



## The Essential Landscape: eBooks – The Future of Publishing

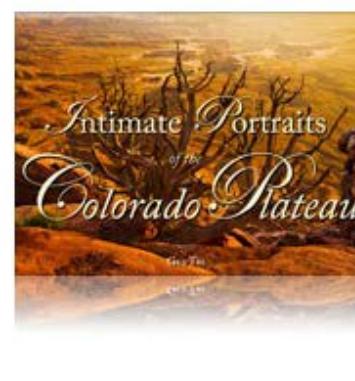
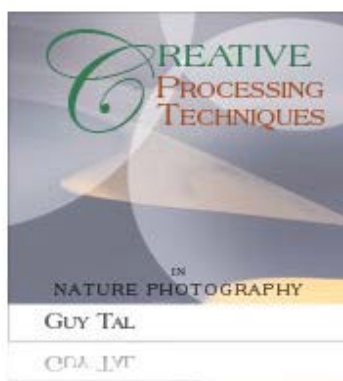
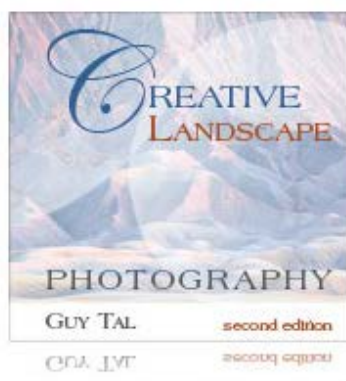
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Electronic books (eBooks) are rapidly becoming the method of choice for many photographers and authors to share insights, images and techniques. While the medium is still relatively new, the trend is significant enough that bookseller Amazon recently made the [stunning announcement that their electronic offerings now outsell their traditional paper books](#). The implications to the publishing industry are quite profound and not unlike the change many of us witnessed in our own practice with the advent of digital photography.

To fully understand the impact and potential of the new medium, one has to realize that eBooks are not just electronic versions of paper books. Certainly, one might think of the convenience factor of carrying around multiple volumes on a portable device, but there is much more to it.

If you are an author wishing to publish a paper book, you will generally follow one of two paths: publish, market and distribute your book yourself; or have a publisher handle the logistics in exchange for a sizable portion of the proceeds. Self-publishing will allow you to retain more of the revenue, but involves a greater degree of risk in terms of upfront investment and working out the complex logistics of getting the books out of your garage and into bookstores. There are many services you can use to help in the process but, obviously, they will each need to be paid, further reducing your compensation. If pursuing the corporate publisher route, you may be giving up not only a significant portion of the revenues but also some degree of creative control. When all is said and done, you will need to sell a lot of books to make the endeavor worthwhile, in either model.

In the world of eBooks things are quite different. While you may still sell your book through corporate outlets, you also already have a global and inexpensive distribution network at your fingertips: the Internet. You also have the advantage of being able to market directly to your buyers through blogs, email campaigns, social media sites etc. In other words: you get to cut out a lot of middlemen, retain full creative control and virtually all the revenue. These same factors also allow you to offer your eBooks at significantly lower cost to your readers, and to target niche markets where you may only sell a few hundred books rather than the thousands you would have needed to generate the same amount of profit with a printed edition. Make your own moral and/or social judgment of the facts, but it is clear that in the new model authors win, readers win, and corporations potentially have a lot to lose. Still, business isn't everything. eBooks also have some very interesting implications unique to photography. At this time, most photography eBooks available focus on technique. The ease of carrying a mobile device loaded with instructional texts into the field where they can be used as reference is an obvious boon, but certainly not the only one. eBooks can add an interactive component to the text, and even things like animation and video to help illustrate specific concepts. When used on devices with a mobile Internet connection, they can even open collaborative opportunities for readers and authors.



Things are not as clear when it comes to portfolio, or coffee-table type of books. Many will agree that the experience of paging through a beautifully produced large format book of exquisite photography is a very different experience from viewing the same images on a screen. There is something tactile, even romantic about the texture of the paper, the

scent of the pages and the heft of the book in your lap that simply cannot be achieved electronically. On the other hand, the use of a luminescent screen vs. a reflective sheet of paper offers a new kind of aesthetic not possible in print.

One technical hurdle still remains for photographers, though, and its name is EPUB – the de-facto standard file format supported by most eBook readers. EPUB was designed under the ridiculous assumption that modern mobile devices should be assumed to have the display capabilities of Mosaic 0.5 (the world's first graphical web browser, released in 1993) running on a 1980s-style green screen monitor.

When delving into the details of EPUB, one can't help wonder if a group of engineers got together with the goal of designing the best possible way to make life miserable for authors while at the same time setting desktop publishing back 25 years, if not more (when you think of it, even cave painters had the option to decide where on the wall they wanted to place the mastodon – something not possible using EPUB). Even simple things like choice of fonts and arrangement of text in relation to images are very difficult or altogether impossible to achieve using this ill-conceived format.

The puzzling thing is that an open, rich format for text and images, offering great flexibility and control and supported by a wide variety of publishing tools already exists: PDF. Modern mobile devices such as many smart phones, iPads, etc. are perfectly capable of displaying PDF files. Still, the industry invested a lot in EPUB and, rather than seeing the light, continues to throw good money after bad. Rather than improving the publishing and reading experience of their electronic offerings, the major players continue to wallow in the murky waters of EPUB, and online eBook sellers still do not support the publishing and sale of titles in richer formats in their stores. This has to change. Until it does, independent authors can continue to sell PDF documents directly to their readers, and corporate eBook sellers will remain at a disadvantage.

Until the technical and business kinks of electronic publishing are ironed out, though, you can already take advantage of the wealth of wonderful titles available right now from a variety of independent authors and for very reasonable price. A good place to start will be the new [NPN/OPG store!](#)

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**Guy Tal** is a professional photographer and author residing in the state of Utah, in the heart of a unique and scenic desert region known as the Colorado Plateau. Guy teaches and writes about the artistic and creative aspects of photography and guides private workshops and individuals seeking the beauty and solitude of the canyon country. More of his works and writings can be found on his web site and blog at [guytal.com](http://guytal.com). You may also follow Guy on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).

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