

[www.jeffgeerling.com /blog/2020/i-gave-away-my-books-free-and-sales-increased-4x](http://www.jeffgeerling.com/blog/2020/i-gave-away-my-books-free-and-sales-increased-4x)

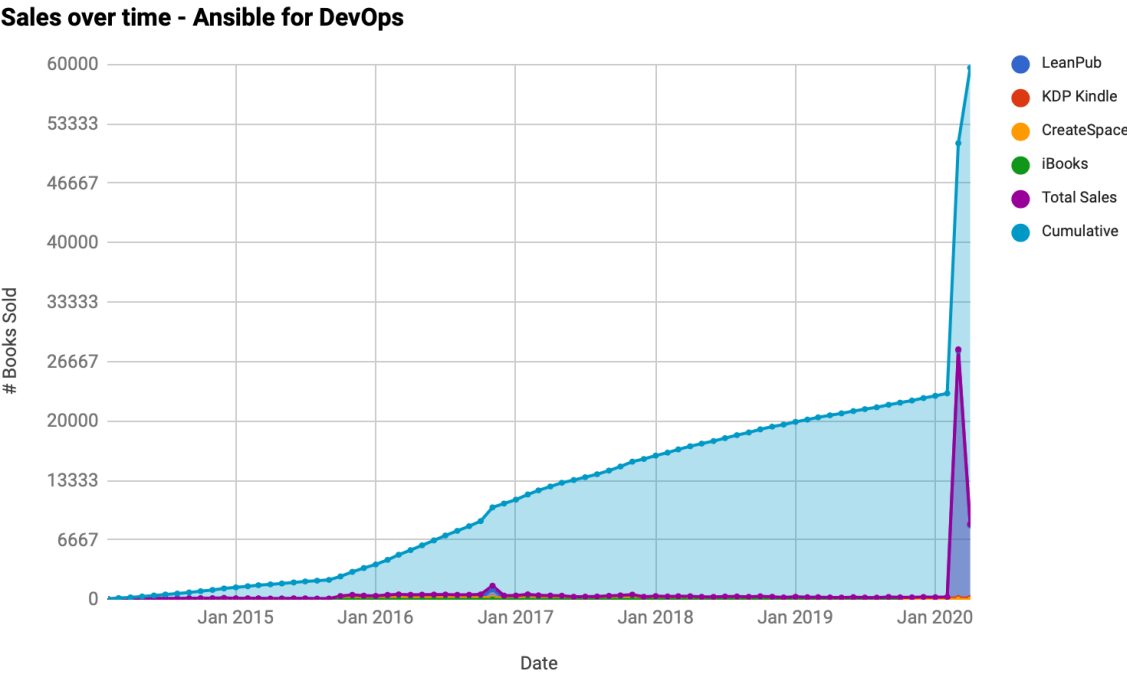
I gave away my books for free, and sales increased 4x

4-5 minutes

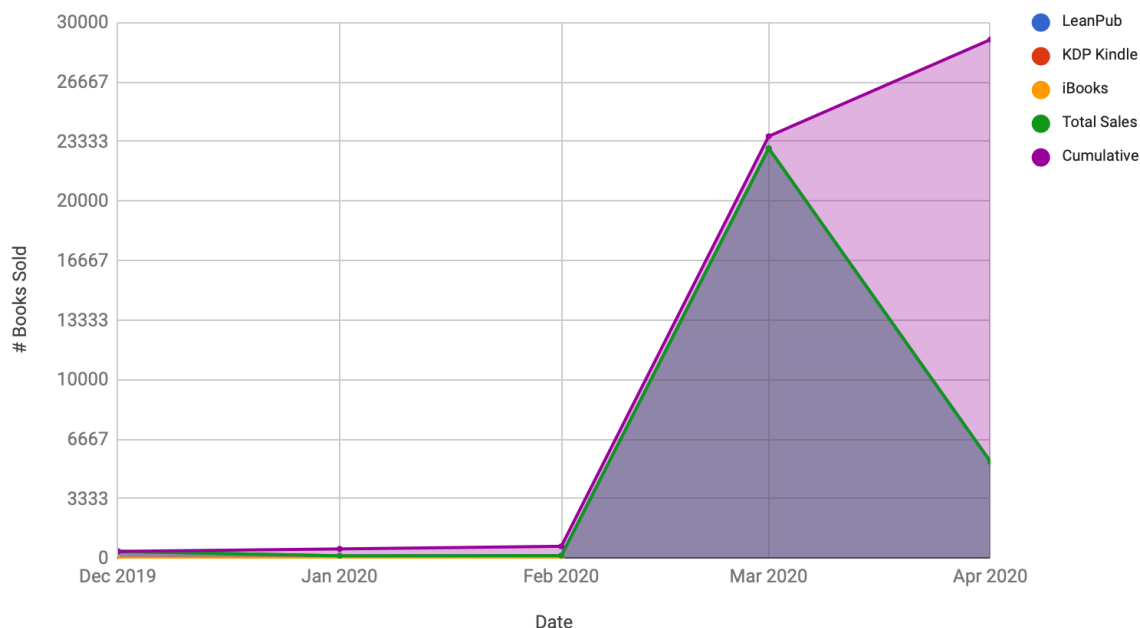
In March, I [made my DevOps books free](#) to help anyone who wanted to learn new skills during the global pandemic lockdown. In April, [Device42 generously extended that offer for another month](#).

I originally had the idea to give the books away on a whim on a Sunday night, thinking I'd give up a fair chunk of revenue, but nothing too substantial. The response I *did* get was overwhelming, to say the least!

As with many [other metrics](#) during these unprecedented times, book sales shot through the roof while they were free. The top chart is [Ansible for DevOps](#), and the bottom is [Ansible for Kubernetes](#):



Sales over time - Ansible for Kubernetes



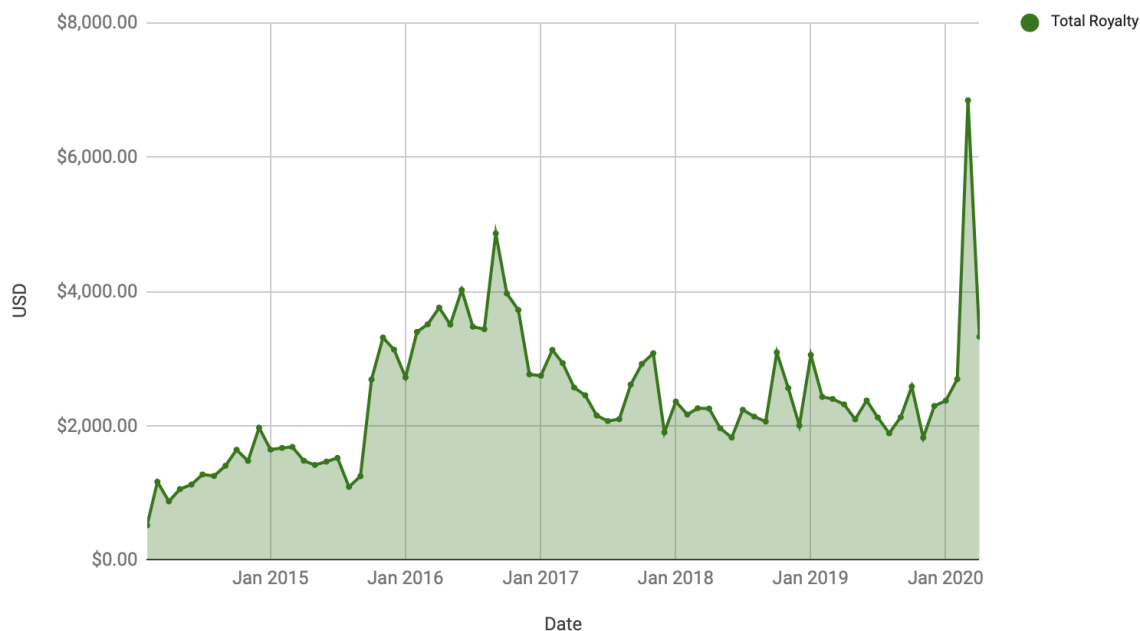
The response was much greater than I'd expected—to the point that I helped [LeanPub](#) uncover a couple bugs in their book sales notification system 🤔

I sold, on average, 541 copies of both books per month prior to March. In the months of March and April, that average shot up to 32,450, or a 60x increase in cumulative sales. I was able to give away almost 65,000 copies of my books—and not only that, they are full LeanPub copies, entitling the new readers to free updates to the books, forever.

What amazed me most, though, was that in contrast to the maxim *No good deed goes unpunished*, paid book sales almost quadrupled!

Here's a graph of royalties per month for Ansible for DevOps (the Ansible for Kubernetes graph doesn't have as much meaningful data to spot trends):

Royalties Per Month



I averaged 328 paid book sales per month in all months prior to March, and then sold 1,910 copies in March and April (almost a 4x increase!).

The book surprises me with its sticking power over time, but most of the reason for that is that by [self-publishing](#), I've been able to update the book over 22 times so far (and counting!), giving ebook purchasers free updates to the book forever, and keeping the text relevant through 12 (and counting) Ansible versions.

The fear of giving something away free is whether it will damage future prospects. For a subscription service, you can convert free customers to paying customers (if you ever plan on having revenue, at least). But for books, it's more of a one-and-done situation. Nobody who bought my book will buy it again—my only hope is they recommend it to others or support me via [GitHub](#) or [Patreon](#). So far May sales (without the free book promotion) have settled back down to pre-promotion rates, but it's too early to spot any long-term effect of giving the books away free.

In the end, this whole sequence of events couldn't have come at a better time:

- I was slightly nervous about income and stability during the lockdown, and this boost in revenue completely put that insecurity to rest.
- My 2016 MacBook Pro's battery started ballooning, requiring a \$350 repair. I was able to make the decision to upgrade to a much faster 2019 MacBook Pro that has helped me work on projects like my [Ansible 101 live stream series](#).
- I was able to increase the amount I donated to the Drupal Association as part of the [#DrupalCares](#) campaign substantially.
- I was able to donate a large portion of the extra book revenues to a local food pantry and two other local nonprofits, who have been struggling the past couple months.

In closing, I'd like to thank two groups in particular:

- [Device42](#), for sponsoring giving the books away in the month of April, so more of those affected by furloughs would be able to get free copies of these books.
- All those who purchased the book, or donated to me via GitHub or Patreon; a decision I thought would include some amount of risk (losing a large portion of revenue for a couple months) ended up having the opposite effect.

So thank you, and if you have any questions about the books, about self-publishing, or anything else, ask away in the comments below!