

## Blog Posts by Rob Steiner

The following is a sample of my blog posts. See my blog (<http://robsteiner.quarkfolio.com/>) for a complete list.

### Telecommuter Blues

Last week Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer launched a brouhaha regarding telecommuting by mostly banning the practice at Yahoo (turns out that [genuine abuse](#) may have prompted the decision).

Now Best Buy has ended its ROWE (Results Only Work Environment) policy for corporate employees for much the same reasons as Yahoo.

I've been a full-time telecommuter for six out of the last ten years, so I thought I'd weigh in:

1. **Successful telecommuting requires managers to communicate clear, measurable goals that telecommuters must attain.** If those goals are *not* being met -- as with any office employee -- then it's incumbent upon leadership to follow up with the employee to find out what happened. If telecommuting employees consistently do *not* meet their goals, then fire them just like any office employee.
2. **Employees can "slack off" in an office just as well as from home.** I used to work in an office cubicle next to guys who'd spend hours each day talking about their fantasy football line-ups; the ladies on the other side of me grumbled about the latest singer to get booted off *American Idol*. Working in an office does not stop "slacking."  
  
It goes back to expectations and goals -- if telecommuters are meeting and/or exceeding their goals, then why should it matter if they spend a five hours a day on Facebook? And if the goals/expectations are *too* light, then shouldn't managers adjust them to fill out the employee's day?
3. **Yahoo says they need "all hands on deck" for face-to-face collaboration.** This is the flimsiest of their excuses, especially from an internet company. There are plenty of [thriving companies today with remote employees](#) who collaborate just fine. Again, if collaboration is *not* taking place among telecommuters, then that is a failure of leadership and imaginative use of existing technology, not telecommuting.
4. **However, telecommuting is not for every one or every job.** Some people are more productive in an office setting, while others are more productive when they work quietly by themselves. Some jobs require office "face time," while others can be done at home. It should be up to managers and employees to decide which situation fits the job and the person.

Telecommuting is a valid work option for managers and employees who agree to clear expectations and goals. Banning it for everyone is lazy policy and makes a company look desperate.

## Thinking of KDP Select? Read the fine print...

Amazon just gave a big fat middle-finger to all the other ebook stores out there with the announcement of their [KDP Select program](#). It *sounds* great:

*KDP Select gives you access to a whole new source of royalties and readers - you not only benefit from a new way of making money, but you also get the chance to reach even more readers by getting your book in front of a growing number of US Amazon Prime customers: readers and future fans of your books that you may have not had a chance to reach before! Additionally, the ability to offer your book for free will help expand your worldwide reader base.*

But as with all things that "sound great," you need to read the [fine print](#):

**1 Exclusivity.** *When you include a Digital Book in KDP Select, you give us the exclusive right to sell and distribute your Digital Book in digital format while your book is in KDP Select. During this period of exclusivity, you cannot sell or distribute, or give anyone else the right to sell or distribute, your Digital Book (or content that is reasonably likely to compete commercially with your Digital Book, diminish its value, or be confused with it), in digital format in any territory where you have rights.*

In other words, if you also published your ebook on Smashwords, Barnes & Noble, iBooks, etc., you'll have to remove it from those sites while you're in the KDP Select program.

Now this is a brand new program, so I don't pretend to know if placing my ebooks in it is worth the lost sales from the other online bookstores I use. I'll wait for all the first-adopters to be my guinea pigs.

But the program's costs/benefits aren't the most interesting thing about it to me.

What's interesting is that KDP Select's "Exclusivity" clause means Amazon has just declared war on every other ebook store. Now authors will have to think about whether their ebooks will get more exposure/sales from KDP Select's -- admittedly -- large marketing mega-phone, or if they'll do better on the virtual shelves of multiple ebook stores. Many authors *will* choose KDP Select and give up placing their ebooks elsewhere.

The other ebook stores *must* respond to this. They have no choice. Whatever they do, though, it'll only benefit authors. They're fighting over us and want to lure us into their stores with the better deal. Without authors, they have no product to sell.

Feels nice to be fought over.

## Love letter to Scrivener

[Scrivener](#), I'd say, "You complete me," but that's gross and hackneyed. You do, but, well, still gross and hackneyed. I mean, you're writing software, I'm human. It could never work, my wife would never understand.

The thing is, I can't hold back any longer. Yes, you're an elegant word processor, but it's your single-source and compile features that give me those butterflies. You see, indie authors like me need to send different file formats of our books to Kindle, Smashwords, PubIt, CreateSpace, etc.

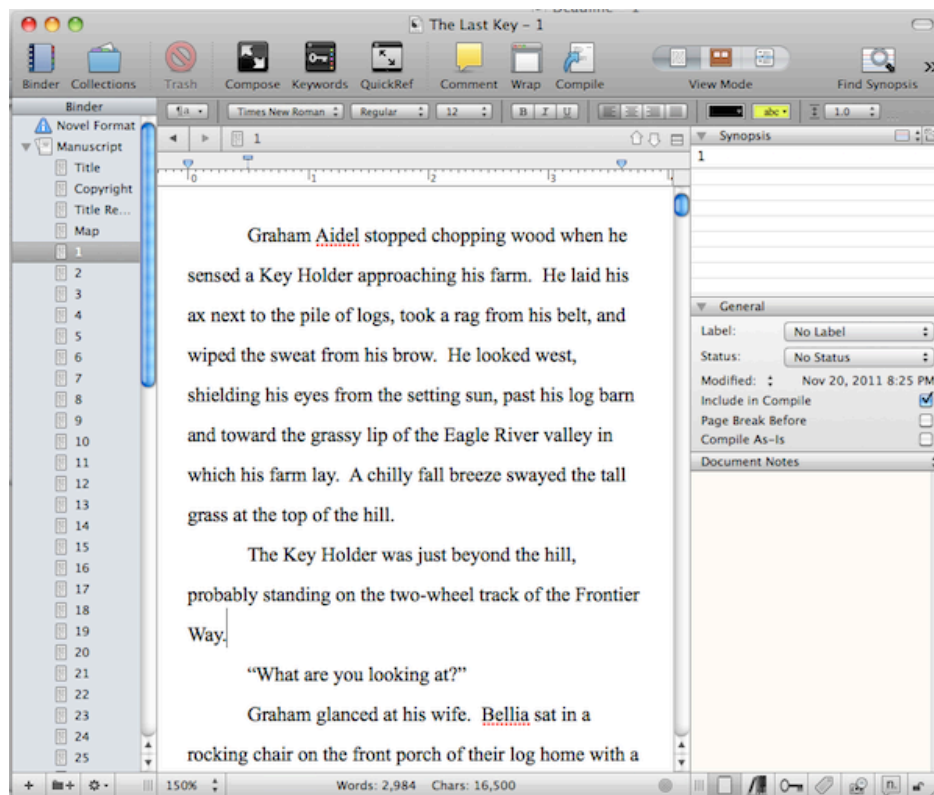
Scrivener, you are quite possibly the greatest tool **ever** for generating those different formats from one file.

There, I said it. I'll stop gushing and explain.

## One file to rule them all

Before I met you, I used trusty old Word to publish my epic fantasy novel, [THE LAST KEY](#), to Kindle and Smashwords. I had to create separate files since Kindle (at the time) wanted an HTML file, and Smashwords wanted a stripped-down DOC. Quite the hassle to maintain two separate files, especially when I found typos and had to fix them in both.

Then you came along, Scrivener, with your sassy single-source ways.

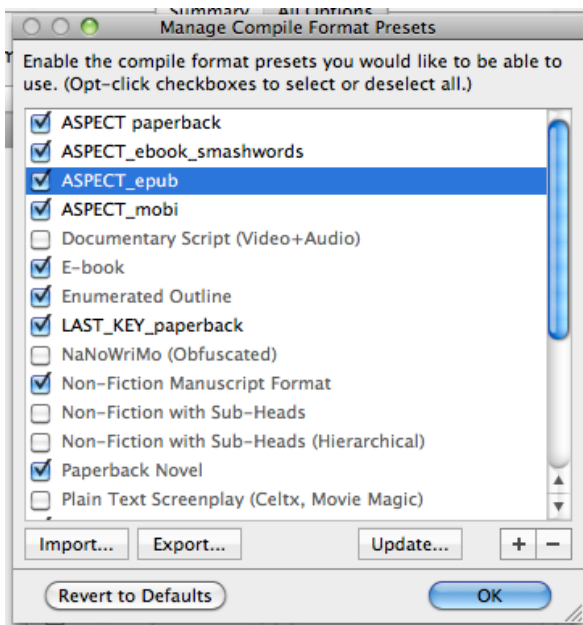


You let me write my novel/screenplay/article in one place. Now, when I do find those inevitable typos, all I have to do is fix them once, then click 'Compile' to generate whichever format I want. Done and done.

### Compile feature alone makes me <3 you

Scrivener, so far you've helped me compile four novels into MOBI, EPUB, PDF, DOC, HTML, and print-ready versions. You helped me create version-specific presets in which I can define fonts and layouts, file types to compile, and pages to include. Once I saved those presets, I used them over and over again for each compile without recreating all those settings.

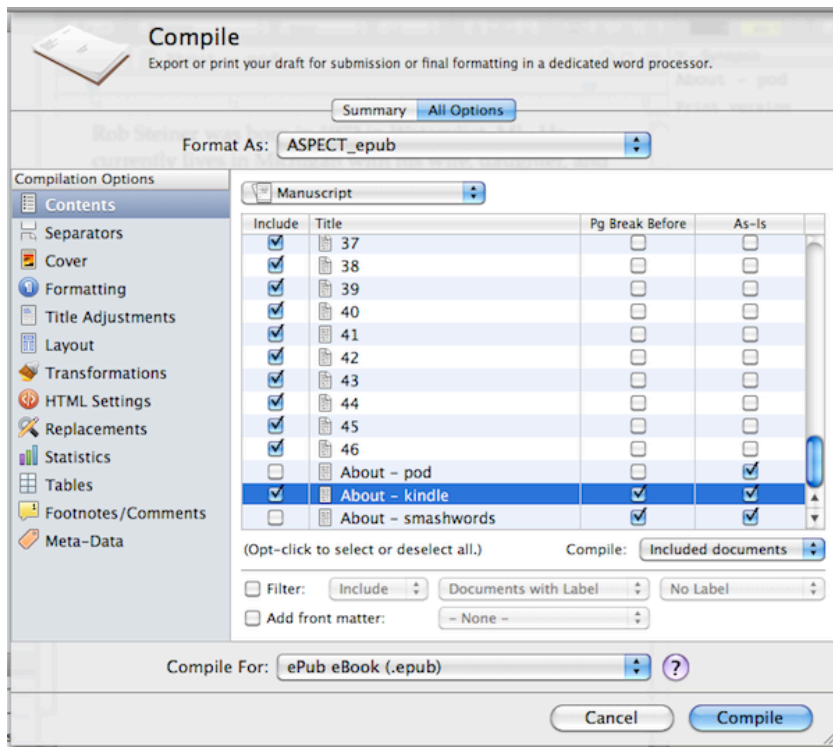
Sigh...



And the option to choose which pages/chapters to include in each compile? Dreamy.

For example, in my recent mystery novel, [ASPECT OF PALE NIGHT](#), I have three different "About the Author" pages in my project. One for my Kindle MOBI, with a link to my fantasy novel on Amazon; one for my Smashwords DOC, with a link to my fantasy novel on Smashwords; and one for my print-ready version, with no hyperlinks. I also have three different "Copyright" pages specific to each format.

So when I compile my novel in, say, Kindle MOBI format, I can un-check the Smashwords and print-ready versions of my "About" and "Copyright" pages. Ditto for the other formats.



No need to maintain separate files, copy/paste version-specific content, etc. Before you came along, Scrivener, the word "tedious" does not begin to describe the process when I did this in Word for THE LAST KEY. Scrivener, you let me do it with a few clicks. I weep with joy.

### What else is there...? Oh, a LOT!

I'd write poems and books extolling your other features, but that's [already been done](#). From your word processing functions to your outlining tools to the "snapshots" feature that lets me save multiple versions of my work...well, Scrivener, you're the best writing tool I've found since I learned how to type in the 5th grade.

And you're available for Mac and Windows. How beautifully open-minded of you.

## The positives of negative reviews

I review small-press and self-published books at the [New Podler Review of Books](#), and I've unfortunately read my share of, shall we say, "challenging" books. I *hate* writing bad reviews. I'm an author, too, so I know how much blood, sweat, tears, love, and butt-in-the-chair time writers put into their work. I know how much courage it takes for writers to submit their baby to a complete stranger and say, "Judge it, please," and then sit back cringing as if waiting to be slapped.

[Peter Hassebroek at LL Book Reviews](#) says authors (especially indie authors) shouldn't sweat over bad reviews, and offers several positives they should take away from one:

- \* Something about your book enticed the reviewer to select it over dozens of others.*
- \* Something made the reviewer spend time reading your book, foregoing reading or some other pleasurable activity, such as watching or playing football.*
- \* After reading it, the reviewer cared enough to dedicate additional hours solely to craft a custom review just for your creation.*
- \* The reviewer respected you enough as a professional author to be honest.*

*A glowing review, while nice to read and share, is useless for your craft and possibly dangerous in the way junk food is tasty but harmful to an athlete's condition. A negative review, on the other hand, helps you grow by providing clues to what might be missing in your craft, what others may fear to tell you, what you need to hear.*

Read the whole thing.

Two things I'd add, though.

First, all commercially successful authors get bad reviews, so if you're a relatively new indie author, you shouldn't take a bad review as a sign to quit. Keep writing, improve your craft, put your work out there, and the good reviews will come.

Second, take negative (and positive) reviews with a grain of salt. Reviews *can* be helpful if they're thoughtful critiques of your book, offering points where you excelled along with suggestions for improvement. But if all a reviewer essentially says is, "You suck!", then your only reaction should be pity for the poor soul whose self-worth hinges on tearing you down.

## Obsession Cycles

I've rediscovered chess. Again.

Right now all I want to do is play chess, read about chess, do chess puzzles, study my old chess games (yes, I record them...), install chess software, etc. I've entered another [USCF](#) correspondence chess tournament. I'm searching for local chess clubs on the off chance I'll get a free night to play over-the-board (I only play correspondence and/or internet chess, since having a first-year medical resident for a wife and a 6-year-old daughter don't leave much time for over-the-board play).



But give it another few months, and I'll burn the chess obsession right out of myself. Just like I've done the last 10-15 years.

Chess isn't the only "obsession cycle" I go through. I have my [Magic: The Gathering](#) cycles, fantasy sports cycles (which I tend to burn through faster than other obsessions), and "[I'm-gonna-freelance-in-my-spare-time](#)" cycles. My reading tastes seem to burn just as brightly -- I just came out of an epic fantasy cycle, and I'm now in a space opera cycle. In a few months, I'll go into a mystery cycle and read any mystery that falls in my lap (or onto my Kindle).

Fortunately my fiction writing "obsession" is the only thing that's stayed constant my whole life. I'm at least disciplined enough to finish my writing quota and then reward myself with my obsession-of-the-moment.

Do you have any "obsession cycles"? What are they and how long do they last? And please keep the comments clean... ;-)