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REVOLUTION

PODCAST
TRANSCRIPT

EPISODE 78

What is Amazon's New Kindle Vella and Should Authors Join?

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Welcome back to the podcast, my writerly friend. I trust you've had a spectacular week and are now enjoying the lovely spring-esque weather wherever you are. Here in Minnesota, the temps have been hovering in the mid-forties, but I'm hoping sometime soon, we'll see a jump in temps so I can actually get outside to put up our gazebo. It's one of my favorite places to write once the weather gets warmer.

Speaking of writing, my goodness things have been a bit interesting in the writerly world this month. On April 13th, Amazon dropped a little bomb called Kindle Vella. A couple of months ago, an episodic story platform called Radish made some tweaks to its royalty rates that got many wide authors up in arms. Presumably, this is Amazon's response to try to woo back those authors into their sphere, or perhaps it's just incredibly fortuitous timing.

Whatever the reason, Kindle Vella is a new writing opportunity for authors on the KDP platform that offers serialized fiction the way Radish and other platforms like it have been operating. Serialized fiction hasn't quite hit the US and UK markets as much as it has some of the Asian countries, but I think Amazon is trying to change that.

So, what is Kindle Vella? In essence, you're writing short "episodes" of 500-5000 words. This could be in short story format with a complete arc or in chapter format for authors who want to release a chapter at a time to engage new audiences as they write their next book.



EPISODE 78: WHAT IS AMAZON'S NEW KINDLE VELLA AND SHOULD AUTHORS JOIN?

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Just like with other platforms like Radish, readers have to purchase “coins” or “tokens” in order to read the episodes you publish – with the first three episodes being free to readers, much like the first 3 chapters or so in the “look inside” option for normal ebooks.

From what I understand, tokens will be equal to 100 words, so for every 1000 words, a reader would use up 10 tokens.

Authors then receive 50% of the royalties from this exchange.

However, there’s a catch here and it’s one that authors should be aware of. Inside the Amazon Vella TOC, it highlights the fact that an author gets paid based off of “what readers spend to unlock your story’s episodes.” Already, we know the first three mean \$0 in royalties. But what about the rest?

Well, that depends on the token bracket the reader purchased. Let’s dive into that a bit. There are 4 options readers can choose from:

1. 200 tokens (or the equivalent of 4 or so episodes according to Amazon’s sale page), purchased for \$1.99
2. 525 tokens (or 10 or so episodes), purchased for \$4.99
3. 1100 tokens (or 22+ episodes), purchased for \$9.99
4. 1700 tokens (or 34+ episodes, purchased for \$14.99

Okay, so the first thing to make note of is the fact that Amazon has the right to change any of this at any time – even before Kindle Vella opens up to readers officially.

Now, going beyond this and digging into the numbers, we find that if you write longer serialized fiction of say, that 5000-word range, it appears that you can be making anywhere between 13¢ and 15¢ per episode. If you had 20 episodes out there of roughly the same length, that’s the equivalent of \$2.60 and \$3 per full story.

At first blush, this seems pretty compared to kindle page reads, which work out to about \$2.66 in royalties for the same book. However, Vella comes with a big caveat. Amazon is planning to make the tokens available through mobile channels that charge a fee to do so - namely Apple and Android. In the case of Apple, that means a whopping 30% deduction straight off the top. What does that mean? It means authors drop right back down to that 35% royalty range with Vella - not 50%. (For those who want to hear the math, it's $100\% - 30\% = 70\%$, then $50\% \text{ of } 70\% = 35\%$). So now, that same 20-episode book drops from \$3 in royalties down to \$2.09 and the \$2.60 royalty drops to a measly \$1.85. And it could get worse - if Amazon offers up free tokens to entice readers into the platform, that means the reader spent \$0 and presumably, the author gets 35% of 0, which is... oh yeah, 0.

Now, at this point, you're probably thinking - gee, Carissa is pretty anti-Vella. Eh, not entirely. I'm just a little leery. I mean, we're in this to make money, after all, so we have to think strategically about how we go about delivering our work. And I'll talk about the restrictions on Vella authors in a minute.

However, one good thing to consider here is the ability to tap into a different reader market. Those who read with Vella are likely going to innately be far different readers than those who read with KU and those who outright buy ebooks. From what we've seen on other serialized fiction platforms like Radish and Wattpad, the audience is made up of largely young readers - soteens, for the most part. For that sake, if you write YA fiction, Vella could be a good thing. But until we have authors who have tested the waters, we won't know.

Right now, Kindle Vella is open for authors to start loading up, but it's not open for Vella readers just yet. We're not even sure when it will open to readers, either. So, there's that. But according to most sources, it looks like it will launch in July of this year.

So, let's say you're considering publishing with this new strategy. Whom might Kindle Vella be good for?

1. Short story fiction writers who serialize their writing
2. Authors writing a new book, who want to build buzz and feedback for their current WIP, but who plan to incorporate the chapters later into long-form content, like an ebook
3. New authors who want to test a story idea before spending too much time on it
4. Authors who want to tap into a new market of readers - ie those young readers
5. Authors who write in the genres of romance, paranormal/scifi, LGBTQ, young adult, horror, mystery, and thriller. Those are the genres that are already doing well on Radish and Wattpad, so they'll likely be the ones to see early success on Vella.
6. Authors who want to build their brand exposure
7. Authors who can publish quickly and consistently - for example, on a weekly or even daily basis. So, if you don't have a solid writing routine, this might not be the platform for you to use.

Now, if any of those sound like you, we also need to talk about what you can and can't do on Kindle Vella. For example:

- Your stuff has to be new. You can't serialize previously published works on Vella. So, if your book is already out there in some form, this is not the platform to use, and doing so would go against the terms of service.
 - You can, however, publish up to 5000 words of content from a previously published work in order to "bridge a story" that will be published on Vella. So, for example, if you wrote a prequel in Vella and book 1 is published, you could include up to 5000 words of book 1 inside the Vella content in order to bridge the story, provided you are the copyright holder for that content.

- You can't incorporate your Vella serialization into a long-form content version (like an ebook or paperback) in any language until you unpublish the serialized version from Vella.
- You can't publish your Vella episodes for free anywhere on the web.
- You can, however, publish your serialized story on another platform – like Radish – as long as it keeps the story hidden behind a pay-to-play firewall.
- If you are outside of the United States, sorry, but you won't be able to use this platform at this time.

One of the cool things that Vella does allow that other Amazon products do not, is the ability to leave author notes at the end of the episodes. This could be in the form of thoughts while writing, more context before moving on, or when the next episode should be available, etc.

Readers will also have some built-in engagement opportunities. They'll be able to follow the stories that they enjoy, as well as getting push notifications when the latest "episode" is released – which could be a huge boost to visibility. They can crown a weekly "FAVE" for the story they enjoyed most, which can then be featured in the Kindle Vella store. Plus, they can give your episode a thumbs up, if they liked it.

All of which, is pretty cool stuff in terms of author brand exposure.

While I can't say I'll be one of the first to hop on the Kindle Vella bandwagon, I will say that I am already thinking about ways I could use it to my advantage in the future. However, I want to see some insights coming in from other authors who fit the strategy better, as well as finish up the projects I currently working on that really aren't tailored to this type of a release strategy.

What about you? Do you plan on giving Kindle Vella a try? If so, reach out to us in the Author Revolution Facebook Community. I'd love to know what you think about this latest edition to the Amazon Publishing ecosystem.



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For those of you who might like to listen to or even watch podcast episodes on Youtube, I want to encourage you to become a subscriber of my youtube channel. Not only can you find videos of the interviews done on this podcast, but the podcast itself is being loaded on there - as well as some of my audiobooks (well, coming soon!). If you'd like to become a subscriber, head over to authorrevolution.org/youtube and click the red subscribe button. When you do so, a magical gnome does a happy dance. At least, that's what I envision.

Now, next week I have an exciting show planned for you. The infamous Ms. Joanna Penn will be joining the Author Revolution Podcast and we'll be talking about a lot of things - but in specific how AI is about to impact the indie author industry. Make sure you listen!

All right, we covered a lot today about Kindle Vella. I'll make sure to have all the goodies loaded up with today's show notes. Head over to authorrevolution.org/78 to check them out.

Well, I'm off. I have 10 chapters left to write in Amends and it's gotta get done.

So, until next week... go forth and start your author revolution.



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