

Crippling A Lesson: An Apple iBookstore Ethical and Practical Issue

By Holly Lisle

Decision Made: Thank you to everyone who commented.



**Ethics
and
iBooks**

BEFORE I START:

*I'm going to ask for reader input ONLY from Mac product users who buy books from iBooks. If you don't have a dog in this fight, then no matter what you think about the ethics of this situation, I don't need to know. I am going to make a decision on the availability of one (or maybe more) lessons in this course that will affect **iBooks customers only** based on what I learn here, and I ONLY need to hear from them.*

If you don't buy books from the iBookstore, please DO NOT answer the following question.

THE PROBLEM

I received an email from Apple's iBookstore that **How To Think Sideways—Lesson 6: How to Discover (or Create) Your Story's Market** has been pulled for containing links to a “Competing Website” and that in order to have the lesson put back on sale, I'll have to remove the offending links.

The problem with this, however, is that the links, which are to Amazon.com, are part of the content of the lesson, in which I demonstrate a technique for doing market research into other genres which might be reasonable places to attempt to sell your book along with your planned market (because in some cases your planned market won't pan out, but that doesn't mean there aren't other places that would buy what you've written).

Two examples of my own experience with cross-genre marketing came with the sales of TALYN (started as high fantasy, was sold as fantasy romance) and MIDNIGHT RAIN (started as urban fantasy, was sold as paranormal suspense). THIS IS A COOL TECHNIQUE.

There is NO other site upon which this technique will work. None. Anywhere. It is the combination of unique features and cross-references on the Amazon.com website that allowed me to come up with this technique, and I have linked to the features and sections writers need to do this research.

If I remove the links, I cripple my iBooks reader's access to the technique, and make it more difficult for readers of the iBook version of the lesson to do research that will help them build and maintain their writing careers.

I have also noted, in my usual smartass fashion, that if you happen to be one of those folks who hates Amazon, you can always use their site to gain the knowledge you need to further your career, and then **not buy anything from their site**. Strangely, Amazon did not remove my lesson for that bit

of obvious commentary. Fancy that.

ADDED INFORMATION

Neither Amazon.com nor BarnesAndNoble.com, the other two big distributors where I have placed my lessons, have demanded the removal of any “Competing Website” links from the lessons before they will publish them.

Such links are in the lessons, because I want to give my students meaningful options, and meaningful options require me to link to sources that compete with each other. That’s what OPTIONS are. (Obviously, the lessons are available in their full versions directly from my shop, so writers who usually buy from iBooks, but who hate Amazon or B&N, are not stuck with buying from sites they hate.)

MY POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

I can remove the links from the iBookstore edition, and leave the reader to find his way to Amazon.com and the features it offers for research on his own.

I can remove the links, but add a link to a PDF the reader could download directly from my site that would include the missing links, knowing when I do this that many readers will NOT download the PDF.

I can take a stand against the crippling of the lesson, leave the links in place, make the lesson unavailable on the iBookstore, and hope that iBookstore readers will download either a copy of the cross-platform Kindle app or the cross-platform Nook app, or will come to my site directly, and buy the missing lessons from Amazon, Barnes and Noble, or from my shop.

YOUR INPUT

ONLY IF YOU ARE A CURRENT IBOOKSTORE CUSTOMER: Please copy and paste the following text into the Reply box at the bottom of this page, and then answer the questions.

You don't need to be a potential or current student of the existing course, though if you are, please let me know. I want iBookstore customers' input on receiving iBooks content that is incomplete, crippled, or intentionally inconvenient compared to versions offered on other platforms.

Copy and paste the text between the lines:

=====

APPLE DEVICE(S) ON WHICH I READ iBOOKS:

YEARS AS AN APPLE CUSTOMER:

WHAT I THINK YOU SHOULD DO:

WHY:

=====

Thank you for taking the time to help me figure out my response on this issue.

ADDED SUNDAY, JULY 1, 11:30 AM: CENSORSHIP INFO

Guys, this is NOT a censorship issue. ONLY GOVERNMENTS can censor. They make it illegal for individuals to say certain things or present certain content, and if you do, you either:

- go to prison
- end up in a reeducation camp/concentration camp, or
- are killed

What Apple is doing is NOT CENSORSHIP. I have the option to work with the company, to work around the company, or to tell

the company to go stick its head where the sun don't shine, and I will suffer no repercussions from doing this beyond minor financial ones. **I AM NOT BEING CENSORED.**

Apple is doing nothing more than requiring all products on its site to meet standards it sets. This is not illegal. This is not immoral. It's just business.

It IS bonehead stupid "Business By Idiots" business—and this process is **precisely** why iBooks has such thin content, and does so little business for me compared to Kindle, Nook, and even my personal shop—but Apple has as much right to be stupid and act against its own best interests as any other company.

(The fact that this topic has generated so only four responses in the 24 hours since it first aired—compared to topics like DRM which generated not only hundreds of replies to the site, but also hundreds more directly to my email—demonstrates to you how effectively Apple has made its iBookstore irrelevant.)

The ethical issue is MINE.

I am unwilling to sell a crippled product on one platform (compared to full working versions on other platforms) in order to make sales I cannot reach otherwise, but I know there are some folks in some countries for whom the Apple iBooks store is their **ONLY** way to get these lessons. I'm looking for direction from iBooks customers on the issues of buying crippled products, and I'm waiting to hear back from the folks on my mailing list, many of whom will receive an email on this issue tomorrow.

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