



**novelists
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Contents

- ◆ President's Voice
- ◆ NINC Member Notes
- ◆ What a freelance editor can do for you
- ◆ Behind the scenes at book fairs
- ◆ Traditional publishing in a non-traditional world
- ◆ Testing your marketing impact with BookTrakr and Littlink
- ◆ How indies work best with Ingram
- ◆ The art of author branding
- ◆ 20 minutes a day to email marketing bliss
- ◆ How to write when everything goes wrong
- ◆ The Mad Scribbler
- ◆ About NINC

President's Voice

By Erica Ridley



When I first decided to pursue a path in publishing, ebooks weren't even a sparkle in my eye. The most important items on my desk were my morning coffee and an only slightly outdated copy of *Writer's Market*. From those pages, I was certain I could pluck a plethora of agents eager to launch my career. A full shelf or two of Erica Ridley paperbacks would grace every Borders and Waldenbooks in the nation, for decades to come.

I don't have to tell you how that plan worked out. Many of you walked the same path.

Out went writer resource tomes, in came the internet. Searchable databases of agents, editors, deals, forums. Ebooks were scoffed at, looked down upon. Then came the first 99-cent Kindle millionaires and suddenly everyone wanted a piece of the pie.

Pirates, proliferating bootleg copies by the second. Publishers, scrambling to digitize backlists before rights reverted. Armchair authors with error-ridden copy and baffling covers. Stock photographers. Freelance editors. Formatters. Previously unpublished writers who finally had an avenue to deliver a professional-grade product at a fraction of the cost with quintuple the royalty. Competition.

A brave new world.

Just in the past five years, we've seen publishers spring up, or merge into conglomerates, or disappear in scandal and heartbreak. Agent agreements, publisher contracts, secret algorithms, and vendor terms of service seem to take a hard left every few months. Opportunities are created—and taken away—daily.

Some say the only constant in life is change. As authors, we're often unsure where to focus our marketing dollars and precious non-writing time, because we have so few ways of calculating accurate return on investment, or knowing which avenues are truly worth our efforts.

For me, the holy grail is the author newsletter.

If MySpace taught me anything, it's that social networks come and go. (And that I should never have allowed any of those hideous photos on the internet.) Bookstores open and fold. Even platforms hit in waves. Ebooks, audiobooks, multimedia content. Who knows what's

next?

Answer: Readers. Your readers. These heavenly creatures will always be there. Maybe they'll prefer hardback or paperback or e-book or audiobook, but what they want is *your* book.

And the next one. And the next.

When a popular publisher or vendor site goes belly up, when a ubiquitous ereading device is no longer supported, how will they find you?

Easy. You'll let them know. You have their email addresses on your mailing list.

Or at least, I hope you do! If you've been somewhat less than proactive about keeping your fans somewhere you'll always be able to reach them, here are a few tips to get started:

Create an evergreen signup link

Nothing is worse than changing mailing list providers and losing innumerable new fans who stumble across the old dead link on websites or past blog interviews or backlist books and their attempt to sign up goes nowhere.

Smarturl.it is one company that allows you to edit redirect links. There are many other options. Find the one that works for you.

Put your signup link everywhere

My signup link is in my Twitter bio. It's in both of my Facebook bios—both personal and author page. It's in my email signature line. (Which, by the way, should be simple to read and easy to scan.)

It's in the front matter of my indie books, both as text and with a compelling graphic. It's also on the last page, right after The End. It's in every file I send to bloggers, reviewers, interviewers. It's on my website: in the header, on the sidebar, in a popup triggered when a new website visitor navigates to leave the site.

The signup form is also on its own dedicated, shareable page. It's integrated into my Instafreebie, integrated into Facebook as a standalone tab and the primary page action button, and integrated everywhere else I can possibly find: Author Central, Goodreads, Bookbub.

My eyes stay peeled for more.

The organic subscribers—the fans who find you—who sign up for your list not because you paid for advertisement or sponsored a giveaway, but because they consciously Googled you or sought you out on social media or bought your books—these readers are priceless. Connect with them.

Welcome new readers

I have an onboarding drip campaign that achieves several targeted goals. I can tell you more about that next month. But at the least, be sure your mailing list has a welcome email of some sort. Ideally with a short introduction from you as a person (not an aggressive marketing machine throwing buy links at them) and some sort of lagniappe, which you have promoted as a perk of being on your list.

Some authors give away a free book. I do. You don't have to. Your signup bonus could be

an exclusive prologue, a second epilogue, deleted scenes, an “interview” with a fan-favorite character, behind the scenes insight into the forensics or geography or history or science or whatever aspect of your books hooks your fans and keeps them coming back.

The main idea is to make them feel like being on your list is a benefit to them, not a favor to you.

Communicate

There are many schools of thought on this. Some writers only send out blasts when there’s a new release. Others email their subscribers up to once a week or more. The range is wide, and there’s no one right answer. Determine what works best for you and meets your readers’ expectations. Then do it.

It sounds obvious, but we get busy. We forget. We have other priorities. Life happens. But there are consequences to not tending your fan garden.

A while back, I had eighteen months of quarterly novella releases, and it felt like I emailed my list constantly with news and links and tidbits. During the year-plus gap before my next series, I didn’t send anything. What was there to say? When I did finally have news, I emailed my list ... and immediately lost a couple hundred subscribers, dozens of whom reported the newsletter as spam even though they’d signed up themselves directly on my website.

So what happened? I think that *nothing* happening is what caused the disconnect. Before I had my drip campaign in place, some readers had signed up for my list, received their welcome letter, and then ... nothing. For a year. By the time I did email them, they’d forgotten they’d ever signed up in the first place. To previous subscribers, perhaps my list no longer seemed worth their while. I’d broken the contract.

Whatever frequency you decide upon, try to stay in the ballpark. In my case, I want my readers to feel they have a relationship with me, as a person—not as a marketing engine. When there’s no book news to report, I can fill an occasional newsletter with other goodies relevant to their interests. Freebies or sales by similar authors in my genre. Personal milestones. Giveaways. Bonus content. The possibilities are endless.

Today, I have just over 16,000 subscribers on my list. This year, I’m going to focus not only on improving that number, but also streamlining and optimizing my process. I’ll share my discoveries, cautionary tales, and life hacks with you here in the president’s column.

NINC is an incredible community of wise, talented, high-energy authors. I’ve grown immeasurably over the years, and you are a large part of the reason why. I am honored and delighted to be able to give back. Please don’t hesitate to email me for anything you might need. I want to help make NINC as valuable for you as it is for me.

Let’s rock 2017 together!



Erica Ridley is a New York Times and USA Today best-selling author of historical romance novels. Her latest series, The Dukes of War, features roguish peers and dashing war heroes who return from battle only to be thrust into the splendor and madness of Regency England. When not reading or writing romances, Erica can be found riding camels in Africa, zip-lining through rainforests in Costa Rica, or getting hopelessly lost in the middle of Budapest.

Member Notes

Volunteer opportunities abound at NINC

Get involved in making NINC the most vibrant place for sophisticated authors to hone their business, marketing and craft skills. NINC is seeking your volunteer support in the following positions:

Membership Committee

NINC membership committee's monthly duties:

- Verify that new applicants' provided documentation meets the requirements for NINC membership.
- Create a list of names, pen names, and the location of qualifying applicants. Send this list of membership applicants to the Newsletter Editor for inclusion in Nink after verification, and then send at list of verified members after approval.

JOT Volunteer Coordinator

JOT (Just One Thing) coordinator's duties:

- As needed: when a board member informs JOT coordinator of the need for a Just One Thing volunteer, the JOT coordinator puts out the call for volunteers, including on the NINCLink Yahoo group and the Novelists, Inc., Facebook group.
- The JOT coordinator disseminates information about the Just One Thing task in question to interested parties, and assigns the duty to a volunteer.

Facebook Group Moderator

Facebook group moderator's duties:

- Be a member of the Novelists, Inc., Facebook group.
- Ensure requests to join are only granted to current NINC members.
- As necessary, remind members to avoid blatant self-promotion (e.g. posts simply linking to a book's Amazon page, etc.) as this is not the place for "drive-by" advertising.

NINCLink Moderators

Novelists, Inc., needs a co-moderator for the members-only Yahoo group. The moderator's duties:

- Be a member of the NINCLink Yahoo group.
- Ensure requests to join are only granted to current NINC members.
- As necessary, remind members to trim posts.

BeachNINC 2017 Moderators

This moderator supports the members-only conference Yahoo group. Duties:

- Be a member of the BeachNINC2017 Yahoo group.
- Ensure requests to join are only granted to current NINC members.
- As necessary, remind members to trim posts.

Newsletter Associate Editor

Novelist, Inc.'s official newsletter needs an Associate Newsletter Editor. This person will work with the editor on:

- Editorial planning—seeking out Nink-exclusive content from authors and subject matter experts, planning each issue's makeup.
- Editing—ensuring articles are at level that speaks to NINC's sophisticated membership, and working with contributors on proposed revisions.
- Formatting—Setting up articles in Scrivener for production in our six editions (PDF, epub and mobi formats, with versions for both members and nonmember comps).
- Distribution—Sending the newsletter via Mailchimp.

This is a great opportunity to sharpen your Scrivener and Mailchimp skills (training is provided), connect with top industry subject matter experts to produce articles, and stay in the know on the latest author news.

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](#).

Freelance Editing

Two former traditional publishing editors share what freelance editors can do for you

By Lisa Verge Higgins



According to the ever-entertaining Richard Marek, “self-publishing is a godsend to freelance editors.” So, with more than a half-century of combined experience, it comes as no surprise that Marek and Marsha Zinberg easily made the leap to freelance editing.

Now they work closely with authors to develop novels, memoirs, and non-fiction with an eye not only toward the manuscript but also toward marketability. Their areas of expertise and approach to the editing process may differ, but not their passion for the work.

Beyond the red pen: what freelance editors can do

Marsha Zinberg began her career in publishing as an assistant editor at Harlequin. She spent many years editing romance for the voracious market of the ‘80s and ‘90s, working with authors who wrote short, long, steamy, inspirational, and historical. She also started some romance continuity series with overarching plots that required series bibles to corral. At one point in her career, she was managing 400 titles per year.

Yet romance novels weren’t the only type of manuscripts she edited. Some of her special projects included calendars, nonfiction, novellas, mysteries, men’s adventure, English versions of Japanese manga, and text for online games.

Zinberg now uses marketing to help authors. As a member of a marketing-oriented company always ahead of the curve, Zinberg learned a lot about marketing despite being in editorial. One of the projects she was involved in was More Than Words, where the corporation awarded seed money to women making a difference in their community, and found authors who’d write novellas inspired by these stories. Zinberg was also involved with strategic partnerships, such as the Harlequin project associated with NASCAR.

Her experience in both editing and marketing uniquely positions her to aid authors in multiple ways. She frequently helps:

- Previously-published authors strategically reissue their backlists
- Unpublished authors place works in the marketplace

- Find new directions for a manuscript that an author may be too lost in the weeds to see clearly
- Edit and develop “books of the heart,” and well-loved “odd ducks”

The jump from editing in traditional publishing to freelance editing has changed the nature of Zinberg’s work in wonderful ways, she said. Her responsibility is no longer to the corporation; it’s strictly to the author. She likens herself to a ventriloquist helping the author find her voice.

Richard Marek has fifty years of trade publishing experience. He worked as an acquiring editor at Macmillan, and then moved to World Publishing before becoming editor-in-chief at The Dial Press where he discovered and edited Robert Ludlum. Later he attained his own imprint, Richard Marek Publishing, at G.P. Putnam. Eventually he became the president of E.P. Dutton.

During this period, publishers were merging willy-nilly, and he became more disgusted with corporatization. He rebelled when Random House put out a new contract that gave the publishing company the right to change an author’s title. “I couldn’t stand that. I fought with my boss and then I was out on the street.”

What to do next? After a slow start, Marek received a request from an agent who was struggling with an author’s huge manuscript. Marek was paid \$100,000 to fix this manuscript for an author who later became a huge bestseller. From that point on, he received many manuscripts from agents. Most of his clients today still come through agents or friends of author friends.

Richard talked about two of his most moving projects in the session. In the first, Trisha Meili, the author of *I am the Central Park Jogger*, was his client. Because of the injuries she sustained during an attack on April 19, 1989, she had great difficulty branching off from a linear narrative. As the ghostwriter for her book, Richard had to do a lot of outlining to keep it on track.

In another project, Joseph Hickman, a staff sergeant and guard at Guantanamo Naval Base, was Marek’s client. This military man investigated the supposed suicides of three prisoners in June of 2006, eventually finding proof of what really happened. The story, published as *Murder At Camp Delta* for a hefty advance, never made headlines. This was Richard’s greatest disappointment.

Richard did a special shout-out to any author who is interested in writing a traditionally published book. The barriers to entry are very high, he said. With his experience and contacts, Marek can eye your project, judge its merits and marketability, help you improve it, and connect you with an agent who may be amenable to taking you on.

Before cementing the author-freelance editor relationship

Marek goes through a four-step process when he’s considering taking on a new client:

He reads the first ten pages to determine if the author can write and tell a story. If the first ten pages pass the test, Marek talks to the author to discuss his process and their concerns. If he takes on the author, he reads the entire manuscript and writes a four- to five-page report. If the author agrees to his analysis, Marek will line-edit the revised book.

Marek may work for a month with an author, or for up to two years, depending on the project.

Zinberg's process varies depending on the situation. Generally, she reads the manuscript and writes a report. Often, she will call the author and outline the main points in the report before sending the client a hard copy. The author revises the manuscript and sends it back, at which point Zinberg re-reads and re-evaluates. This process can be repeated.

If the author is looking for more than a developmental edit, Zinberg will do a line-edit as well. She might also discuss marketing issues, such as determining the target audience for the project. She generally gets back to a new client within two weeks to a month. Most of her projects span a couple of months' time.

What are the most important qualities in a freelance editor? Zinberg suggested that likability and respect are very important, as is communication. Learn which projects the freelance editor has worked on and whether they match your own project. Zinberg also suggests checking referrals.

Marek noted that he is reluctant to give out names of authors he has worked with as referrals because many of those authors don't want it known that they use an editor. Rather, he says, look at the freelance editor's experience. "If you can edit [famous author]," he said, "you can edit anyone."

Lisa Verge Higgins is the RITA-nominated author of eighteen novels who also writes as Lisa Ann Verge. A Golden Leaf and Bean Pot winner, she has twice cracked B&N's General Fiction Forum's top twenty books of the year. She'd love to connect with fellow writers on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Pinterest](#), [Instagram](#), or even through her [website](#).

Working with Book Fairs

Go behind the scenes to learn selection criteria and trends in children's fiction

By Maureen McGowan



The Scholastic Book Fair is essentially a floating bookstore, usually held for a week or more in a school's gymnasium, where every book is face-out—no spines. The fairs are also fundraisers for the schools. Scholastic holds 100,000 fairs a year, all over the US, and reaches 35 million children. Many of these kids live in areas without access to a bookstore or library.

Scholastic Book Clubs, in contrast to fairs, are the flyers sent monthly to schools, with different clubs targeted for each age level. The book clubs have a larger assortment of titles and usually sell the books at a lower price point than the fairs.

Ed Masessa, Senior Manager of Product Development at Scholastic Book Fairs, and author Marianne Mancusi provided an illuminating look behind-the-curtain of book fairs.

Having a title included in the book fair is a big win for publishers and authors, because Scholastic will typically buy at least 35,000 copies of the selected books, versus approximately 1,000 for a book featured only in a book club. Mancusi pointed out that another reason book fairs are great for authors is because they open the doors for school visits—another source of income.

Masessa pointed out that while they do often select already popular books, some titles only became bestsellers after their inclusion in Scholastic fairs, such as Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series.

How are books selected?

The fairs have two seasons, and books for the larger August-December season are selected in January, while titles for the January-June season are selected in August.

The selection process takes two weeks. Every meeting of the selection committee starts with a "book talk," during which each committee member shares a book with the group that affected him or her—either a recent title or something he or she read as a child.

All of the major publishers of children's books attend to pitch titles. After a book is presented, the committee members hold up cards to vote either A, B, C or F. "A" means an

absolute yes, and “F” means an absolute no. Opinions often vary greatly across the room.

Once the titles are selected, there’s another process to choose which books will be used for advertising the fairs. Approximately 55 titles will make this cut, and the selection committee makes sure they include something for every child in the school, i.e. media/non media, girl/boy, fiction/non-fiction, gaming books, etc.

As a result, a very select group of titles in each category make up this list of 55 titles. Then, out of that group, certain titles are selected to be featured on headers for the displays and/or on posters or other promotional materials. These books are chosen both based on their appeal and on their covers.

There are four sizes of fairs and the number of titles shipped to a particular school is based on how much revenue their fair is expected to generate. The expected revenues of each size of fair are:

Core Fair – < \$2,500

Premium Fair – \$2,500 - \$10,000

Custom Fair – \$10,000 – \$20,000

There is a level above “Custom” for fairs expected to bring in \$50,000-\$100,000. Typically Scholastic will fly in authors to appear at the larger fairs.

Mancusi described her experience of being flown by Scholastic to Los Angeles for a series of book fairs. The librarians at the schools she visited made sure many of the kids had her book before her visit, and she usually had 100 or more kids in her signing line after each talk.

Beyond the four sizes of fairs, there are approximately 100 more variations in the sets of books each fair will receive. Scholastic can add modules to the fairs based on ethnicity, religion, language and other interests that are significantly represented at a particular school.

Librarians and/or the fair’s chairperson can request a specific title, even if the book isn’t included in the core fair. Therefore, authors whose books were selected for the fair should coordinate with schools in their local area if they hope to visit during or after the fair.

A former teacher in the audience asked why Scholastic includes non-book items for sale, as she’d seen many students spending their limited budgets on gadgets instead of books. Masessa explained that it was a purely economic decision, but that each school had the option not to put those items out for sale.

What types of books are chosen?

According to Masessa, the “sweet spot” are books that crossover between elementary and middle schools. Usually the committee chooses more titles that will sell well to both age groups.

Mancusi pointed out that the book fairs don’t go to high schools, so the only Young Adult titles that get considered skew younger, and once selected, the YA titles are only included in the fairs that go to middle schools.

Which YA titles get selected?

In general, violence in a book’s content is considered more acceptable than language or sex. To maximize the number of fairs in which your book can be included, you should avoid cursing and include lust without sex. Masessa noted a selected book that had 61 beheadings, but the

only complaint he got was about one instance of the word *goddamn*.

As an example, Masessa mentioned that John Green's novels are aimed too old for the book fairs. He admitted that middle school-aged kids read John Green, but once a book is in the fair, they have no control over which titles the kids buy, which is a problem for K-8 schools.

To further clarify, Mancusi mentioned that her novel, *Gamer Girl*, was included in the fair, but as a special edition. She had to delete certain phrases such as, "Mom put the smack down on me," and "He was in the comic book closet." She also had a scene where a character wore a unicorn shirt and someone made a joke that the character was "so horny", and she had to change it to "corny."

Masessa clarified that they don't often do that anymore as the market has changed and become somewhat more lenient.

What about self-published titles?

An audience member asked whether there was room in the fairs for self-published authors. Masessa responded that it was possible, but a lot tougher. Because only major children's publishers are invited to present titles, a self-published title must have shown up on the selection committee's radar.

After that, the book would be considered like any other. But he pointed out that it would be almost impossible for a self-published picture book author to be included because the competition is so fierce.

Masessa further clarified that anyone with an agent could submit to the editorial team at Scholastic, but that Scholastic did not look at any unagented manuscripts. This is something for which a self-published author could use an agent, as book fair rights are sub-rights.

Which books work well?

For up to grade six, dog stories work very well. For middle grade, war stories also work well, especially WWII stories where there is a definite good guy and bad guy. Ghost stories also sell well—the higher the creep factor the better. Fantasy trilogies do well, but not all of them. Princess stories do well, and illustrated fiction is doing well, following the success of the Wimpy Kid books.

In YA, what works best are contemporary stories of forbidden love (with lust, but not sex), and stories with elements that will make a girl cry, such as illnesses or deaths. Paranormal thrillers are also big, both horror and romance, and even better if you can combine the two.

What doesn't sell well?

Books with really long titles, and/or cluttered cover images. Sci-fi and aliens are not working well, nor are dinosaurs beyond the picture book stage. Historical or nostalgia-type stories also do not do well.

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.

Traditional Publishing in a Non-traditional World

How commercial publishers are evolving with the market

By Allie Pleiter



Ask twenty authors their opinion about traditional publishing, and you'll probably get forty answers.

NINC gathered three traditional publishing professionals to talk about the place of traditional publishing in today's swiftly changing market. On hand were Sourcebooks Editor Deb Werksman, Crown Trade Senior Editor Julian Pavia, and Soho Press Publisher Bronwen Hruska to offer their views.

"Innovation" was a word often heard in the session. Indeed, traditional publishers have had to retool how they do business to maximize their strengths and adapt to the new digital landscape.

Building on strengths

One of traditional publishing's strengths, according to Werksman, who prefers the term "commercial publisher" to "traditional," is the level of support a publishing house can provide.

"If all you want to do is write, a publishing house is best for you. Of course, there is a control trade-off, and you need to know where the balance falls for you," Werksman said.

Pavia agrees. "Millions sold and outlets like Costco are things traditional publishing can bring to the table."

Traditional publishers can leverage marketing in ways that might be prohibitively expensive for an independent author. Pavia cites the innovative marketing done for the hit *The Martian* which sent out potatoes—a key prop in the story—as part of its marketing campaign for the book. That would be hard for an individual author to pull off on a large scale.

Still, it's not always about large scales. Even smaller, boutique publishers such as Soho Press can create inventive, niche-targeted promotions like the collectibles produced for its recent hit *Mort*. "We can tackle unique, crazy-in-the-best-way books and run strongly with them," said Hruska.

Traditional publishers also have access to a lot of influential networks that can be exploited

on behalf of an author. They might not be as strong in direct-to-reader marketing as an indie author can be, but they do excel at business-to-business (bookstores and libraries, etc.)—markets no author should ignore.

The partnership of hybrid

The industry is still learning about how today's book consumer behaves. According to Werksman, the pure impulse purchase ("I hadn't planned on buying a book") happens 30 percent of the time vs. the planned purchase ("I came looking for a book but not a specific book") happens 26 percent of the time.

"That's why presence is still important," said Werksman, "and why package still matters. Faster isn't necessarily better. Better is better. There is such a thing as too fast, even for a prolific author—and this is the ideal place for the hybrid model."

Traditional publishing can play a crucial role in building an author's career even if he or she seeks to publish independent titles as well. Effective hybrid partnerships are out there and working.

Challenges in this changing market

While traditional publishers still powerhouses in terms of discovery, it's tough for a large business to be quick enough to react to surges in customer demand. It's no surprise that publishers hate running out of stock just as much as authors do.

They share other issues as well: just like their indie counterparts, publishing houses are experimenting and learning about the tricky business of pricing. Do free books really result in paid sales? Where's the sweet spot price point?

We all know it's getting harder for audiences to self-identify, and even the most avid readers can't possibly keep up with the huge volume of content flooding into the market on a daily basis. Traditional publishers are now devoting as much time and energy to tackling these issues as any individual author, perhaps more.

That's a good thing as we all look to answer questions such as: Where do libraries play a role in the current genre rush? How will reviewers figure as the market adapts? How can readers be effectively reached with all the entertainment choices surrounding them? How prolific is too prolific? How do we cope with the vast disparity of quality out there?

One thing in this session was clear: publishers are looking to partner with authors to find the best way through this continually shifting market. "After all, readers don't want to connect with publicist or editors" said Werksman, "They want to connect with the author."

And every author wants to connect with his or her reader. Thanks to today's publishing landscape, the format he or she chooses to make that happen now can be traditional, independent, or some combination of both.

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.

The Marketing Test Lab

How to evaluate your marketing impact with (or without) BookTrakr and Littlink

By Margaret Daley



BookTrakr and Littlink can be used to test your marketing for your books.

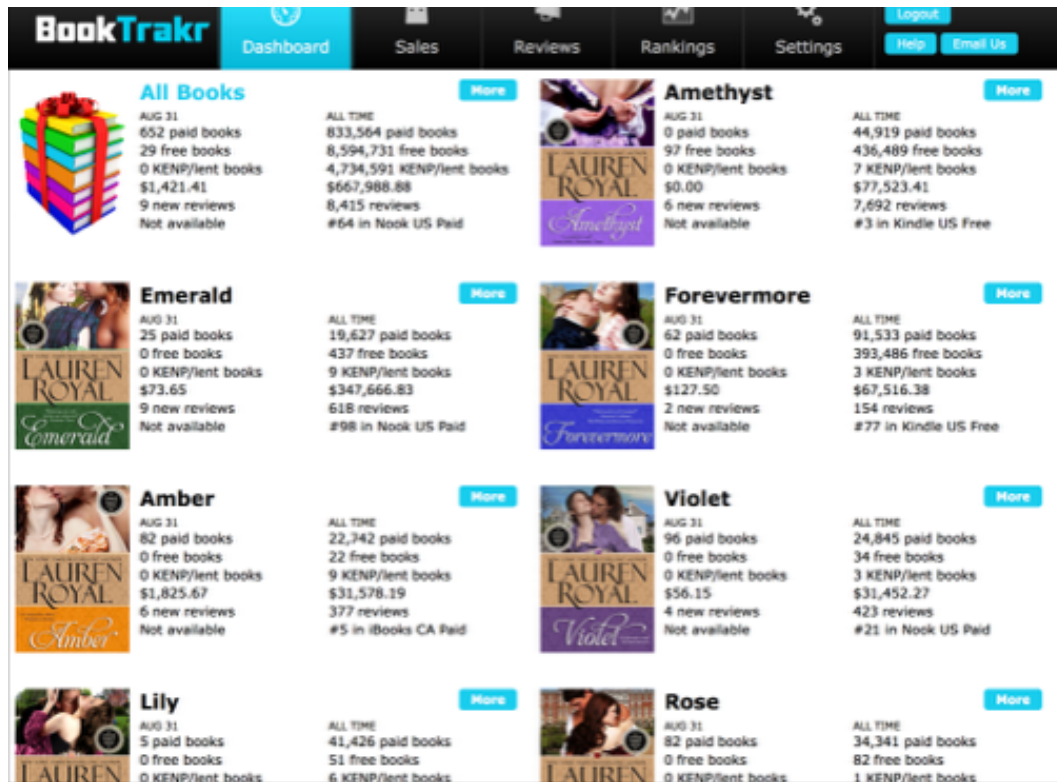
When applying the scientific method to marketing books, the first thing you need to do is decide on a goal (e.g. Sell more copies of Book A). Then you have to come up with an idea on how to reach your goal (e.g. Run different ads to see what works best). The third step is to run a test with two or more samples (e.g. Use Facebook to run different ads for Book A).

After this campaign, measure its impact (e.g. Examine the data you collect from the ads to discover the most successful one). The last step is to decide if it worked for you (e.g. Did you increase sales of Book A? Was it worth the investment?). You can then take the same goal and execute it differently.

How BookTrakr does the work for us

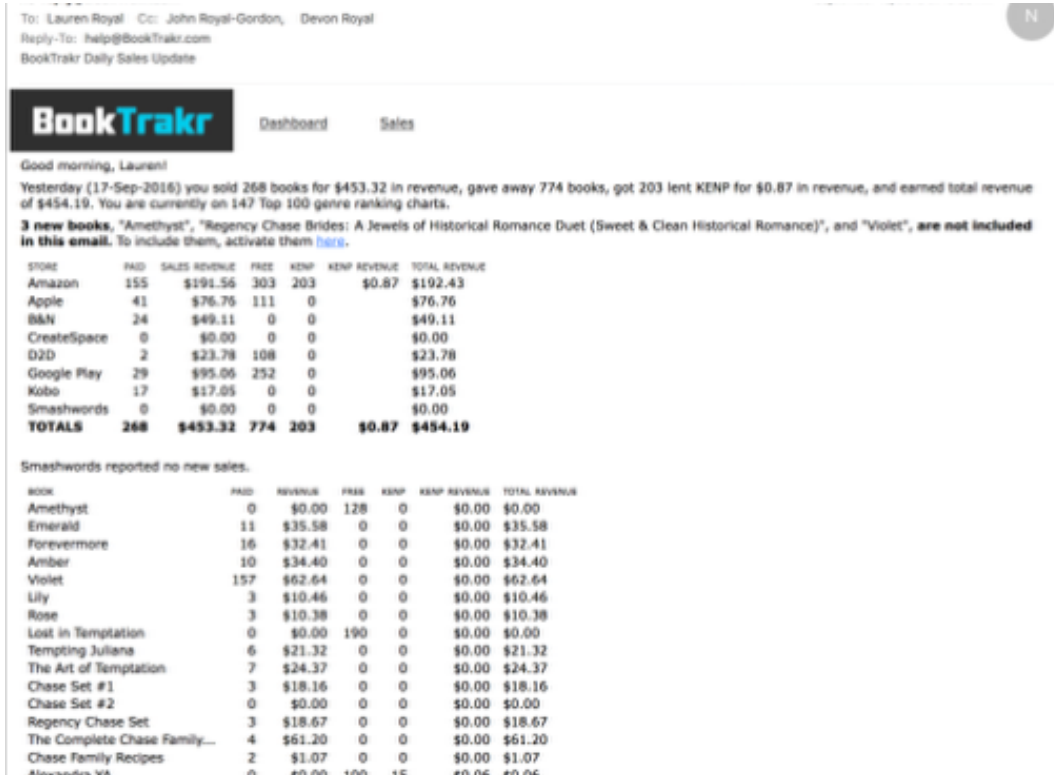
BookTrakr can help an indie author collect information from different stores where it is sold (Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Apple iBooks, Kobo, Google Play, Createspace, Smashwords and Draft 2 Digital). You can view this data by stores, countries, books, rankings or sales to help you analyze what is most effective for the goal you set.

When you are deciding whether a marketing effort worked, you can examine the data before and after your test. Look at the charts and assess the sales through BookTrakr to help you decide. All your information will be there in various charts to answer if a certain Facebook ad increase the sale of Book A. Is the money you earned on the ad more than the cost of the ad? What is your return on investment?

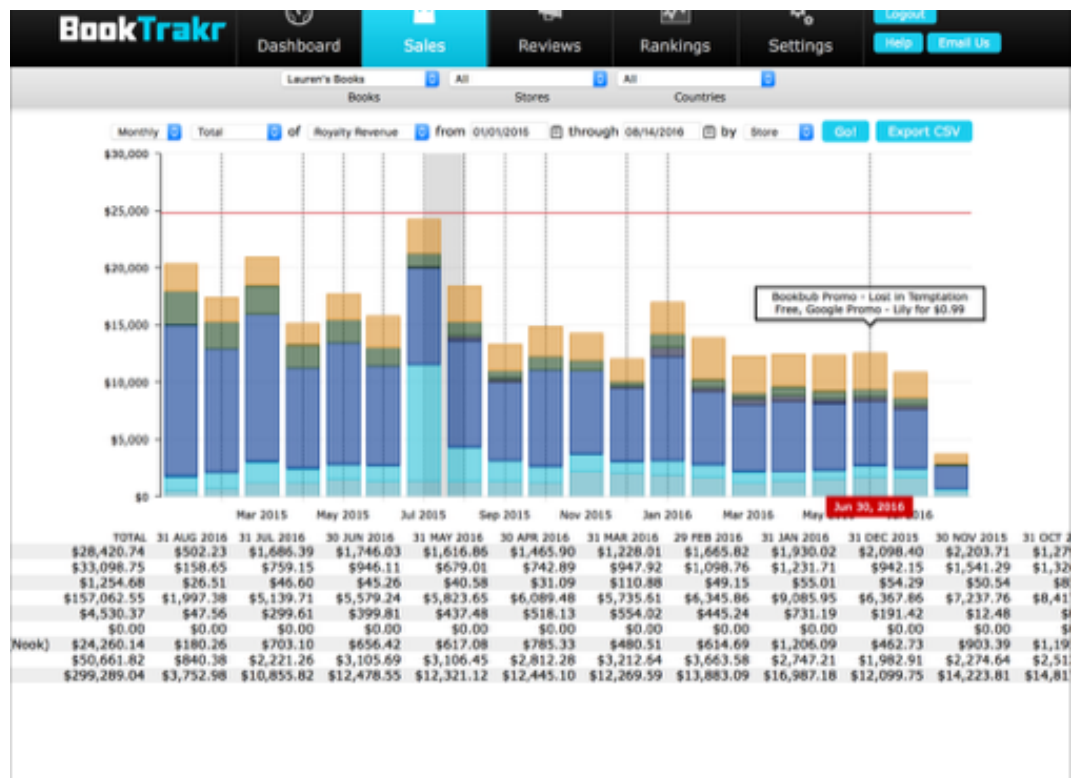


For the purpose of the charts used in the article, the figures have been changed. On an author’s dashboard in the first column, the books will be listed with information about how much money you made in sales, KENP pages read, and the number of books sold or free, reviews and rankings.

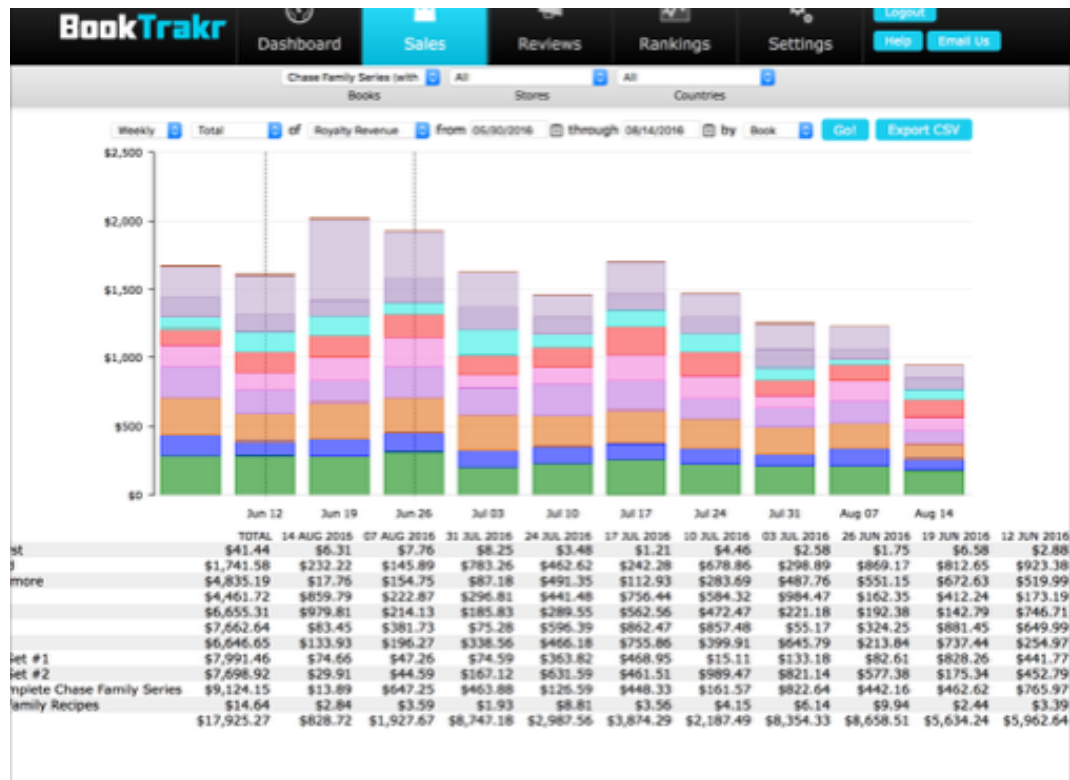
In the second column, there is a total of the same information for the books since they were published.



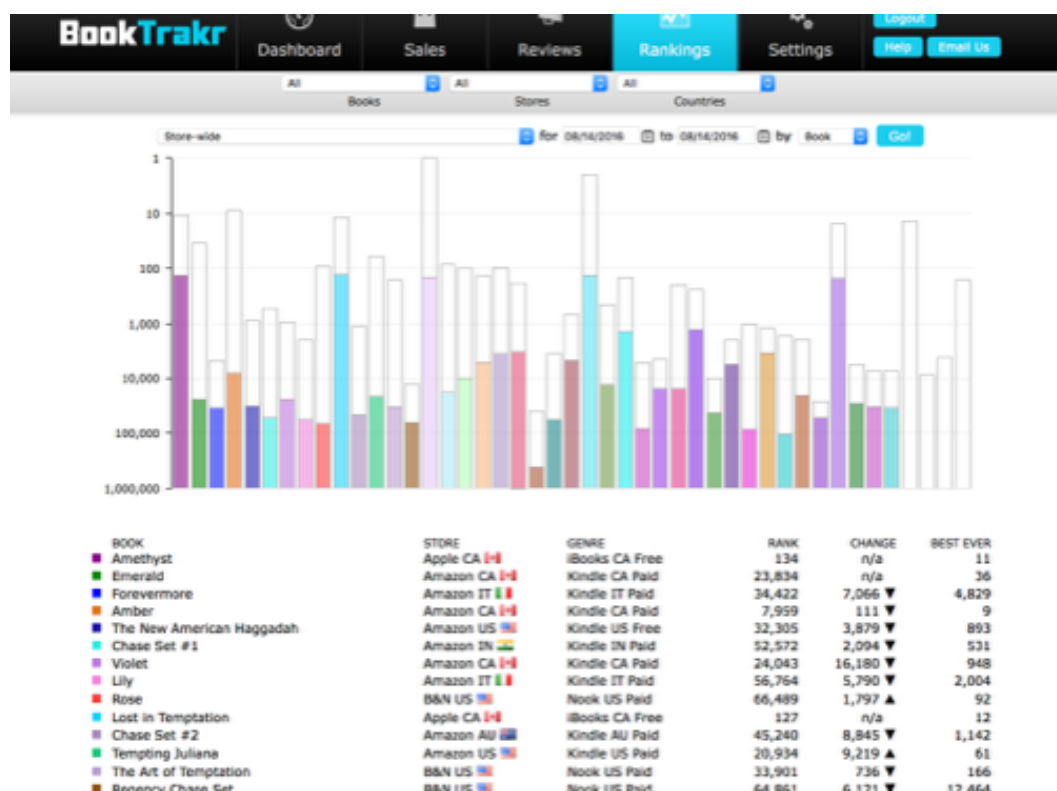
This is the information you receive each day in your email.



This sales chart (you assign a color to represent a title) can be for daily, weekly, monthly or yearly for your total books or individual ones. You can adjust the revenue displayed for the chart (example: paid+free, paid, free, KENP, royalty revenue, or lending money).



Sales can be charted by a title or series, store or country.



You can chart the rankings for each title. It will show the current ranking in the color you chose, and the white part of the column indicates a book's all-time-high ranking.

BookTrakr's cost is based on whether you have the Basic Price or the Pro Price. In the Basic Plan, they track your sales at the stores you choose. In the Pro Plan, they also track your ratings, rankings, and reviews. BookTrakr bases its price of your monthly plan on how many books and distributors you want to keep track of.

Most authors pay \$4.99 to \$9.99 for the Basic Plan or \$9.99 to \$19.99 a month for the Pro Plan. By using BookTrakr, writers don't have to visit each store every day to keep track of their sales. They don't have to input their sale figures in an Excel chart to keep up. BookTrakr does it for you. You can start a free trial at <http://www.booktrakr.com>.

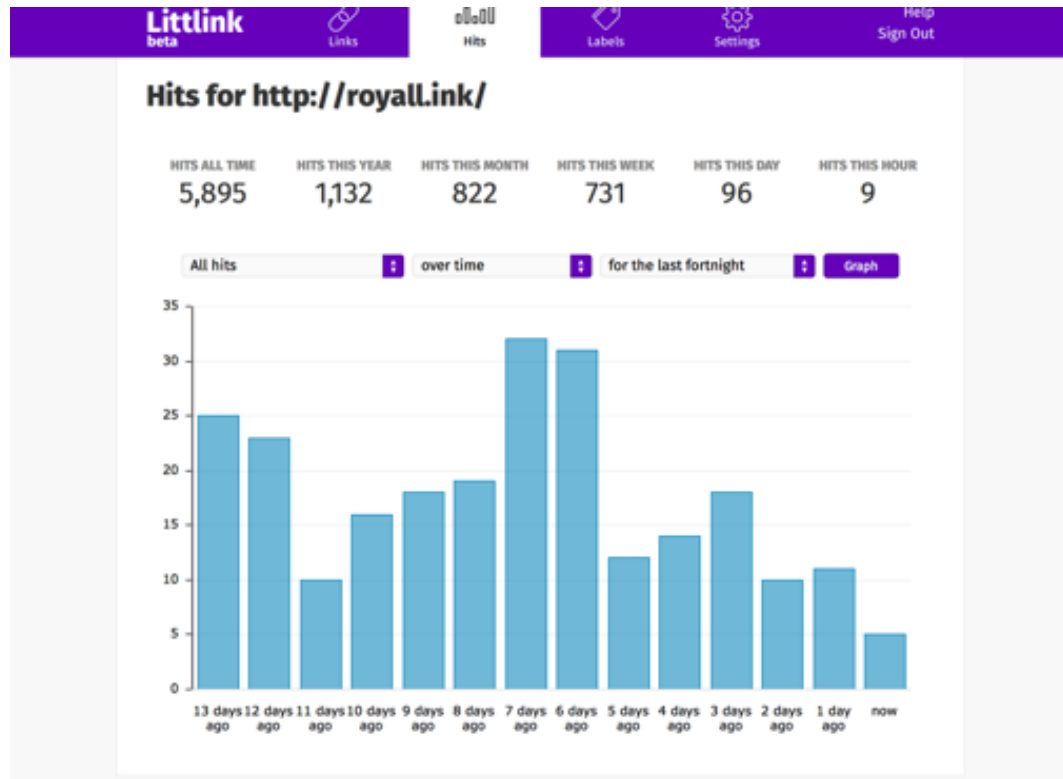
How Littlink does the work for us

Littlink will help you measure the effects of what you are testing. It also will give you a nice descriptive link so you will know where it goes. It is an evergreen link that can be changed without you having to go back to all the places you used the link to make the modification. You only have to change the link at the source on Littlink dashboard.

Using Littlink will help you with each step of testing what works the best.



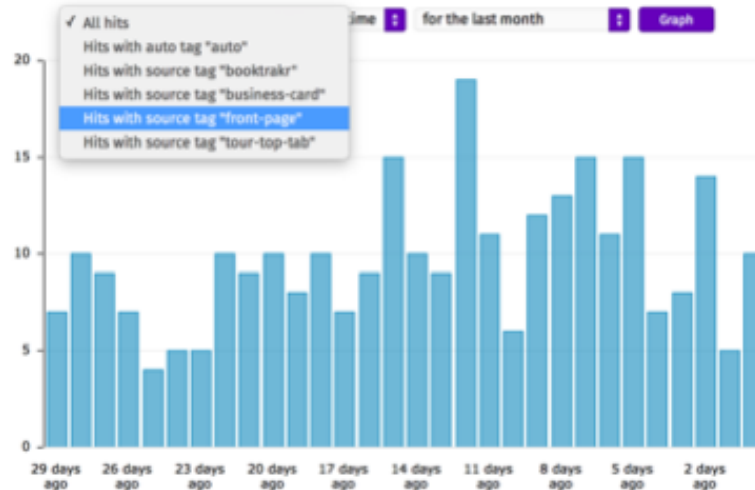
For each link you get information on the hits in numbers as well as a graph for all the links special tags. All the links are for the same book but are tied to different stores. You can click on a specific wedge to get more information (see chart below).



If you click on a wedge in the pie graph, you will get a detailed report of the clicks by days for that particular book at that store.

Hits for <http://littl.link/tour>

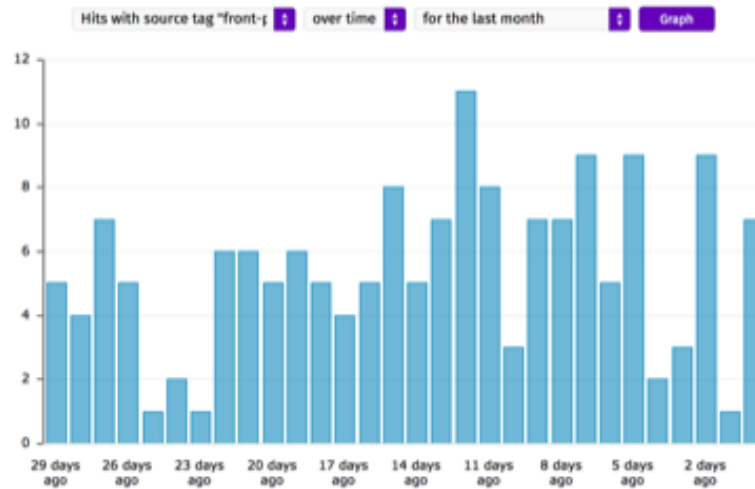
HITS ALL TIME 4,131 HITS THIS YEAR 3,732 HITS THIS MONTH 298 HITS THIS WEEK 71 HITS THIS DAY 10 HITS THIS HOUR 0



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Hits for <http://littl.link/tour>

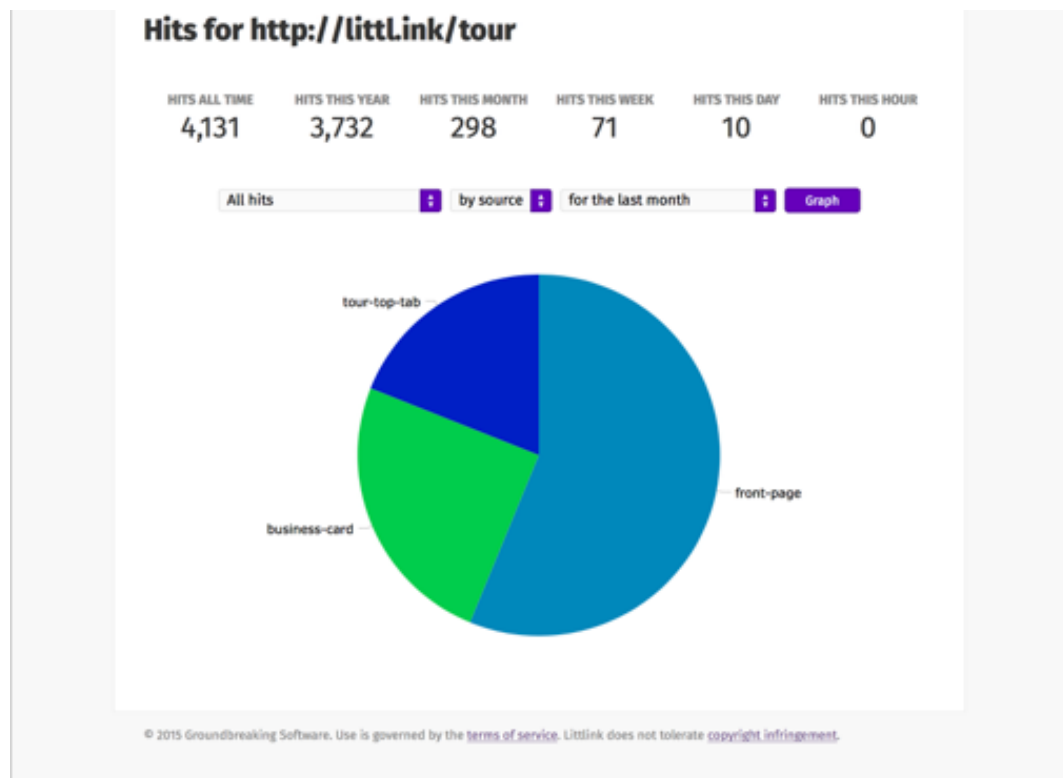
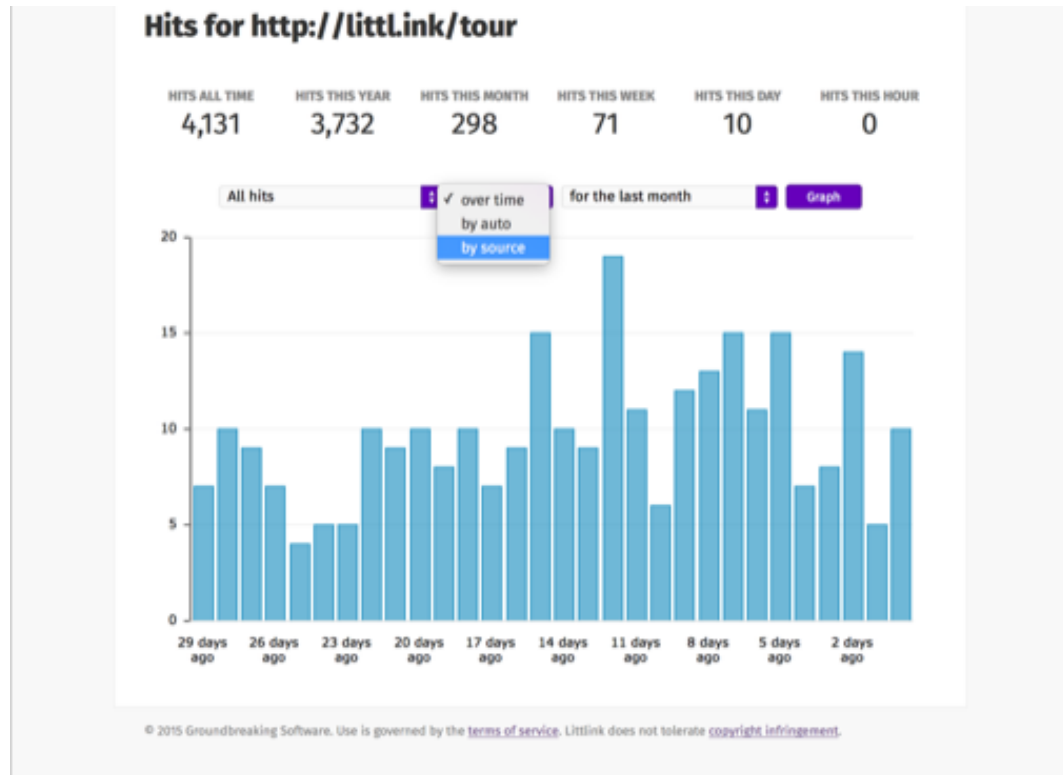
HITS ALL TIME 4,131 HITS THIS YEAR 3,732 HITS THIS MONTH 298 HITS THIS WEEK 71 HITS THIS DAY 10 HITS THIS HOUR 0



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You can add tags to a link to further understand the source of the click. For example: the above chart is for the link <http://littl.link/tour>. You can check all the hits or only one of the

source tagged links. See the second chart above.



Change over time to source and you will get a pie graph showing where the clicks originated and discover which tag is the most successful.

The screenshot shows the Littlink beta dashboard. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Littlink beta', 'Links', 'Hits', 'Labels', 'Settings', and 'Help Sign Out'. Below the navigation bar, the main heading is 'Links Labeled AMETHYST' with a 'Filter by Label' option. A 'CREATE LINK TO ADDRESS' section shows a text input field with the URL 'http://something.really/long/and/ugly?also=complicated' and a 'Create Link' button. Below this is a table of links. The table has two main columns: 'SHORT ADDRESS' and 'HITS'. Each row represents a link with its short address, a category label (like 'BOOK LINK' or 'FREE LINKS'), a hit count, and 'Edit' and 'Track' buttons.

SHORT ADDRESS	HITS
http://royal.link/Amethyst/Buy BOOK LINK	0 hits
http://royal.link/Amethyst/Google BOOK LINK Affiliate link	1980 hits
http://royal.link/Amethyst/iBooks BOOK LINK	3165 hits
http://royal.link/Amethyst/Info BOOK LINK	290 hits
http://royal.link/Amethyst/Kindle BOOK LINK	6553 hits
http://royal.link/Amethyst/KindleFree FREE LINKS	0 hits
http://royal.link/Amethyst/Kobo BOOK LINK	849 hits
http://royal.link/Amethyst/Nook BOOK LINK Changed to CJ	730 hits
http://royal.link/Amethyst/Paper PAPER	32 hits

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To change a link, go to the Links Labeled page.

1980 hits	Edit	Track
3145 hits	Edit	Track
290 hits	Edit	Track
4553 hits	Edit	Track
0 hits	Edit	Track
849 hits	Edit	Track
730 hits	Edit	Track
32 hits	Edit	Track

Littlink
beta

[Links](#)

[Hits](#)

[Labels](#)

[Settings](#)

[Help](#)
Sign Out

Links Labeled AMETHYST [Filter by Label](#)

CREATE LINK TO A

[http://something](#)

SHORT ADDRESS

[http://royalLink](#)

BOOK LINK

[http://royalLink](#)

BOOK LINK Affili

[http://royalLink](#)

BOOK LINK

[http://royalLink](#)

BOOK LINK

[http://royalLink](#)

BOOK LINK

[http://royalLink/Amethyst/Kindle](#) →

BOOK LINK

[http://royalLink/Amethyst/KindleFree](#) →

FREE LINKS

[http://royalLink/Amethyst/Kobo](#) →

BOOK LINK

[http://royalLink/Amethyst/Nook](#) →

BOOK LINK Changed to C

[http://royalLink/Amethyst/Paper](#) →

PAPER

Add Tracking Tags

Tags help you tell where your hits are coming from. Simply customize your link with a different tag for each place you post it. Tag names and values may include any character, but letters, numbers, dashes, and underscores work best.

TAG NAME	TAG VALUE
source	Twitter

Enter your tags, then select and copy this link:

[http://royalLink/Amethyst/Kindle](#)

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Then tap on the Track button of the link you would like to modify. An *Add Tracking Tags* box

will pop up (see second chart above).

Labeled AMETHYST [Filter by Label](#)

Add Tracking Tags

Tags help you tell where your hits are coming from. Simply customize your link with a different tag for each place you post it. Tag names and values may include any character, but letters, numbers, dashes, and underscores work best.

TAG NAME	TAG VALUE
source	front
source	twitter

Enter your tags, then select and copy this link:

<http://royall.ink/Amethyst/Kindle?source=front>

Put a descriptive word in the *Tag Value* field to indicate where you're putting the link. In the chart above, the link will track who opens a Kindle version and clicks on a title in the front list of your books. The *Tag Name* describes what you're measuring.

In this case, Kindle is the source. At the bottom is your link you copy and paste to use it.



You can use Littlink, and as we did with BookTrakr, run a test to see what works—from Facebook ads to where is it best to put a list of your titles in the book: in the front or back. With two different links, one tagged front and the other back, you can see on this chart that readers liked both places equally, which led the author to decide to put her book lists in both front and back.

[Littlink](#) costs \$2.99 per month; [take a tour](#) and use the program free for fourteen days.

Both BookTrakr and Littlink can help an author decide what's working and what isn't. The programs are tools to make your life easier and to test ideas and make sense of the data you receive.

Some of the ideas they suggest you try testing are: running an ad; the usefulness of a social media activity; changing titles, keywords, blurbs, categories and covers; the best way to release a new book or a box set; changing prices; offering a free book; discounting a book; going exclusively with KENP or going wide; cross promotion with other authors; and mailing list effectiveness.

I want to thank Jack Royal-Gordon and Brent Royal-Gordon for the use of their PowerPoint.

Margaret Daley, a USA Today best-selling author of one hundred books (five million plus sold worldwide), has been married for more than 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](#).

How Indies Work Best With Ingram

Understanding booksellers' preferences, plus new hardcover options for POD

By Sidney Swanson



The Ingram Content Group provides wholesaling, full-service distribution, library services, textbook services, and print-on-demand services. With fifty years in the publishing industry, Ingram is the world's largest and most trusted wholesaler/distributor of books, bringing together 30,000 publishers and 39,000 retailers.

Ingram's two most important services for the independently published are their print-on-demand (POD) branches: Lightning Source (LSI) and IngramSpark. Of the two programs, LSI has been around the longest, but the LSI platform has a notoriously steep learning curve. LSI best serves the customers for whom it was created: publishers uploading dozens (or more) titles every week, who can memorize the steps required.

Robin Cutler joined The Ingram Content Group with the mission to serve a different segment of customers by creating a user-friendly interface allowing indie and micro-press publishers to easily and quickly upload their titles to Ingram for publication in their choice of hard cover, paperback, or ebook format.

Having worked previously at CreateSpace, Cutler is uniquely positioned to understand the interests and needs of independent publishers. Any indie who previously used LSI will be thrilled with the ease of the IngramSpark platform, not to mention the lower price point and IngramSpark effort to avoid unexpected change fees. Best of all, IngramSpark customers enjoy the same access to Ingram's global distribution as those using LSI.

Cutler provides several reasons to explain why print-on-demand (POD) makes sense. Perhaps most obviously, at \$49 for print and ebook combined set-up fees, it is an inexpensive way to bring your book to market, allowing you to test the demand for your title. It's also possible to switch from POD to offset printing if demand calls for it.

There is no inventory to manage, no warehousing, and no orders to pack and ship. Lastly, with POD, it's easy to make corrections so that your information remains up to date and correct. Even covers are easy to change.

Uploading to IngramSpark

So how do POD and distribution work with IngramSpark? You upload your book files to IngramSpark, review an e-proof, and approve (or revise) the proof. At this point, the title goes into a data feed to Ingram's partners and into Ingram's catalog of orderable titles. Retail and library partners place orders for your title, which Ingram prints and delivers, and then Ingram pays you for the sale.

Cutler is quick to point out that distributing is distinct from selling—IngramSpark is your distributor, not your sales rep: you still have to market your book to individuals, retailers, and libraries so that people know about your title. By telling retailers and libraries that your book is orderable through Ingram, however, you are removing one of the major barriers preventing these customers from purchasing from indies.

Most retailers prefer to order from Ingram. Announcements in Ingram's Advance catalogs can be purchased to provide greater visibility for new titles, and if you desire sales reps or agents to take your title to retailers, this is possible through Ingram's partnerships with full-service distributors including IPS, IPG, PGW, and Midpoint, which you can email Cutler about.

Mastering metadata

So what does an indie need to get started? For print books, you'll need PDFs of the book's cover and interior. For ebooks, you'll need an EPUB file and a JPG cover. You will additionally need ISBNs for distribution, a credit card, an email address, and metadata for your title, which includes:

- Book title and author name
- Author bio, affiliations, and physical location by region
- BISAC codes (subject codes which increase discoverability, used heavily by librarians)
- A description of the book
- Keywords, reviews, endorsements, and a table of contents can be entered
- Audience (adult or juvenile? What age/grade?)
- ISBNs (for distributed titles)
- Pricing in global markets (at minimum: US, UK, EU, CA, AU)
- Print attributes (trim size—use standard sizes for a professional look, number of pages, paper color: use cream for fiction, white for non-fiction)
- Retail discount, which for print is typically 30 percent to 55 percent of list price, and for ebooks is typically 60 percent of list price
- Returnability (choose: non-returnable; returnable where you pay for both cost and shipping the book back to you; return and destroy where the book is not shipped back and you only pay cost)
- Publication date and on-sale date (for preorders)

Cutler points out that BN will only stock returnable titles. However, independent retailers in the room agreed loudly that for indie bookstores, the deep discount is much more important than the returnability of a title.

Cutler suggests authors use the 55 percent discount to provide an incentive to book

retailers. If you are only interested in selling paper books online, however, then the 30 percent discount is fine. Interestingly, while large return rates are common for the Big Five publishers, indie publishers usually only have return rates of 1-2 percent, according to Ingram's records.

A few more miscellaneous tips

Use an impressive-sounding imprint for your publishing efforts, as this still matters to retailers buying books. A publicist in the room chimed in to agree that you will get a lot more respect if you name your imprint. Ingram also allows you to designate multiple imprints.

Make sure your BISAC is drilled down as deeply as possible. Never choose "General Fiction" as your category. Far better would be to choose Juvenile Fiction > Dystopian.

If you want to sell to libraries, be aware they prefer hardcover. Both laminate and cloth cover with jacket are available from Ingram.

Work with professionals in editing, design, and marketing to create a desirable product.

You don't know what format your readers prefer, so offer hardback, paperback, and ebook. For the same reason, use the widest distribution options to reach the greatest number of readers.

If you have titles set up with CreateSpace, Robin can port them over to IngramSpark if you [email](#) the request to her.

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.

The Art of Author Branding

Creating a visual identity throughout your titles and public presence

By Laura Marie Altom



Vivacious entrepreneur Kimberly Killion has been in the publishing industry since 1998 when she first started writing. In 2008, she sold to Kensington Publishing, and in 2009, one of her books was nominated for RWA's RITA award. She is also self-published, holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts, is an Adobe Certified Expert, and has been a graphic designer for 25-plus years and a higher education graphic design teacher for 13 years.

All of the above makes Killion uniquely qualified to assist authors with branding. Since launching The Killion Group, Inc., she reports that she no longer has time for her own writing, since she now helps a clientele of more than 2,000 authors, and along with her staff has helped create more than 6,000 book covers.

Her clientele is as varied as her cover art, and includes *New York Times* bestsellers such as Deepak Chopra, Carly Phillips, and Roxanne St. Claire.

Where to start with individual book branding?

If you should decide to enlist the help of The Killion Group, Inc. your process will begin with filling out their extensive cover questionnaire. Think of this as a cheat-sheet for the cover designer.

Image selection comes next. It is crucial that an author use royalty-free images. The Killion Group has a sister site called hotdamnstock.com that sells stock art images specifically created for the romance publishing industry. They will also do exclusive shoots using models who match a story's specific needs.

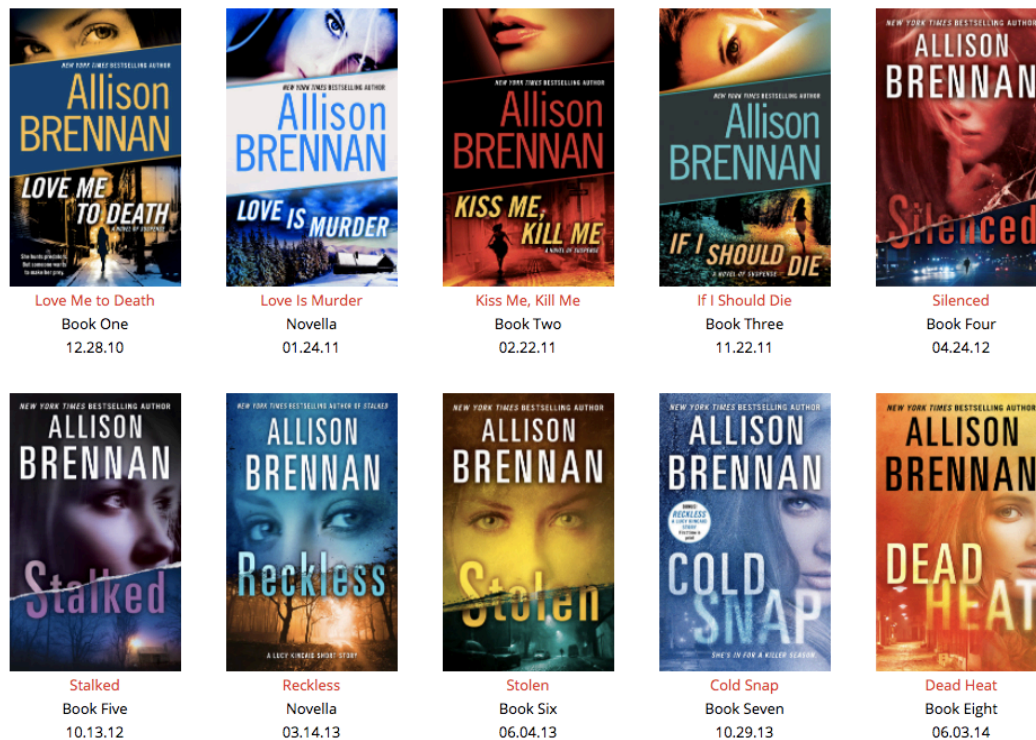
Typography is as important as the image when branding a book, series, or author. Killion reports that many clients have their own signature fonts that are carried with them throughout the launch of each new series. Be sure type is legible. Kerning (the space between letters) and leading (the space between lines) are crucial to make the cover legible. Author names can even be tied in with typography to create unique logos.

Taglines add the extra spark that elevates an average cover to one that appears more

professional. Add achievements such as *New York Times* or *USA Today* bestselling author. Prestigious contest wins can also be added.

Color is an important element to consider in cover design. “There’s a time and place for neon. Historical isn’t it,” Killion said. Consider your genre with selecting colors. Colorschemedesigner.com gives users the ability to pick a single color, then find groupings that work best together.

Allison Brennan’s [Lucy Kincaid thriller series](#) was shown as an example of a great cover/branding project wherein all elements were seamlessly woven together to make a successfully branded package.



Logos are another vital element of cover/author branding. They can be used in:

- Name branding—Website headers, to make an author name stand out
- Series logos—Small logos that are placed on covers to aid readers in series recognition
- Publisher imprints—Useful for indie authors printing as themselves, but wishing to appear to readers as if they run their own publishing house.

Where should authors use logos? Everywhere, Killion said. Title pages, calendars, bookmarks. Especially on print book spines and back covers.

When branding book series, remember to show related covers on the back cover or in the back matter of each new title. It’s also important to remember the inside of your books when branding. Develop type and image styling. Make the inside of your books as beautiful as the outside.

Your author name on your website is another important place to remember branding. The

font and style should be consistent across all social media platforms.

When marketing book series, it was suggested to bundle box sets. Adding a mini-book to an existing set is a great way to add additional reader value.

What if you're a hybrid author? How do you brand? Highlight current projects by putting a banner as the face of your site. If you're selling two different genres, the banners need to rotate. If mixing genres, stack the names and have one of each. Maybe add a unique design elements or logos to make each stand out.

[Laura Marie Altom](#) is a hybrid author of over 50 books in three different genres. She's been happily married to her college sweetheart (Go Hogs!) for 25 years and believes their boy/girl twins actively plot to drive her crazy. Find her on [Facebook](#).

Mastering Your Best Reader Connector

20 minutes a day to email marketing bliss

By Tyra Burton



What is one of the best ways to get your books in front of readers? Nurturing your email list.

Many authors, myself included, are guilty of not establishing one because it's a daunting task. When I attended Chloe Kizer's "When Everything Clicks: 20 Minutes a Day to Email Marketing Bliss" panel at NINC 2016, I knew I'd hit the jackpot. By following her six simple steps, and committing to 20 minutes a day, five days a week, email domination can be yours.

By why email?

On social media platforms, others dictate the rules and "own" the fans. Booksellers might share sales data, but they don't share who buys your books. In order to have control, and the ability contact readers directly, email lists are the hands-down winners as they're a direct channel between the author and reader.

Because of that, your email signup prompt should be highly visible on your website. If you don't have a website yet, Written Word Media, where Kizer works, has a free on-line course on how to create one in less than 4 hours. It's available on [Teachable](#).

If you build it, they will come

Getting started is part of what makes creating an email list seem impossible. First you need to choose an Email Service Provider (ESP), then decide on the information you need from subscribers, where to collect information, and what to offer as a sign-up incentive.

ESPs can help you create more effective emails through templates and providing analytics about your open rate (subscribers who open your email) and click rate (those who click on links in your email). [Mailchimp](#) and [Constant Contact](#) are two ESPs that help you manage subscribers and email delivery.

During signup, Kizer suggested getting two additional pieces of information beyond the subscriber's email address: the individual's name and zip code. The ESP will be able to customize your email with their first name, and the zip code will allow you to target subscribers

for personal appearances and conferences.

If you want to build a quick-loading landing page that is mobile optimized, Kizer suggested [Instapage](#). It integrates with Mailchimp and is a great choice if you don't have a website or a slow loading site. You can pin the Instapage link post to the top of Facebook and Twitter feeds when you don't have a new release.

Don't forget to include a link to sign-up for your newsletter in your e-books. The goal is to have active subscribers on your list, people who are interested in your work. Subscribers gained through your website, social media channels and books are most likely to be active. The goal is not to have *everyone* subscribe, but instead earn subscribers who want to know more about you.

Now that you have an ESP and a place to direct readers to sign-up, you need to think about the incentive for readers to take that action. The incentive is the carrot that gets them to start a conversation with you. This is all about give and take. Instead of "join my list," you can now say, "get my book for free."

Don't have a full book you can use as a freemium? Try a prequel, behind-the-scenes, or deleted section as unique lures. Both [Instafreebie](#) and [Bookfunnel](#) will help you make free content available.

Pay to play

In the current climate of social media newsfeed algorithms, consideration needs to be given to social advertising. Pay to play will help you get subscribers, especially if you correctly define your target market.

News feed advertisements can be used to send users to a site (e.g. your website or an Instapage) to sign up. Don't forget to use your lure to encourage people to click. Lead-generation ads on Facebook can be used to increase subscribers.

The sign-up is seamlessly integrated into Facebook through a call-to-action link. Facebook uses a script called Pixels which help you increase conversions, optimize ad delivery, create custom audiences, find lookalike audiences and audience insights. Facebook's Help Center has more information on [Pixels](#) and how you can create or modify an existing one.

Giveaways can be a great incentive to subscribe to your list. Kizer warned to be cautious using gift card giveaways because they often bring in lower-quality subscribers. The goal is to have *active* subscribers who are interested in you, not in a \$20 Amazon gift card to buy the latest Avengers movie. Focus on giving away your books, or those of other authors who write in a similar genre.

Something borrowed: renting a list

Promotional services such as [BookBub](#) have email lists that you can rent to connect with readers. BookBub recently expanded their promotional offerings to include not only the highly coveted featured deal, but also advertisements in which you can promote any book at any time.

Written Word Media has several web properties including [Freebooksy](#) and [Bargain Booksy](#), with audiences that are looking for deals and are very active. [New in Books](#) targets a high-end reader who pays full price and likes print and eBooks, and [Red Feather Romance](#) subscribers are mainly women who are looking for romance reads and use eReaders.

Written Word Media also has several different publicity packages. Once you find the one that is right for your target market, promoting with them can help drive sales and downloads, increase reviews, and obtain subscribers. Owning your own list is the goal, but paying for placement on BookBub and Written Word Media can help you achieve that goal through increased reader exposure.

Keep it short and sweet

When putting together emails, think short stories—not *War and Peace*. The key is to provide interesting content in easy-to-digest chunks. This begins with your subject line which should be less than 30 characters and mobile-friendly. Aim for short and snappy, making the subject line completely visible in the in-box list, while enticing them to click or tap to learn more.

Once opened, the body of your email needs to have easily scanned headlines that break up your newsletter and highlight content. You don't want your newsletter to look like a wall of text. These bolded sections let the reader know what you are trying to say.

Your call-to-action should be at the top, preferably seen as soon as the email is open, and without having to scroll down. This can be a challenge on mobile devices, but most ESPs have templates and previews available.

Drop the dead weight

It might seem counter-intuitive, but you should actually make a habit of weeding out your mailing list. By cleaning out your list you can keep your engagement rate up. One thing you to do at the start is a double opt-in process, in which your ESP sends an email after sign-up to confirm.

Next, you will want to pull the segment of subscribers who have never opened your emails into a separate list. They are dead weight and lowering your open rate. A good open rate makes you look better to email providers.

Now that the dead weight is gone, let's focus on the super-fans. Pay attention to your clickers, the subscribers who not only open your email but also follow through on your call to action. Put these readers in a separate bucket because they are your most valuable fans, and you want to reward them. If you have specials or giveaways, these are the people who will appreciate them the most and are most likely to participate.

Slow and steady: a little bit every day goes a long way

By focusing on your email list for 20 minutes a day, five days a week, Kizer's plan makes creating a subscriber base doable. With her formula, it will take you two to three weeks for set-up and testing. Once you have reached maintenance mode, tasks fall in to four main categories:

Growing your list – two days

During these days, you are going to set up and monitor your ads and giveaways. Remember, your email signups might be slow at first, but over time you will establish a list of active readers.

Planning – one day

Planning includes thinking about and creating content. Possible content includes promotions, acknowledging holidays, updates on your work-in-progress, new releases, appearances, and blog post preview or guest blog posts.

Some authors are comfortable sharing fun pictures of their cats and dogs and writing about their travel for research. Your readers want to know more about what goes into writing your books and into your daily process. As mundane as it may seem to you, for them, it's a glimpse behind the curtain. If you're just starting out, begin with a once-a-month strategy. As you grow, move to once-a-week as it will help you stay at the top of your readers' minds.

Creating and sending – one day

If you are only sending out an email once per month, this makes it easier for you to be ready to hit send as you'll be able to do bits and pieces over time. This is the day to put your ESP templates to work and craft a layout that grabs attention.

Analyzing results – one day

When checking results, open rates and click rates are most important. Generally, your click-through and conversion rates will be lower than your open rates, which is why it is important to hook them with subject line. Smaller lists will have higher than average open rates. For media and publishing overall, MailChimp reports a 22 percent open rate. Romance and mystery have better engagement rates than do other genres.

Armed with my battle plan, and an idea of what I need to accomplish each day, I'm proud to say that thanks to Chloe Kizer I have an email sign-up form and I'm ready to rock my first newsletter.

Marketing professor by day, gamer geek gadget girl by night, Tyra Burton is a social media strategist and co-author of Socially Engaged: The Author's Guide to Social Media. An award-winning professor, Tyra is a frequent workshop facilitator, presenter, and panelist on topics ranging from social media to gaming gender issues. She lives in metro Atlanta with her husband and their three socially engaging fur babies.

Crisis Coping Strategies

How to write when everything goes wrong—part one

By Allie Pleiter



"Life is what happens while you were making other plans."

Working writers need to figure out how to continue writing when muse-squashing chaos erupts. But how? In my three-article series, we'll cover tactics for keeping your creativity up and running. But first, some basic writer crisis survival strategies:

The four powerful questions

Your goal in any crisis is to make it out intact—even if wounded—with hope and confidence. Taking a cue from leadership guru Michael Hyatt, I have found the following four questions to be useful in the thick of things:

1. What's still possible now?

When crisis hits, our brain kicks into totalitarian thinking: *everything's awful, all my plans are shot*. Deliberately shifting your thinking toward what is still intact, however, can gain you a foothold.

2. What's not possible now?

Sometimes, denial only makes things worse. Recognize the limitations of your crisis. If your crisis will tank your tight deadline, own it now, not days before your deadline.

3. What do I need right now?

The "right now" part of this question is crucial. Our writerly imaginations can churn today's problems into tomorrow's catastrophes. See the larger picture, but know your best hope for coping is in the here and now. Focus just on today's next solvable step (sleep, advice, funds, information, etc.), and your survival comes more easily.

4. What do I want right now?

If need to stay beside an ill loved one, you might want a trashy magazine to occupy your anxious mind. That's not a "luxury." Anything that makes you calmer or more comfortable is not selfish, but self-care.

Change what you can

Remember that in situations even as desperate as terminal illness, war, or disability, something can almost always be done to achieve “better.” Not “all better,” but some form of improvement. If you look hard and get creative, there is something within your control to slightly improve your situation or environment.

Go and do it. It might feel small or silly, and it won’t likely solve the problem, but it might make the current situation just a bit more tolerable, and that goes a long way.

Even in “permanent” chaos—situations that are forever changed—resist the temptation to throw your hands up in despair. “Better” is still possible, albeit incremental. In fact, the long-term nature of the challenge makes such increments more powerful.

What kind of crisis are you facing? Most crises eventually sort into two categories: short-term, intense wrecks havoc for days or weeks, while long-term epic shifts can impact our lives for months, years, or forever.

The Short-Term Intense Crisis

A tree crashed through your roof, you’re having emergency surgery ... these crises attack with little warning but have—hopefully—a foreseeable end. Here are a few coping strategies:

1. Clear the decks

Ditch all non-essential commitments immediately. Declare your schedule in “survival mode”—but try to keep anything that makes you happy or gives support.

2. Say “YES”

Let people help! Make a list so that when people ask, you now have specific, helpful things they can do.

3. Find a survivor

Contact someone who has successfully come out the other side of your kind of crisis. A face and a story bolsters your belief that good outcomes—or even just survival—are possible.

4. Assign a manager

Most of us have that “organizer” friend—give her the list you made and send all inquiries her way. There are even websites set up to digitize this, including the organizational board [Trello](#) (list tasks and invite anyone to view them), to [Take Them a Meal](#) or [Meal Train](#), which organize meal deliveries from friends and family, and [Send a Meal](#), which allows far-flung friends to pitch in.

The long-term epic crisis

Chronic illness, loss of a loved one ... life excels at changing our world in large-scale ways. You’ll need to be creative and persistent in how you cope. Here are some things to remember:

1. Don’t sprint in a marathon

It’s tempting to throw up your hands and declare a catastrophe, but it is smarter to learn pacing, goal-setting, resource budgeting, and self-care to get yourself to the finish line.

2. Don’t ask for a two-week extension when you need six months

Don't confuse stubborn courage with foolish denial. Take whatever feels reasonable and double it. A wide margin is far better than a second or third missed deadline.

3. Compartmentalize your muse

Not all parts of writing will elude you, even in the worst of moments. You can't edit, but can you draft? If you're too fried to proofread, see if plotting offers a diversion. Experiment and sort the pieces of your current project by your capabilities.

4. Take emotional vitamins

Ask friends and family to be generous and frequent with their encouragement. A daily dose of "you can do it" can bolster your emotional immune system.

Sensory calm-farming

Anxiety has two components: physiological and emotional. Calm the body, and you can start to calm the mind. Here are a few of my favorite tricks:

1. Scent

Find something—perfume, a candle, food—that smells like "peace" to you. It might not make you totally calm, but combined with some other tactics, you might be amazed by the effects.

2. Sound

Apps such as Spotify and Pandora allow you to add a tailored soundtrack anywhere. Music is a powerful mood-changer; wield it to your advantage.

3. Touch

Wear something comforting. Hoard hugs. Adjust the room temperature. Grab a stuffed animal, a cat, or a puppy. My favorite freak-out fix? Put on pajamas. Even just for an hour—it works.

The fort of fours

We writers are "what if?" experts, so we need to actively soothe our minds in times of trouble. Build what I call "The Fort of Fours." Early in the day, open a notebook and list four items in each of the following categories:

1. Four good things

They can be big or small, but they must be specific to the day. Force yourself to find the good hiding around you in a bad situation. This activates your optimism radar.

2. Four wishes, prayers, or goals just for today

Train yourself to walk through a crisis one day at a time—even for a problem that could be years in the solving.

3. Check off yesterday's list

You might be amazed how many check marks appear. The accompanying "I did that," or "this came to pass" or "that prayer was answered" is powerful evidence that you can get through this. That's why you must write it down—a hard-copy list is always more powerful data for your brain.

These are the most effective crisis management techniques I've found anywhere. I hope they are as helpful to you as they have been to me. In the next article, we'll shift from self-

management to the tricky challenges of everyone else around you.

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.

The Mad Scribbler

Jurassic Writer

By Laura Resnick



"There were giants in the earth in those days...."
— Genesis, 6:4

As we celebrate yet another New Year in the 21st century, I recall a recent question from another writer about what it was like to be an author before the internet era, and nostalgia sends me down Memory Lane.

I started writing seriously in 1987 (I was a zygote at the time) while living in Palermo, the capital city of Sicily. I am such a dinosaur that I wrote my first two published novels on a typewriter. In fact, it was a manual typewriter. Yes, electric typewriters existed in those days—I am from the lively Jurassic era, not the murky Precambrian period of primordial ooze—but I didn't own one.

Looking back, I can see clearly that communication, conveyance, and access to information are the major changes the internet introduced to my life as a writer.

When I lived there, it could take up to a year to get a phone installed in a flat in Sicily, so I didn't bother ordering one. In that pre-internet era, trans-Atlantic mail was the only way for me to communicate with people in the US. When I queried agents or submitted to publishers in New York, I typed individual letters to each of them. And since I didn't have access to US postage for the self-addressed stamped envelopes they all required, the letters or packages I sent to them always included some international reply coupons—which were official little slips of paper they could take to their post office to get the necessary US postage to return my self-addressed envelope to me.

Similarly, research was an epic adventure in the misty eons before the internet. Just to find the addresses in New York to which I wanted to send my queries and submissions, I had to make a train journey to Rome, which was a 26-hour round-trip. That was the closest American library, and the only place I could find a copy of Writers Market (several years out of date),

which was one of the few sources of such information in those days.

These days, of course, I would just search for contact information online, from anywhere in the world.

Airmail postage for a manuscript was so prohibitive that I submitted my books via trans-Atlantic surface mail, which took a couple of months to get to New York. These days, of course, it takes only seconds to send a manuscript as a file attached to your email.

I had moved back to the US by the time I got a response to my submissions the following year. I received a letter sent overnight via FedEx from Silhouette Books saying they'd been trying to contact me for about a week, but no one ever answered the phone. (No one was ever at home in my shared apartment, since we all worked multiple jobs, and we didn't have an answering machine.)

It was a letter I'm glad I didn't miss the way I had missed all those calls, since they were making an offer on my first book. These days, I check email daily, which how editors usually reach me.

I wrote my next book on an electric typewriter I got from my dad, who no longer used it because he had switched to a DOS computer.

As a brand new romance writer who knew no one in the field, I had no one to talk to about my frustrations with my publisher and my questions about the genre. These days, many aspiring writers have more access to trusted sources, professional writers, and current information than I had in the pre-internet era while making my third book sale to a major house.

So I wrote a letter to a veteran Silhouette author whose books I liked, and I posed a number of very candid questions and comments to her about some of my confusion at Silhouette and my frustrations with my editor. And since I had no way of finding contact information for that writer, I sent my letter to her in care of our mutual publisher, which company I assumed would forward it to her.

The following week, I received a phone call from my editor to discuss that letter with me.

Silhouette Books had a policy of opening and reading the mail addressed to its authors. This struck me as a pretty clear violation of federal law, and I said so. But the editor ignored this point and proceeded to address some of the questions I had written to the author who would never receive my letter. (As you might suppose, things were a bit awkward between us for a while after that, but we got past it.)

While numerous writers (including me) have sometimes written a very candid email and then idiotically sent it to the wrong person, the above instance was the sort of interference with one writer seeking information from another that publishers, editors, and agents can no longer conduct, because the internet ensures that most of us have access to each other and/or to information.

The internet also completely changed self-promotion for writers in many ways. Writers (including me) complain about publishers not doing enough to promote our books or our names, but that's nothing new. What is new, thanks to the internet, is how much we can do for ourselves in that vein, as well as how much control we can take over our professional profile, self-presentation, and writer-to-reader contact compared to the way things used to be.

The nuts and bolts of being a working writer are completely different in the internet era, too. For example, not only can we do a lot of online research now, it's also much easier than it used to be to find and contact experts on subjects we're researching. And whereas it used to take me months or years to track down hard-to-find books (if I ever even learned of their existence), I can now fill almost any research niche in my library with just a few minutes of online shopping. (I like Bookfinder.com for hard-to-find titles.)

In the 1990s, I wrote a fantasy novel, *In Legend Born*, that was over 1,000 MS pages. Printing, photocopying, verifying, and shipping multiple copies of that MS for my publisher, my agent, and the agency's foreign desk took me two days and cost me a ridiculous amount of money. Without ever discussing it with me, the agency later spent about \$800 making additional photocopies and shipping those enormous packages overseas via airmail; I found out when they deducted that sum from one of my advance checks.

Happily, those claims no longer exist when sending our manuscripts to agents, editors, and markets via the internet. I have always distinctly remembered the day my then-agent told me he'd had something called a "cable modem" installed in his office, and he had "downloaded" several manuscripts from clients before lunch, and he had a strong feeling that this technology was going to change the way he conducted his business. I didn't even really understand what he was talking about at the time, but within a year, that technology was also changing the way I conducted my work, too.

It also means, frankly, that I creep up even closer to my deadlines than I used to, because I no longer have to include a few days for shipping when calculating delivery.

There is a downside, though, to all this ease of communication, conveyance, and connectivity. When I was young, a quarrel among writers or a feud within a writing organization took months to build up. There often wasn't enough will to sustain a fight when it involved writing hardcopy letters to various people and waiting days or weeks for a reply.

"Open" or public letters appeared in publications that were released only once a month, or perhaps once a quarter. A disagreement might be very old news before most people heard about it—if they ever did.

So despite all the inconveniences we endured in that prehistoric era, there is also a sense in which those were halcyon days, indeed.

Long ago, Laura Resnick wrote romance novels under the pseudonym Laura Leone. After the wheel was invented, she turned to writing fantasy novels under her own name.



Founded in 1989

NINC Statement of Principle

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

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