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Member Notes

Nink Update

Following the NINC Master Class conference, Nink produced two super-issues containing conference reports from virtually every session. The larger issues were spaced out over the past three months, with one delivered in early November and this issue in mid-December. Nink will resume monthly newsletters on Jan. 5, 2017, containing the final few articles from the conference.

Members who ordered *The Best of Nink* should have received their books (please allow extra time for international shipping). Contact admin@ninc.com if you have not received your books for a tracking number.

Workshop Submissions Wanted

The 28th Annual Emerald City Writers' Conference is now accepting workshop submissions for their annual conference, Oct. 13–15, 2017 in Bellevue, Wash. They are looking for workshops for attendees in all stages of their writing journey, from beginner to advanced.

Workshop Categories include:

- Self-Publishing
- Writing Craft
- Writers Life
- Research
- Business

Limited AV is available. Workshop lengths are 60, 90 or 120 minutes. Speakers receive a discount on their conference registration. Submissions are open Feb. 1 through March 31, 2017. Contact the [Greater Seattle Romance Writers Of America](#).

Publishing in the New Paradigm

Three small publishers, three divergent philosophies on bringing books to market

By Maureen McGowan



Panelists: publisher Bronwen Hruska of Soho Press; publisher Liz Pelletier of Entangled; author and publisher Jane Porter of Tule Publishing; agent Nalini Akolekar of Spencerhill Associates

This lively session featured three small publishers and one agent discussing how they operate in the ever-changing publishing environment. The diversity of their answers, compared to what one might expect from the Big Five, is in itself a defining feature of the new paradigm.

The moderator, Elizabeth Sims, asked the panelists to describe their house's most innovative program. All four panelists first commented on how quickly the market is changing.

Jane Porter described Tule Publishing as author-driven. Their focus is on what their most talented authors want to do, and the ideas they bring to the table.

As an example of a current innovation, Porter mentioned a successful series by one of her authors that had recently come to an end. Because readers had enjoyed the series' setting—a chocolate shop—Tule and some of its authors developed a spin-off, multi-author series branded around the setting, and they are now shopping it as an idea for a TV series.

Publisher Bronwen Hruska stressed that at Soho Press they consider every book to be unique—a new opportunity to determine what will best help readers find the book, author, or series. Soho typically releases their titles in hardcover, followed in eleven months by a paperback edition, with the ebook coming out with the hardcover.

For marketing and promotion, the focus is on social media, their sales conferences with reps, and the distribution of ARCs, especially to independent bookstores and librarians. In Hruska's experience, if a reader doesn't already know about a title, they aren't going to be able to find it on Amazon or the shelves at Barnes & Noble; therefore, Soho finds their titles do better if they engage independent booksellers and librarians.

Publisher Liz Pelletier said Entangled is constantly reevaluating marketing, promotion, and advertising strategies. She described how Entangled has been using a marketing concept called *growth hacking*, a term coined in the tech industry, to develop approximately twenty percent of

Entangled titles.

Applying tech marketing concepts to publishing

Based on Pelletier's experience in the tech market, she observed how marketing in traditional publishing was almost the polar opposite of what the tech industry does to make a product to "go viral." Therefore, she decided to apply growth hacking and shadow marketing techniques at Entangled.

A huge part of a traditionally published book's production cycle has already happened before it lands in the marketing department. Growth hacking takes the opposite approach, by using *shadow marketing*, which involves developing only the absolute minimum amount in order to test market a product.

For a book, this is essentially a blurb or even a tweet.

Entangled will test a blurb with a focus group of readers, asking whether they would buy that book based on the description. Once they have a concept they think works, they develop a synopsis of approximately eight pages in length.

It won't have every detail of the story, but will include overall tone, the dynamic between the hero and heroine, and the main story beats. They then test-market the synopsis before the author starts to write the book.

They are using this technique mostly with their proven authors, either with ideas the author brings to them, or ideas they bring to the authors. An audience member asked whether this was a write-for-hire contract. Pelletier explained that while the publisher is involved in idea development, the story and copyright belong to the authors and normal royalties are paid.

The main difference from a normal book cycle is that an iterative, test-marketing process occurs before the author starts to write.

An audience member asked whether some ideas would then go stale before the book is released. Pelletier explained that the cycle is very rapid, with the shadow marketing happening over a few days, and the books sometimes written in as little as thirty days.

To highlight one of the major differences between the panelists, Hruska balked at the idea of a book written in only thirty days, stating that at Soho they are looking for more literary-based works that authors often spend many years on. Pelletier clarified that not all their titles are written that quickly.

An audience member asked Hruska to describe what they would do at Soho to create buzz for a book and have it "bubble up." Hruska said that they do this by having the author blog on sites carefully selected for their genre, and by distributing ARCs and/or unique swag bags and posters highly tailored to the specific title. Soho knows its strategy is working when staff start to see mentions on Twitter and other social media outlets.

Agent Nalini Akolekar noted the differences between the answers given by the three publishers and how it reflects the dichotomy between craft and commerce in publishing.

The craft and commerce conflict

Akolekar advised authors to consider their priorities: either to indulge craft and vision or to produce highly marketable products. These competing priorities create a definite tension, and

frequently authors must compromise one for the other, or at a minimum, strike a balance. As an agent, she is happy to work with authors with both objectives when she believes in a project.

Porter stated that, as both an author and publisher, she is always struggling with the artistry vs. commerce tension. Because Tule is small, she is glad that they can take chances more often and respect the author's vision—in particular with established authors.

She pointed out that certain established authors naturally have more “stick” so the chances of their projects succeeding are stronger, especially if that author's vision for the project or series is strong/passionate.

Why would a self-published author consider a small, independent publisher?

Pelletier is a huge believer in hybrid strategies for authors; she believes that traditional and indie publishing reaches two different reader markets and it's good for an author to tap into both.

She also stressed the advantages of access to the team of experts at Entangled and how much attention they pay to each title. For example, they have regular weekly meetings to review the recent and upcoming releases and tweak the strategy if the original plan isn't working.

Hruska agreed with Pelletier that it's important to pay attention to the metadata and other information, especially at Amazon. She described an example of a very tailored marketing campaign they recently used at Soho for a sci-fi title, using both online sites frequented by sci-fi readers and influencers, and by using unique and fun swag bags and posters to get booksellers and librarians excited. She said this type of strategy works especially well when a book has a self-identifying reader group.

Porter loves community and collaboration and involves the author with marketing decisions. She also expects the authors to bring something to the table. She noted that Tule acquires very few newbie authors. Most of the authors they publish have left their former publishers because they were not “running at the same pace,” or the publisher didn't share the author's vision.

Pelletier also pointed out that one reason many authors chose to work with or stay with publishers is that they simply love their editors and want to have a professional relationship with someone who believes in them—especially because authors spend so much time alone.

An audience member noted that it was refreshing to hear that some publishers were studying the analytics of individual book performance as much as savvy self-publishers do.

Pelletier clarified that she is in the business to make money, and based on Entangled's business and royalty structure, she doesn't make money unless her authors make money. She said they regularly look at their ten worst-performing books to consider what changes could be made in the marketing for those titles to get them out of that bottom ten.

From this audience member's perspective, it was fascinating to listen to three publishers whose approaches and philosophies were so different.

Maureen McGowan is the author of two YA series including the Amazon #1 bestselling dystopian thriller series: The Dust Chronicles. As Mara Leigh, she self-publishes new adult contemporary romance and short erotic fantasies.

Aside from her love of books, she's passionate about films, fine handcrafted objects and shoes. She lives in Toronto, where she attends the film festival every year. You can find more about her online at MaureenMcGowan.com or MaraLeigh.com.

Breaking Through with Julian Pavia

Strategy and structure driving best-sellers

By Trish Milburn



Virtually every author has at some point fantasized about having one of their books break out in a big way, the kind of life-changing breakout that leads to Hollywood red carpets and ensures your place in the annals of fiction.

But this type of success is hard to achieve when there are so many books vying for the attention of readers.

Crown executive editor Julian Pavia, who has helped shepherd novels including Andy Weir's *The Martian* and Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One* to the top of best-seller lists, shared his thoughts with NINC members regarding what it takes to turn a good book into an international phenomenon.

The power of word of mouth

"People get genuinely excited about them—so excited, so passionate, that they become advocates for the book," Pavia said. "I'm a believer in passionate word of mouth."

When he then jokingly said he'd tell the session attendees exactly how to garner that type of word of mouth, laughter could be heard throughout the room. While he admits there is some magic involved in these type of breakout scenarios, he said it was also interesting how much *The Martian* and *Ready Player One* had in common, especially one fact about their creation.

"Both authors wrote for themselves," Pavia said. Weir had given up on commercial success, and Cline wrote his book as a passion project over a few years with no expectations.

Balancing craft and storytelling

While there is a balancing act between craft and being a natural storyteller, Pavia said that when there is passion on every page, readers can forgive some flaws.

This point, interestingly, was also brought up in Liz Pelletier's Growth-Hacking a Best-Seller session, in which she noted how books such as *50 Shades of Grey* and *Twilight* received a

good amount of criticism regarding the actual writing but nevertheless became huge bestsellers because of the authors' ability to tell a story.

"An author [who] really has a love and knowledge about a subject makes something that could be boring come alive," Pavia said.

For instance, Weir is a computer programmer, so he wrote programs to make sure the science in his book was right even though readers wouldn't know it. This gives an authenticity and a depth to the story that readers perhaps couldn't identify, but that could be felt.

Do the unexpected

Another way books break out is when they do something unexpected. "It's amazing how few books I come across that actually manage to twist and turn and surprise me," Pavia said.

We've all heard that there are only so many stories to tell, but it's how we tell them that sets us apart. Pavia touched on this piece of conventional literary wisdom.

"As different as they (*The Martian* and *Ready Player One*) are, they are basic and universal stories told in different ways," he said.

For instance, *The Martian* is a classic human vs. nature story. This survival story theme is something people have been able to identify with since the beginning. Even though it was told in an environment none of us have personally experienced, we could still identify with the core of the story.

That makes it the elusive "same but different" book that editors say they look for in acquisitions.

Just prior to the Q & A part of the session, Pavia ended his prepared remarks by echoing his earlier point about authors writing for themselves.

"It's hard to forget about the audience sometimes, but go back to when you started, when you were writing for yourself," he said. "You wrote the story you wanted to see in the world but couldn't find. You had no idea if anyone would ever want to read it."

Q & A

The first question from an audience member was about the book *City of Stairs* by Robert Jackson Bennett. She said it was hard to get into, but at some point it grabbed her. She wanted to know how Pavia stuck with it.

"As I recall, it grabbed me early. He's a dense and challenging writer while still commercial," Pavia said. "He fulfilled fantasy tropes while pushing against them."

When asked about how to create big, memorable books when you write in a genre such as romance, where you are expected to be prolific. Pavia admitted that it was rare that authors could produce amazing, awesome books consistently. He noted Stephen King and John Grisham as successful examples of those who do.

He mentioned how having a big breakout book right out of the gate sometimes leads an author to being a victim of their own success. Writers often write their first books in obscurity, taking as long as they need, but if it becomes a big success there can be pressure to replicate that success. A million people might be disappointed if you don't do it again. It can be paralyzing.

Another audience member noted that even among successful authors, readers often only remember one book they wrote.

"I agree in principle for some authors," Pavia said. "Others can repeat. But every second book I've witnessed from gestation, it's hard."

In these situations, where the pressure to replicate an initial success is strong, Pavia admits that sometimes deadlines have to be moved for authors to support the necessary process. Even though there is a contract, editors sometimes have to tread more carefully and not hurry the author. However, Pavia said that sometimes authors do need the motivation of deadlines.

When asked if the inclusion of the hero's journey structure was intentional in *Ready Player One*, Pavia responded that it was 100 percent deliberate. Cline, a screenwriter, is a huge *Star Wars* fan and had dissected that movie according to the hero's journey.

Has there ever been a book Pavia was excited about that flopped?

"I try to keep my expectations realistic," he said. "Finding out what happened is hard to identify."

He said that the job of editors and publishers is to garner enough initial readers for a book to give it a chance for getting that all-important word of mouth going.

Pavia was asked whether the large volume of indie books that are published now inhibits sales for books from traditional publishers. He replied that he viewed them as two different audiences because the books have different price points.

What's on Pavia's wish list?

"I'm looking for something that really takes you somewhere that's fresh and exciting," he says. "I don't want more of the same."

Writing Rule No. 1

One final point that Pavia shared about what makes a book strong is similar to something I also heard some months ago from Matt Stone and Trey Parker, writers of *South Park* and Broadway's *The Book of Mormon*.

Pavia said you should use "because" and "since" when plotting, instead of "and then." Stone and Parker, in this video, [shared their number one writing rule](#) of making sure that the words "therefore" or "but" belong between the beats of your story rather than "and then."

The former shows causation between beats; the latter signals weak writing.

Trish Milburn is the author of more than 30 books for Harlequin, Razorbill/Penguin and Bell Bridge Books as well as self-published titles. She's a two-time winner of Romance Writers of America's Golden Heart Award and a former newspaper and magazine reporter. You can follow her on Twitter @TrishMilburn or [Facebook](#) and learn more about her books at www.trishmilburn.com. She's a fan of visiting national parks, binge-watching cool shows, and attending fan conventions where she occasionally cosplays.

Passive Voice/ Active Insight

Understanding common contract problems and their solutions

By M. Louisa Locke



I'm a big fan of David Vandagriff, an attorney specializing in contract negotiations, who is best known to authors for his informative blog [The Passive Voice](#), a site for lively discussions about all aspects of the publishing industry—particularly the rise of self-publishing.

So I was delighted to hear him speak on the ways in which traditional contracts are disadvantageous to authors, and on some of the solutions to these problems.

Vandagriff became interested in the issues surrounding ebooks and self-publishing when he helped his wife, a traditionally published author, get back her rights and begin to self-publish in 2011. This personal experience has made his attitude particularly “author-friendly.”

He shared the ways in which Amazon represents a case study in disruptive innovation—both in attracting readers with lower prices and technological innovation, and attracting authors with the tools to self-publish and market books independent of traditional publishers.

He also described how traditional publishers have stuck to old business practices (high prices for ebooks and increasingly author-unfriendly contracts) that are now backfiring as their ebook revenue goes down and authors pursue alternative methods of publishing.

Vandagriff described some of those author-unfriendly contract elements and his solutions. (For a more thorough discussion of these problems, Vandagriff offers a short ebook, [The Nine Worst Provisions in Your Publishing Contract](#).)

Contracts last forever—life of copyright

Problem: When contracts give a publisher the rights to a work for the length of copyright, this means they own the work for the remainder of an author's life plus 70 years. For example, if a 35-year-old author signs a contract, and lives to be 82, the contract would last 117 years.

Solution: Contracts should be limited to three to seven years, renewable with the consent of both parties.

No minimum performance standards—out of print clauses

Problem: Out-of-print clauses should really be called “never out of print” clauses, because they are vague and seldom have a minimum standard detailing what the publisher should be doing to sell a book.

Solutions: Minimum performance standards give the author the right to get his or her book back if conditions are not met. Establish a “minimum wage for authors” that should increase every year and be adjusted for inflation. The author should also have the right to buy out a contract for the amount of the last three years’ royalties they received.

Non-compete clause

Problem: This concept is based on the false idea that the the sales of an author’s books will cannibalize sales of their other books—when in fact the opposite is true.

The real reason publishers ask for long non-compete clauses is that they don’t want to have to pitch too many books to bookstores at the same time.

Solution: A non-compete period should not last more than 30 days before and 45 days after a book’s release.

Rights grab

Problem: A contract gives a publisher all the primary and subsidiary and derivative rights anywhere in the universe—despite the fact that they mostly have to sub-contract out to other entities to sell those rights because they are in the book business (not the translation, movie, or game business).

Solutions: Rights granted in the contract should be limited to books, and for any rights granted in the contract—there should be a “use it or lose it” clause so any right not exercised in five years reverts to the author.

Assignability of contract without consent

Problem: Given the current length of copyright, and the decades of consolidation in the publishing industry, the right to assign a contract to a different entity can cause problems since an author has no idea whether or not this new entity will or even can live up to the contract.

Solutions: Get rid of this clause and replace with one where authors (or their heirs) must give their consent if a contract is assigned (and if they do not, their rights revert back to them).

All money goes to the agency first clause

Problem: Most literary agencies are small businesses with not a lot of staff. They are not sophisticated in terms of business management. And, since most agency agreements run the length of copyright (life of author plus 70 years) which means at some point the original agents will be gone, this increases the chances of mismanagement or outright embezzlement.

Solutions: Instead of the agent getting an author’s money and then sending on—the contract should say the publisher splits the check.

Unlimited liability

Problem: Worldwide contracts mean worldwide warranties (even KDP terms include this) and the warranties in contracts usually say the author “will violate no law or regulation anywhere in the world” for the life of copyright.

This is an impossible warranty for any author to be held to, yet the contracts also say that if an author is found to have violated that warranty that they will have to pay all indemnities.

Solution: Publishers should have liability insurance and not require authors sign these warranties.

Payment every six months with reserve for returns

Problem: Reserves are subject to abuse by publishers—they make it easy to keep money back based on no data. Holding royalties for six to nine months after the publisher is paid means the authors are providing interest-free financing for the publisher.

Solution: Publishers of any size should update their technology so they can pay authors every month.

Vandagriff suggested that the increase in the number of authors who are self-publishing at least some of their work, and the increase in the number who are making substantial incomes as independent or hybrid authors, will eventually force publishers to change some of their author-unfriendly practices.

Amazon and other ebook distributors, as well as Amazon’s imprints and some small publishers, are beginning to incorporate some of these solutions into their contracts.

M. Louisa Locke, a retired professor of U.S. and Women’s History, has a successful second career as the author of the best-selling Victorian San Francisco Mystery series. These books feature Annie, young boarding house keeper, who supplements her income as a pretend clairvoyant, and her lawyer beau, Nate Dawson. Not just content with writing about the past, Locke has recently started writing science fiction in the open source collaborative world of the [Paradisi Chronicles](#) that she helped found. Locke is also a director of the [Historical Fiction Authors Cooperative](#). More about her work can be found at www.mlouisalocke.com

The Real Costs of Producing a Book

Strategies to make production good, fast and cheap

By Cheryl Bradshaw



Independent authors and those considering moving into self-publishing must have a clear sense of how much a book will cost to produce, since it is they—and not their publishers—who pay these up-front costs.

Reedsy, which matches authors with designers, editors, proofreaders, publicists, ghostwriters, and marketing professionals in the industry and guides authors in every aspect of the publishing process, presented at NINC to help authors better understand what to expect in terms of cost and product.

Reedsy co-founder Ricardo Fayet said Reedsy is very selective about the professionals it hires to ensure every author receives quality work. Professionals are located worldwide; 64 percent are based in the United States, 16 percent in the United Kingdom, 4.5 percent in Canada, and 3.6 percent in Australia.

On average, a book submitted for copy editing and proofing costs \$720 for 40,000 words, \$1,080 for 60,000 words, and \$1,440 for 80,000 words. The average editing cost is 2.05 cents per word across all genres.

In breaking down editing in individual genres, mystery and crime edits are most expensive, and romance and literary fiction are the least expensive.

Editors in the UK charge 15 percent less on average than editors in the US. Most editors are booked months in advance, and they suggest authors request a quote and book an editor ahead of time to avoid waiting once the book's finished. By lining up an editor this way, it speeds up the process and the release of the book.

Reedsy editors work with the author every step of the way, from the first draft of a manuscript to a polished piece ready to be launched.

Editing is divided into five areas: developmental editing, copy editing, proofreading, editorial assessment, and query letter review.

Editorial assessment: This is a review of the author's entire manuscript. The editor offers

feedback on structure, pacing, characterization, conflict, and style.

Developmental editing: Editors focus on the structure of the text in the manuscript. Words might be moved, revised, and cut out. Changes are suggested. A good developmental editor will also pay attention to the audience the book is geared to and make suggestions based on what's trending in the genre today.

Copy editing: Copy editors edit the text, making it readable and easy to understand. They check for grammar, spelling errors, and things like plot holes and inconsistencies. They make sure each page transitions smoothly and in such a way that the reader isn't tempted to skip ahead and miss critical parts of the book.

Proofreaders: A proofreader is the final stop in the editing process. In this stage, the manuscript is looked over to ensure it's as perfect as it can be before publishing. A proofreader's job is to catch small typos and errors that went unnoticed during the editing process.

Query letter review: For authors looking to go the traditional route before publishing their manuscript themselves, Reedsy offers a service designed to make the query letter the best it can be. The better the query letter, the more likely it will interest agents.

Sometimes authors perceive the quotes they receive for editing work to be too high, and this happens because the author might be confused about what a line editor does, often underestimating the work the editor puts in on the author's manuscript during this process.

The service for a structural or line-edit is more in-depth than an author receives from a simple proof. A line editor's job is to look for things like overall structure and characterization, whereas a proofer checks for typos, grammar issues, and fine details/mistakes, such as a character having green eyes in one scene and blue in the next.

Good, fast, and cheap

Ricardo introduced something he called the "Good, Fast, and Cheap" rule regarding how to get better rates from editors and cover designers. For manuscripts, he suggested turning in clean copies that are easy for editors to work on. The cleaner the work is, the less the editor will need to do, and the less the writer has to pay.

Whether hiring a cover designer, an editor, or both, Ricardo suggests being polite during the process and trying to relate to the person hired to do the work. Networking and negotiating are two other ways authors can reduce the overall expense. For example, on a cover design, an author can make the work easier and faster by limiting the number of design iterations.

Cover designers are divided into four areas: book cover design, book layout design, typography, and illustration. Pricing depends on the type of cover design requested and the amount of work and detail the cover artist needs to put in.

Sixty-six percent of quotes for design are between \$200 and \$800, with the average cost coming in at \$680. There is also a difference in what cover designers in different countries charge. In the UK, quotes from professionals are about 10 percent less than what cover designers in the US charge.

There are two ways a writer can reduce the costs of a cover design: negotiate the price with the cover designer when given a quote, and bundle several books together, requesting a quote on several designs at once.

Ricardo said authors shouldn't be afraid to ask the cover designer if they are willing to reduce the price they quoted, especially when receiving a quote from a designer the author likes and wants to work with.

When bundling several books together for multiple covers, the more work sent to the cover designer, the cheaper the price per book. This method is especially helpful to authors looking to rebrand an entire series with a set of fresh covers.

This is because cover designs in a series are usually consistent in their look, such as background and fonts used for the title and author name. Once these elements are selected, it's easier and faster for the cover artist to duplicate the first book's design concept with the rest of the books in that series. Writers can save hundreds of dollars by bundling this way.

Once the editing and cover design process is completed, Reedsy offers a few different kinds of publicity and marketing, including blog tours, press coverage, email marketing, book advertising, and a marketing plan. It offers professional publicists who specialize in all genres.

Hiring a marketer is often beneficial because marketers who have been in the business for several years have an understanding of what works and what doesn't work. They use this knowledge to create a specific plan for the author based on the book they're selling.

Often, writers have some idea of what they can do for marketing, but hiring a professional takes it to a new level and helps increase exposure.

Cheryl Bradshaw is a New York Times and USA Today best-selling author writing in the genres of mystery, thriller, romantic suspense, women's fiction, and paranormal suspense. Her novel Stranger in Town was a Shamus Award finalist for best PI novel, and she was the only woman to receive the nomination in this category.

Now Hear This

Digital Audiobook Production with ACX

By Margaret Daley



Why consider making your book an audiobook? The market for audiobooks is growing, with more than \$1.77 billion in sales in 2015, which was a 20.7 percent greater than 2014, and double-digit growth since 2012.

The top five categories of audiobooks include mystery and thriller; science fiction/ fantasy; teen; fiction; and romance.

Audiobooks are an emerging market. Many people find that listening to a book helps them pass the time while commuting to work or doing repetitive chores. ACX allows you to produce and control the rights to an audiobook.

Channels for audiobooks

Audible is transforming spoken word audio through six ways of connecting with the audience:

- Some audio channels offer premium listening services, such as Pandora and Spotify.
- Offer audio content to readers by posting clips of custom excerpts to your social media networks.
- Share a free book with friends by sending it to them.
- Whispersync for Voice (WIV) allows you to change between reading a book and listening to the same one where you left off in the story.
- Immersion reading where you can highlight a story while it's being played.
- ACX is a self-publishing platform that pairs narrators and producers with the person who holds the audio rights to a book. So far they have produced 65,000 audiobooks.

Know your rights

If you are interested in producing your books as audiobooks, know your rights concerning an audio version.

Look at your traditional contracts to see what they say about your rights on audio. If your

publisher retains the audio rights and put out your story as an audiobook, then you can promote it.

If your publisher has the rights and hasn't used them, you can ask for them back.

If you have the rights to the audio version of your story, you have several options. You can sell those audio rights to an audio publisher such as Audible Studios, publish the audiobook yourself, or do nothing.

How it works

Let's say you're in control of your audio rights. How does publishing and distributing your own audiobooks work?

First, interview professional audiobook producers and negotiate with the chosen producer (the narrator manages the production).

Set a budget and timeline for production. You give feedback concerning the audio recording either directly with the narrator or through the ACX site.

Usually there is only one narrator. You can negotiate with them. You can get out of a contract before the first fifteen minutes of an audiobook is produced. You can also bring your own narrator to ACX.

Finally, Audible puts the audiobook up and sends you monthly statements.

When working with a producer (narrator), be active. Listen to the production as you go along. You can ask your producer how many projects she's working on at one time. To help calculate the length, in hours, or your book in audio format, 9300 words equals about an hour of audio.

You must decide whether to do a royalty share or pay for the narrator yourself. A royalty share contract lasts seven years.

There are three ways to distribute and earn royalties. If you choose exclusive distribution, which means Amazon, Audible and iTunes only, there is no cost and the royalty earned is 20 percent.

If you choose the non-exclusive distribution, the cost is negotiable and the royalty earned is 25 percent.

If you choose the exclusive distribution but negotiate the cost of production, the royalty earned is 40 percent. That means although you'll pay the narrator for the production of your audiobook up front, you will keep the entire 40 percent royalty.

Some narrators are willing to split the royalty equally for a set number of years in exchange for no upfront payment.

Marketing and beyond

Think of different ways to advertise your audiobooks. For example, some authors interview their narrator and put it up on their website or social media.

Ask your readers to help you decide who the narrator should be. You can also put an excerpt of your audiobook up on Soundcloud, an audible-only social network.

Two websites you might want to check out are Audiobook Reviewers and Audio Gals. Both sites review audiobooks.

You can put bonus content at the end of your audiobook, such as an author's commentary, teaser chapters, exclusive content, and information about your other audiobooks.

Another way authors can promote their books is to use "Audible Send This Book" free to a reader.

Make sure the audiobook is linked to the print and ebook versions on sites. Market it in your newsletter, on your website, and across all your social media accounts.

Link directly to Audible when you market your audiobook. On the Audible sales page, make sure your series books are connected. Audible has a bounty program where they reward the author with fifty dollars for every new reader whose first book is your audiobook.

You will also receive twenty-five promotional codes from Audible for reviewers, contests, and gifts to readers. Use them.

Margaret Daley, a USA Today best-selling author of one hundred books (five million plus sold worldwide), has been married for over forty years and is a firm believer in romance and love. When she isn't traveling, she's writing love stories, often with a suspense thread, or corralling three cats who think they rule her household. To find out more about Margaret, visit her website at <http://www.margaretdaley.com>.

Authors on Audio

Learn from their best practices—and mistakes

By Rochelle Paige



One piece of advice was hammered home during the Authors on Audio workshop: get it right the first time. From how you choose to pay for audiobook production, to choosing the right narrator, mistakes can be costly.

Kristen Painter said if she had used the royalty share option through Amazon's Audiobook Creation Exchange (ACX), she would have lost a lot of money.

With forty-five thousand units sold, Painter's not overstating the situation. She cautioned authors to remember that if royalty share is the only way they can afford to get their audiobooks produced, then they need to be prepared to pay their narrator a lot of money if it starts to take off.

As Wayne Stinnett put it, "If you think you will sell one a day, then you'll be better off paying up front."

Painter stressed that "an audiobook lives or dies by its narrator." This is a lesson Susan Stoker learned the hard way. She shared with attendees how much she had to pay to buy out the narrator she used on her first audiobook—a whopping ten thousand dollars.

When she uploaded the audition script into ACX, she didn't have dialogue in her script. She picked a female narrator and approved the sample without providing feedback. Then when the final file came in, she approved it with no changes.

It didn't turn out well for Stoker. Her audiobook got bad—but appropriate—reviews. Since it was done under royalty share, she needed the producer's approval to pull it down. Her advice was to learn from her mistakes.

How do you pick the right narrator?

Don't settle for just any narrator, search for the one who is perfect for your series. It might take time, but it will be worth it in the end.

Stinnett used the narrator from the sixty-third audition he listened to. Painter went through 56 auditions to find one of her narrators. When selecting her second narrator, Susan emailed the

narrator of an audio book she enjoyed.

When you're working on audio for a series, this will be a long-term relationship, so you'll want to make sure the narrator with the perfect voice is also a good fit for you.

Painter stressed the importance of knowing what kind of communicator your narrator is and if their communication style meshes with yours. Stinnett recommended communicating with your narrator outside the ACX system and getting to know them.

How do you get more auditions?

Painter took an ACX workshop in 2015. When it was done, she went back to her room and loaded an audition. Based on what she'd learned, she was as specific and detailed as she could be on what she expected, as well as providing information that would help a narrator know why they would want to narrate it.

She recommended including data on how many copies sold, what kind of promotions you do, rank, Facebook likes, newsletter subscribers, etc. Then, try to paint a picture of how you envision the character, likening them to an actress to make it easier.

Mention how many books will be in the series, and that you'll want the same narrator. Try to make it look as attractive as possible. Also, pick a competitive per-finished-hour price—preferably in the \$300 to \$450 range.

What about Whispersync?

Within a week to a month after your audio comes out, if someone has purchased your ebook, they can usually get your audiobook for \$1.99. But if the ebook is more than 10 percent different than the audio, it will not be whispersynced.

Some authors will purposely make sure their ebook and audiobook files don't match by adding a prologue or epilogue in order to break whispersync because of the pricing. The panelists advised that the volume helps make up for lower price. For every 5-8 ebooks, you're likely to sell one audio. So if you're doing well in digital, the audio will follow.

A BookBub Featured Deal can be even more beneficial if you have your audio whispersynced. Susan shared the success she saw when she had a first in series free promo and readers were upsold to \$1.99, purchasing audio along with their free ebook.

Best practices

- Put samples on your website using sound cloud.
- Wear good-quality headphones when listening to your auditions, not ear buds.
- If you have a relationship with your narrator, they can start recording before you can even post it in ACX. And then you can have your audio ready to go ASAP.
- Give free audiobook codes out to bloggers.
- Always have the narrator do a one- or two-chapter teaser of the next book. It gets them interested and increases the recording length a little.
- Include the audiobook link in the back of your ebooks: if you've enjoyed this, try the audio.

- Proofread your audiobook by listening to the entire recording. If you don't want to do it yourself, have someone else do it for you.
- Your narrator can update just the closing credit files to change the audio backmatter to include a preview of the next book.

Painter, Stinnett and Stoker have all successfully built their audiobook readerships, to the tune of a combined 100,000 units sold. Although the costs to produce are high, the readership is out there and growing.

Rochelle Paige is a best-selling author of romance in a variety of sub-genres: contemporary, new adult, paranormal and romantic suspense. Although she holds a BA in Economics, her career was mainly spent as a marketing professional. She lives in West Palm Beach, Florida, with her two sons. Contact her at me@rochellepaige.com.

What You Don't Know About Kobo

Unlock special features that other platforms don't offer

By Cidney Swanson



Ebook seller Kobo is owned by the Japanese ecommerce company Rakuten, which also owns Pinterest and OverDrive. Kobo, which takes its name from an anagram of “book,” is headquartered in Toronto, where it began in 2009.

Kobo has retail partnerships around the world, including Walmart and Best Buy in the US, Canada’s Chapters/Indigo, and the UK’s WHSmith, Waterstones, and Sainsbury’s.

Kobo has also taken over eBook handling for Sony and Flipkart.

Kobo’s self-publishing arm, Kobo Writing Life, was created by authors, for authors. Members of the KWL team have published on all existing platforms—they know what’s out there, what works, and what they, as authors, would like to have available.

This has translated into an incredibly user-friendly platform, which Kobo’s Mark Lefebvre refers to as “the sexiest dashboard experience for authors.” It’s customizable, attractive, and authoritative, providing live data and a global view.

Although the KWL platform is only four and a half years old, it supports 52,000 authors from 170 countries publishing in 97 languages, and books are available on 17,500 unique partner sites.

KWL titles sell more units per week globally on Kobo than the Big Five publishers sell. About 51 percent of KWL author sales are in Canada, followed by 11 percent GB, 10 percent AU, and 9 percent US. The balance is sold in other countries, where Kobo sees strong growth.

Lefebvre made it clear that Kobo has great third-party aggregators for those who don’t wish to use the KWL platform but still want to sell through Kobo. In particular, he called out Draft2Digital as being user-friendly and cutting edge.

For authors who like participating in Kobo’s many promos (more on this later), D2D partners with Kobo to make it happen. However, those using D2D should be aware that if they wish at a later date to switch to KWL, it is likely all book reviews would be lost in the switch.

Also, because Kobo sells in eight world currencies (soon to be 14), it is a best practice to use an aggregator which allows you to set the price at an amount “friendly” to each country.

(Typically in amounts ending with 99.)

KWL dashboard features

- Set up titles for preorder. All books available to buy/pre-order have previews, so put up something appropriate.
- Check “real-time” sales, which are updated every half hour.
- Schedule price changes for events such as sales or promotions.
- When a price change is critical, Lefebvre advises requesting the change 72 hours in advance in case one of the Big Five publishers decides to update their entire catalog at once, which slows changes down to a trickle. (It happens.)
- Apply for Kobo promotions (in beta—more below)
- Adjust currency to make it user friendly (i.e., “3.99” instead of “3.77”—customers in the US, CA, AUS, and NZD like .99 price points; EUR and GB are OK with prices ending in .49 or .99)
- Lefebvre suggests pricing books slightly higher in Canada. If your book is \$4.99 USD and this converts to \$6.57 CAD, round up to \$6.99 CAD. Also round down pricing for the UK—if \$3.99 USD converts to 3.16 GBP, round down to 2.99 GBP. Make prices as cheap as possible in India (49-99 INR), which has more English-speaking readers than does England.
- Enter complete and descriptive metadata.
- Keep the title of a series completely consistent from book to book, as Kobo uses series metadata to move readers from first in series to next-in-series. (This includes internally generated emails.)
- A stellar feature for series writers is the ability to include a book numbered “zero” (for a prequel) and to add decimals to titles in order to indicate reading order. Thus, Book 1.1 comes before Book 1.2, which precedes Book 2, etc.
- Lefebvre admitted that one piece of the dashboard is “broken” (free tracking). He went on to say that this will be fixed soon and reinstalled along with other dashboard improvements, including the ability to track preorders.

KWL will soon be rolling out the opportunity to opt-in to OverDrive on a title-by-title basis, with the ability to set a unique library price in USD. Lefebvre points out that publishers usually charge three times regular rates for libraries.

Indies can do well with a more gentle price hike: i.e., \$6.99 for a title that sells for \$4.99. Many librarians see price as an indicator of quality or value, so it isn’t a good idea to go too low.

KWL is serious about working with indie authors. For some authors, Kobo is their No. 1 or No. 2 retailer. As in the traditional world, there are big players who earn millions, but there are also thousands who are earning more in self-publishing than they ever earned as a traditionally published mid-list author.

2015 stats for approximately 52,000 KWL authors

Based on stats provided by Kobo, 95.9 percent of its 52,000 authors earned less than \$1,000 in 2015.

- 1 author (0.002%) earned more than \$200,000 from KWL
- 10 authors (0.019%) earned more than \$100,000 from KWL
- 18 earned (0.035%) more than \$50,000 from KWL
- 73 earned more than \$25,000 (0.14%) from KWL
- 251 earned more than \$10,000 (0.483%) from KWL
- 1779 earned more than \$1,000 (3.421%) from KWL
- The vast majority (95.9%) earned less than \$1,000

KWL's Promotions tab (on the dashboard) is still in beta and allows authors to apply for a wide range of promotions, many of which mix traditional with indie titles. If a title is rejected, an author can click on the "declined" button to see a personalized note explaining why it was declined.

It's worth checking these because sometimes you might be requested to re-submit to another promo. NINC members who aren't in the beta group can contact KWL and request to be added now.

Interesting tidbits

With no upper limit price cap on the 70 percent royalty compensation for authors, Kobo makes big box sets feasible. A six-book box set doesn't have to lose money if you can price it at \$19.99 and receive 70 percent of that in royalties. (Titles under \$2.99 are subject to 45 percent royalties.)

In the US, popular KWL price points are: \$0.99, \$2.99, or \$3.99 USD. Romance (including "active" romance) tends to do better at lower price points, as does YA.

Mystery and Fantasy tend to do well at higher price points. Some non-fiction sells well at \$9.99 or higher.

With 16 localized merchandising experiences, there are 16 top-selling lists. (About 30 percent of the top 50 are generated from promos such as BookBub, Bargainbooksy, etc.)

There are two KWL team members (besides Mark Lefebvre) who interact regularly with KWL authors. [Shayna Krishnasamy](#) works on internal Kobo promotions. [Taylor Kasairis](#) works in merchandising and author services.

If you have marketing ideas or wishes for an upcoming title, please let Shayna know. She wants to hear from authors and often "complains" (said tongue-in-cheek) she doesn't hear from authors enough.

Cidney Swanson is a full-time writer of Young Adult Sci-Fi and Fantasy including The Rippler Trilogy and The Saving Mars Series. Saving Mars was named to Kirkus Reviews Best of 2012 and was an honor book for the SCBWI Spark Award. Conversant in the following geekdoms: Star Trek, Shakespeare, and Ballet, Cidney lives in rainy Eugene, Oregon with her family.

How Nook Press is Changing

Refreshing new opportunities, from POD to ebook promotions

By Susan Tisdale



Admittedly, I did not want to sit in on this workshop. I believed it would be more of the same-old, same-old from Barnes & Noble and Nook Press.

For the past several years I felt they didn't 'get it'—they didn't care about indie authors in the past, so why should they care now?

I could not have been more wrong.

I now believe there are some good people at Nook Press who sincerely do want to see their company succeed. Sarah Dickman, Senior Manager of Business Operations, had some very useful information about Nook Press's recently launched print platform as well as exciting opportunities for in-store distribution and events at Barnes & Noble's retail stores.

What impressed me most was Sarah's excitement about the future. We don't always see that from our vendors, and I don't believe I've seen that from Nook Press in the past.

I felt a shift of sorts, in attitudes toward us indie authors. It truly does look as though they are genuinely interested in working with indie authors and building relationships with us.

What we can look forward to on POD

Nook Press is now offering print on demand for indie authors. Not only can you have paperback versions of your books on their online portals, but hardcover versions as well, complete with dust jackets if you'd like.

Currently you can get hardcover versions of your books through CreateSpace, but they are for your own personal use and they are pricey. You can't offer them for retail to your readers, which is a shame.

But with Nook Press, you can now give your readers a choice between paperback and hardcover with jacket or case. I find that exceedingly exciting. Or perhaps it is my ego that has me dancing a jig.

While we all know the real money is in the ebooks, there is just something about having your books in print that makes it all feel more 'real', this journey of independent publishing.

And now that Nook Press is offering hardcovers? I think it makes us look even more professional and serious about our craft.

Sarah provided samples of both paperback and hardcover books. I found them to be of high quality, perhaps even better than Ingram. Yes, I said it and I refuse to take it back. These were really nice books, and you will earn 55 percent royalty off the print cost.

You will need a separate ISBN for the paperback and hardcover versions of your books. You will not be able to use the same ISBN for Nook Press books as you use for Amazon.

You must also take your book out of expanded distribution at CS. Yes, your readers will be able to find the paperback or hardcover versions of your books at Amazon; Nook Press will be the distributor for them.

Another requirement is that you become a ‘vendor’ with Nook Press. I’m told the process is simple and that is next on my many list of ‘things to do’ since my return from NINC. Yes, you will be able to order proof copies. Up to ten of them, at cost.

Getting indie books into brick & mortar Barnes & Noble stores

Finally! Although it isn’t an easy process, the fact that it’s possible should make us all stand up and applaud B&N. They’ve finally realized that indie authors are here and we’re here to stay.

What are the requirements for in-store placement and signings?

If you sell at least 500 digital copies of a book within a 12-month period, you are eligible for signing events at B & N Stores. My personal thoughts on this: I would recommend building relationships with your local B & N stores now. I personally find this a wonderful opportunity for indie authors.

If you sell 1,000 digital units in a 12-month period, you are eligible for what they call a B&N Buyer Review for potential store placement at the local, regional, or even national level. Those might sound like huge numbers for many of us, but at the very least there is hope—which is far more than some of us have had in the past few years.

What about Nook ereaders?

Nook quit producing ereaders. While some people still hang on to their Nook devices, more and more are reading on their smartphones, tablets, and other devices. All you really need is an app.

B&N wants to focus on things that make sense financially. That is the main thing I took away from this session: A change in attitudes both toward indie authors and the future.

USA Today bestselling author, storyteller, and cheeky wench, [Suzan Tisdale](#) lives in the Midwest with her verra handsome carpenter husband. Her children have all left the nest. Her pets consist of dust bunnies and a dozen poodle-sized groundhogs—all of which run as free and unrestrained as the voices in her head.

First Word: Marketing

Case studies offer expertise on targeting, cover and series branding, and going beyond 'first book free'

By Maureen McGowan



Porter Anderson moderated the First Word marketing panel, sponsored by Ingram Spark and featuring panelists Fauzia Burke of FSB Associates; author and email strategist Mark Dawson; and Bronwen Hruska of Soho Press.

Case 1: One Darkbeast of a marketing issue

Author Mindy Klasky has a two-book, middle-grade fantasy series traditionally published in 2013 and 2014 under the pseudonym Morgan Keyes. The books didn't perform well, and the rights reverted in 2016.

The series features a twelve-year-old protagonist, but has a dark concept. Klasky is considering self-publishing the titles, hoping to attract readers of her adult fantasy series. The original titles of the books were Darkbeast and Darkbeast Rebellion.

Klasky noted that there is a first-person shooter video game called Darkbeast. She asked for opinions on the following questions:

- Could this series be marketed to adults?
- Should she use the same pseudonym?
- Should she change the titles?
- Should she change the covers?

All three of the experts on the panel were encouraging about the idea of re-launching this particular middle-grade series for the adult market.

Fauzia Burke responded that Klasky should publish them under her real name, take the young girl off the covers and design covers that are more atmospheric to target fans of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Mark Dawson asked about Klasky's mailing list and suggested that she set up an advance reading team of, say, 30-40 readers from that list, then ask those readers for their thoughts on the first book and the cover design, so that they'll feel invested.

Bronwen Hruska wondered whether Klasky should revisit the tone of the novels to make sure they suit an adult readership. She also said that she would not advise using the same pseudonym Klasky used as a middle grade author.

Hruska thought it was also a good idea to retitling the novels and seek out blurbs from adult fantasy authors to help reposition the books as adult fantasy.

Case 2: When book No. 1 really counts

The author, Vicki Thompson, has a long career in publishing, most recently the 19-book Gaslight series for Berkley Prime Crime. While the books in this series have been national bestsellers, none have hit the *USA Today* or *New York Times* lists.

She was recently contracted for the first book in a new series. She asked the panel what she could do to ensure this book would be pushed by her publisher, with the objective of landing on a major list, and to ensure future books in the new series would be contracted and published.

Burke commented that the author was smart to want to be a partner with her publisher. Since her publisher will be selling to booksellers four to six months before the book releases, Burke suggested that this was the ideal time to make sure her publisher understood her marketing plans.

Burke suggested developing a marketing plan including a concrete list of speaking engagements, guest blogs posts, and interviews, and sharing this list with the publishers' sales reps. Burke stressed the importance of Amazon pre-orders for traditionally published titles as they will impact the size of the buy from Amazon. She suggested identifying 50-100 readers willing to pre-order her book and review it the week it comes out.

Burke stressed for this author, this launch was the time to pull out all of her favors owed and do some begging to help make the launch a success, stating that, "Begging is a good art we should all embrace."

Dawson stated it was unfortunate that, if the book didn't do well, through no fault of the author, the author wouldn't be able to do much with the series, since the publisher holds the rights for book one. He hoped her reversion rights clause was good and advised her to keep an eye on that. He also suggested asking her publisher to do price promotions during the launch period, and also pointed out that pre-orders are not great for e-books rankings.

Burke clarified that this is a difference with traditional publishing vs. self-publishing, as the publisher will be watching the Amazon pre-orders and waiting for them to bump their order, and it may affect the print run.

Hruska disagreed on a few points made by the other experts. She believed that if the author's publisher was on board with this new series, they could do more than the author could do on her own. She suggested that, instead of asking her publisher to get on board with her plan, the author should set up a meeting to ask them to outline *their* plan.

For example: how many galleys are they printing, and what are they doing with them? Will they have any pre-publication mailings to distributors, libraries, booksellers, etc.?

The author will want the sales team to know that the publisher is behind the book as a signal to pay attention. She advised that it takes around 1,500-2,000 galleys for a big launch to build buzz.

She suggested that the author ensures her publisher knows she's committed to making this launch be a bigger story, and then only after she knows what the publisher is doing, develop her own plan to fill any gaps.

The author pointed out that the first book in the new series would be in hardcover and would likely be timed around the mass-market release of the last book in her existing series. Dawson suggested asking whether the publisher would put an excerpt of the new book in the mass-market edition of the last book in the old series to help capture fans.

Burke mentioned that she'd visited the author's website in advance of the conference and suggested that the author makes her newsletter signup form more prominent and use her newsletter followers to help build buzz for the new series by doing a cover reveal.

Case 3: What to do after the first free book

Author Ann Roth has launched a series of contemporary romance novels featuring firefighter "calendar" men, e.g. Mr. January etc.. She has four books released and is ready to launch book five.

She tried the first book free strategy, advertising on a number of well-known sites, and while sales were good for a while, they dropped off and she has received very few reviews, especially on books two through four in the series.

She asked the experts for advice on increasing sales and reviews.

Dawson suggested that she work on her website, in particular her newsletter signup. He advised her that not only is an immediate pop-up annoying for many people, she asks for too much information, and she should make it clear what she's offering the reader if they sign up.

Dawson thought her covers were great and that they were well branded as a series. He was impressed by her newsletter signup number of 3,500, and suggested she build an advance reader group from that 3,500. Perhaps offering that sub-group book 2 in exchange for an honest review.

He suggested an automation sequence for people who sign up to her newsletter:

- First e-mail: Here is your free book!
- Second e-mail: Did you get your free book?
- Third e-mail: Would you like to sign up for my advance reader group list?

Dawson noted that he currently has 750 people on his advance team, and as a result had 150 reviews on his latest book on launch day.

Burke suggested that she try to do her releases in the month on the title, i.e. publish Mr. May in May. She recognized that with the faster cycle in romance, this might not be practical.

Hruska commented that she doesn't publish much romance, but suggested that the author have some characters recur in other books in the series; Roth noted that she did do that.

Case 4: A whale of a series, but will it float?

Author Edie Claire was traditionally published in cozy mystery and romance, and has been self-publishing since 2010. Her romances were stand-alones.

In 2014, she started a Pacific Horizon series that blends contemporary romance and women's fiction, featuring a heroine who follows the humpback whales from Alaska to Hawaii.

The settings play a big part in her novels.

In spite of doing the “obvious things,” including having the first book permafree, 99-cent sales, audio books, etc., the series has failed to take off. She even worked with a videographer to shoot a trailer for the series that was featured on the *USA Today* blog.

Burke noted that not everything works all the time—that’s just part of publishing. She advised the author to keep trying different things, and to continue spending money on things that *do* work, while stopping things that don’t.

Burke commented that the video, while beautiful and professional, is very long and perhaps she should have a much shorter version for Facebook, etc., using the full-length version only on her website. Burke added that video trailers often don’t work, but the author should send reviewers the video link so they can imbed it in their reviews.

Claire asked how to promote her audio books. Burke commented that authors will do better to promote the book, rather than the format. Instead of promoting the audio book separately, Claire should just make sure her advertising lets readers know that an audio version is available.

Dawson personally advises against using book trailers because readers compare them to movie trailers and we can’t compete. But, as a general principle, he agreed that Claire should cut the video into shorter clips to use for a Facebook lead-generation ad.

The author asked him about boosted posts and Dawson advised against boosting posts, because better targeting is available if you set up an ad campaign.

Facebook is currently pushing video, because they’re in a “death match” with YouTube. Therefore, if you use video ads and set the objective as video views, you should get your ad placements inexpensively.

Hruska wondered whether Claire could push the travel and location aspects of the novels to target travelers to Alaska and Hawaii. She suggested tweaking the metadata and SEO information to make sure her books pop up when someone types those words into search engines.

Someone in the audience commented that while the covers were beautiful, they didn’t indicate the genre of the books.

Another audience member asked Dawson what is the conversion rate for buying the second book when the first book in a series is free. Dawson said it’s hard to precisely track read-through to the second book, but that authors should take a benchmark look before and after starting a first book free promotion.

Another audience member shared that her sell-through varies widely from platform to platform. On a recent free promotion for the first book in her series, she saw 25,000 downloads on Kindle with 600 sales for books 2 and 3; vs. 10,000 downloads on iBooks with also 600 sales for books 2 and 3.

Porter Anderson added that a lot of things that worked a few years ago have stopped working and that free was no longer the incentive it once was. He pondered whether it was time to stop thinking about series as a sure-fire way to market books.

Case 5: Co-ed demon sluts in search of a genre

Author Jennifer Stevenson has published a women's fiction series about ordinary women who solve their problems by becoming succubae. She characterized the books as funny, raunchy, paranormal chick lit. The books have cute cartoon covers that look a little like Bratz dolls.

Stevenson wanted to know how to find her reader and how to target those readers. She didn't know whether to focus on the universal qualities of her characters' problems, or on the paranormal elements of her novels.

Hruska stated that the first thing that jumped out for her is that the series isn't about "sluts", so she didn't understand why the author had used that word in the title. Stevenson should consider the signals associated with using that word, even if it was meant in a different way.

Burke commented that Stevenson had the room laughing as she presented her case and addressed Hruska's concerns, making her think that the author was a good candidate to try Facebook Live chats, suggesting that she could even chat about whether or not her characters are sluts, adding that she'd never been interested in demon sluts before today, but she was now.

Burke said that instead focusing on launches, authors should try to have a more long-term approach to marketing. Readers don't like to be "sold" all the time, so it's better to build a relationship with your readers.

Hruska agreed, adding, "Don't tell people you have a new book. Be a personality in social media and use the platforms organically."

Burke wondered about using a feminist angle to discuss the word *slut*. For example, she suggested the author write some essays and blogs about the use of the word from a feminist perspective to generate interest, perhaps in the humor column in Huffington Post.

In terms of finding and targeting her audience, Dawson suggested creating a series of adsets on Facebook targeting different types of readers and see which ones work. He also agreed that Facebook Live could be a good opportunity for this author as it has a great organic reach at the moment.

From the audience, editor Deb Workman commented about the packaging/positioning of the series. She loved the idea for the novels but felt a disconnect between the concept and the covers. Workman advised authors to think like a publisher and consider the books from the readers' perspective when doing the packaging for books.

Case 6: Time-traveling SEALs swim for it

Sandra McDonald has a series about time-traveling Navy Seals who get caught up in historic events, and sought advice from the panel—with everything.

Dawson commented that her covers didn't say Navy Seal or Time Travel to him, and pointed out that she didn't have a newsletter sign-up on her website. He suggested a website redesign with fewer links. He mentioned the universal books links at Draft 2 Digital, which is one slick way to send people to the correct store, without a long list of links.

Hruska commented that the author's 5,000 followers on Twitter was impressive, but asked what she did with Twitter. For example, did she talk about the fact that she was once in the military? This is unique and would tie in with her series. Hruska also agreed on the importance

of getting covers right. An audience member suggested the author take a look at science fiction covers and the TV series *Stargate* for ideas.

Case 7: Overwhelmed with options

Author Kate Freiman walked away from traditional publishing before self publishing was a viable option, because the kinds of stories she wanted to write weren't what publishers wanted.

She asked the panel for advice on how to re-introduce herself to the market as she releases a series of light paranormal romances set in an unusual small town. She also noted that pacing releases will be an issue as she is not prolific.

Dawson mentioned Reedsy, which is a vetted marketplace where authors are matched with vendors. Hruska mentioned that Jon Fine had set up consulting firm to help with that problem authors face, too.

Burke commented that hiring the right professionals is a challenge and we authors have so little time. When you take on the responsibility of being your own publisher, you need to figure out what you're good at and outsource the others, choosing people who have a solid track record.

Maureen McGowan is the author of two YA series including the Amazon #1 bestselling dystopian thriller series: The Dust Chronicles. As Mara Leigh, she self-publishes new adult contemporary romance and short erotic fantasies. Aside from her love of books, she's passionate about films, fine handcrafted objects and shoes. She lives in Toronto, where she attends the film festival every year. You can find more about her online at MaureenMcGowan.com or MaraLeigh.com.

Building a Successful Author Platform

Tips and tools to boost engagement and visibility

By Mary Lee Woods



Online marketing can be overwhelming. So much to do, so many options ... and so little time.

At this year's conference, NINC attendees were privileged to hear from Fauzia Burke, an expert in the field of online marketing, and Founder and President of FSB Associates. She is also the author of *Online Marketing for Busy Authors*.

Burke is not only an expert who knows the business inside and out, but she is also skilled at breaking it down to a simple approach that provides focus for authors who must make time to both write *and* market their books.

Her formula is:

DESIGN
+ ENGAGEMENT
+ VISIBILITY
= BOOK MARKETING SUCCESS

Design: Going beyond cover art

Design can cover several areas: photos, book jackets, websites, social media assets, and graphics. It's very important to make sure that you have a consistent and professional brand in all elements of design.

A Princeton study revealed that first impressions happen in only a tenth of a second. Your photos should always be high-quality and appropriate to the venue. Burke shared before and after website redesigns for two of her company's clients, author Sue Grafton and author/military technology expert, Dan Ward.

Burke noted that your website is often your reader's first impression, so if your website looks as professional as possible, people are more willing to trust that your work will be high-quality.

Also, it's important to include images on your website and in other forms of visual

marketing. Research tells us that content with images receives 94 percent more attention and is 40 percent more likely to be shared.

Some great free tools for images and creating graphics are:

- Pablo.buffer.com
- Canva.com, which offers easy automatic photo sizing for various social media needs

Commonly used stock photo sites such as iStock and Shutterstock have excellent images, but Burke suggested also considering depositphotos.com. This site offers images and graphics that don't expire and often specials are available such as 100 images for \$39. She suggests batching your time on image searches to be more efficient.

Engagement: Everywhere you reach readers

Engagement includes your mailing list, social media, and videos. In Burke's opinion, your mailing list is your goldmine. It is by far the most important marketing tool you have, and she recommends you make it your top priority.

Burke often sees open rates of 40 to 60 percent, which is an amazing response compared to other industries. Also, the more engaged someone is, the more likely they are to buy.

However, it's very important not to be in perpetual "launch mode." In other words, don't use your mailing list simply to announce new books or special offers. Your goal should be to educate and entertain your subscribers so that they look forward to your news.

Also—we all know this, but just a reminder—do not sign up people without their permission, and all newsletters should offer an option to unsubscribe.

There are several mailing list services available, but the most popular seems to be Mail Chimp. Burke recommended it as one of the easiest and most robust options. Mail Chimp offers good analytics and is free if your list is under 2,000.

As your list increases, paid versions are available. Your mailing list sign-up should be very prominent on your website and it should be easy for readers to subscribe. Though you may feel negative about pop-ups, as did most of people in the room, Burke revealed that they are "crazy effective" and can increase signups by 100 percent.

An easy tool that works well with WordPress is mailmunch.com, which has settings that allow you to drag and drop your pop-up onto the page and also to schedule the pop-up at three, five, or ten seconds in.

After your mailing list, social media comes next in terms of engagement. It should be used to drive traffic to your website, connect with influencers, and help you be likable.

Though social media is very important, it can also be time-consuming. Burke's suggestion was for authors to pick two to three social media platforms they enjoy and stick to these.

You should also make sure your audience is there. It's important to be where your readers are and that vary from genre to genre. In all forms of social media, focus more on relationships and making connections than on selling books.

"People will hire you, work with you, and buy from you only if they like and trust you," Burke said, and likable people:

- Ask questions
- Are honest

- Don't seek attention
- Are consistent
- Smile

Burke advises authors not to chase numbers when looking at engagement, but rather to use the analytics available to them (Google Analytics, Facebook Insights, Twitter Analytics, etc.) to find out what's working.

Visibility

Visibility includes publicity, advertising, distribution, and events. In distinguishing between publicity and advertising, Burke described publicity as the fine art of begging. When you advertise, you pay for space and control the message and the timing. With publicity, you don't pay, and you don't have control of those things.

Blogging remains one of the most effective publicity tools. Reach out to bloggers for interviews, reviews, and feature articles. Your own blog works to drive website traffic, showcase your skills, build credibility, and help you find a distribution partner.

Places to post your blog:

- Your website/blog
- LinkedIn
- [Medium.com](https://medium.com)—a new online platform created by Twitter founders, Ev Williams and Biz Stone, and is currently getting a lot of buzz.
- Larger sites/blogs—When reaching out to bigger sites and other bloggers, it's important to know their beat. Also, don't simply focus on traffic. It can be more important to find the right match than to be on the highest-traffic site.

When you do make contact, do your best to make things easy. Create a professional post and make sure your biggest line is in the top. Send your information in plenty of time and then follow-up with an email to make sure they've received it.

Follow-up again two weeks later and keep the relationship going. You might begin your efforts by making a list of people who would be likely to cover your book.

One great Google search trick find potential connections is to search similar authors by "Author Name" "Book Title" and "Book Review" or "Interview" and then check your search results. This is an easy way to find those people who might review your books or be interested in an interview or a post.

Once you have the results, take a look at their site/blog and then if you believe they might be interested, contact them. Be sure to let them know why you're contacting them and also mention something personal about their site.

Final tips from this info-packed session included: take time to audit your online presence (website, blog, online profiles, social media, etc.), set up an editorial calendar, and remember what worked yesterday may not work today.

Fauzia Burke was a wealth of information and we look forward to hearing more from her in the future on this ever-changing effort of marketing to readers. For a list of her favorite digital tools, sign up for updates at www.FauziaBurke.com

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Building Your Business With Facebook

How to use Facebook to build your list and turn readers into fans

By Pam McCutcheon



Many people are afraid to try Facebook ads because they fear wasting money, not having the time, or not understanding the technology. However, since Facebook is great at building mailing lists and selling books, Mark Dawson detailed his four-step program to help you overcome these fears.

It might help to understand how Dawson has become successful. He started out traditionally published in 2001 with no promotion, no marketing, no contact with readers, and unearned advances. The books faded away, and he gave up.

When Dawson learned about indie publishing, he started writing again and self-published a book in 2012 with no idea how to sell and no way of getting noticed. He had only five people on his mailing list—all friends and family.

BookBub came on the scene in January 2013, and he realized they were building a list of readers who wanted to be on their list, and that BookBub was able to harness that list for big sales. He decided to create his own personal BookBub.

To do this, Dawson offered a permafree book and offered another free book in exchange for the reader's email address. He then used KDP Select free days, and advertised with Freebooksy, BookBub, and others to get new readers.

As a result, his list grew to 2000 members. In January 2014, he added Facebook advertising into the mix, offered a "Starter Library" of two novels (the first books in two series) and two novellas, added Calls to Action on his product page and website, became active in social media, and started to advertise on Facebook. This increased his mailing list to 15,000 members, and he had his first five-figure month.

In January 2015, he ramped up advertising for subscribers, did joint promotion with other authors, and used every tool at his disposal to advertise for sales. Now he has almost 52,000 people on his mailing list.



Dawson said he has never dipped below five figures per month since his first month at that level, and he has had three months earning six figures. That's the power of a mailing list.

Why else do you need a mailing list?

- To enhance launch strategies
- To cross-sell other books
- To create a pool of readers for Advance Teams
- To find beta readers
- To ask for reviews
- To provide a powerful basis to create Facebook custom and lookalike audiences
- Amazon and other vendors won't provide customer information.

Four-step process to build your list with Facebook ads:

1. Provide an incentive. Give the reader something free and interesting in exchange for their email address. By doing this, Dawson increased his sign-up rate by over 500 percent. The giveaway doesn't have to be a full novel, either. He offered a "redacted copy" of a case study of his protagonist.

2. Target your ideal readers. Use Facebook ad set filters to specify reader location, age, gender, and behaviors. Under interests, target authors, films, TV shows, and Facebook pages in your genre, plus anywhere your readers hang out.

In addition, you can use your mailing list to create custom audiences and lookalike audiences to be even more specific. You might also want to use Facebook ads to target iOS users for iBooks, Kobo readers, etc. and maybe offer them exclusive deals.

3. Create the ad. To stand out in the Facebook newsfeed, use highly converting copy of

50-100 words with short, punchy sentences. If you have social proof (awards, bestselling status, star ratings, etc.), use it.

Example: Looking for your next great read? How about your next 3? With just two taps you can get the FREE starter library from #1 New York Times bestselling author Barbara Freethy, and find out what millions of readers already know.

Or ask the reader a series of questions in the ad copy: Do you like Lee Childs? Would you like to read more books like his? Would you like a free book? With each successive “yes” answer, they’re more likely to click on your offer.

Ensure you have an eye-catching image, following Facebook’s image guidelines. To find images, use stock photo sites, including Facebook’s, or use your own. Though Facebook has changed their rule limiting text to just 20 percent of an ad, text still makes it less likely Facebook will deliver the ad (book covers are exempt from the text rule).

Avoid “contentious” content—blood, man chest, pointing a gun at the reader, etc., and try a thin yellow or orange border around the photo to make it pop.

An example of an effective image:



Use a headline to hook the reader, and ensure the Call to Action is context-sensitive: if you’re targeting desktop users, say “click here;” but use “tap here” for phones. You can also use the Learn More, Download, or Sign Up buttons. Use British spelling for UK audiences.

Facebook suggests you shoot for a target audience over 800K people, but Dawson finds 40,000 to 50,000 people works; the bigger the audience, the less effective the ad.

4. Make the process fire and forget. Dawson takes no more than 10 minutes per day to advertise by automating his processes. If you use Facebook lead generation ads (fewer clicks for the reader and Facebook collects the emails), Facebook will tell you your cost per subscriber. You can then automate email transfer to MailChimp with Zapier, automate your on-boarding sequence with MailChimp, and automate delivery of the incentive with BookFunnel or instaFreebie.

Start low with your budget, no more than \$5 per day, and scale carefully upward, watching

to see how your ads perform, and tweaking them as necessary. Once you're happy with \$5 per day, go to \$7.50, then \$10. Increase your budget no more than once a day, and only if you're still getting a positive return. Dawson's sweet spot is \$70 to \$80 per day per ad, and he personally spends \$200 to \$300 per day for his courses, and \$200 per day for his books.

As Dawson kept reminding us, the key is to test, test, test. Try it for three days, see how it works, then scale up. If it works, keep running it.

For more information on creating ads or to sign up for Dawson's courses, go to <http://www.selfpublishingformula.com>. His next Facebook Advertising for Authors course will start by January.

What's working now with Facebook advertising

Dawson has spent several years perfecting his Facebook ads process to sell books, and he shared with us what's working for him at this moment in time:

1. Interaction. Dawson's objective is to turn "cold leads" into customers, turn customers into fans, then turn fans into friends. One way he does this is by answering every comment he sees on social media with the commenter's name and tagging them.

He also uses automation to send out weekly social media messages, then likes or answers every comment. In addition, he engages with his readers by asking for their help and bringing them into the creative process. Poll readers often in your Facebook feed.

2. Use Facebook Live videos. Regular Facebook posts will only reach 2 percent to 3 percent of your fans, but with Facebook Live, Dawson has seen a 50 percent to 60 percent reach (don't boost posts—it's not effective, he says).

The resulting video is shareable, you can turn it into an ad, and you can post it to a page or group. You can also use them for launch parties, for scheduled Q&As, and to discuss giveaways. Dawson did a demonstration by taking a video of the NINC audience during his talk which you can see by liking his Self-Publishing Formula Facebook page.

3. Lead-generation ads. The typical way a reader gets your free book looks like this:

- Facebook ad
- Landing page
- Opt-in email
- Download book

You might lose people at each step in this process. However, they're more likely to click on a Facebook lead generation ad because they can sign up with one click. Plus, Facebook is a trusted environment and they don't need to leave it to get your book. You can automate the process to get it to them.

4. Lead generation ads plus video. Combine lead generation ads with video to get cheaper sign-ups.

5. Upselling. Sell additional content/services to the customer while they're in a buying mood. For example, after they've subscribed to Dawson's newsletter, he takes them to a page offering them two different boxed sets at a discount. It significantly decreases the cost of customer acquisition because of the increased boxed set sales and affiliate sales.

6. Use your Facebook page to its full potential. On [his Facebook author page](#), Dawson has

three links to his mailing list landing page:

- Imbedded in the cover image
- A “Sign Up” button below the image
- On the menu where it says “Get Free Books” which he created with a Facebook mailing list sign-up app.

He also uses the “pinned post” function to ensure his giveaway shows up at the top of his page, and has increased sign-ups this way.

7. Invite the likes. If someone likes, shares, or comments on your ad, invite them to like your page through Facebook Ads Manager. Dawson has added thousands of people this way.

8. Like campaigns. Con: The organic reach for posts is 2 percent to 3 percent. If you pay for likes, you’ll have to pay again to reach the reader with an ad.

Pros: Likes can be cheap to acquire and open up new marketing strategies. They’ll see the sign-up options on your Facebook page, and you can get them onto your mailing list with instaFreebie or BookFunnel. In addition, more data opens up better analysis through Audience Insights, and you can send sales ads to them.

Dawson spent \$121 on a Facebook carousel ad campaign (rotating his various offers on one ad), and received revenue of \$126. The return on investment (ROI) was low, but this doesn’t take into account the benefits with store ranking, read-through, etc.

9. It’s all about video. Video is great for branding and awareness. Set your video ad objective to video views, and you can pay as low as one cent per view. You can also create a custom audience of those who viewed the video, then send them a targeted ad later. A video ad doesn’t have to be professionally produced, you’ll get updates on the fly, and it’s simple to put it on both Facebook and YouTube. Your videos should be no more than 30 seconds long.

10. Launch strategies. Your mailing list is still your No.1 asset, but use ads to boost the launch. Though every subscriber will get your email, not everyone will open it, and even fewer will actually click on a link.

To solve this problem, create a custom Facebook audience of your mailing list, then send them an ad when you send your launch email. By doing this, Dawson achieved a 40 percent conversion rate and 100 percent ROI. Send a plain-text email to those who didn’t open the first one 2-3 days later.

11. Higher-priced content. For your non-Amazon venues, there is no cap on pricing to receive the 70 percent royalty. So, for example, you can price Kobo books higher, then use Facebook ads to target Canadian customers who have Kobo as an interest. Dawson has used this effectively with boxed sets. Though the conversion rate is lower due to the higher price, his income is higher.

12. Carousel ads. You can show your entire range of offers in one rotating ad. Dawson has been experimenting with them and believes Facebook might actually favor carousel ads.

13. \$.99 as a price point. He thinks it’s better than free, because a purchase makes the reader more likely to actually read it. Plus, you’ll rank in the paid chart, your affiliate income won’t be threatened by exceeding the free cap, and other sales can offset the cost of the ad and lower royalty.

In answer to audience questions, Dawson also provided the following information:

- Budget \$50 per day over several ads when launching and test.
- Put Facebook tracking pixels both on the whole site in the header, and on individual landing pages.
- Don't use Amazon affiliate links in Facebook ads. Instead, use something like Draft2Digital's universal book links.
- If this is what's working now, what's the next big marketing thing? In Dawson's opinion, advertising boxed sets will still be the way to go for a while.

Pam McCutcheon is a hybrid author who writes how-to books for writers, romantic comedy, and paranormal romance under her own name, and the YA urban fantasy Demon Underground series as Parker Blue. She also provides services for writers (pammc.com), and assists writers with self-publishing in partnership with Laura Hayden through Parker Hayden Media (parkerhaydenmedia.com).

Playing Nice With Your Dragons

Identify and stamp out attitudes that erode your long-term satisfaction with writing

By Allie Pleiter



Every working writer is fixated these days on how many books they can generate. Let's face it: productivity is the buzzword of the year, if not the decade. However, author Jane Porter reminded us that output is only part of the picture. Our creative selves need tending as well, and neglecting that can lead to costs and consequences.

"Writing is hard, really hard, but not everyone is openly willing to admit it," Porter said. Most of us have discovered that while we love what we do, the day to day isn't always lovely and special.

This is a tough business, a career in which effort and talent don't always reap the rewards we wanted. Terrific books "fail," leaving us with the weight of what might be the best thing we've ever done being branded "a failure."

Even success carries burdens

"The better we get, the easier it looks to the outside," says Porter, who, as the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of 50 books, knows a thing or two about success.

Most of us have learned the hard way that there will always be those willing to throw darts at our careers. "So put on your protective gear like an athlete," advises Porter, "and get ready for the hits of the game. Hits are part of a any career, especially a successful one. Don't view a hit as a lack of success."

But what does that protective gear look like? How does a smart author survive in a world of sales numbers, rejection and rewrite letters, Amazon rankings, and review trolls?

The key, according to Porter, is to define the life we want as a storyteller. We need to spend more time focusing on creating a life that is best for us instead of just numbers.

Quoting Ray Bradbury from *Zen and the Art of Writing*, Porter reminded us of this: "Zest. Gusto. How rarely one hears these words used. How rarely do we see people living, or for that matter, creating, by them. Yet if I were asked to name the most important items in a writer's makeup, the things that shape his material and rush him along the road he wants to go, I would

only warn him to look to his zest, see to his gusto.”

The muse dragon

Many authors talk of their muse, but Porter envisions hers as a dragon. “I’ve needed to learn what the dragon will and won’t tolerate. I’ve dealt with the responsibility of living with this creature and its nature.”

Porter said a muse wants to be recognized for what it is. “It’s more than a job, it’s a magic, mythic thing. Your dragon wants to be told it’s great. You’re great. That’s why bad reviews sting so much—but we don’t always remember it’s about the story, not about us.”

It’s wise, then, to tend to your dragon. Feed yourself: make time to play, ensure you have sufficient emotional and production margins, give yourself permission to step away from things that don’t feel “right.” Simply put: have a life, not just a career.

“Don’t live most of your career in your books,” warns Porter.

Redefining success

Few of us are willing to recognize the tension inherent in what we do. The truth is that success costs and often hurts, and outsiders often only see the success and not the price.

It’s an ongoing challenge—and continual trap—to marry creativity with commercial success. How do you define “success” for yourself?

“Don’t covet your neighbor’s dragon,” warns Porter. If we fall into the comparison trap, nothing we do will be good enough because there’s always someone farther down the spectrum.

Instead, take the time and attention to define your own version of success. Identify it as clearly as you can so you know you’ve reached it—and be aware that external measures won’t work. Instead, set out to be the person you’re supposed to be, writing what you’re supposed to write.

Porter challenges us to “fight for the career that’s yours, filled with things that fascinate you. Be aware of the market, but give readers your unique voice to reach your unique segment of today’s diverse readership.”

Take the time to think about this so you can harness the accomplishment.

Today’s powerful possibilities

The best news of all is that today’s market really can allow a writer to create his or her own version of success. “We have so many choices now that used to be only waiting for someone to bestow a contract upon us,” Porter said. Indie, traditional, hybrid, multi-media, DIY or outsource—the choices are greater than they have ever been.

We can have a lot of control over our writing by going independent, have less control by opting for the traditional route, or some combination of both. There’s no wrong choice, because now a writer can give up that control by choice in order to gain specific things.

“That’s powerful,” Porter says. Publishing’s merchandizing machine no longer has the assumed right to drive your process and your career. “It may not be a huge chunk of the full

market, but it can be enough for you.”

You can choose to write for your readers and what they love. “Let your choices be made in light of the quality of your life.” Good advice for any author, indeed.

Allie Pleiter spends her days writing four books at a time and buying yarn to knit. Both a RITA and Carol Award finalist as well as a RT Reviewer’s Choice and RomCon Reader’s Crown Award winner, Allie recently celebrated her millionth book sold. She speaks nationally on writing, faith, women’s issues, and time management. To obtain a free copy of the Chunky Calculator, visit www.alliepleiter.com or text the word CHUNKY to 22828.

First Word: Craft

Insights on using metafiction, deep narration, central characters and building ties for a series

By Sandra McDonald



“To thine own self be true,” said Polonius to Hamlet, once upon a time. The same sentiment was echoed in the Master Class: Craft session at NINC 2016 as industry guests Richard Marek, Julian Pavia, and Jane Porter tackled case studies and explored several wide-ranging topics including metafiction, narrative voice, complex storylines, and refreshing older books.

Mad about metafiction

Author Diana Peterfreund loves use metafictional elements. (Definition: Fiction in which the author departs from novelistic conventions and traditional narrative techniques.) Her first chick lit series included lists, signs, text messages, and omniscient footnotes. For a different young adult series, her editor made her cut some of this, arguing it would “distract from the story.”

Peterfreund’s dream now is to build a satirical adult novel that comments on social media through likes, tweets, comments, and other conventions of our online world. Yet she knows that many readers might skip over such material, or they may not render well in ebook format. Is it worth writing the book?

The craft panel agreed that the tension between editors and writers about what is “publishable” is not new, nor is it easily overcome. Yet we all know that offbeat, groundbreaking works with unusual structure can succeed.

Examples include the Griffon and Sabine trilogy by Nick Bantock, which contains removable letters and postcards, as well as the scrapbook/novel “Miss Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children,” which draws on fifty curated photographs from history to build a spellbinding narrative.

Peterfreund’s worry? That these successes are far and few between.

The panelists urged her to leap once again into the metafictional gap but keep a compelling, engaging story at the forefront and follow her writerly instincts.

"In the end, what's the point of writing if you're not writing for yourself?" asked Jane Porter, whose best-selling romance and women's fiction explores themes she cherishes.

Making deep narration unique

For author Mari Mancusi, a fondness for dueling protagonists has sometimes led to reader confusion, even when using third-person POV.

"I've been getting feedback from readers and editors that my two point-of-view female characters are not distinct enough to differentiate between one another," she wrote to the panel. "Not that they don't have varied backgrounds, character traits, etc. But that they *sound* too similar voice-wise in the text."

What tools does a writer have for making such voices unique?

As a senior editor at Crown who worked on Andy Weir's bestselling novel, *The Martian*, Julian Pavia has firsthand experience with juggling multiple characters and a narrator with an offbeat voice. He places great importance on tone in dialogue, which helps readers distinguish between characters: for instance, one character with a wistful tone vs. one with a more bitter outlook.

More importantly, Pavia thinks it's vital for writers to remember that "every description in a story is the character's encounter with something, not an objective observation." A princess and pauper set of narrators, should they each walk into a seedy tavern, would notice different things, have different emotional reactions to those details, and walk away with different perceptions.

Legendary editor Richard Marek, whose work with famous novelists has spanned many decades and bestseller lists, finds the difficulty in handling dual narrations to be fascinating. Given the inherent limitation of first-person only—namely, that the POV character has to be in the every scene of the work—he is especially interested in first/third switching, such as that used by Diana Gabaldon in her *Outlander* series.

Marek also recommended Truddi Chase's book *When the Rabbit Howls*, in which several dozen multiple personalities vie to control the story of schizophrenic woman, as an example of making voices stand out in memorable ways.

Keeping central characters central

Many authors have faced problems with multiple characters vying for space in the story. For Karen Tintori, writing a novel about healing and reconciliation has led to challenges incorporating a unique and complex character—The Divine Feminine.

"The Divine Feminine is identified with sexuality, childbirth, motherhood, and wisdom, so I've chosen childbirth and motherhood/children as themes on which to center my protagonist's conflicts," Tintori wrote to the panel.

Tintori's protagonist, however, is a scientifically minded woman who has rejected the spirituality of her upbringing and is now struggling to reconcile with her distant grandmother. Revealing the existence and history of The Divine Feminine to this heroine—and having her accept this world-changing revelation—was proving to be a problem.

The easiest solution—dueling protagonists, which Tintori has used in other novels—had

already been considered and rejected, as the heroine and the Divine Feminine each had storylines did not naturally tie together.

The strongest recommendation from the experts, and from Richard Marek in particular, was to move the Divine Feminine from the outskirts of the story to the very center of it by making her a narrator. Instead of making her a prize in the heroine's quest for knowledge, he urged Tintori to place her at its heart and give her a strong voice from the very beginning of the story.

In this way, the story would become less complicated, allaying fears of info-dumping or artificial. It would also allow the unique thoughts, experiences, and richness of the Divine Feminine to shine through.

Everything old is new again

Julie Leto recently got back the rights to several contemporary romance novels that she wants to revamp for re-release. Although the novels weren't originally linked, she hopes to tie them all together in a way that feels organic and not simply like a marketing ploy.

With new titles and new covers, Leto had a solution in mind: writing in scenes set in the "present" that had the heroines reconnecting ten years after going to summer camp together.

"In these new scenes, they meet up to discuss how much they've changed over the years and how much of their lives still revolve around sex. Do you think two scenes (beginning and end) of each book will give readers the "series satisfaction" that they crave?"

The panel considered this option but thought she could create an even stronger tie with a mystery or big question spanning the series. By weaving a hook that carried through each book, Leto could lure readers into following along and caring about what happens next.

In a follow-up email, Leto wrote, "When I submitted the question, I thought I had a solution already worked out, but hearing the feedback from Julian, Richard and Jane, forced me to rethink on several levels. The 'masters' themselves made me consider adding in a separate storyline—which I had not considered at all. This is a deeper solution and one that I think will enhance the stories to the level I was hoping for."

Afterward

Although the panelists addressed specific questions from the case studies, their advice proved helped not just to the authors seeking help but to all NINC attendees seeking more craft knowledge and tips.

As Julie Leto neatly sums up: "After the workshop, more than a dozen people stopped me to talk about my issue. Half had been facing (or would be facing) a similar issue with their re-releases or new books and appreciated hearing what the masters had to say. It made them rethink what they'd been planning to do. The other half had alternate ideas they thought I should consider."

Leto added, "I know that NINC members are sometimes resistant to craft-focused workshops, but it seems to me that as a resource for craft, there is no better group than NINC to help tackle solutions. It's a different experience than listening to masters talk about business or marketing, but it is no less productive. The answers might be less concrete, based on the nature of the topic, but I thought it was a fascinating and productive addition to NINC's focus and I'm

grateful to have had the chance to participate!"

Sandra McDonald's first collection of stories, Diana Comet and Other Improbable Stories, won a Lambda Literary Award and was a Booklist Editor's Choice, ALA Over the Rainbow book, and Rainbow Award winner. Her Florida Keys adventure Mystery of the Tempest won a Silver Moonbeam award for children's literature. She is currently writing military romance (SEALs!) and served eight years in the United States Navy. She lives in Florida.

The Psychology of Fandom

How scientific analysis of fan fiction can make your writing and marketing magnetic

By Mary Lee Woods



Have you ever wondered why some books elicit such a response in readers that fans become loyal followers? Those loyal followers then become, well, more than just regular fans. They become this community of people who are so invested emotionally in the book or series (and all the details thereof) that they band together in a sub-culture around the characters, the settings, and the plot.

That's called a fandom, and Dr. Jennifer L. Barnes is a cognitive psychologist who studies the phenomena. Not only that, uniquely qualified as both a professor of psychology and an author, she breaks it down to how fandom works in fiction.

Let's start with the basics. There are three theories of fiction:

- Fiction is practice for "theory of mind."
- Fiction provides a sense of belonging.
- Fiction is gossip about people who aren't real.

Theory of Mind

Theory of Mind (ToM) is how we conceptualize thoughts, beliefs, and emotions. In fiction, that plays out as helping us better understand people.

We like fiction that challenges but does not overwhelm our ToM. There's a sweet spot. To better understand theory of mind, the first order is we understand that people think. From there, it gets more complex.

For example:

- First-order ToM = He thinks.
- Second-order ToM = He thinks that she thinks.
- Third-order ToM = He thinks that you think that she thinks.

Theory of Mind also considers meta-emotion, which Barnes described as what we feel about what we feel. For example: Do you feel guilty about feeling happy or sad?

Additionally, it addresses use of social cognition which is an understanding of real social

norms. This involves an evaluation of what words the speaker is using, what their posture is saying, etc.

Fiction and belonging

We all have a need for relationships. However, there is also a term “para-social relationship” which is a one-sided relationship you form with someone you don’t actually know.

In fiction, we see this forming of para-social relationships around characters in highly successful series such as Harry Potter or Twilight.

Fiction as gossip

Fiction as gossip appeals to a liking for certain types of real-world stories and for knowing about other people’s lives and wondering what will happen to them. It covers topics that you might find in magazines about celebrities or political leaders, such as death, sex, power, romance, parentage, family, instinct, survival, status, scarcity or abundance, and intergroup conflict.

It’s the reason people read Shakespeare and also why they want to read about Brangelina.

Another important concept in understanding the psychology of fandom was *alief*. In philosophy and psychology, alief is an automatic, gut-level belief-like attitude that may contradict an explicitly held belief. (Gedler, 2008)

For example, a person standing on a glass balcony might *believe* that they are safe, but *alieve* that they are [in danger](#).

When we look at the psychology of fiction and the psychology of fandom we see several factors:

- Discussion, theorizing, debates (live tweeting)
- Fan art
- Fan videos
- Fan Fiction
- Filk (songs)
- CosPlay
- Cons

Dr. Barnes’ research studied fan fiction primarily because there was so much data readily available in this area. More than one million fan fiction stories were pulled from fanfiction.net. No differences were found in the media (TV, movies, books) or in the genres. There was continuity between the way that fans engage with stories. Also, the research found that there were generally three genres of fan fiction: angst, tragedy, and hurt/comfort.

The research also indicated two psychological prerequisites to fandom:

1. Emotional Investment (ongoing)

- Imaginative work
- Personalizes narrative (identifies with character or story)
- Extends beyond the moment

2. Resistance to Authorial Authority

In a fan fiction writers' survey, 72 percent developed their own relationship with the characters and 51 percent felt they knew the character better than the author. Fan engagement exists to:

- Fill in gaps
- Participate in conjecture about the future

Fans become engaged in the gaps and in the “what ifs” of a story. If the story gives the reader everything they want, there is no need to further engage.

So, now how do we apply this to our books? In her presentation, Barnes covered several specific areas: Writing, Packaging, and Marketing.

Applications to Writing

Theory of Mind:

Listed below is Dr. Barnes' ToM checklist. Does your book contain the following?

- Diverse desires
- Diverse beliefs
- Knowledge access
- False beliefs (dystopian stories)
- Hidden emotion
- Second-order and higher theory of mind
- Secrets and lies
- Meta-emotion
- Non-literal dialogue
- One or more characters who is difficult to read
- Characters navigating social norms
- Moral dilemmas and conflicting moralities
- Explorations of how characters' personalities were formed
- Intergroup conflict

Fiction and Belonging:

Most successful fandom books offer a reader something they can imagine belonging to such as a family or a tight-knit organization. It's even more powerful if the group has a name and if one or more of the characters become part of the group during the course of the story.

Fiction as Gossip:

Fiction as gossip focuses on characters' reputations and may involve a scandal or secrets. It also utilizes the aforementioned evolutionarily relevant themes (death, sex, power, family, etc.)

Resistance to Authorial Authority:

This technique provides the reader the opportunity to test themselves and relates to the earlier survey where most readers writing fan fiction believed that they knew the characters better than the author. For this, use:

- Narrative gaps (between chapters, in backstories)
- Baited gaps (raise questions but don't provide answers, use foreshadowing to invite speculation)
- Shipping (allow the possibility of multiple relationships)

- “What if” thinking/daydreaming: make hard, controversial choices, or explicitly identify pivotal moments and alternatives
- Moral shades of gray (creates sympathetic and powerful villains)

Applications for Packaging

Titles

Use a title that appeals to Theory of Mind, such as:

- Explicit mention of minds
- Explicit mental states (such as *Cruel Intentions*)
- Implied mental states

Metaphoric or symbolic language in the title:

- Titles that invite the reader to mind-read the protagonist
- Titles that use the pronoun “I”
- Titles in the vein of “The Girl Who...”

A title that appeals to a liking for gossip:

- Key words such as secrets, scandals, or lies
- Titles that sounds like they are true stories

A title that offers a gap for the reader to fill:

- Titles that are questions (such as *Where’d You Go, Bernadette?*)
- Titles that imply or raise a question (such as *Gone Girl*)
- Titles that invite resistance (Can the reader say “No” in response to your title?)

A title that offers an opportunity to belong:

Examples of this are titles such as: *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* or *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*.

Covers

Theory of Mind

- Covers that provoke mental state attributions, but require effort on the part of the reader, such as partial faces, eyes, multiple characters (each with different expressions or body language)
- Metaphorical covers

Fandom

- Covers that invite fan activities
- CosPlay
- Fanart
- Covers that engage the imagination
- Covers with blanks for the reader to fill

Applications: Marketing and Fan-Service

To build fandom:

- Write a fandom-enabling book
- Name your fans
- Create ways for fans to self-identify

- Think about which para-social relationship to cultivate: a relationship with characters, or a relationship with the author
- Find ways to connect fans with each other
- Provide exclusive access to something (content, a secret, etc.)
- Use psychology to maximize the emotional investment
- Create opportunities for fan activity
- Take a step back and allow room for resistance. Perhaps step away while you're on deadline. "I'm working on my next book, while I'm gone..."

There was clearly more information on this topic than could possibly be covered in this short session. However, Dr. Barnes has offered to explore the topic of fandom in greater depth in subsequent articles in the NINC newsletter. In the interim she offers the following recommended reading for those with an interest in the topic.

[Such Stuff as Dreams: The Psychology of Fiction](#) by Keith Oatley

[The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human](#) by Jonathan Gottschall

[How Pleasure Works](#) by Paul Bloom

[The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, and Human Evolution](#) by Denis Dutton

[Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel](#) by Lisa Zunshine

Books on Fandom

[Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Cultures](#) by Henry Jenkins

[Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth](#) by Camille Bacon-Smith

Also, Dr. Barnes has done a TEDx Talk on para-social relationships, which is [available online](#).



Mary Lee is the “Sparkle” half of the co-writing duo, Sparkle Abbey. In addition to her NINC membership she is a member of Mystery Writers of America, Romance Writers of America, Kiss of Death and Sisters in Crime. As half of Sparkle Abbey she writes every other book in the national bestselling Pampered Pets mysteries. The most recent books in the series are Downton Tabby and Raiders of the Lost Bark. For more info visit: www.SparkleAbbey.com or on Twitter @SparkleAbbey.



Founded in 1989

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Novelists, Inc., in acknowledgment of the crucial creative contributions novelists make to society, asserts the right of novelists to be treated with dignity and in good faith; to be recognized as the sole owners of their literary creations; to be fairly compensated for their creations when other entities are profiting from those creations; and to be accorded the respect and support of the society they serve.

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- Rebecca Brandewyne
- Janice Young Brooks
- Jasmine Cresswell
- Maggie Osborne
- Marianne Shock

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