital publishing analyst and author, and president of The Future of Publishing, based in San Francisco. He is a contributing editor to Publishers Weekly, covering digital innovation and publishing startups. thad@thefutureofpublishing.com



Steve Sieck is an accomplished strategy consulting and market research professional with a strong specialty in business, professional, and academic markets for publishing and information services. His analyst consultancy is SKS Advisors. steve@sksadvisors.com



Respondents

- The survey was widely shared within the indie author community, through a range of partners.
- The survey garnered a total of 2,539 respondents, of whom 2,261 (89%) met the qualification criteria.
- Of these, 1,843 (82%) completed the full survey questionnaire including optional demographic questions.
- 60% of the respondents were located in North America and 21% in the UK, followed by Australia/New Zealand and Europe each representing about 8%



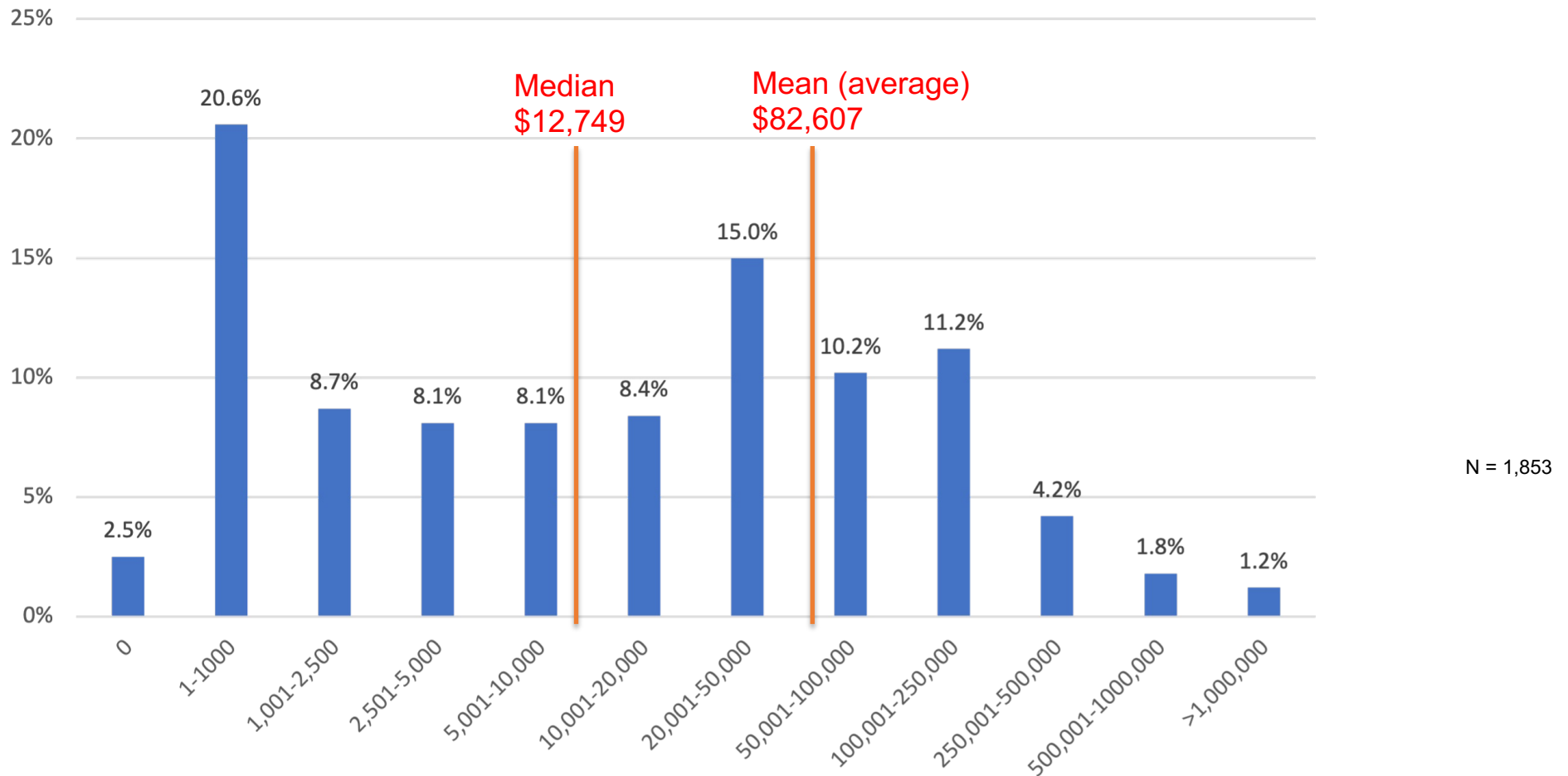
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The Indie Author Income Survey Core Findings

Indie income is higher



The median writing and self-publishing revenue in 2022 was **\$12,749**, a **53% increase** over the previous year.



Indie author incomes are higher than trade-published author incomes and rising fast

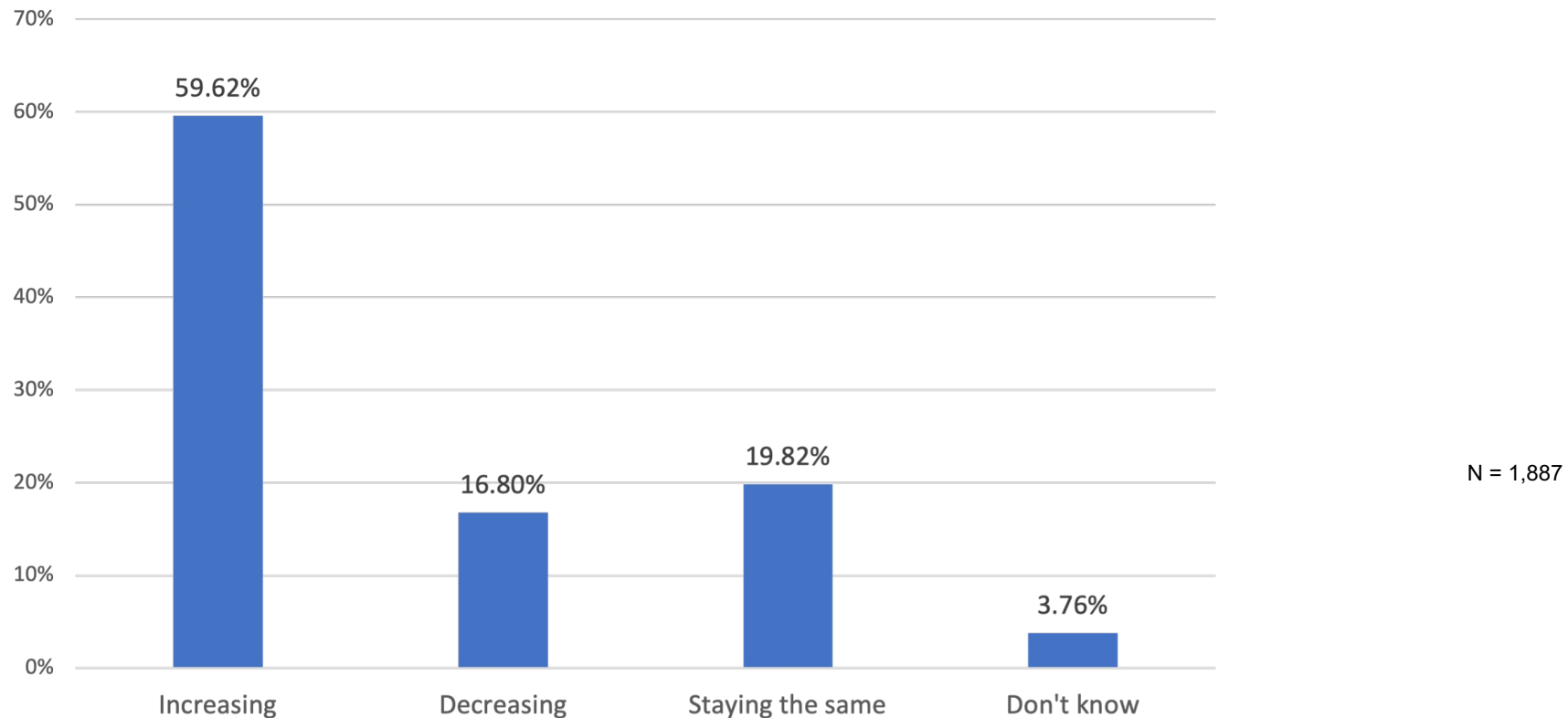


- 43.8% recorded revenue over \$20,000 and 28% over \$50,000
- The median writing and self-publishing-related income in 2022 of all self-publishers responding was **\$12,749, a 53% increase** on the previous year.
- 60% of respondents indicated that their self-publishing income had increased in the past year. Only 17% reported a decrease (potentially linked to post-covid slump).
- Anecdotally, when we asked for respondents who were spending 50% or more of their time on publishing-related activities, some authors told us, 'I'm already making \$12k a year with less than 50% of my time.'

Median incomes rising at 53% year on year.



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Traditionally published author incomes are low and (mostly) falling



2022: Australia: National Survey of Australian Book Authors:
US\$12,120 (A\$18,200), up 3% per year over 7 years.

2022: UK: Authors Licensing & Collecting Society (ALCS):
US\$8,600 (£7,000), down 38.2% (in real terms) since 2018. Down 60% in the last 15 years.

2018: Canada: Writers' Union of Canada
US\$6990 (C\$9,380) down 27% since 2015, and 78% down on 1998.

2018: US: Author's Guild
US\$6,080 down 42% from 2009 (\$8,000 in 2014 and \$10,500 in 2009)

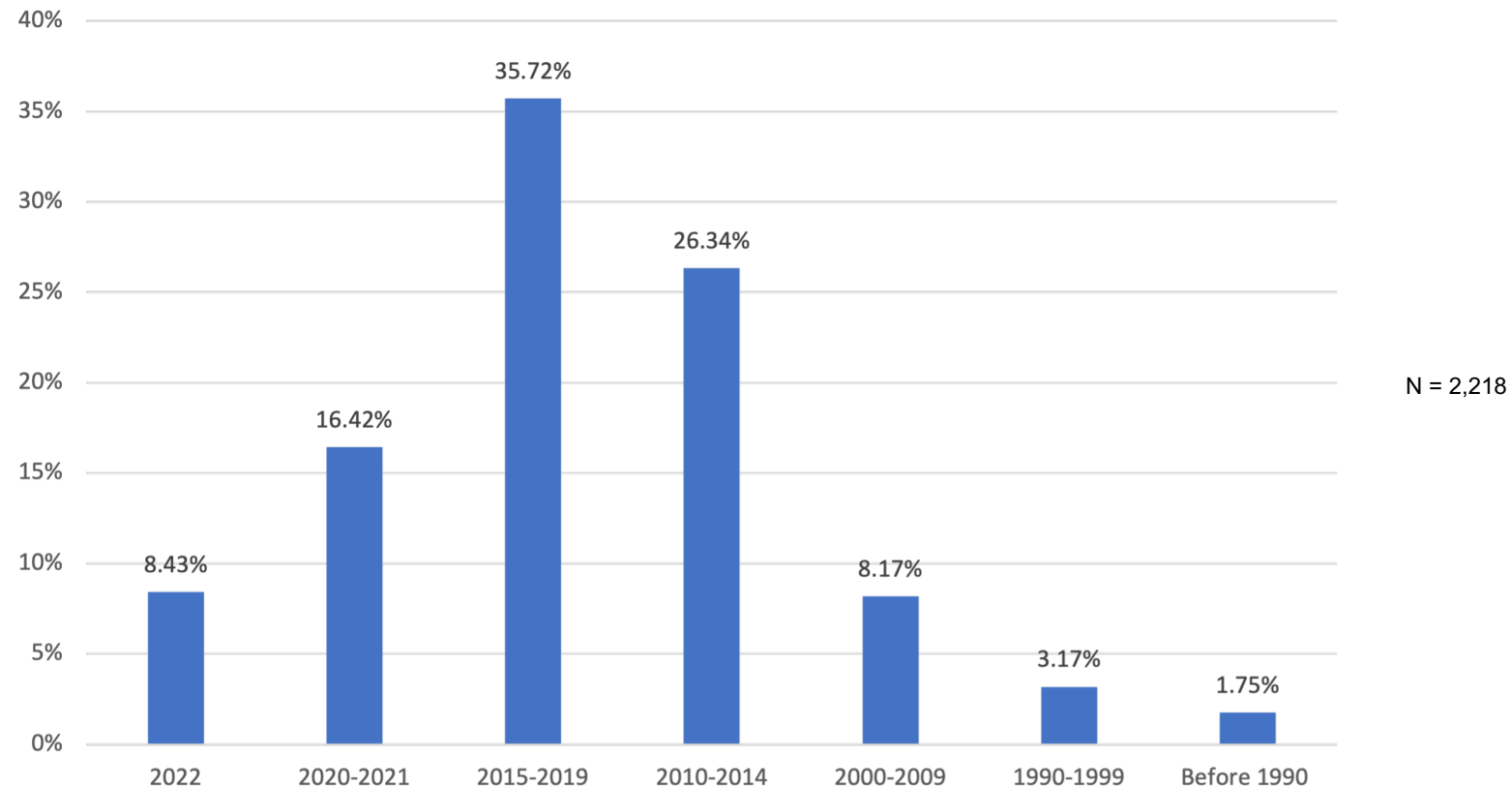
The Australian study had a higher proportion of self-publishing authors. 1/3 of authors had self-published a book, and 1/5 of authors had done so in the past year.

Median (middle number of a sorted list, to give a more accurate number where significant outliers might skew results).

Approx. US dollars conversion to give accurate comparisons.

A growing community

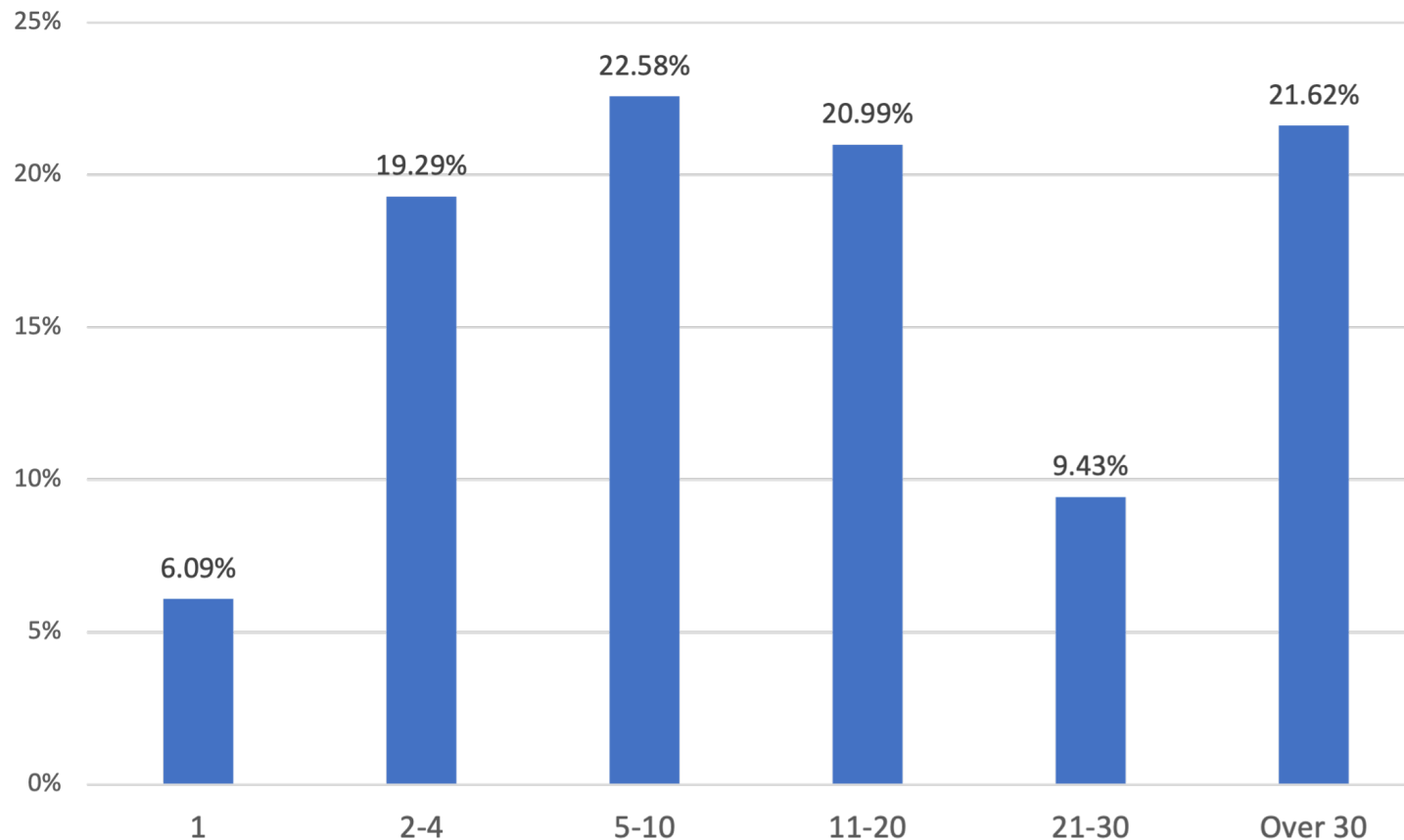
60% of the self-published author respondents had published for the first time during the past eight years (2015-2022), and a full 25% since 2020 – indicating the ongoing vitality of the self-publishing community



Prolific author-publishers

Over half of the self-published authors had published more than 10 books, and 20% had published more than 30

Q. How many books have you published?*



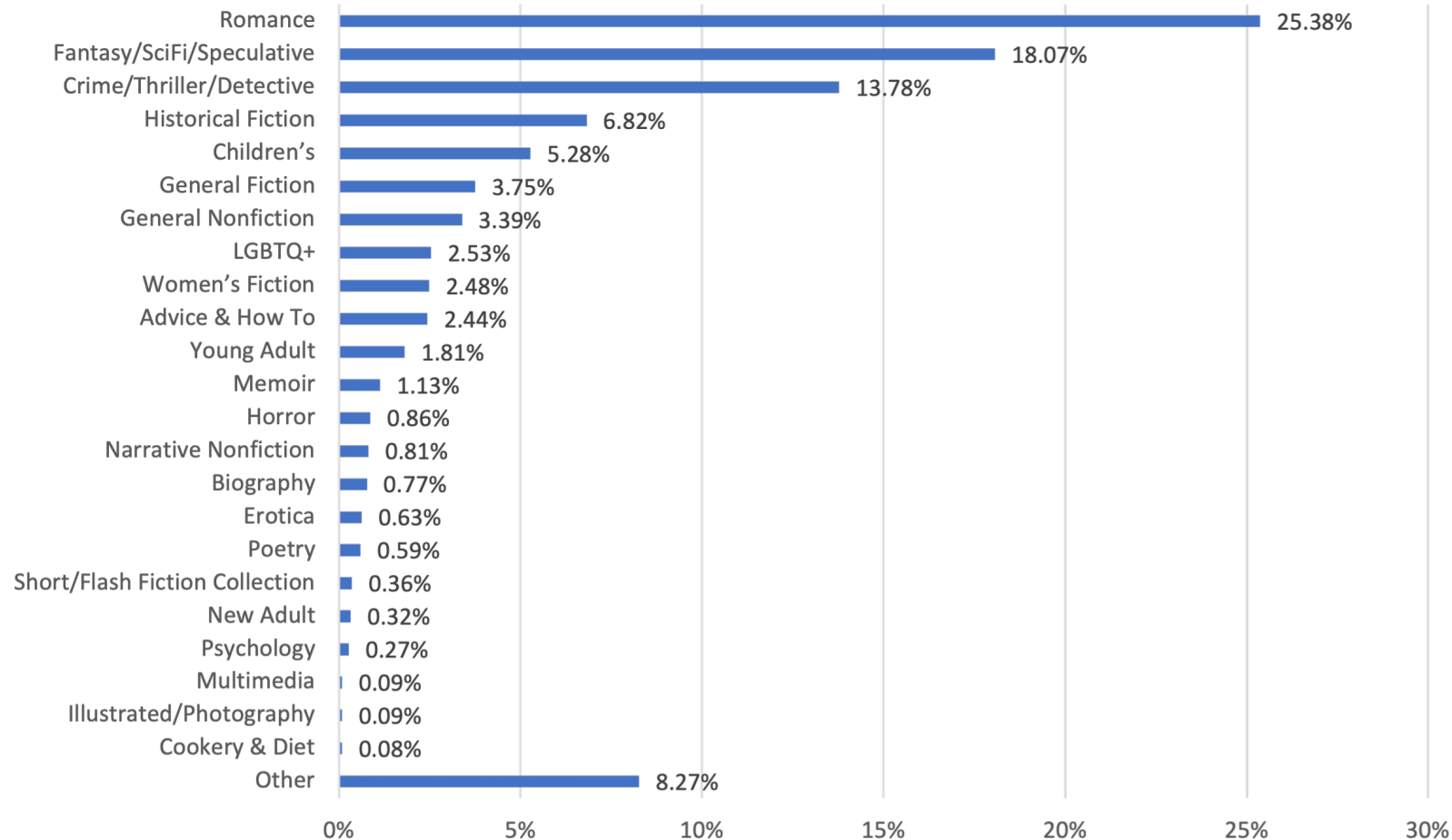
N = 1,887

*Note: Respondents were instructed that one book title in three formats should be counted as one title.

Genre breakdown



Romance, fantasy/scifi/speculative, and crime/thriller/detective were by far the most prevalent genres, representing a combined 57% of all respondents



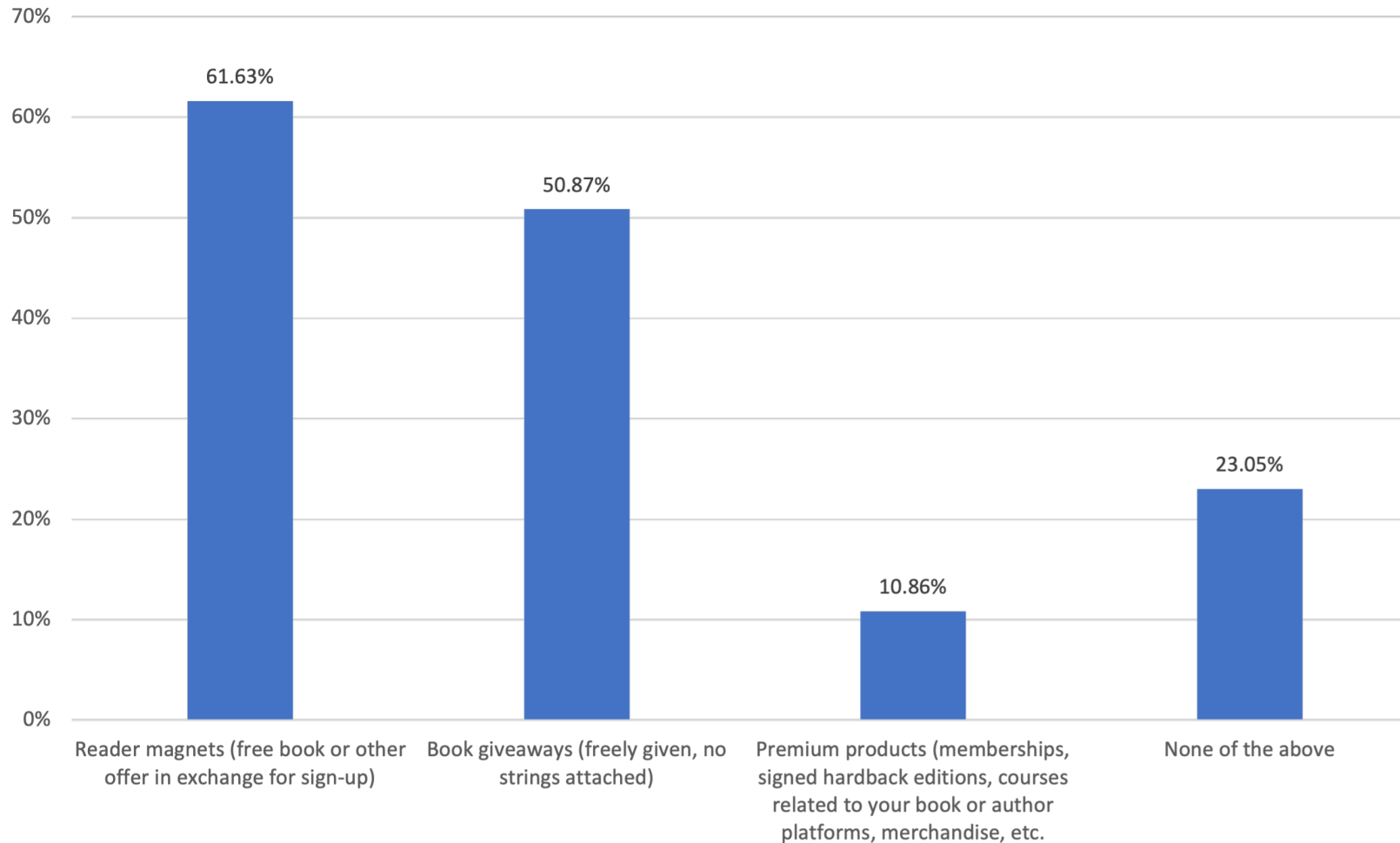
N = 2,215

Most of the money comes from books

Self-published authors derived income from a variety of products and formats, though books in mainstream formats comprised the main sources

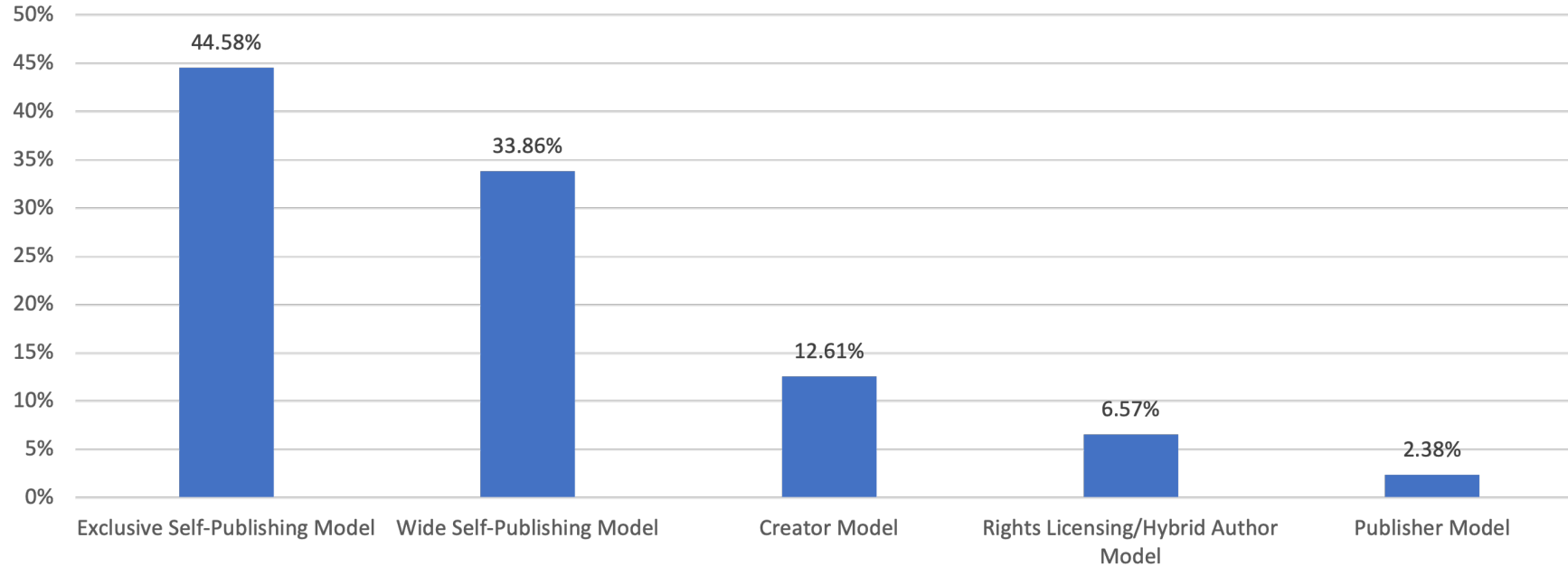


But indie authors are using entrepreneurial marketing...



Free books ('reader magnets') to build mailing lists and build author visibility.

... and developing direct sales in line with the growing Creator Economy



“You publish books exclusively with one self-publishing platform / retailer, e.g., Amazon.”

“You publish books non-exclusively with a range of self-publishing platforms and aggregators, e.g., Kobo, Apple, or aggregators such as Draft2Digital.”

“As well as using self-publishing platforms, you sell books and other products **directly** through your own website and/or other outlets, e.g., Shopify store, Kickstarter (50%+ of business income).”

“As well as using self-publishing platforms and/or selling direct, you license some rights to third-party publishers, producers, and other rights buyers (50% of business income).”

“You publish other authors’ books as well as your own (for business purposes).”

Building up direct sales (based on their mailing lists) unrelated to 3rd party retail platforms.

What's next?

- So much fantastic data! We will be repeating this regularly.
- Watch out for **The Big Indie Author Data Drop** at Self-Publishing Live (20-21st June '23)!
- Collaborating with our peers to bring together a central report, including more extensive analysis of the survey data by CREATE at Glasgow University (who did the ALCS report), including demographic breakdown for further insights.



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Questions?

Find out what we can do for you: www.allianceindependentauthors.org

Ethics and excellence in self-publishing since 2012

Glossary: Median

The median is the middle number in a sorted list of numbers and can be more descriptive of that data set than the average. The median is sometimes used as when there are outliers in the sequence that might skew the average of the values.