

Free vs. Paid ISBNs

At IngramSpark, we want to provide you with the knowledge you need to make an informed decision that's best for you and your books. Confused about why you would pay for an ISBN when you could get one for free? Below are the most important considerations in making this decision. Find out what's right for you and your book by checking one option in each row.

THIS

or

THAT

- I live in the U.S. OR Canada
- Strapped for cash
- Publishing for fun
- Not worried about my publishing imprint name
- Not planning on publishing my book multiple places

- I don't live in the U.S. or Canada
- Money's not an issue
- Publishing professionally
- Want to name my publishing imprint
- Want to publish my book multiple places

FREE ISBNS (This)

U.S. or Canada: some self-publishing platforms, such as IngramSpark and Amazon KDP, offer free ISBNs to United States publishers. Lucky Canadians get them for [free from their government](#), regardless of publishing platform. A full list of ISBN distributors for your country can be found on the [International ISBN Agency's website](#).

Money: free ISBNs are obviously FREE! If money is a major concern for you in your publishing journey, this may be the best way for you to bring your book to market on a budget, especially considering that every format of your book needs its own individual ISBN (for example: a print book and an ebook of the same title will need two ISBNs).

PAID ISBNS (That)

U.S. or Canada: free ISBNs aren't currently offered via IngramSpark to publishers outside of the U.S. (and Canadians get them for [free from their government](#)). A full list of ISBN distributors for your country can be found on the [International ISBN Agency's website](#).

Money: if you can afford to purchase an ISBN, then doing so can be a good investment. U.S. ISBNs are provided by Bowker for \$125 each (hint: IngramSpark offers U.S. publishers Bowker ISBNs for only \$85 each). If you plan to publish multiple books or one book in more than one format (print and ebook), then it's a much better deal to buy a set of 10 ISBNs from Bowker for \$295 (or a set of 100 for \$575; 1000 for \$1,500).

FREE ISBNS (This)

Publishing for Fun: if you're publishing your book mostly for yourself and not as someone who will be making an investment in retail relationships, book marketing and promotion, or creating your own publishing business, a free ISBN is a great option!

Imprint Name: if you use a free ISBN through a self-publishing platform, it will hold that platform's publishing imprint (for example: the imprint associated with IngramSpark's free ISBNs is Indy Pub). This means that the platform is recognized as the ultimate owner or publisher of the work.

Distribution: because of where the identification number for your book came from and the imprint name that designates that distinction, you can't use the same ISBN to upload your book to multiple self-publishing platforms (for example: if you wanted to use IngramSpark and KDP at the same time). You'll need a new ISBN for your book if you wish to upload it to multiple platforms or transfer from one to the other.

PAID ISBNS (That)

Publishing Professionally: if you're publishing your book and plan to pursue retail relationships, book marketing and promotion, or are creating your own publishing business, paid ISBNs are the way to go for the reason you'll see in the next point: Imprint Name.

Imprint Name: if you purchase your own ISBN, your publishing imprint will be associated with your book. This means that you will be recognized as the ultimate owner of your work on retail sites and in the metadata sent to retailers worldwide. While retailers may not recognize your imprint specifically, they recognize that of self-publishing platforms (IngramSpark and Amazon KDP) and may make stocking decisions based on this information.

Distribution: if you purchase your ISBN, you can publish it on other platforms. IngramSpark distributes your book to Amazon, but if you wanted to publish through IngramSpark and Amazon directly, you cannot use either platforms' free ISBN to upload your book to the other. Owning your own ISBN allows you more distribution freedom than free ISBNs.

Want access to even more indie publishing resources?

Create an IngramSpark account today to publish like a pro.

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