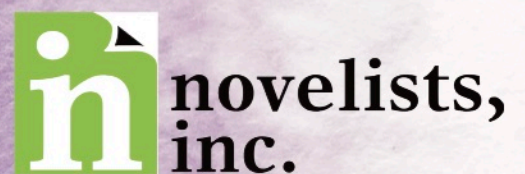


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President's Voice

By Julie Ortolon



As we start to edge toward Thanksgiving in the United States, I'm grateful to everyone who helped make the NINC conference such a success. Hopefully by now everyone who attended the conference has had some time to recover and is a busy ticking off an item or two from the always epic Post-Conference To Do List.

For me, a NINC conference is a good barometer of the state of the publishing industry. The last few years have been a roller coaster for all of us—traditional, hybrid, and indie—as we learned new skills and adapted to the changes. As a result of the ebook revolution, both our conference and our organization has seen a lot of growth.

There are some things, however, that haven't changed: quality writing still matters. The world has a reading culture that will always value physical books. After years of explosive growth in the ebook sales, we learned during the conference that ebook sales have leveled, print books are rebounding, and audio books remain a new frontier and area for growth. To address all of these factors, NINC is working on some new initiatives that I can't wait to share with you soon.

We have more options than ever for how to publish and distribute our works, and as an organization, NINC hopes to be a resource and support for all aspects of your career. Dive into this month's special issue of *Nink* to read the Thursday conference reports and learn more about what those options are.

Julie

NINC Member Benefits

Don't forget to sign up for the [email loop](#), [critique/brainstorming group](#), and the members-only [Facebook group](#) if you haven't already. The Pro Services Directory, member [discount page](#), and [sample letters](#) are also great resources.

Missing a newsletter? Past issues can be found [here](#). You can also [propose an article](#) or submit a [letter to the editor](#). And you can [buy a paperback copy](#) of the 2016 *Best of Nink*!

Accessing the NINC Website

Not sure how to log in to the NINC website? Visit the login page here: <https://ninc.com/membership-overview/login-to-ninc/>

Julie Ortolon is a USA Today bestselling author of contemporary romance. First published by Dell Publishing in 2000, she has also written for St. Martin's Press, and Signet Eclipse. Since going indie in 2009, she has hit the Amazon Top 100 several times. One of her greatest joys is helping other authors find success. When not writing, she enjoys traveling the world with family and friends.

Strategies and Tactics

Writing when you aren't feeling it

By Denise A. Agnew



Every writer experiences days where creativity isn't flowing. Are you employing strategies and tactics that make the situation worse or better?

Perhaps you recognize one of these scenarios. You're tired. Maybe a chronic health condition is flaring. The coffee isn't providing you energy. The dog is barking. The husband has an attitude. The cat box needs cleaning. The kids are running amok. Still, you're determined to write. You plant your butt in the chair. You demand creativity flow.

Or maybe you don't have any of these distractions. Maybe you can't think of one situation or responsibility that should keep you from feeling creative. Thirty minutes later you're still sitting in the chair and the one paragraph you wrote makes no sense. You give up, filled with negative thoughts and believing you can't write your way out of a paper bag.

Many people (including well-meaning writers and coaches) will just tell you to suck it up. You *may* be able to tell yourself to suck it up, but that isn't going to keep you creative in a satisfying way that will stick.

What strategies and tactics can you use to increase your chances of creating for life?

Employ draft mode

Knock the critic off of your shoulder. Your first draft is *not* the time to give yourself non-productive, destructive evaluations of your writing skills. It's draft mode only. Later is the time to clean things up. The first draft is for your enjoyment, to remember what you've loved about writing in the first place. Play and have fun. While pantsers sometimes use this tactic naturally, plotters can use this tactic, too. Remind yourself that you don't need to know every beat of the story. A little uncertainty can insure some amazing new points in the story you didn't consider the first time around.

Thou shalt not compare

Comparing yourself to other writers is a sure-fire way to destroy your creativity. You may admire a writer because they've published 100 books or how much money you *think* they are making. Here's the thing ... you don't really have an insight into what methods they're using to get to where they are

now. Even if they reveal their tips and tricks, you can't recreate every special set of circumstances in their lives that propelled them to where they are today. Instead, say *so what* and be determined to manifest your writing the way it works for you.

Recognize your strengths

The inner critic is determined to point out your flaws either personally or professionally. Owning your strengths isn't deploying the humble brag or brushing off compliments. Give yourself credit every day. Make a list of what you do well (and not just in your writing life). Maybe you're a loving friend, wife, or parent. Maybe you've done good works in your community. Perhaps you were kind to a stranger this week. Recognize these strengths as worthy.

Sleep it off

If physical or mental complications hijack your quality sleep, it's time to discover what the problem is and get assistance. Quality sleep can go a long way toward curing what is causing a creative block.

Apply intention-based thinking

Writers are bombarded with advice filled with negativity. The messages often arrive as tough love. You might hear someone say that writing is hard, so suck it up, buttercup. What if you employed the idea that it isn't? This sounds contrary to common sense. Are you one of those writers who apply virtue to the idea that writing is difficult? If you tell yourself that writing is difficult, you are planting the idea in your mind that it will be. Why do that to yourself? Instead, plant some positive seeds. Applying intention-based thinking can help.

Intentions are sometimes misunderstood. People will say things like, "I will write five pages today." A better way to frame it is, "I am writing five pages today." Take the attitude of you *are* doing something rather than what you *will* do. Saying you *will* do something means you haven't accomplished it yet. Acting as if you *are* doing that thing right now tricks your brain into believing it.

Set the following intentions before you write. Write every day, "Writing is easy." Write this once for seven days and see if it makes a difference in how you perceive writing. If you have other negative thoughts about your ability to write, now is the time to change your thinking. Add these intentions: I am a great writer; I write exciting stories that people love to read. Brainstorm other intentions, including ones that are non-writing related. Keep this up for seven days and see what a difference it makes.

Listen to music that motivates you

Writing an uplifting story? Play music that feels uplifting. Need to create a suspenseful scene? Discover the right tone for whatever you want to convey on the page and allow music to set the mood.

Reward yourself

Maybe you love a certain type of coffee or other food or drink. If you write those pages today, enjoy that coffee, chocolate, or whatever gives you a little pleasure. Perhaps there's a book you've had on the shelf that you want to read. Designate it as a treat you'll receive for doing the work. Maybe

there's a movie that you are dying to see. Finish your page writing goals for the day and treat yourself. Why not? You deserve it.

Discover true motivating factors

If you've had a lengthy writing career (or even if you haven't), you can forget why you started writing in the first place. Or perhaps the reason you started writing isn't the same reason you're doing it now. Either way, it is easy to forget your true motivations. Spend time thinking about the single most motivating factor in why you write. Is this motivating factor based on what you think *should* make you want to write? Or is the motivating factor deeply personal? Make a list, without over thinking, of your motivating factors. Sit with them a few days and then reexamine your list. Decide which of these factors used to be true but may not be now. Explore the concept that you could need new motivators in this part of your writing journey. You don't need to adhere to the same motivators now that you did in the past. If the motivators you had in the past still keep you writing, that is wonderful.

Denise A. Agnew is the award-winning author of over 67 novels. Denise's novels Love From the Ashes and Blackout were optioned for film/TV by Where's Lucy? Productions. Denise is a writer/producer (Happy Catastrophe Productions/Bright Frontier Films/Where's Lucy? Productions), a paranormal investigator, Reiki Master, Certified Creativity Coach, and RT Academy Mentor. As a creativity coach, Denise assists anyone in the arts to maintain lifelong creativity. You can find her at www.deniseagnew.com and www.creativepencoaching.com.

The Mad Scribbler

Your voice, your choice

By Laura Resnick



“Government is an association of men who do violence to the rest of us.”

—Leo Tolstoy

One consistent guideline since NINC’s inception is “no politics.” Although we sometimes discuss legislation pertaining to career novelists (such as proposed changes to copyright, trade, or tax law), we don’t debate political issues or discuss politicians. Not in *Nink*, not on Ninclink, and not on NINC social media.

Despite members having passionate political views, NINC members abide by this guideline the majority of the time. Keeping the organization a politics-free zone is such a longstanding and central aspect of NINC zeitgeist that board members and moderators aren’t alone in enforcing it; members also participate in maintaining this standard.

If someone does make a political remark on Ninclink, for example, members may well precede the moderator in reminding that person that we don’t talk politics here. When I was NINC president a decade ago, a member posted an essay on the newly-founded NINC blog in which she discussed a high-profile political candidate, using that individual as an example of a real-life person who could feasibly serve as inspiration for a fictional character. Within hours of the blog going “live,” there were over a dozen emails in my inbox from members saying that although the essay wasn’t explicitly political, using the NINC blog to write enthusiastically about a current political candidate still crossed the “no politics” line and the post should be removed. (After email discussion with the board, I contacted the member, the blog was removed, and I revised the blog guidelines to define “no politics” more clearly.)

NINC’s prohibition against broaching political subjects has proved to be a wise course, as it’s ensured the organization’s ability to stay focused on its mission as a professional network for career novelists. Even in this deeply polarized era, more than 800, multi-published author NINC members who cover a broad spectrum of political positions, are able to network and communicate constructively about the craft and business of writing novels. They work together on NINC projects and committees, all without descending into angry debate (or enraged invective) over the events and

issues that daily dominate national media and which are omnipresent (and famously volatile) in social media.

In contrast, I used to belong to another writing organization where members discussed and clashed regularly over political ideology. This contributed to the often contentious atmosphere, and I thought it was a frequent, time-consuming, and discouraging distraction from our mutual interests as writers: professional networking, education, and advocacy.

Advocating for and sharing information about getting publishers to revert the rights of our intellectual property in a reasonable and timely way, for example, is highly relevant to any professional writer who works with, has worked with, or might eventually want to work with publishers. Your political ideology (and mine) is irrelevant to that subject. There is no possibility that arguing about our different political perspectives will educate us more about the topic of reversion, or improve our strategy for getting rights reverted, or help us develop tactics for convincing publishers to negotiate fair reversion clauses in their contracts.

The same goes for the subjects we discuss daily, weekly, and perennially in NINC: writing craft, marketing, cover images and design, sales figures, contractual clauses, literary agents, editors, publishers, algorithms, vendors, self-publishing tools, metadata, software, hardware, PR and promotion, readers, bookstores, grammar, libraries, foreign markets, translators, piracy, cookies, and conferences.

We engage in NINC for sophisticated discussion of specialized subject matter related to writing and publishing novels across multiple formats, and our political views have no place in those exchanges.

That said, my applause for the apolitical culture of NINC doesn't mean that *I* am apolitical. It just means this organization is among the places I'm convinced it would be counter-productive and inappropriate to talk politics.

However, we are not *only* writers. We're also citizens. Every citizen must exercise their conscience, as well as their individual taste for self-expression, when it comes to publicly discussing sociopolitical issues and events. I don't hold with the oft-expressed sentiment that actors, celebrities, writers, athletes, musicians, or anyone else shouldn't talk publicly about politics. In fact, I find that suggestion extremely offensive.

Public political discourse is fundamental to democracy, and no one's profession or station in life makes their voice one that "should" be excluded, whether by custom, taste, or communal pressure. Yes, I can name many people who often air their views publicly whom I dearly wish would just shut *up* already; but that doesn't mean they "should" be silent, it just means I'd be delighted if they were. Similarly, I'd be delighted if Chicago-style pizza with extra cheese were a diet food.

Fortunately, no one has any obligation to pay attention to someone else's rhetoric, and—to paraphrase Hubert Humphrey, an American politician of the past—the right to speak doesn't include the right to be taken seriously. Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park is a living monument to these principles. By tradition, absolutely anyone can turn up unannounced at Speaker's Corner and talk on almost any subject there. People may listen intently and applaud, or just walk on by, or even stop to heckle them. The novelist George Orwell was among the many influential figures who have frequented Speaker's Corner over the years. It's one of the places I visited on my first trip to London decades ago. A young British Muslim was speaking when I arrived, articulately advocating for peace in the Middle East. (He seems to have been unheard.)

Of course, apart from rights and customs, whether it's always *wise* or *desirable* to talk about politics publicly is another matter. There are writers who consider it an obligation of citizenship to speak out in public on various political issues, and others who think it's wrong-headed to do so.

My own view is that there is no "correct" answer; it's strictly a matter of individual choice. In this volatile and contentious political era, I know writers who never before (or very rarely) publicly addressed a political issue, but who have lately done so several times, posting passionate statements or essays on social media. I also know writers who continue to eschew political topics. And I know writers who discuss politics regularly in their blogs, as well as their other social media.

Whatever choices you make as a novelist about publicly talking politics, there's a good chance you've already revealed yourself politically, at least to some extent, through your work. Although I don't directly address specific political topics in my fiction, it's very likely that anyone who reads my novels, for example, would be largely unsurprised by reading my political views.

Although contemporary political debate is usually based on alignment with political parties, if we think of politics more broadly—as a set of beliefs or principles about society and its governance—then virtually all fiction is political. That certainly includes the commercial and genre fiction that NINC members write. Romance writers created an entire genre wherein women are the primary protagonists, and the needs, goals, and interests of women are prioritized and treated as important. The mystery genre focuses on justice. Science fiction looks to the future. Fantasy fiction considers the nature of good and evil.

How you write about these matters in your novels is bound to reveal something about your own beliefs and principles, in terms of the characters you create and how you portray them; what you frame as sympathetic, important, attractive, or heroic; what you present as unfair, tragic, or immoral; and what you include, omit, or ignore.

The role of women in society, the meaning of justice, the shape of the future, and what constitutes the greater good—all of which are central subjects in various forms of genre fiction—are not just personal or moral matters, they are also political in nature.

This is why, regardless of your choices when it comes to public expression, your vote as a citizen matters. By voting, you take part in choosing what role you believe women merit in the world, how you define justice, and what you believe ensures the greater good.

This issue of *Nink* is distributed one day before a U.S. election. If you're an American citizen, don't forget to vote!

Novelist [Laura Resnick](#) lives so close to her polling place that she wears her bedroom slippers when she goes to vote. True story.

Letter from the Editor

By Michele Dunaway



Welcome to the first of two jam-packed issues containing conference coverage. I had the good fortune to cover a few sessions myself, and all I can say was that the annual NINC conference delivered on the goods.

If you've never been to a NINC conference, let me reassure you there's something for everyone. I'm mostly traditionally published, but I learned something new and things I can apply to my career. I also met new people and made new friends, hung out on the beach, ate delicious food and embarrassed myself singing karaoke. But I was in good company throughout all of it. Registration is now open for 2019, so make your plans now.

What follows in this issue are the reports from Thursday's presenters. Friday's presenters will be in December's issue. Then, starting in January, we go back to our regular schedule. Please note, we do not cover the night owls or the Saturday roundtables. We consider these reports to be member services.

One last note, we did cover Blurb-gasmic twice, so yes, there are two separate reports, each with unique info.

Have a wonderful Thanksgiving holiday for those of you in the United States, and for the rest, may your November be profitable and fruitful.

Michele



Conference Reports

Content Marketing for Long-Term Fiction Sales

Presented by Joanna Penn

Reported by: Jenny Gardiner

According to Joanna Penn, New York Times bestselling author and award-winning entrepreneur, podcaster and YouTuber, 70 percent of customers prefer to be exposed to content marketing—which is creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience with the intent to drive profitable customer action. Customers would rather learn about products through good content, including reading blog content, from a brand they're interested in versus facing endless ads for products they're not interested in.

Penn, whose blog TheCreativePenn.com was selected by Writer's Digest as one of the Top 100 sites for writers, said the most important thing about marketing through content is that you are creating a body of work that you own and can then market and package in many manners to increase sales.

Penn started her career as a business consultant, but after writing—and trying to sell—her book *How to Enjoy Your Job*, she eventually parlayed drudgery into something she spends her life devoted to doing: marketing her brand, her content and her words.

"I didn't want to do push-push-push marketing (interruption style of marketing), and I hated my job," she said. "I wanted to live a life of creation, which led to content marketing."

While creating content can be time-consuming, it can and should be about doing what you love. She lives in Bath, England, near The Circus, a famous historic crescent-shaped street lined with 18th-century Georgian homes that was the center of Druid activity in Britain, so she often writes about Freemasons and druids. She also frequently blogs, posts and records podcasts about her travels, which she said makes for interesting content through which people can discover her brand and her writing.

"To me that's far more interesting than ads," she said. "When creating content you own it, you're creating a body of work. Creating content is rewarding in itself, but you are also building another asset. This is all intellectual property that can bring you income. Beyond the ephemerality of it, this grows long-term. If I die, (my estate) will still have money—because my website will still generate money," she said.

Penn said her approach is about creating organic traffic, and over time you will become an authority site around themes and topics around which you work. For instance, as she incorporates into her postings information about places she's visited for book research, readers might find this when they're looking for information on exotic scuba diving sites.

Relevant content can include free First in Series when promoted through vendors like iBooks and Kobo, or free short stories you can post on your website with a buy button on the bottom nudging readers "did you miss it?", or even free chapters on Wattpad. You can create podcasts with stories or related themes. Audio books are another form of content important to not overlook, and consider recording it yourself because your audience would likely connect to it that way. Penn narrates her

own short stories and puts them up on podcasts and [Findaway Voices](#)—she said the possibilities with recorded content are endless for readers to discover you. She said the Swedish company [Storytel](#) is breaking barriers by taking markets in the world where Amazon hasn't; these mobile-first countries will be audio-driven rather than book driven. These countries are not going to be Kindle users but rather listening to audio on their phones.

"What if the future is audio-first?" she said. "This is radical because America was first with digital ebooks, but what if that's not the way it happens in the rest of the world? The growing market is everywhere *but* the US/UK/Australia/Canada. I'm investing with my voice for this reason."

Additional areas of content growth include blogging and guest-posting. Her fiction blog aims to be in the vein of the [Atlas Obscura](#) blog, featuring wild and wonderful and different travel experiences throughout the world. This ties into the themes of her books, so it fits her brand. So when she travels she'll go to places that might be featured in her suspense novels and her readers can learn more details about these places. Other people who are searching for similar types of stories will discover her and perhaps then her books.

"This is about organic traffic, and over time you become an authority site around themes, topics around which you work. Sixty-one percent of online consumers have made purchases based on recommendations from a blog," she said. "It's about 'know, like and trust,' as people are more inclined to buy something they know, like or trust."

Penn said she always cross-pollinates her posted content through social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest.

"I visited the Columbarium in San Francisco, and posted on Instagram. Those images are my content, and someone might go online to look for pictures of this, and they'll see 'hey, I have this featured in my book!' and this traces back to your book," she said. "Instagram is fantastic for image marketing. On Pinterest, I put 20 high-quality good images from San Francisco, then pinned them from my website and it takes the traffic back there."

She said she has a Pinterest board for every novel in which she'll research and pin info for her book research. She said then she'll write a long article with pictures for the research, then pin them on the boards, that gives a way to get click-throughs.

"This is why having a strategy is so important," she said. "If you like photos, then Instagram is for you, but your claim to your photo must be clear, and you must have it on your website." She added she's thinking of making her website more image-driven because people have such a connection to images. They go to see pictures on her website, see her books, plus the pop-up message on her website, and might be inclined to link to it.

Penn said consistency is essential, which translates into content planning and scheduling.

"This is what is wrong with so many people's websites," she said. "People are good with rapid release schedules with their books, but as far as content, they're not."

She said her content is already scheduled out to April 2019 for her non-fiction website. She said if you are consistent with content planning, Google can feel that ticking clock and sends traffic there. She said also by scheduling regular content, readers make it a habit to see what the latest posting is.

To attract and retain a clearly-defined audience, you should first clearly define that audience. Her book has an apocalyptic Laura Croft-action/adventure feel to it. She then thinks of articles/podcasts/images that will tie in. She said searching [Google Ad Planner](#) is a great way to search keywords that will help come up with ideas to target (for her she looked at Apocalypse-type content to drive people to her novel).

Next you should optimize content and social sharing. She uses [Social Warfare](#) sharing, a paid plugin to help with social media sharing and [Canva](#) to size for each site. She's done this with "End of Days" research for her book that she's turned into an article and will probably do a podcast. She said an SEO plugin is essential for your website (she likes [Yoast](#)) and she has a tutorial on her website.

Driving profitable customer actions is important. Do pictures of your cat drive profitable customer actions? Perhaps, if you write cozy mysteries. You need attention, interest—her pictures of graveyards interest certain people, and desire—your book has just come out and sounds interesting. They know you, like you and trust you because you've earned it. It's not interruption advertising, rather, you've earned it. Then comes the action: you ask them for the buy.

"Right now people pay for ads driving traffic to Amazon, totally ignoring the ecosystem idea," she said. "But you don't want to be in the habit of just automatically sending to Amazon. Don't hand your power to Amazon. Are you building your own intellectual property assets for the future? These intellectual property assets put money in your pocket long term—you own and control them rather than driving it to Amazon."

She said each day a sign above her desks asks her, "Have you Made Art Today? Have you written 1,000 words? Are you a step closer?"

Slides of Penn's speech can be found at <http://www.TheCreativePenn.com/ninc1>, password NINC.



[Jenny Gardiner](#) is an award-winning novelist and #1 Kindle bestselling author. Her work has been found in Ladies Home Journal, The Washington Post, Marie-Claire.com, Paste Magazine, and on National Public Radio. She's also the food columnist for Cville Weekly in Charlottesville, Va. and the volunteer coordinator for the Virginia Film Festival.

Five Career-Killing Mistakes an Author Should Avoid

Presented by Mark Leslie Lefebvre

Reported by Michele Dunaway

Okay, first, as Mark Leslie Lefebvre indicated, the title was done for “shock value and clickbait.” Still, in this session, he shared some of what he’s learned in more than 25 years in the publishing industry, and he included slides of Seinfeld, a Spider-Man reference, and a shirtless Jeff Goldblum from *Jurassic Park*.

Lefebvre began as a bookseller in 1992 and is the former director of self-publishing & author relations at Kobo.com. He first published a short story in 1992, and his first traditionally published book was in 2006.

He says he’s still learning, and that was the focus of this session—not on the negatives, but to turn that clickbait “five mistakes” into positives.

As Lefebvre told his audience, “The way we read might be changing.”

Publishing was agent to editor to bookseller, but with digital, that’s not necessarily the case. He also pointed out that the way we read might be changing, and the way we write might be “changing and evolving,” case in point, using dictation software programs or writing on our phones.

However, what hasn’t changed is the intimacy between the writer and the reader. Lefebvre said that’s never been stronger, thanks to digital.

And digital represents an untapped market, as many people have never read ebooks.

But with digital, to quote Lefebvre quoting Spider-Man, “With great power comes great responsibility.”

Or, the stupid things that you do can be shared around the world. And often these are seen in your one-star reviews. Now you can even get a bad review because you made people angry.

He mentioned how authors spend time taking each other down, and used the example of #cockygate. As he put it, “Divided we fall.”

Then he showed a slide of a shirtless Jeff Goldblum with the quote, “You were so preoccupied with whether or not you COULD self-publish. You never stopped to ask if you SHOULD.”

What do we want as our goal? Or using the [Life of Brian](#), yes, we are all different.

For every single thing you do as an author—your path is unique. We learn and hear all great things others do, but the No. 1 key is “don’t mimic.” You need to ask yourself, “How does it apply to me, my readers, and my goals?”

Digital provides many great opportunities to try and to experiment, so stop obsessing over things people did and focus on you.

This also goes with the idea of no longer obsessing over things people did to make you angry. Sometimes we focus on “outrage over output” and our output suffers. He suggested using your time wisely. Fix something. Write the next book.

Lefebvre admits, though, that when you see a review that’s one-star, it hurts “like a knife in the back.” But he suggests that you do not respond to a review, as it looks desperate. Not even to offer another book or to thank them for responding. Let it go. Don’t be desperate. Don’t try too hard. However, if you do read reviews, take what you can learn and see if the readers might be right. He

shared a personal story of once changing the cover—moving both the title and tone from horror to dark humor. He realized, through a reader review, his book was more dark humor than scary. He was trying to reach the wrong audience.

So, he suggested that if it makes you a better writer, work on lessening the outrage, and instead, focus on the output.

After all, he asked, “How do we sleep when our bridge is burning?”

Hiding behind a keyboard makes it easy to lash out, where in the past mistakes you made never became global. He also sees a pack mentality, like at a soccer game for five-year-olds. They don’t move in their own unique positions and spaces, but rather as the ball goes one way, they move in a blob. The ball changes directions, they move in a blob to follow the ball.

Pay attention to your long-term. You will have a digital trail of things you’ve done. As an editor, he would look at an author’s website and what they are saying on social media. He reminded us that even with corporations, there are humans with feelings on the other side. So don’t close doors, but use the leverage we have. And, just because you can push a button, doesn’t mean you should.

He also turned personal, using a meme saying, “When life gives you lemons, grab tequila and salt.” In today’s fast world, you will fail. Look at that failure and say, “What can I learn?” Track your failures. Apply the lesson learned to the next attempt, and next learning, and the next lesson.

Lefebvre then shared by using his divorce as an example of making lemonade. He said it was dark and scary, and he was glad his ex-wife was brave enough to say she wanted out—they’d been like roommates. He had to work on the outrage, stay focused on the fact she was right, and make lemonade. He’s met a wonderful new person and has a better relationship with his son—and he doesn’t hate his ex-wife; they remain friends. He’s moved on to a better thing and wanted others to understand that in dark times to focus forward. He also brought up Michael Connelly’s books, for the Bosch principle: “Everybody counts or nobody counts.”

He said the minute you stop learning and close your mind, you’re done. Every person teaches you something. Don’t discount what people know and when networking, everyone counts, even if they don’t know the same as you or aren’t on the same level as you.

So, while he said five things, in reality, there are more. His current release in non-fiction is the book titled *Professionalism: the 7 P’s of Publishing Success*. These P’s are practice, professionalism, patience, progression, persistence, partnership, and patronage (with a bonus P for promotion.) In essence the “mistakes” of this session were all really the P’s.

Q&A answers follow:

Q: What is Stark Publishing?

A: I self-published in 2004, back when it was vanity press and a writer had to hide the fact, and Stark is from Steve and Mark, my college buddy. I brought it back when I was podcasting, as my podcasts let me keep learning.

Q: What are commonalities in good writing?

A: You write the best book you can. Do the best product you can. Think of how you are communicating. Your newsletters are not a blast but sharing something about yourself with “your best friends.” When he does a podcast, he wants to learn.

Q: What are untapped international markets?

A: [Kobo](#) is great for getting into these, as is [Draft2Digital](#). He mentioned [PublishDrive](#) and [StreetLib](#).

Q: We can't try everything, so what should we try?

A: I go home and I'm overwhelmed by conferences like this. Here's my rule: Wait until I hear it three to four times. Example, your book cover is a billboard. You must see something seven times to get familiarity, which is why Coke and Pepsi advertise so much. Look at a word cloud—what is something I haven't tried yet? Go back many times. The idea may seem good at the time, but it's okay to put it away or wipe it off the white board.

Q: What is the process for his writing?

A: Lefebvre said he is more successful if he schedules himself and dedicates time to write. He's scattered, so he uses a calendar. He admits he has a lot of ideas and sometimes has trouble executing them. There are challenges because humans only have so much time to do the amount of ideas we have, and the list of things can come from anywhere: editor, writer, reader, etc.

Q: When will the boom in foreign markets start?

A: We are only about five years into a 20-year change. It could take time. The ebook was technically 40 years old when the Kindle gold rush began. We are still in the early days as we've only begun to tap the United States market. You have to be patient. Be available. You can't make money if you're not there. Hugh Howey's *Wool* was his 10th book.



[Michele Dunaway](#) is your Nink Editor. She loved meeting all of you who said "Hi" at the conference and hopes to see those of you who didn't make it next year.

Social Media and the Art of Priorities

Presented by Maria Connor

Reported by Jennifer Stevenson

Maria Connor, founder and owner of [My Author Concierge](#), intended to help NINC members understand social media, so that they can make better decisions on how, when, and why to use social media for concrete marketing decisions.

"Many authors hate and fear social media," she said. "Some love it so much, they procrastinate writing to do it. You cannot sell books on social media, except maybe through a Facebook ad. But social media is your engagement, a relationship-building tool. Through it you develop visibility, connect with readers, establish loyalty and a common ground. Through *that* you then sell books. Book sales are an *indirect* outcome of using social media. The benefits are not tangible, physical outcomes. The benefits are more about finding new readers, connecting with new readers, identifying readers who have interest in your books who can be beta readers or street-team reviewers, or meeting authors you can network with or cross-promote with. Those outcomes are more successful and important than the sale of a book."

Social media management is the act of monitoring and participating in social conversations across platforms. A social media manager schedules posts, responds to questions, manages communities, and participates in conversations.

First priority

Decide and commit to social media management.

In 2016, 76 percent of Americans had a social media profile.

"I never say to authors, 'You *have* to do this, except social media. It's non-negotiable.' If readers are going to connect with you, it'll be at Google first, Facebook second," Connor said. "If it causes you physical pain, don't do it. You can engage in a digital manner by doing articles, a blog, video content, or online classes. You can still reach the reader. But the connection is not as strong as a social media presence, which brings intimacy and accessibility to the reader-author relationship. This kind of connection was once available only through live events. Readers had to write snail fan mail and hope the author would write back. Social media has created expectation among readers that you are accessible to them. You can have relationships with them, that's the benefit."

Active social media users as of August 2017:

- Facebook 2.47 billion
- YouTube 1.5 billion
- Instagram 800 million
- Tumblr 357million
- Twitter 328 million
- Skype 300 million
- Pinterest 175 million
- LinkedIn 106 million

Second priority

Understand your options.

Social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Tumblr, Snapchat, Reddit, MySpace, YouTube, Vine, LinkedIn, Skype, Meetup, Goodreads, and BookBub. The last two aren't traditional social channels, but they are social communities. In terms of social media, think broadly to include apps, sites, and communities. There are also audio channels like SoundCloud where you can upload your own stuff. You can upload your own podcasts to iTunes.

Third priority

Identify your social media goals and objectives.

This is the most important aspect of social media management. Many people struggle here. Figure this out to solve your social media problems. Know why you're there so you know where you need to be. Reasons for being on social media include:

- *Discoverability*—you should be on Facebook and have a Goodreads profile so you can be found.
- *Readership*—expand your readership with giveaways and events.
- *Brand awareness & engagement*—to increase your engagement and brand awareness, ask, do readers know who you are and where they can connect with you?
- *Sales and Marketing*—sales and marketing are available through Facebook ads.
- *Education and Information*—not just for readers but yourself. Club Indie for example, is helpful to learn about trends and get updates in the industry.
- *Check the pulse of the industry & market research*—market research can help you make smarter decisions.
- *Identify new opportunities*—find opportunities to participate in group events and other such things.
- *Social proof*
- *Professional networking*—social media is not just about selling to readers; you're connecting to other authors. You can collaborate and cross-promote. Most cross-promotion opportunities come through Facebook.

These factors drive your execution and content on social media.

Fourth priority

Determine which platforms are right for you.

This is different for everybody. Too many authors make marketing decisions on the premise that everyone else is doing it. That won't work. What's appropriate for *you*? Via social media, you connect with reviewers, bloggers, influencers, librarians, editors, promoters, agents, and other authors.

Where are the readers? The biggest outlets are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, BookBub, and Goodreads, in order of priority. If you only do one, do Facebook. Most readers are there. If you are willing to invest more time, Connor recommends Twitter, BookBub, and Goodreads.

Those are communities, so there's more payoff. Followers at Goodreads and BookBub get a free email saying you have a new book out.

Many authors are leery of Goodreads because of trolling. You have to be aware that it's a reader community, not an author-reader community, so post as a reader, not an author. Your content needs to be relevant and timely. Keep it up to date and accurate.

Once a quarter, Connor uses a tickler to check her websites, profiles, and author pages everywhere to ensure that they're up to date. She encourages authors to create content that is 100 percent evergreen, to prevent it falling out of date.

All these social media have different structures, content, and application. You can't put excerpts on Twitter, but you can do a logline. She goes to Facebook and Twitter to see what topics are trending. Then she posts about them. Is today Cheeseburger Day? Post about a cheeseburger. It's easy to support others by retweeting. She retweets when she's in line at the store. It's so easy, and she gets good author-to-author karma.

Driving content from Twitter to Facebook is hard because Facebook readers aren't comfortable with Twitterspeak—the hashtags and other idioms. It's more common to drive Facebook content to Twitter.

Some genres work better on some platforms than others. Instagram for example works for young adult and contemporary romcom, where authors post about giveaways and launches. Reach millennials best with Instagram and Snapchat. Pinterest is for the over-40 reader, so that might be a good place for heartwarming sweet contemporary romance.

Many authors don't think about being on LinkedIn. If you're an editor or assistant, or if you're looking for an editor or agent, it's a great spot for connecting. You never know when you'll get a key contact there.

Fifth Priority

Determine what, when, where.

How can you make social media less painful if you hate it? How can you feel you are more in control? Look again at your objectives, outcomes and goals. For example, one of Connor's clients wrote a romance that was a twist on the *Wizard of Oz*. She did stuff on her page about *Wizard of Oz*, so the news story about how the original ruby slippers were stolen was useful content for her page. It wasn't "Buy my book." Get social and create content!

Personable vs. personal: Be friendly and positive, and respond appropriately.

Authentic vs. efficient: You can create the content yourself or pay someone to create it. Some authors say letting an assistant create your content is wrong. Connor disagrees. You can balance it. "At My Author Concierge, we have a social-media calendar. Monday we post Monday inspiration. Tuesday is Teasers. Win [a contest] on Wednesday. Then there's Throwback Thursday and Freebee Friday. Make up your own. How about Work in Progress Wednesday or Sneak Peek Saturday? Why do you need to post that you're doing a contest for a signed paperback? Let your assistant do that." Sometimes Connor posts as the assistant, sometimes she posts as the author.

If you don't have an assistant, figure out your schedule. You can do it by the week or by the month. Typically about the 25th of the month, Connor looks at her clients' lists and schedules all the routine stuff for a whole month: inspirations, teasers, giveaways, throwbacks, and freebies.

Sometimes she can't schedule the freebies ahead of time, because she has to check to see the books are still free, but otherwise, she can post ahead using [Hootsuite](#) (a social media scheduling tool).

It's okay to schedule routine content. There are benefits. You can train your readers when to come and look for stuff. If you're new to them, posting those teasers every Tuesday gives them a way to know where to get them. For added value, post every Friday a page from your work in progress: unedited, uncorrected work in progress. They get to see it. They don't care if it's terrible. They love the behind-the-scenes part.

Step into reader shoes. Remember, *you are a rock star to readers*. If you have super-readers, you are Jon Bon Jovi to them. If you admit you got toilet paper stuck to your shoe, they're delighted. They love posts about kids especially, also food and their own families. Pets are *huge*.

Asking your readers to post or comment gives you a chance to learn about them. Books make a difference in their lives, like the reader who read your book to escape their mom's hospital bedside for a couple of hours. You have an obligation to be grateful for that.

Quality vs. quantity: How often do you have to post? That's personal to you, but it needs to be frequent and consistent. Don't leave your Facebook page unchanged since 2009. If you only want to post once a week something such as, "I'm going into my writing cave, I'm on Chapter 14 and have 10 to go, here's a picture of my coffee mug, gotta go, have fun while I'm buried," that works. Post guy stuff if you have guy fans. Post whatever you have about behind the scenes and what goes into the book.

Random vs. intentional: Learn how to use each medium. If you write YA, you can probably connect with readers on Instagram. Learn how they like to get their content. Share quality content. Don't post clickbait, or links that don't work.

[Chris Syme](#) is Maria Connor's favorite guru on social media, writing about smart marketing for authors. Syme recommends that you have a central social media hub, which would be wherever you have the most engagement. Then all the other channels are "outposts." They have relevant and accurate content, but they drive people back to your main hub. That's how you manage multiple platforms. If you set Hootsuite or TweetDeck up so that Facebook posts go to Twitter, make sure your Twitter profile is up to date.

If you post only when you are in the mood, people won't visit you very often. Chris Syme recommends posting once or twice a day. It depends on your lifestyle and your social media goals.

Reader-centric vs. author-centric: Your content should not be about you but about them: readers, reviewers, bloggers, everyone else. Don't make it all about you. Chris Syme says that your content should be 80 percent about your readers: solve a problem for them, educate them, give them information, create an experience of emotion for them. Only 20 percent should be sales content.

Qualities for successful social media engagement: Reciprocate and share other authors' releases. Diversify. If you use multiple channels of social media, the outpost media drive everything to central social media. Each of your buckets of content has different categories of content. For example, you like recipes, zombies, cats, and travel, those are four buckets. First Monday you post a recipe, second Monday, zombies, etc.

Other concerns for successful social media engagement are consistency, authenticity, timeliness, integrity, persistence, and selectivity. Remember to set realistic expectations. As Connor said, "Rejoice in your small successes there!"



Jennifer Stevenson has published five series, 17 novels, and more than 20 short stories.

Story Grid Part 1: Macro Editing

Presented by Shawn Coyne

Reported by Jenna Kernan

Editor Shawn Coyne is a 25-year book-publishing veteran who worked for Big Five publishing houses, as an independent publisher, as a literary agent at a major Hollywood talent agency, as a ghostwriter and as the head of Genre Management Inc. He also runs independent publishing company [Black Irish Books](#).

Coyne began by explaining that when he was a young book editor at a Big Five house, his survival was tied to his ability to quickly evaluate the potential commercial value of the stories landing on his desk. Because of this, he needed an objective method for judging—in a single read-through—whether the story had all the elements necessary to deliver a satisfying read to potential customers. Setting about this task in an analytical way, he found there were many books about how to write a story but nothing about evaluating an existing story to see if it worked. So he could present the best for possible publication, necessity led him to create a mechanism to filter submissions. The result was [The Story Grid](#). He uses this methodology to teach the editing craft through courses, workshops, articles, blogs, podcasts and a book.

Coyne describes this grid as a useful tool to evaluate written stories and a tool that authors may institute to edit their work at the macro and micro level. He describes his methodology as a way to keep from “getting lost in the weeds.” Beginning with a macro look at the overall work, Coyne divides each story into the beginning hook, middle build, and ending payoff.

“The beauty of limitations is that they allow you to have constraints,” Coyne said. These boundaries keep you within the realm of your story. He refers to this Global Story Grid as a foolscap. A foolscap is a legal-size, lined, yellow sheet of paper and the idea here is to get the macro elements of the story down on one sheet. Once down, the writer has created a one-page story grid on which all elements of your story must appear. Or not, because the [Global Story Grid](#) also allows the writer to quickly note missing elements. Coyne showed an example of a story grid of *Pride and Prejudice*, by Jane Austen. The entire story appeared scene by scene on one foolscap.

Coyne then launched into the editor’s Six Core Questions. “These six questions will never do you wrong,” Coyne said.

Six Core Questions

1. What’s the genre? Coyne suggested that authors commit to their genre “full-bore!” A quick test of genre is for the publisher to instantly know what image they could use on the cover. When considering your story, he provides a guide to help you nail down all the elements of your story in the [Five Leaf Genre Clover](#), which is a free resource available on his website. The five leaves include:

time, reality, style, structure and content. **Time** qualifies the length of your story (short, medium, long) and the **reality** refers to a story that is real, absurd or a fantasy. **Style** includes such subcategories as drama, literary, and comedy, to name a few. **Structure** consists of archplot, miniplot and antiplot. The final leaf is **content**, which encompasses the greatest number of variables. Some of the content qualifiers are: Western, action, crime, love. For more on the content petal of Coyne's Story Grid, [Five Leaf Genre Clover](http://storygrid.com), see the resource section of his website at <http://storygrid.com>.

2. What are the conventions and obligations scenes of the genre? Each of the genres has its own conventions and obligations. Coyne has created genre "cheat sheets" and presented the one for love stories which included the controlling idea, core emotions, obligatory scenes, conventions and love subgenres.

Coyne then used *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen to illustrate the conventions and obligations that must be met in a love story. Coyne's list of conventions includes: lovers meet; first kiss (or intimate connection); confessions of love; lovers break up; proof of love; and finally, lovers reunite.

3. What's the point of view/narrative device? Who is telling the story? Coyne briefly covered the difference between first, third, free and direct-style POV and suggested that third person mixed with first person allows the author to have "her cake and eat it, too."

4. What are the objects of desire?

What does your character want? Coyne offered several examples of objects of desire, including one from the book *The Martian*, where the protagonist's desire is to get back to Earth.

5. What's the controlling idea/theme? Coyne said that in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the controlling idea is that love triumphs when we see people for who they are, and do not judge them by their social group.

6. What's the beginning hook, middle build and ending payoff? The simplest way to describe this is by how most people would ask you about a book or movie. They might ask, "What happens?" (beginning hook) and then ask, "What happens next?" (middle build) and finally ask, "How does it end?" (ending payoff). Coyne shared with the audience a completed example of these elements using *Pride and Prejudice*.

Coyne stated that he believes that stories mirror life. Both real people and the characters in our work will do anything possible not to change. It is called homeostasis and it is a survival mechanism, but he stated that "Stories are the process by which we are encouraged to change."

According to Coyne, there are **Five Commandments of Storytelling** which include the following: The inciting incident; progressive complications; crisis; climax; and resolution. He compared story construction to Russian nesting dolls with the largest doll being the Global Story and the Five Commandments of Storytelling being the dolls that nest within. Coyne spoke about the five commandments offering that the crisis is "choosing the best bad choice" and that the climax is the choice your protagonist makes from the crisis.

Coyne summarized the Macro Editing approach stating that the Macro sells the book. This bestseller code, once used to evaluate stories under submission, has morphed into a practical and prescriptive guide to help authors create and objectively evaluate their work.



Publishers Weekly bestselling author, Jenna Kernan, writes stories that blend heart-pounding adventure with heart-racing romance. A natural redhead, Jenna has recently transplanted to the Gulf Coast of Florida where she has increased her sunblock to SPF 50. New subscribers to Jenna's newsletter receive a romantic suspense ebook as a welcome gift. Visit www.jennakernan.com and find Jenna on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Amazon](#) and [BookBub](#).

Story Grid Part 2: Micro Editing

Presented by Shawn Coyne

Reported by Jenna Kernan

A 25-year book-publishing veteran, editor Shawn Coyne's second session turned the editing of story down to the scene level so that each scene would hit the necessary highs and lows, allowing it to best resonate with readers. Coyne calls this portion of editing Micro Editing and believes that using this method affords a mutual language between writer and editor. This type of analysis can help prevent the sort of uneven progressive complications where the scene flatlines, only to hit the major turning point big. Micro editing helps writers create complications that escalate.

The slide presentation provided concrete examples of where Jane Austen hit each of her obligatory scenes for a love story in her novel *Pride and Prejudice*, but also detailed where helpers and hinderers appeared. This technique can be used as a self-check to be sure you have hit the global scenes in your genre.

Coyne likened the micro editing process to focusing your review, like a laser, to one skill, which is the same skill and analysis for each scene. He believes that toggling from micro to macro editing, from turning points to spelling, for example, is so daunting that writers quickly "fall into the weeds." He suggests you check each scene this way and then go on to another type of editing task.

The spreadsheet he shared included, from left to right: scene number, word count, story event, value shift, polarity shift, turning point, period/time, duration, location, on-stage characters, off-stage characters.

Scene #	Word Count	Story Event	Value Shift	Polarity Shift	Turning Point	Period/Time	Duration	Location	On-stage Character	#	Off-Stage Character	#

Here is more on some of Coyne's Micro Editing topics of analysis:

Word Count: Coyne suggests about 1,500 words is the scene length that keeps readers reading when they want to go to bed. He calls it the "potato chip model" where you decide to just eat one more. Five pages leads to the next chapter and the next. This helps move you up on the readers TBR (To Be Read) pile because they know you are a fast read.

Value Shift: This is an active shift in life values. The scenes turn on a value that is at stake in your global story. Your genre helps define what life values are likely to be at stake.

Polarity Shift: Things often go from bad to worse but can also move from good to better or from bad to good or good to bad. In each scene, Coyne wants to see a change in value from -/+ or +/- and, in some cases, a bad situation gets worse and would be represented in the chart like this: -/--. Coyne believes that the absence of a polarity shift within a scene is a red flag that your scene is not doing its job.

Turning Point: Turning points occur after a complication brings a polarity shift from positive to negative or negative to positive. Turning points can be either Active (something happens) or Revelation (character reveals something).

POV: Coyne's only advice on this column is that you be vigilant for toggling between POV which can be disorienting to readers.

Period/Time: Record the time of year, season, day, time in order to keep the story on track.

Duration: How long does this scene last? Is it four hours or five minutes? Look for variety here and keep an eye out for too many scenes of similar duration.

Location: Where does the scene take place? Make these places interesting and varied. Keep a watch for too many scenes occurring in one location. He suggests you think like a movie director searching for locations for each scene.

On Stage Characters: Who is there on the page? Two characters? Or so many that the scene is confusing? The column beside this one with the # refers to the page on which each character appears.

Off Stage Characters: This entry refers to any discussion by onstage characters of characters not in the scene. And again, the next column would be the page on which the mentioned character appears.

"All of this is a way to diagnose problems. Because I guarantee that much of this will be unclear to you on your first draft," Coyne said. He suggests you only analyze five scenes at a time in order to keep from being overwhelmed. But if you use the potato chip method, you can always do one more! Checking the scenes keeps writers from glossing over mistakes when they feel something is off but cannot identify exactly what that something might be. "This spreadsheet becomes the lifeline to fixing scenes," Coyne said, and he admits that writers will sometimes tell him that all the elements of this spreadsheet are not present in every scene to which he replies, "In the great books they are."

Coyne also identified two types of crisis and then two types of resolutions. There is the *best bad choice* when the protagonist must pick from two bad options and the *irreconcilable goods*, in which what is good for one character will be bad for the other. He said the only reason characters change is that they need to meet a physiological need, or they need to be safe.

He suggests that you finish the entire spreadsheet of every scene before you begin fixing problems. Taking time off will also let your brain process the information you have revealed. If you are struggling to fix a scene, Coyne suggests you return to the **Five Commandments of Storytelling** (The Inciting Incident, Progressive Complications, Crisis, Climax, and Resolution) to see what is missing. Then consider if each scene really reaches towards the overarching global story arc. He believes that all love stories are maturation stories where the characters move from naïve to mature, which causes a world view to shift.

Coyne believes that the foolscap spreadsheet will keep writers busy with scene analysis, but the Story Grid will give you mastery. He encourages writers to use these tools on the books and stories that they love. Then use the information they glean to inform their work: "I would suggest that you really take seriously the Foolscap Macro Editing and the spreadsheets."

For more on scene analysis visit Coyne's [Story Grid website articles](#).

Resources:

Story Grid: <https://storygrid.com/>

Five Leaf Genre Clover: <https://storygrid.com/resources/five-leaf-genre-clover-infographic/>

Foolscap Global Story Grid: <https://storygrid.com/resources/foolscap-global-story-grid-fiction/>

Story Grid Translated into Common Writing Terms (article): <https://storygrid.com/the-story-grid-translated-into-common-writing-terms/>



Publishers Weekly bestselling author, Jenna Kernan, writes stories that blend heart-pounding adventure with heart-racing romance. A natural redhead, Jenna has recently transplanted to the Gulf Coast of Florida where she has increased her sunblock to SPF 50. New subscribers to Jenna's newsletter receive a romantic suspense ebook as a welcome gift. Visit www.jennakernan.com and find Jenna on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Amazon](#) and [BookBub](#).

Ready to Launch? How to Nail Your Next Release

Presented by Mark Dawson

Reported by Jenny Gardiner

Mark Dawson has fine-tuned his launch strategies to maximize sales and capitalize on algorithms to help sell and keep selling books in a series. He shared methods he's employed to launch his books at the top and keep them there as long as possible.

His first consideration was whether to set up pre-orders. He didn't use to do that, instead doing a soft launch versus a hard launch, but you can't do that with pre-orders. Dawson suggested pre-orders work well if you have a large mailing list and can send lots of traffic to the link page when you launch, or if you can send organic—in his last book there's a link to immediately get the next book in the series. If you're wide, most platforms will give you double ranking when you do the pre-order—counted both when pre-ordered and when it goes live. If you're exclusive to Amazon, it doesn't work the same way—instead you get the ranking on pre-order but won't see it when it goes live, so it could cannibalize the launch since you want Amazon to go high in ranking as soon as you launch.

To mitigate this, if you have a budget, you can spread awareness with advertising, which he does, and generate interest through things like blog tours or national media. His latest release has a similar storyline to the infamous Russian spy poisoning in Salisbury, England, which is near his office, so he was able to have those pre-orders ready for the response from media events.

"However if you're not generating interest through paid ads or organic traffic, it might be better to focus on soft and hard launch and get more bang for the buck that way," he said, adding if you want to do a full-price launch it also won't work so well. So he devised a launch plan beginning 60 days out that has worked well:

Day 60: Dawson commissions his cover when he's between two-three months from launch.

Day 35: His book is done; he sends to proofreader.

Day 34: He schedules BookBub pre-order alert—the price being dependent on the number of followers. For his last launch, the cost was \$90, which generated \$800 in sales, so his ROI was 788 percent. BookBub can set it up whenever you like, but can set the pre-order for up to a week before the release.

Day 30: Dawson amends the book to correct errors then sends to his copy editor, and then to his advance review team. These 700 readers will crowd source his edits to pick up errors and correct factual mistakes. His group has expertise on weapons, for instance. He'll be in touch with his private Facebook group because some don't want to interact via email. He'll consult on cover ideas, or ask about the proper way a character should hold a gun (not intuitive in the U.K. where guns are uncommon).

Day 20: Dawson applies for a new release Feature Deal on BookBub. “It’s not cheap—it costs about \$900,” he said. “But I’ve had 30 BookBub deals and I’ve never made less than 200 percent on a deal, so to spend one to get two isn’t bad, but it’s usually spend one to get three.”

Day 14: He prepares advertising assets, including Facebook ads, BookBub CPM ads (anyone can do these type of BookBub ads, which are done by auction), and Amazon ads, and he meets with retailers to discuss launch promotions. He’s been doing Facebook video ads for about six weeks for \$4.99 books and will have 7,000 preorders before it even goes live, which is about \$23,000 in revenue before the book launches. He said his video ad is a crime scene tape and someone steps beneath it—it’s ambiguous, he refers to the Russian polonium poisoning episode since it happened in his town. He said if you watch three to five seconds of the ad, he’ll send you another when the book goes live. Dawson said his other ad is just a cover image with the words: “John Milton is back. A sleepy English town. A murdered Russian spy. Unputdownable thriller.”

Day 7: Now that assets are ready, he schedules Facebook Live on his business page. He said this works best for a closed group. While less potential reach, better organic reach because these people are in your group. Dawson said you can put a message in your group linking to a page, directed at your fans. It’s free, Facebook loves live, so you get natural reach. He said you could even do this 60 days out with a cover reveal. Or you can do a live reading, a launch contest or Q&As.

Day 5: He incorporates all editorial amendments, does the final proofread, and formats through Vellum.

Day 2: Dawson uploads to all retail platforms, sets the price to 99 cents (if not doing a pre-order, which is a soft launch) and he tells *no one*, definitely not his audience, because he doesn’t want his audience to buy at this discounted price. The lower pricing helps move the book in the algorithms.

Day 1: He contacts the advance team—by email and via Facebook live. He tells them the book is available, and what he’d like them to do. He asks for reviews, encourages purchases at that discounted rate because the reviews are verified, sales count towards rank, and he’s aiming for around 2,000 in paid store.

Day 0: His aim is strong, steady sales. He doesn’t want 85 percent of sales on that day because Amazon rank will decay quickly and he wants to make it sticky and give it longer tail over a longer period. He raises the price to \$4.99 and once he’s checked the price is correct on Amazon, he emails his list of 100,000 subscribers. His list is segmented whether they were sourced from an ad, how he found them, how effective they might be as subscribers. He’ll email them over the course of a couple of days. For his main list of 16,776 sends, he’ll get 41.3 percent opening, and a click-through rate of 9.3 percent.

Dawson uses [BeLive](#) for live video—it allows you to take peoples’ questions and it’s branded with his logo. He hangs around and talks about the book, answers questions, sometimes does a contest in which he might ask people what is the first word in the first line in chapter 20, which means they’ll have to have purchased the book to know that, which of course drives traffic.

Dawson mentioned additional options to consider for a launch:

- *Schedule list swaps* with similar authors in which you promote each other’s books with new releases.
- *Blog tours*, which he said are a lot of work for potentially minimal results—not a great bang for your buck, and are very genre-dependent (might work with romance).

- *Press and PR*—he doesn't recommend because it's expensive, however with his recent launch he spent about \$1,000/month because of the news tie-in between his book and the Russian polonium poisoning; he said the publicist got him on BBC news and in newspapers, but he hasn't seen if it has actually driven sales.

He urged authors to not ask family and friends to buy the book just to help sales. You don't want your "also boughts" to be polluted by their "likes" such as cookbooks or biographies, which are not helpful in selling your book in your genre. He also said do not buy a mailing list—it is spamming and of no help to sell books.

Day +1: Now he activates his ads. His aim for advertising is seven touches (the multiple exposures to a product that a customer must have before making a purchase). He starts to run Facebook ads with warm traffic, with a custom audience of his audience. With his main list of 16,777, while he had a 9 percent click-through rate, 59 percent didn't open from his mailing list. He reaches them by creating a custom audience and sending Facebook ads to them. For his launch of *The Ninth Step*, he had a conversion of 40 percent and ROI on ads around 100 percent, but he said this has improved with subsequent releases. In addition he does the following:

- *He starts to run Facebook ads* with more warm traffic: retargeting website visitors, video viewers (for instance those who watched the early release video), Facebook engagers (anyone who has engaged with anything to do with the book).
- *Then he focuses Facebook ads on cold traffic ads:* people with interest in other similar books and authors, such as Lee Child or James Patterson. He'll generate a lookalike audience—a bigger audience of people who like his type of book. Facebook will take his 100,000-strong list and create a copycat type of list with similar type of people.
- *He starts to run BookBub ads.* "Be sure when they get daily BookBub emails they get an ad for your book," he said, adding that this is done using readers who like similar authors to him, such as Lee Child. BookBub allows you to send to people with much wider interests. He said to target yourself, and similar authors—more cost effective to run those ads, which are just a short bit of cover, a tagline (John Milton is Back) and a call to action (buy now).
- *He starts to run Amazon ads with Amazon Marketing Service (AMS),* targeting himself and other authors (keyword ads, for instance Daniel Silva readers), similar interests, and ASINs (PDAs). He suggested for instance the book *Red Sparrow's* page would get more traffic when the film was released, so if your book was like *Red Sparrow*, you'd include that book. Use automatic keywords—rather than manually working out which keywords he'd want to bid on, he lets Amazon choose and he gets average cost of sales of 25-30 percent.

Day +7: Dawson mails the unopeners of first mail campaign—he finds out who didn't open his first email and sends another one, changing the header. He also sends as plain text because images can depress opening percentage, and this can increase who sees it/opens it.

Day +8: Usually around this time he has a Bookbub New Release Featured Deal, which keeps sales up and prevents spiking.

Day +10: Dawson now exports the list of those who didn't open either email campaign, exporting them as an excel file and then importing to MailerLite, and then emails them again from there with a

new subject line—he might get more open rate from MailerLite than from MailChimp. He said he squeezes another 10-15 percent open rate this way.

Results: Dawson said for the launch of his novel *The Ninth Step*, he got into the top 100 in several categories, sold 7,000 copies over the course of its life, got 7,000 pre-orders for the new one, increased sales and audience, and that book earned out \$46,000.

Slides of Dawson's speech can be found [here](#).

Q&A

Q: What is your criteria to decide how to launch?

A: If you want verified reviews for your launch, don't do a pre-order. But if you do want verified reviews, do pre-orders because you might generate more sales over that three to four month period. For new authors he'd still recommend a soft/hard launch on Amazon, but you can't do any pre-orders with other vendors though.

Q: Where does he run ads?

A: When he runs ads, he does run them on places like Bargain Booksy, but says BookBub is the gold standard.

Q: Does he recommend being in Kindle Unlimited?

A: Dawson says in his self-publishing course, he's re-recorded the answer to this question 10+ times because the answer changes often, and there is no singular answer. "At a basic level, do you want to yield to Amazon as the biggest player in town? I'm happy to do KU now, and I've been in since January, and I'm probably going to do \$1 million in revenue, and it's because of KU."

Q: Does he recommend KU for splitting a list?

A: Dawson says he was wide for a long time, was in KU, then left, then did really well on other platforms, but last December saw sales drop, so he emailed his fans surveying them to see if they would go to Amazon to purchase his books. He said only two percent were opposed to his going exclusive with Amazon, and since he's been in KU only 20 people have expressed dismay with this.

Q: Clarification on his pre-order pricing.

A: Dawson says his book was only ever \$4.99, which is what buyers were charged on Day 1. But you can set it to 99 cents and only tell your private list about the discount rate to get them to act on it, and as soon as you have enough reviews or suspect people have noticed and are buying it at that discounted price, you then jack the price up to \$4.99 in time for release.

Q: Why does he raise his price up to \$5.99 after the launch period?

A: Dawson said it depends on how it is ranking. If it is ranking highly, he'll keep it but if it's falling at around a month out, he'll change ads, changing the copy (for instance, removing the 'limited time' pricing wording), and he takes the best-performing aspects of certain ads and tries to make a new ad with that new price.

Q: How many have you launched in KU?

A: Dawson says he doesn't launch in KU in order to not anger fans on other platforms. He launches pre-orders in every platform, keeps them available on Apple, Barnes & Noble, and Kobo until he stops selling well on those platforms, then a month or so after the launch he'll move the books over to KU. He said there might be some people who have read through book five in the series who then can't get book six.

Q: How long do you keep advertising a book? Do you do it for only a book in series or whole catalogue?

A: Dawson says he focuses mostly on first in series, but has various points of entry—for instance if the cover on book nine will perform better, he wouldn't know unless he advertises it. But he wouldn't do multiple Facebook ads that way.



Jenny Gardiner is an award-winning novelist and #1 Kindle bestselling author. Her work has been found in Ladies Home Journal, the Washington Post, Marie-Claire.com, Paste Magazine, and on National Public Radio. She's also the food columnist for Cville Weekly in Charlottesville, Va. and the volunteer coordinator for the Virginia Film Festival.

From Page to Screen

Presented by Erin Hennicke

Reported by Cidney Swanson

Erin Hennicke is a scout with Franklin & Siegal & Associates, the largest literary scouting agency in New York City. An English major who loved both reading and movies, she started work in Viking Penguin's Subsidiary Rights Department before transitioning to work in the film industry.

Just what does a literary scout do? In Hennicke's case, she's on the lookout for interesting properties that would be a good fit for the companies she reps: Universal Studios and Paramount TV.

According to Hennicke, this is a great time to be an author because the demand for film content has exploded. She broke down the process of book-to-movie by looking at 10 steps. The first five steps will feel familiar to any author who has published traditionally. She admitted the system heavily favors those authors who are agented, and that it is more challenging for independently published authors to get their material in front of scouts and film agencies. However, a few suggestions for addressing these challenges are listed at the end of this article.

The first step is one all NINC members have already done: write a book. Hennicke described the traditional path to publication, whereby an author with a completed manuscript finds a literary agent and obtains representation (step two in the process.) Hennicke says an agent is nearly indispensable in the book-to-film process. Agents offer protection to the author and have at least some familiarity with subsidiary rights, even if they outsource film rights management to a colleague.

Step three is where, after obtaining representation, an author and agent will tighten up the manuscript as much as possible. Step four is when an agent sends the manuscript out to publishing houses with the aim of signing a book deal and, ultimately, seeing the book go to print. At step five, the book is sold and published. In most cases, the following step happens after the book is in print and for sale to consumers.

At step six, a literary agent will probably partner with a film agent to get either an option, an outright sale, or "shopping agreement." An option is money up front for exclusive rights to a work for a set period of time. In cases where there is interest from many places (such as screenwriters, producers, actors, and others), a title can go to auction.

In very rare cases, material may be bought outright, which makes it permanently the property of the purchaser who may or may not choose to turn the work into a film. For example, Fox bought *The Woman in the Window* outright, and they have all the time in the world to produce a film/TV version—or not. If it is bought outright, and never made, there is unfortunately nothing an author can do about it.

Hennicke advises authors to take the money and do something great with it, while letting their attachment to their story go. "It is no longer yours, and you need to let it be something else," Hennicke said. A wise author will focus on the money they made and leave it at that.

The final possibility in step six is something called a "shopping agreement." In this case, there's no money upfront. The person requesting the shopping agreement may want to shop it to an

individual (such as Ridley Scott) or company (such as Paramount TV) to place the property and get financing. This kind of agreement will have an expiration date just like an option would have—six months is typical.

Whether a book is optioned, sold outright, or enters into a shopping agreement, the end goal is to get to step seven where a property goes into filming. In step eight, the author may actually have some involvement as an associate producer, a consultant, an adapter, or even someone with a walk-on role in the movie. Production is wrapped in step nine, and in step 10, the movie premieres.

In describing this stage, Hennicke reiterated some of her earlier advice to authors. At step 10, the movie or TV series is out there in the world. It will almost certainly be quite different from the book. Again, she cautions authors at this point, “The book is your baby, the film is someone else’s baby.”

Hennicke next offered a couple of projects as case studies, citing examples of options that ran out only to have the project re-optioned and filmed, as well as examples of outright buys that never resulted in anything being made due to actors and directors changing their mind about being involved.

From here, Hennicke switched to offer a few ideas to independently published authors looking to break into film. Again, she emphasized that film industry people want to work with agented books, but for an author who is entrepreneurial, it may be possible to get attention for your book, with or without an agent by trying some of these ideas.

- Put together a one sheet (a single-page document showcasing your book) to help film readers understand the project. She added that comparison titles are essential in marketing books to the film industry, citing the “X” meets “Y” format as incredibly useful despite being cliché. She also recommended that authors come up with an elevator pitch—a one-minute description of their book.
- Scouts such as Hennicke are constantly looking at best-seller lists, literary magazines, journal articles, and even newspaper articles for a project that catches their eye, so these can be a places to gain visibility.
- Likewise, Wattpad can provide visibility, although as a recent Forbes.com article pointed out, Wattpad isn’t screened at all, so Hennicke feels it is more of an iffy bet.
- Hennicke and other scouts attend conferences which offer speed-pitching opportunities, and she recommends going to reputable conferences which will vet the scouts and agents taking pitches.
- Addressing indies who are agented but whose agents don’t do film, it is possible to get a film agent on your own.
- Addressing indies who want to query literary agents, Hennicke suggests reading comparable titles and checking who the agents are for those titles to gather a list of agents to query.

Finally, here are a few takeaways drawn from her answers to audience questions:

- In today’s market, a project that fell out of option might be of interest again simply because of the number of outlets for properties.
- Lots of interest by readers doesn’t necessarily translate into potential buyers having interest. Conversely, if the story is strong enough, lack of readers is not necessarily a bad thing.
- Check *Variety*, *Hollywood Reporter*, and IMDB to see who is doing what kind of project.

- With the recent success of *Crazy Rich Asians*, Hennicke is seeing some shifts. Romantic comedy is hot right now. Additionally, that film and others like it (*The Kissing Booth*, *To All the Boys I've Loved*) have created demand for heartwarming family drama in markets like India and Spain. Finally, strong female leads seem to be in demand, to which Erin added, "You always want that!"
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[*Cidney Swanson*](#) is Kirkus Reviews award-winning author of young adult sci-fi and fantasy, including the *Ripple* series, the *Saving Mars* series, the *Thief in Time* series, and more. Cidney lives in Oregon's Willamette Valley with her husband, some cats, and entirely too much rain.

Expanding Your Reach with BookBub (Advanced)

Presented by Carlyn Robertson

Reported by Pam McCutcheon

Carlyn Robertson is a member of the BookBub Partners Team, which was designed to help authors work effectively with BookBub, and that's what she focused on in her presentation. To start with, she shared some statistics concerning BookBub subscribers:

- 74 percent read four or more books a month.
- 94 percent use BookBub to discover new books.
- 26 percent purchase only discounted books.
- 74 percent purchase both discounted books and full-price books.
- Of those who purchase full-price books, the average purchase price is between \$6 and \$7.
- 95 percent of BookBub readers purchased from authors unknown to them because of a discount.
- 84 percent purchased new books from authors they like.

Robertson primarily talked about BookBub's newer tools. The company is already sending out new release emails to your followers. In addition, they have a new tool called **Featured New Releases**, which are curated weekly emails that go to U.S. subscribers who have signed up for the category you choose. You may submit a new release request up to six months before and two weeks after your release, but it must be available for pre-order or purchase. There are no discount pricing requirements, so you can submit at full price if you choose. The selection process is very similar to the one for BookBub Featured Deals, so they look at plot, content, and cover.

They may also look at the following (you don't have to have all of these, but they might help):

- Author platform (if you've had a featured deal before, it helps),
- Quotes from other major authors in your genre,
- Early reviews on your pre-order, or
- Wide distribution.

Use **Pre-Order Alerts** to advise your BookBub followers in the U.S. of upcoming releases. You can choose the email to go out between seven and 30 days in the future, so it must be submitted to BookBub at least eight days before the release. You need to have at least 1,000 followers to use it, and it costs \$.02 per follower.

Book Recommendations: BookBub sends subscribers a weekly email roundup of books recommended by authors they follow, and notifies authors when they receive recommendations from readers. BookBub highly recommends you "like" the recommendations to show readers you're engaging with them. Readers are allowed to just give a rating, and some authors mentioned that they only "like" the ones that actually write a review.

Notably, 76 percent of BookBub readers buy books based on recommendations from authors they like. Contrast this with the fact that 77 percent buy based on friend and family recommendations, and you can see it's pretty important. She highly recommended you use the Book Recommendations to engage with your followers by sharing books you love. Not only does it garner good karma to help other authors, but it will help get you more exposure because BookBub highlights author recommendations on their category pages and the reader blog. As an example, author Kate Quinn doubled her followers when she started recommending books. However, as some authors mentioned, it might not be helpful to recommend a book in a subgenre you don't write in. The suggested frequency for recommendations is no more than once a week.

BookBub Ads: These aren't the BookBub Featured Deals everyone is familiar with—these are the self-serve ads that appear at the bottom of the daily and weekly emails. They have a narrower audience and are very customizable. You do not have to go through the selection process for these; instead, you compete using auction bids for impressions (or clicks) to appear to your selected audience. You define your audience, determine your budget and bid, and provide an ad image. The important elements here are:

- *Content.* What should you promote? A new release, first in series, a discount, a box set, even full-price books.
- *Audience.* You can target by region, retailer, category, and author. Since the competition is lower for countries other than the U.S., Robertson suggested targeting them using their currency to advertise a discount (for example, £.99 in the UK, instead of \$.99). She also suggested targeting retailers other than Amazon because the competition is lower there as well. In a quick test she did, Robertson targeted one ad to Amazon and New Adult, and received a .14 percent Click-Through Rate (CTR). When she changed it to Amazon plus New Adult and eight comparable authors, her CTR went up to 1.67 percent (2 percent is considered good for BookBub ads). So, she recommends you do a combined target of both category and author(s) (for example, both Romantic Suspense and Nora Roberts).
- *Message.* Decide on a strategy for Return on Investment (ROI) to determine what readers to target. For new releases, target existing fans and new readers with your text ("How will the series end?"). For first in series or discounted books, hook new readers ("The series is complete"). For box sets, maximize your reach to boost sales and revenue. For full-price books, use a narrow target audience with a strong hook.
- *Choose author targets wisely.* Make sure you target yourself, then look at also-boughts (which may be different for each retailer), popular authors on BookBub.com in your genre, and perhaps ask your readers who else they read.
- *Test and iterate.* Test both your ad copy and ad image. Keep your target audience in mind. Are they familiar with you? If so, add your name. Do they know your series? Feature it prominently. Do they know nothing about you? What hook will you use to get them to click? You can trumpet a deal price (the lower the better), use a trope (secret baby, anyone?), use short quotes from authors or reviews (30 percent better CTR with author quotes over publications), or compare your book to similar titles, authors, movies, or television shows (26 percent more clicks).

- *Ad image design.*
 - Clearly signal the genre and mood.
 - Keep it simple and legible with a clear font.
 - Use the cover or an image from the cover.
 - Include a Call to Action (Buy Now, Download Here, etc.)—red or yellow buttons are good.
 - Test, test, test, and keep testing.
- *How do you know if your ad is working?*
 - Run tests—start at \$10, spend it fast (as opposed to spreading it out over a period of time), then review and repeat.
 - Your goal is to maximize the CTR, to ensure your message is resonating with the reader.
 - Calculate ROI, or estimate it using affiliate links, or by comparing sales before and after.
 - Aim for a profitable Cost Per Click (CPC) (they will have more on this on the blog soon).

Robertson finished by saying that if your ad isn't working or you want advice, email partners@bookbub.com and they will help you. In addition, slides from this presentation are available at <https://insights.bookbub.com/ninc18/>.



[Pam McCutcheon](#) writes romantic comedy, paranormal romance, and how-to books for authors under her own name, and YA urban fantasy as Parker Blue. Someday, she hopes to find a little focus.

Mastering BookBub Ads

Presented by David Gaughran

Reported by Cidney Swanson

With humor and panache, David Gaughran provided methods for NINC attendees to make their BookBub Ads ROI positive.

Gaughran believes that with the right approach, it's possible to do better with BookBub Ads than with Facebook or AMS ads, but it requires an understanding of three ways BookBub is different from other platforms.

Delivery differences

With Facebook, ads serve throughout the day on newsfeeds. BookBub ads are served by email in a newsletter sent to readers who sign up for deals in a particular genre, and who may additionally have signed up to "follow" an author. The customized daily newsletter lists titles at a huge discount or even free. These books are the coveted "featured deal" spots. BookBub Ads are slotted in at the bottom of emails. By including only one ad per email, BookBub shows it values the long-term sustainability of the ad platform.

Unlike Facebook Ads, which are drip-fed to readers throughout the day, the BookBub newsletter with ads drops daily around 9 a.m. Eastern. Because BookBub subscribers are voracious readers, there will be a spike of activity between 9-10 a.m. Eastern, with smaller, spread-out results trickling in as emails are opened.

One of BookBub's best features is its quick feedback through the ads dashboard. The dashboard updates many times a day, providing an advertiser with the ability to turn on a dime if needed. Gaughran encourages advertisers to keep an eye on the dashboard, warning that if an author places an ad immediately prior to the big (9 a.m.) email blast, the money will spend out quickly, potentially burning through hundreds of dollars almost immediately.

Audience differences

Although many BookBub reader-subscribers may be Kindle Unlimited members, BookBub prefers wide titles in their featured deals. Thus, it's a no-brainer to advertise KU titles using BookBub Ads. However, there is no ability to select "KU Readers" as a target. So how should an author-advertiser choose their targeting?

Gaughran stresses keeping in mind how BookBub collects and sorts its readers. Advertisers might be tempted to target a big-name, traditionally published author, but some of the biggest may never have been featured on BookBub, making them extremely poor targets without many followers. In addition, while the readership for a big-name author might be huge, it will often be broad, so Gaughran suggests avoiding big names.

Another distinctive character of the BookBub audience is that its subscribers are deal-hungry. They are typically avid readers trying to keep reading affordable. Advertisers who push a full-price new release may be disappointed in their results.

Advertisement differences

BookBub Ads has other specific quirks. Unlike with Facebook ads, BookBub Ads has no text restrictions in place. However, Gaughran advises not using too much text.

As mentioned earlier, the BookBub Ads platform is super responsive, with lightning-fast posting of results. It is more typical to see results after about an hour, and Gaughran recommends waiting an hour or two before making a judgment that an ad is underperforming. You can kill an ad almost instantly, if needed, although stats will continue to trickle in for several hours. Again, because of the platform's responsiveness, it is possible to burn through money very quickly.

With the above differences and quirks in mind, Gaughran has recommendations for how to use the platform optimally.

The BookBub Ads Trifecta of Success

CPM vs. CPC

Gaughran recommends CPM (cost per thousand impressions served) bidding over CPC (cost per click). CPM serves far more ads, providing an advertiser with a larger amount of feedback. With CPC, an advertiser doesn't know ahead of time what bid is needed to win the serving of the ad. Finally, CPM helps keep up the steady flow of sales that Amazon rewards.

When using CPM bidding, a CTR (click-through rate) result of 2 percent or better is good for a sale-priced, non-free book. With a free book, the percentage result should be higher. For full price titles, a much lower CTR is normal. Gaughran believes using CPM teaches better habits, because it forces advertisers to laser-focus their targeting.

In general, Gaughran ignores bidding costs, although he recommends bidding on the upper range of the suggested bid to win the impressions. If your CTR is good, the ads will be cheap regardless. As a rule of thumb, bid high when testing, medium when running regular promo, and low for perma-free titles or drip campaigns. Likewise, a wide author not doing big blasts of advertising can bid lower, allowing the high bidders to blow their huge budgets in the morning at which point lower bids begin serving.

Images that sell

Professional images are a must. Gaughran suggests asking your cover designer to prepare several cover-based images in standard sizes for Facebook and BookBub Ads. Once you have the correctly sized image, you can use a program like Canva to add price and the duration of the sale, swapping this information as needed for new ads.

Gaughran disagrees with BookBub recommendations to try ads without cover or cover art. In Gaughran's experience, the CTR will be worse. This could be the result of the reader landing on a book page and being surprised or confused by the cover image. At this point, cautions Gaughran, advertisers have lost the sale.

Gaughran admits that there are a few "cheesy" elements that work well for ad images. Successful images have a button with a clear offer and a clear call to action (CTA). "Free" or "New Release" or ".99" on a red button may look tacky, but it will catch eyes. "Download Now" and "Order Now" are good CTAs. "Free," besides being a clear offer, is also something BookBub readers respond to. Ads that are spare tend to work better than ads that are cluttered.

In all cases, Gaughran suggests testing to see what works for the readers an advertiser is targeting. Test multiple iterations, changing only one thing at a time. Often in A/B testing, an ad Gaughran thinks will perform well doesn't.

Targeting: use BookBub-specific author comps

When choosing author targets, look for authors you share an audience with and *NOT* authors with whom you have style or voice similarities. Importing author comps from Facebook or AMS ads can be a bad idea. Gaughran encourages advertisers to go to the reader side of BookBub's website to check on how many followers an author has before targeting that author. He recommends choosing indie authors with between 500 and 20,000 followers for optimal results. In addition, plundering your own book's Amazon Also-Boughts can work.

Gaughran uses both author and genre/category when targeting ads. The reason to add genre is that many authors write in more than one genre.

Through extensive testing, Gaughran sorts authors into gold, silver, and bronze levels, reserving bronze (the least tightly matched) for times he's doing an aggressive launch and wants every last sale.

With BookBub Ads, the line between success and failure is easy to cross. Any flaw in your targeting or image when served to 20,000 people will result in wasted money.

Testing: best practices to follow

Here are Gaughran's best practices:

- Start with a small budget of \$10-15 per test.
- Test one variable at a time!
- Always test when you start a new campaign. Even if you think the image is great, test.
- Sometimes changes as simple as shifting the background color from yellow to green can hugely impact the percentage CTR.
- Always make sure you have rock-solid author targeting.
- Bid aggressively, choosing CPM.

Gaughran has a non-fiction title forthcoming which is exclusively devoted to BookBub Ads. You can learn more at <http://davidgaughran.com>.



[Sidney Swanson](#) is a Kirkus Reviews award-winning author of young adult sci-fi and fantasy, including the Ripple series, the Saving Mars series, the Thief in Time series, and more. Sidney lives in Oregon's Willamette Valley with her husband, some cats, and entirely too much rain.

Blurb-gasmic

Presented by Damon Suede

Reported by Caroline Linden

Blurbs are the language you use to sell your work, or, as Damon Suede put it, they are “a money tree you shake and orgasms and cash fall on you.” His workshop was titled Blurb-gasmic, and while it might not actually cause orgasms, it was full of concrete ways to sell your book in 200 irresistible words.

Suede said all pitches are Trojan horses: they should be clever and even sneaky, to slip under the reader’s guard, through their doubts, boredom, exhaustion, and spur them to pick up your book and start reading. A blurb should grab the reader’s attention, and make it easy for him to talk about it to everyone he knows. The best marketing is word of mouth, and remarkable books inspire remarks.

What makes bestsellers? They are *uniquely familiar*. These stories satisfy the readers’ expectations, but with a fresh twist. They start with a base (a familiar genre trope people love), take a swerve (some twist or reversal of those expectations), and reach the point, which is the interaction between the base and the curve. Sharpening and refining these will signal to readers exactly what they will love, and find special, about your story.

To that end, make every word of your pitch sell the book.

Brainstorm a list of ingredient words. Consider character elements, genre indicators, tropes, flags to particular fandoms, and even comparable authors and titles. Watch social media to see what language readers use. Google Trends tracks terms and language for popularity, or harvest terms from similar authors’ pages on Amazon.

A few notes to consider:

- Choose powerful language.
- Use active verbs and descriptive nouns over adjectives and adverbs.
- Avoid clichés, redundancy, jargon, spoilers, but **do** include trigger words for your specific genre.
- Be clear and direct!
- Emphasize contrasts!
- Let your voice shine; the tone of the blurb should communicate the tone of the book. And don’t be afraid to write something terrible on the first or second or fifteenth try.

There are different kinds of pitches, from one-sentence loglines to full cover copy. A logline summarizes the story in 20-30 words using only the critical story elements. It is a sound bite. Focus on the high concept of your book, not the plot twists.

A logline may look like this: In a [Context], [an appealing Protagonist] must [impactful Conflict] with [Antagonist/Opposition] to achieve [Goal]. Note that the stakes are only suggested, not spelled out. Draw out the irony in the Conflict, the relatability of the Goal, and the imaginative potential in your story.

Loglines are excellent for social media marketing, where they can be easily shared and retweeted, and when someone asks what your book is about.

A blurb is 100-200 words that sells the heart and emotion of a story. Strip out the subplots, backstory, narrative detail, and secondary characters. Draw on your ingredient list of keywords to strike a few clear, strong story beats to plant a question in the reader's mind and heart that makes them want to start reading *immediately*. Write in a voice that reflects the story, and be sure your story delivers on the promise in the blurb. Never betray your reader's genre expectations.

Some helpful templates:

- *The Dialectic* is most popular, and flexible enough for all genres.

Paragraph 1: Introduce Protagonist A, who wants X, but faces dilemma/disaster because Y.

Paragraph 2: Do the same for Protagonist B.

Paragraph 3: Together A and B must work together to (Achieve Something) but (Disaster) intervenes. After (Transformative Crisis) they learn/solve/achieve goal.

- *The Duel* is great for a clash of characters, enemies-to-lovers, competitive stories. The entire focus is on the two protagonists, no one else!

Paragraph 1: Describe Protagonist A and his goal, ending on an impossible question or mission.

Paragraph 2: Describe Protagonist B, clearly contrasting with A, and end with a hook that complicates the question or mission in Paragraph 1.

- *The Duet* works for intense, high-stakes books with lots of tension and drama.

Paragraph 1: An unstoppable force, such as Protagonist A focused on his goal.

Paragraph 2: An immovable object, such as person B standing in A's way.

Paragraph 3: The hook, hinting at what A will do to surmount B's opposition.

- *The Crescendo* is good for escalating stories, such as intense Gothics, farces, melodramas, where the events and emotions are steadily ramped up to the limit.

Often written in one rush, where each sentence piles on the complications and danger and raises the stakes to a tantalizing crisis point, but without spoilers.

A good blurb is a promise of a roller coaster ride, an emotional lure rather than a story outline. Make every word juicy with meaning and subtext, to both attract readers who will love it and warn away readers who will hate it. And let it reflect your voice, as a preview of what the reader will find inside the book.

For more information, see <http://www.your-a-game.com/booklinks/pitchquery.html>.



Caroline Linden studied math at Harvard University and wrote computer code before discovering that writing fiction was far more fun. Now she writes historical romance (mostly) and has won the Daphne du Maurier Award, the NJRW Golden Leaf, and RWA's RITA Award.

Blurb-gasmic

Presented by Damon Suede

Reported by Jennifer Stevenson

Damon Suede said he grew up out-n-proud deep in the anus of right-wing America, and escaped as soon as it was legal. Though new to romance fiction, Suede has been writing for print, stage, and screen for two decades. You can find the handout for this workshop at www.damonsuede.com/ninc. It is strongly suggested that you download the handout, as portions of the handout elaborate and enhance the workshop as presented and as described below.

Suede said, "Blurbs are like a money tree—you shake it and orgasms and cash fall on you. I came to fiction from TV and film. I never want to work for the Weinstein brothers again."

Why does fiction become a bestselling property? Pitches, queries and blurbs are a Trojan horse. Get past the reader's doubts, boredom, feeling of saturation, and exhaustion. Get the Trojan horse inside the gates, and they become your team member.

William Goldman wrote, "Bestsellers are uniquely familiar." So how is a bestseller familiar? How is it unique? Honor what the fans want, then give it to them in a new way.

The hook

The hook is the free prize, the fortune in the cookie, the tinsel in the window—the extra that means nothing in particular. Nobody buys a fortune cookie for the cookie. The hook has three parts:

- *The solid base*: This is the familiar trope that they love. Promise and deliver that.
- *The smooth curve, the twist, a surprise, reversal, or unexpected irony*: Twist the tropes and outstrip the reader's preconceptions.
- *The sharp point of the hook*: This punctures boredom and sticks in the imagination; it pierces. How do unique and familiar elements combine, intersect, and refine one another?

Keywords

Keywords are recurrent language that is known to fans, used for genres and tropes. Keywords indicate the kinks in your genre that poke you in the dark places under the covers. They signal to the reader, "I get you, I speak your language." Once you have assured them you speak their language, you also promise, "I'm going to stretch your mind. I'm going to bend your understanding of this familiar genre."

Shop for your audience *before* you expect them to shop for you. The cues are baked into your fans, the ones who already buy your books. SEO (search engine optimization) happens when someone you're talking randomly to says the word that sets you on fire. Whatever your genre, be assured that fan language about your genre is changing right now. Check social media. Fans' language extends the language of the genre and gives you more keyword tools. Google is another

source of the new fan language; it will reveal the top current genre topics and hashtags. Google Trends literally tracks what language is rising and falling. The terms that set off your readers in the most current contexts are the new keywords.

What genre flags, terms, and other language are associated with the tropes baked into your character and what do they signal to your reader? Trope terms are used in certain groupings. Be aware of those groupings. Step-brother romance is not best-friend's-brother romance. Think in terms of audience bait: clues and flags that appeal to a certain demographic.

Try matching your keywords, your hot-button words, to other books or genres that use the same words. The language that fans like can help you cross over to a fan group that responds to the same keywords. Consider also your shelfmates: who lives next to you on a bookshelf?

Your task is to assemble active, fascinating verbal ingredients. The most powerful verbal ingredients, in descending order of power, are *verbs* > *nouns* > *adjectives* > *adverbs*. Adverbs cripple verbs. Use your strongest tools.

Embrace placeholders. Write a crappy first draft. Amplify contrast: go for the jugular, the "emotionally legible." Any time your marketing language can amplify the contrast is good. People buy what you make them feel.

Logline grammar

The "logline" is an artifact of the era when Hollywood's movies were typed on typewriters. Movie scripts were stored spine-out, with the logline written on the spine. Studio executives would call for a movie by its logline. This 20- to 30-word statement can be diagrammed to increase clarity and punch.

Book blurbs

Summarize the structure before you get to the point. Lay the tracks of the roller coaster. People like consistency. There's no need for the blurbs to change. You cannot smell a television, so the TV ad is supposed to evoke the smell by playing on your feelings. This is the emotional trailer, the emotional ad. Blurbs can be 100 to 200 words, but shorter is better. If you can blurb your book in six words, great. But don't—it'll be too generic, and will need more specific trigger words.

Considerations when constructing a blurb:

- Which emotional ride are you promising?
- Always feature trigger words.
- Every phrase is a boobytrap you set, waiting for them to step on it.
- You want to sucker the people who have never read a book before.
- Voice counts. Make the blurb sound like you and your book.
- No backstory or dialogue.
- Make it emotionally legible.
- Plant a question in their mind and heart. "I wonder what I would do."
- Make them curious in their mind and heart. "I wonder how I would feel."
- Present an insurmountable goal.
- Make them think for a while afterward.

"Don't use first-person blurbs," Suede advises, "unless your readers come from a heavy fanfic background, or are otherwise first-person whores."

Some blurb templates are the *dialectic*, *duel*, *duet*, *crescendo*.

The **Dialectic** template is the most popular for all genres because of its flexibility. It uses the classic structure of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.

Paragraph 1: Character One wants X but Y. Character One faces dilemma and/or disaster.

Paragraph 2: Character Two wants X but Y. Character Two faces dilemma or disaster.

Paragraph 3: Together, Character One and Two cooperate to [take action] but [disaster]. After [transformative crisis] they learn their lesson and/or solve their dilemma.

The **Duel** template is especially good for friction. Two intensely conflicting characters butt heads throughout.

Paragraph 1: Describe Character One, end on an impossible question or declaration with a clear, compelling narrative hook.

Paragraph 2: Describe Character Two (with clear contrasts to One) and use the hook to complicate the above question or declaration.

The **Duet** template is especially good for tension, featuring intense, high-stakes narratives with a punchy hook. Or it can be a slow burn story.

Paragraph 1: Unstoppable force.

Paragraph 2: Immovable object.

Paragraph 3: Hook and/or tagline.

The **Crescendo** template is good for escalation, such as farce, melodrama, intense gothic, or anything where the events and emotion push your protagonist to the limit. The blurb is often written in a single rush, each sentence piling onto the last, where each successive sentence piles on complication and peril to reach a nail-biting crisis. The stronger the language, the better. Use no spoilers! Don't admit that they'll know what happens.

Cover copy

Cover copy is 100 to 200 words of strong emotions & active, third-person language. Make every syllable sing for its supper. Shorter is better. Every word should carry multiple loads. Use no cliches, passive voice, redundancy, jargon, or spoilers. Set the hook, feature keywords, and amp your voice. Show them! Be visual visual visual. Think in terms of movie-trailer moments that don't need backstory or dialogue to clarify. Embrace placeholders: use the things that encapsulate the reader crack, as overpacked as possible.

Damon Suede is co-author, with Heidi Cullinan, of *Your A Game: Winning Promo for Genre Fiction*. He also recommends *Inventing Human Rights* by Lynn Hunt, and suggests *Elements of Surprise: Our Mental Limits and the Satisfactions of Plot*, by Vera Tobin, a professor at Yale. In this book she explains that story works because it's how our neurons fire. Another is *Euphonics for Writers: Professional Techniques for Fiction Authors* by Rayne Hall; this book explains how words sound, and what the sounds mean to us.



[Jennifer Stevenson](#) has published five series, 17 novels, and more than 20 short stories.

Live Video For Authors

Presented by James Blatch, Cecilia Mecca, and John Dyer

Reported by Tawdra Kandle

Live video on social media is one of the most promising new ways for authors to connect with readers. James Blatch, co-host of the [Self-Publishing Formula Podcast](#) (soon to relaunch as the Self-Publishing Show, with video), John Dyer, co-founder and producer of the Self-Publishing Formula Podcast, and author Cecilia Mecca presented a compelling case for even the most reluctant and camera-shy authors to consider this platform.

Blatch first discovered the power and appeal of live video in his days as a BBC reporter and then as a co-owner of a video production company. He noted that videos that included a person speaking—giving the product a face—far outperformed those without the personal touch.

Why video? The reasons are numerous: first, it is well established that the best way to sell a product is through face-to-face conversation. Live video is the next best thing to being physically present; in terms of results, live video performs far above written posts and emails. This is a personal form of communication, making a real connection with readers while engendering loyalty, as readers tend to feel that they actually know the authors they've watched on video.

How can video work for authors? It's a process that builds on itself. Readers become fans, fans become super fans, who in turn spread organic word-of-mouth promotion. Video can boost book launches and allow the author to receive real-time feedback on cover design and ARCs. Furthermore, since such a small segment of the author population is currently engaged in live video, jumping in now gives video-using authors a way to get ahead of the competition and increase book sales. Businesses that use video grow at least 49% faster than those that don't.

And it's not all about the sales, either. The best use of live video lies in building relationships with readers on the other side of the camera.

The primary platform for live video is Facebook, which is still the top social media site for marketers despite age issues. The recent algorithm changes organically promote video; in fact, the organic reach of video posts is 135% better than image posts, garnering more comments, likes and shares.

Facebook is also the easiest platform on which to begin, as starting a live video is as simple as clicking the button on your laptop with a built-in camera and microphone or by using a smart phone. Most authors begin very simply, but it's also not difficult to scale up production values by adding an external microphone, lighting, and external cameras.

Blatch acknowledged that live video can be daunting at first. But as a former BBC reporter, he assured authors that being smoother is not always better—it's far more appealing for authors to simply be themselves, sticking to an informal format.

"Everyone is awful at the beginning," Blatch remarked. "But practice makes better."

But what should authors talk about on their videos? The options are virtually limitless and include hot topics, questions and answers, release dates, book research, covers, book unboxing, giveaways, book readings, release day excitement, event coverage and chats with other authors. Even

if the author's initial engagement and reach isn't spectacular, it will still perform better than other posts.

The second most popular platform for video is YouTube. It is the biggest producer of video content on the internet, but it is not necessarily ideal for live video. Blatch cited two different YouTubers—[Garrett Robinson](#) and [Antoine Bandele](#)—as examples of how this venue can be best used, including regular videos aimed at writers and readers individually. Robinson actually writes his books on live video, allowing his readers real-time input on his work.

Author Cecilia Mecca presented a demonstration of live video marketing, using the app [BeLive](#), which allows the user to stream to any Facebook page, profile or group while offering some extras to enhance the experience, such as branding on the video screen, the option to add others to the video via split screen and the ability to see comments and questions displayed on the screen in real time.

On BeLive, as many as ten authors can participate in group videos, although only four will appear on the screen at one time. The app's simplicity of use makes it appealing to many authors who prefer more than just the basic Facebook Live experience.

Mecca uses video frequently for regular communication with her readers, for joint-author chats and interviews such as her Medieval Monday video show and for unscheduled pop-ins to her reader group. She frequently schedules the live videos to build expectation and excitement among her readers.

Mecca stated that live video is the cornerstone of her marketing and has increased not only her sales but her fan base as they respond to her personal touch. Her reach and engagement have expanded tremendously. The example of her success with live video certainly reinforced her own enthusiastic endorsement as well as that of James Blatch and John Dyer.



[Tawdra Kandle](#) writes romance, in just about all its forms. She loves unlikely pairings, strong women, sexy guys, hot love scenes and just enough conflict to make it interesting. Her romantic subgenres include sports, military, small town and new adult. Tawdra lives in central Florida with a husband, mostly grown kids, two sweet pups and too many cats. And yeah, she rocks purple hair.

I Hear Voices! Writing with Dictation

Presented by Danielle Norman

Reported by Michele Dunaway

Danielle Norman is the author of over 57 children's books, all dictated. She first sold in a 12-book deal to Simon & Schuster because as the VP said, "her voice was so strong."

Norman felt the reason her voice was so strong was because the only way she could write during Stage IV breast cancer was by dictating the words.

As she said, "Do you want to type your story or tell your story?" After all, every trope has been done. Then she asked the audience how many of them had heard the Ernest Hemingway quote: "There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed."

Our blood is what makes every story different.

Dictation allows you to find your voice, as your voice is your authentic self. This is one reason that children's books are different. They have beats and rhythms as they are designed to be read aloud. They are designed by and for the voice.

Two big terms in writing by using your voice are dictation and transcription.

Dictation is talking and letting the computer type, such as the talk-to-text feature on your phone, such as when you dictate a note or a text message. You see what you type. Basically, you talk to your computer and you see it in real time (see it now).

Transcription is when you use a little transcriber and plug it into the computer. You don't see the words as you type. You will see it later after the device is plugged in.

Both can be overwhelming, but you can start with small pieces, one bite at a time. One of the best parts about dictation is being able to move around. You get to pace. Act it out. Go mobile.

[Dragon](#) fuels both Window and Mac OS X platforms' built-in microphones and recording programs. So it's already on your computer and you can use it and figure out if you like it before you invest in the full Dragon software.

Norman likes to use a transcriber, which she carries everywhere, even keeping it beside her bed. She recommends the Sony Dictaphone ICDPX370 Digital Voice Recorder with Built in USB, which you can get on [Amazon](#) for around \$48. She said you plug it in and it prints out into your computer program, and when she stops going, it simply records the silence and doesn't turn off. (Editor Note: the device has internal memory and SD card capability).

One of the best things about using a Dictaphone and the transcription method is that you are not looking at your computer. You are free talking. You don't see your words, and Norman says this has made her faster. She can type 500-1000 words in 30 minutes whereas she can speak 3,000 words in 30 minutes. When the idea hits you, you say it. You can carry the device with you.

Doing this also helps you figure out the story rhythm. You hear rhythms when you read out loud, and when you read a story, you are actually hearing the words out loud in your head. She said dictating and transcribing are especially good for you when considering how your book will sound in audio.

You also hear your authentic voice—the one voice that makes you "you." The voice that your readers know when they read your work—whether or not they see your cover, they immediately know this is a "So and So" book.

Norman also shared some of her equipment preferences. For dictation apps, the inbuilt speech-to-text software in Windows and OS X is powered by Dragon (as indicated earlier). You can use it to practice dictating before you invest in premium speech-to-text software. To activate it on a Mac, press the FN key twice. To activate it on a PC, open the control panel, type “speech” into the search box and select Start Speech Recognition.

For a headset or microphone, you have several options, such as Bluetooth or wired. She likes the Blue Yeti USB Microphone—Blackout Edition—2070, which is less than \$150 on [Amazon](#). Norman prefers to be more hands-off. She also says that many devices will pick up background noise and will turn off, so be careful. You don’t want the device hearing your refrigerator or AC kick on and turn off and not record your work.

As for software, Dragon is a downloadable program. You can also go online for [Speechnotes](#), and [Brainia](#) is a subscription service. [GoQ Software](#) is also for a more visual speaker, and she found it more for presentations.

Other alternatives include Siri, Apple Dictation, Google Docs Voice Dictation, Windows Speech Recognition, Cortanna, Listnote, Gboard, Speech Recognizer and Rev.

Norman says that for her, there’s nothing as strong as Dragon and the full version is worth the investment.

When you’re ready to get started, Norman has some dos and don’ts. She said she became a better dictator with outlining. She uses it for her story premise and suggests newbies start with that.

She suggests you should do the following:

1. Allow for a learning curve.
2. Practice every day (while not realistic, the more you work at it, the better you get).
3. Remember the equipment makes a difference.
4. Learn to outline and plan what you are going to say.
5. Spend 10 minutes preparing before you start recording.

She also advises you don’t do the following things:

1. Expect perfection.
2. Freak out over punctuation.
3. Worry about pauses. It’s recording nothing.
4. Use filler words like umm, you know.
5. Watch the cursor/screen.

Each is important. You should try to find a speech to text that fits your accent, and the more the program learns your voice and rhythms, the better written text you will get. Be prepared before you start, which is why she outlines. Hers are about 200 words. While most software programs have a cheat sheet of punctuation, she fixes all that later. Her goal is to get her rough draft done, as this is the hardest part. Her process is to dictate one chapter and then fix the chapter, and she does a chapter a day of 3,000 words. To outline the whole story would take about an hour to speak 5,000 words. She says you will become a more organized writer. Her process is *idea to outline to chapters*.

She also advises that your speaking and typing voice are not the same, and that Dragon will not get specific words, like a Greek hero’s name, so she will actually say hero name and later do a search and replace.

She also offered the following tips and tricks:

1. Use something that uses the least amount of computer CPU. Dictation is resource intensive. Don't dictate into Word, use Notepad instead.
2. Give yourself a year to switch over. It takes time to transition from storytelling at the keyboard to speaking story aloud. Weeks and months of time.
3. Keep track of everything. Don't erase, just keep talking. You'll erase later and cut. Close your eyes while you dictate.
4. Micro plot your chapter ahead and dictate from that.
5. Set up various computer profiles, especially if you change genres. Your tone of your voice changes with dictation, depending on what you are doing, so with different profiles, it will keep things clear for the AI of your computer. The computer gets accustomed to the words in that profile. Our computer knows words/tones, and your voice will be different if you are writing a romantic comedy or a thriller or a horror scene.
6. There are tons of books on Kindle, some even free, that you can download.

Q & A from audience

Q: Mistakes, say word to find?

A: Audience suggestion was to say "new line, new line" and that way it gives it a break. If you don't use new line then you will see a big blob of text when transcribed.

Q: New Profile?

A: A way to get ready to start a new profile is to dictate your old book into it. That way the program gets used to you.

Audience advice:

- You may hate your voice. Close your eyes. Wear headphones. Use noise-canceling headphones.
- Do 5-10 minutes. You can do short bursts. You can fix as you go.
- Find your comfort level. Turn your brightness down on your screen if you don't want to see the words as you type.
- Don't expect it to sound like a story. That's revision.
- Use the accessibility features in your computer to help you set things up.



Michele Dunaway is your Nink Editor. She loved meeting all of you who said "Hi" at the conference and hopes to see those of you who didn't make it next year.

Scene Dictation Prep Sheet

Chapter/Scene:

Purpose:

Sensory/Setting:

Imagery/Metaphor/Similes:

Character reveal:

Tension/Conflict:

Summary/Beats:

1. Who is in this scene? List them and give initial positioning

Character 1:	Starting position:
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Character 2:	Starting position:
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Character 3:	Starting position:
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Character 4:	Starting position:
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2. Which character controls the viewpoint and why?

Character:	Why:
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3. Purpose of the scene?

4. What is the time for this scene?

The Id List: The Science of Fiction and the Psychology of Fandom

Presented by Dr. Jennifer Barnes

Reported by Jennifer Stevenson

Author and professor, Jennifer Barnes has a Ph.D. in psychology from Yale and currently works at the University of Oklahoma, where she is one of the world's foremost experts on the cognitive science of fiction and the psychology of fandom. Barnes discussed the psychology of pleasure and helped attendees create an Id List of tropes that will simultaneously up the innate appeal of their books while helping them recapture the joy of writing what they love.

Barnes focused on the study of fiction and the imagination. Why fiction? Why do we spend so much energy on something that's not real? And why *that* book? That's a scientific question for her. These questions feed into each other.

Why and how did fiction happen?

Steven Pinker wrote in *How the Mind Works* that fiction is like cheesecake. Why do we like cheesecake? You could theorize about how liking cheesecake is a Darwinian advantage. We evolved preferences for sugar and fat. The core of his thesis is that cheesecake is a pleasure technology. We evolved pleasure centers for sugar and fat. And then someone created cheesecake.

Fiction is a pleasure technology. Savvy authors chock their fiction full of things we are hardwired to like, and Pinker and Barnes predict that the most successful books will be the ones that deliver the most pleasure. It's not complex. It's about pleasure.

Barnes noted that the books she is writing now are much better than the books she wrote 12 years ago. But the relationship between the level of craft in her books and how beloved those books are by her readers is nonexistent. Likewise for sales numbers. She asked, "Why that book?" for her own books.

She said luck is a factor, but as we progress in our craft as writers, we sometimes edit out our id, our base-level pleasures, from our books. We do it for what seem like good reasons. "Is this cliché, realistic, silly, too much, done that before? I'm so sick of instalove. No more love triangles! She's such a Mary Sue character. Princesses are so overdone."

We have internal and external voices telling us to tamp down these things. They then become guilty pleasures: over-the-top things that readers love. And we start editing them out.

Stop subconsciously editing the id out of your books! Learn to consciously edit all kinds of pleasures—both universal and idiosyncratic—in! The id is the impulsive, irrational, pleasure-seeking part of the self. It wants what it wants. You should edit that in, not out.

There are two kinds of pleasures you can edit into your book: universal, or hard-wired pleasures, and idiosyncratic pleasures—your personal pleasure kinks. This is how to make cheesecake.

If you could press a button and deliver pleasure, what buttons could you push? What do most humans seem to find pleasurable?

Sex and touch

These create oxytocin delivery, so work in moments of touch, sensations of softness and warmth, cuddling, snuggling, small furry creatures, and moments of platonic intimacy. These are all ways to *push the touch button*. Add a puppy into your book and suddenly there's more pleasure in your book. How much *platonic* touch is in your book? This can be a stealth pleasure button.

Also great buttons are touch-based superpowers, rules against touching (which increase sexual tension and just plain tension), scripted touch, forbidden touch, and messing with people's heads about touch.

Beauty

Beauty varies across cultures. A preference for beauty (however defined) is always there. Infants love symmetrical features more. So put in some beautiful characters. Example: *The Belles* by Dhonielle Clayton, a book about beauty. This includes people who can make over people to become beautiful, instinctively or magically, slavery, exploitation, beauty as power. More beauty as power buttons include Snow White and the Evil Queen, etc.

What is beauty? Example: *Dumpling* by Julie Murphy, is about a girl who doesn't fit cultural ideals of beauty and yet she enters a beauty pageant. Makeover sequences work, too. Think of adding beautiful places, such as scenes in nature. Such scenes exploit aesthetic awe—stuff that makes you feel awe, such as vastness in setting. Example: *Black Panther* is full of gorgeous people, but also they talk constantly about the beauty of Wakanda.

Resources and wealth

Stories that exploit this pleasure button include *King Midas*, *Rumpelstiltskin*, *Crazy Rich Asians*, *Dynasty*, *Gossip Girl*, any book with billionaires or superheroes, *The Great Gatsby*, *Fifty Shades*, and entire subgenres of romance. What if you're not writing about billionaires? There are a lot of other ways to depict wealth and luxuries. You can include critical depictions of wealth, such as stories about wealth disparity. It's irrelevant to the pleasure center if the story criticizes wealth, as long as we get to see it. Example: *The Hate You Give* is about a poor girl who goes to a wealthy private school. This pushes the wealth pleasure button. Remember that what constitutes wealth is relative. A high contrast in wealth between characters can push this button.

Status and power

These are often correlated with wealth. This is why there are so many dukes and royalty in fiction. You can use these things in titles to push the power/status button: positions of power, royalty, peerage, politicians, FBI, police and other authorities, CEOs, generals, and supernaturally empowered people. Remember that there are all kinds of power: influence, connections, occupational prestige, legal or religious authority, respect, physical size and strength (which are evolutionarily powerful), and reputation. As with wealth, you can exploit power differentials to hit this pleasure button. This includes the dystopian genre, or any underdog story.

Competition

If we didn't innately like competition, there wouldn't be such things as spectator sports. It pays to pay attention to competitions, such as contests, races, games, rivalries, love triangles (a romance competition), bets, battles and war, anything that turns conflict into a competition. Example: *Game of Thrones*, *Highlander* ("there can only be one").

Danger

There's a caveat to this pleasure button: it must be *safe danger*. We don't like actual danger. There are all kinds of reasons to like danger in a fictional context. There's a famous experiment in psychology literature called the "rickety bridge experiment." People walk across two different bridges: a rickety one and a sturdy one. The real test was: how hot did they find the research assistant at the other end of the bridge? After you have walked across the rickety bridge, you are in a state of heightened physiological arousal, and excitation transfer makes you think that the next person you see is hot. Example: the first danger moment in *Twilight*. So what pushes the danger button? Answer: Dangerous characters, dangerous worlds (dystopians, PNR worlds, and realistic danger), and dangerous moments. In a sweet book, you can still have a rickety bridge moment. It doesn't change the genre but it gives people the sweaty feeling.

Different genres are associated with different pleasures

Romance is associated with touch, thrillers with danger. Ratchet up the intensity of the pleasures associated with your genre and subgenre, while taking care to include moments or scenes that push other pleasure buttons, creating "rest" moments.

Examples of the Cheesecake Theory in action

The Hunger Games, a dystopian YA series where the rich capital forces poor children to fight to the death. Look at all the pleasure buttons pushed.

- *Beauty*: When you are a competitor in the hunger games, you get a makeover. A quarter of the book is the "beauty quarter."
- *Wealth*: Huge disparity between rich and poor.
- *Power*: Disparity between powerful and helpless.
- *Competition* and *Danger*: The story is about competing to the death.
- *Touch*: Lots of touch between the sister Katniss and Prim, and choreographed touch between the competitors.

Twilight

- *Beauty*: Vampires are supernaturally beautiful.
- *Wealth*: The Cullens are wealthy.
- *Power*: All kinds of power and supernatural powers.
- *Competition*: A love triangle and species rivalry and impending war.
- *Danger*: Edward tells Bella he's dangerous for the entire book, and there are little dangerous moments throughout.

- *Touch*: In addition to romance, vampires are cold and werewolves are hot. Sometimes Bella gets to ride or play with wolves.

Titanic

- *Beauty*: The film is full of beautiful people, plus two beauty-centric scenes. In one, Jack draws Rose, and in another her mother puts her in a corset.
- *Wealth*: Upstairs/ downstairs disparity between the wealth of the characters.
- *Power*: Associated with wealth, associated with gender.
- *Competition*: Fiancé sees competition with the hero.
- *Danger*: It's the Titanic!
- *Touch*: All the iconic moments are touch moments.

Four ways of integrating pleasure into books

- Pleasure-centric premises: Competition is central to *The Hunger Games*.
- Adding pleasure to premises: Adding more ancillary pleasures.
- Pleasure in plot: Pleasures that occur during pivotal moments.
- Pleasure-centric moments, details, or incidental scenes.

Take a pleasure inventory of your book

What pleasure buttons are you hitting in your premise? In the book as a whole? In each individual chapter? What is the featured pleasure of each scene? Can you hit a button, can you hit it more or harder? If you're not hitting one of the six hard-wired pleasure buttons—beauty, wealth, power, competition, danger, touch—consider adding it. You don't make your book better by putting less pleasure into your book. You put in *weirder* pleasures.

The Id List

Barnes realized she was enjoying writing less and less. Then she started her id list. Her id list includes all her favorite tropes, locations, anything that does it for her, no matter why.

Now she has a list of 600 things she really loves. When she's writing a book, she looks at the list and asks, can we cram in more of these?

What are your bulletproof tropes? Make a list of all things big and small that you love in fiction.

Examples from her personal list: identical twins, clones, robots who look like people, robots who don't know they're robots, twenty-somethings raising their teen siblings, hereditary magic, little sister characters, big families, curses, heiresses, puzzles, eccentric billionaires, newly human and strangely literal characters, amnesia, princesses, people living under aliases, scenes that take place on rooftops, waterfalls, spies, thieves, assassins, secret passageways, overprotective siblings, cousins the same age, secret societies, and females who use gender expectations to crush their enemies.

For the past four years she has been asking people about their id lists. She asks her students to make their id lists too. Examples include: airport reunion scenes, characters eating ice cream, unique character names, road trips, organ donation scenes, vinyl records, characters incapable of feeling emotions, police dogs, scenes set on trains, unnatural hair colors, bonus if they naturally have an unnatural hair color, underwater caves, haunted houses, dating bets, boarding schools, cities at night, dying requests, parents who leave clues for their children to discover after they die, old maps,

abandoned amusement parks, ballrooms, evil twins, and people discovering mistakes about the identity of their biological parents.

How do you make your own id list?

Go through your keeper shelf and check the blurbs. Also think of what attracts you back to those books over and over.

- *Character trope examples:* waifish assassin, fragile grip on reality, overprotective older brother characters.
- *Plot trope examples:* amnesia, buried alive, comas, secret babies.
- *Place setting examples:* rooftops, islands, private islands, small town islands, deserted islands, hotels, luxury hotels, people who live in hotels, small historic family hotels, tunnels, hedge mazes.
- *Detail examples:* characters with mismatched eyes, who name their cars, who love archery.
- *Events or set piece examples:* masquerade balls, car chases, scavenger hunts, truth or dare, rodeos.

Update this list every time you see a movie or read a book. The Id List is ever-evolving. When you're toying with a premise, ask yourself which items on your id list you might be able to include. This makes you excited to write the book.

Q&A

Q: Do you think this works because you plug into the muse, or because readers enjoy it?

A: Both! Some people will search Amazon for items on their id list. The list helps you bring energy and magic to your own books. *Twilight* got a lot of criticism, but there was a lot of crack in those pages that could have been edited out. The vampires sparkle! There was a lot of derision, but hell yeah, the vampires sparkle!

Analyze bestsellers in your genre for how they integrate both prevalent/universal pleasures and idiosyncratic ones. Look for everything that seems "iddy."

Analyze books you've written before:

- What pleasure are you strongest on?
- Which ones are weak or absent from your work?
- What items on your id list appear a lot? Are there any you now wish you had included?

Make cheesecake at every stage: conceiving and choosing projects, outlining or first drafting, in revision, packaging, and marketing. Package and market your books in ways that advertise the wish-fulfillment elements. Make sure people know what items are on your id list that are on your book. "If an id list tree falls in the forest and it's not on your cover, then no one knows about it."

Example: "If you like plot twists, secret siblings, accidental kidnappings, same-age cousins, masquerade balls, scavenger hunts, fish out of water comedy, sarcasm, and girls who are underestimated and use that to destroy the people who underestimate them, this might be the book for you." This selling copy for her book got skyrocketing engagement.

The more super-specific idiosyncratic pleasures you mention in the marketing copy, the more luck you'll have.

Q: Is it as powerful to use id with secondary characters as it is with primary characters?

A: Both! You'll have different id with primary and secondary characters. If you can have every character be very iddy, then it adds; it's more powerful. For example, "people who might be evil or good but you can't tell which." You can't do that with romance very often unless gothic, but it works with secondaries.

Q: Why do we find dark characters so pleasurable? Why do some people love horror movies and others hate them?

A: The comfort level for danger is different for different people. If that's your pleasure button, then that's on your list. If you're writing really dark books, the danger will already be there. Your challenge is looking at all the other pleasures besides danger and seeing to it that they're there. Is there beauty in your dark book? Is there a moment of lightness? One character who is sarcastic and funny?

Q: How do I avoid every book being about twins on a rooftop near a waterfall?

A: It can help if you have a long list. But it doesn't matter. Readers don't care if you write 15 amnesia books in a row. If they like amnesia books, they can't wait to read your next amnesia book. The readers who like that book are never going to get sick of another amnesia book. No one cares if you do it again. Give yourself permission to go back to the well as often as you want. And compile a list that's long enough to give you variety.

Q: Are these the best buttons for fiction? Are others nonapplicable for fiction?

A: These are the six hardwired pleasures that are most universal. But a chocolate fountain and cheesecake also count. They have an adaptive value. We like competition because you need to come out on top, i.e., the hardwired pleasures reference Darwinian advantages. We're hardwired to like gossip. Fiction is gossip about people who aren't real.



Jennifer Stevenson has published five series, 17 novels, and more than 20 short stories.

Irresistible Premise (aka Writing the Irresistible)

Presented by William Bernhardt

Reported by Michele Dunaway

What makes a book rise to the next level? In presenter William Bernhardt's workshop, he discussed the idea of premise in terms of down-to-earth stuff—or as he calls it, the practical, useful advice. Information in the workshop came from the eighth book in his Red Sneaker series, *Powerful Premise*.

Bernhardt suggested that when no one is requesting your work or buying it, the reason could be because the premise is lacking. If editors are asking to read your book and passing on purchasing it, that's style.

Usually the feedback you will get is that the premise needs to be larger, but Bernhardt says you must think of this feedback as being a different view of larger. To get the audience involved, he asked the audience to think of their three favorite books of all time—three novels.

Audience members had a wide range of suggestions. Several said *Gone with the Wind*, which Bernhardt said would be on his mom's list. One said *Lonesome Dove*. So take a moment to think about your favorite three novels of all time.

List them here:

Now what is it that you liked about them? List some reasons:

Most likely you came up with what the audience did, and all reasons fell under the following overarching terms:

- *Setting*: A convincing fictional world
- *Character*: Larger-than-life persons
- *Plot*: A great story involves great events

Bernhardt said that when we write, we create large fictional worlds. While this seems simplistic, he said that often initial writers base characters on themselves, or they set books where they live—because it's what you know. We do it instinctively.

But as we grow as writers, we must ask about our choices. Is what we are doing the right choice for the story? This may require some introspection. Bernhardt then said, "This may sound harsh, but just because it happens to you, doesn't mean it's interesting."

That's brutal reality. You need to ask yourself about your story's value: What is the value? Is it of family value? Stories about your aunt may only be of value to your immediate family. Or is your book of commercial value? Will it reach a wider audience?

The big premise could be found in the external conflict, or the personal conflict, or the internal conflict.

Bernhardt shared a slide showing that key elements of enlarging your premise boil down to the following five things:

- An element of originality
- High stakes
- Internal credibility
- Inherent conflict
- Emotional appeal

Originality: same but different

All big premise books have an element of originality. The three top-selling books from the last 15 years are *The Da Vinci Code*, *Twilight*, and *Fifty Shades of Grey*. When everyone says “same but different,” they mean they want some recognizable form of the genre. The same is important. But they also want something in that genre that stands out.

For example, *The Da Vinci Code* was a thriller that broke out in 2003 when thrillers were dead. It had the fast pace of a thriller, but the protagonist was a Harvard professor who studied historical religious symbols, not bombs or spies. It sold 80 million copies. Think about it, Harvard professors sounds boring, but the book wasn't. *Twilight* was about vampires, but they were not guys with foreign accents, but rather hunky boys who sparkle when the sun hits them. The book wasn't a horror novel, but rather a teen romance. *Fifty Shades* began as *Twilight* fan fiction, and then she changed it up. While at its core it's a romance, the difference was S&M bondage.

The big premise means you have to go beyond. Bernhardt also mentioned a book titled *The Girl with All the Gifts*. While it wasn't as huge as the previous three, he said it sold well. It was a zombie novel, but this girl is sympathetic and she's the step to the future.

Also, at the core of originality is your characters. Your characters make the same old tropes and plots unique. Bernhardt didn't go into much here, as he gave a workshop on characters the next day. But he wanted to touch on the fact that all fiction is character-driven, and readers must care about your characters. That's one core element key to an irresistible premise.

Raise the stakes

The higher the stakes, the more invested your reader and your characters are. You must have high stakes, and to do this, two questions can help.

For your characters, you must make it personal. To raise public stakes, ask, “How could things get worse?” To raise private stakes, ask, “How could this matter more?”

For instance, a firefighter runs into a burning building to save people at the top, and there's only so much time before the building collapses (the “how could things get worse”). But what if his pregnant wife was at the top? The stakes just got higher (the “how could this matter more”).

For an irresistible premise, heighten expectations. Thrillers can now be about biologists and viruses. Disaster movies are now being repackaged as thrillers. Stuff has to happen to people you care about, so make it personal.

Believe

A key part of premise is internal credibility. The plot doesn't have to be real, but your characters must believe it can happen. (*Jurassic Park* from DNA in mosquitoes, anyone? Especially in the 90s? This is a prime example.)

Edgar Allen Poe called this believability verisimilitude. Your novels don't have to be life-like, but your novel has to be realistic. Basically, in its own framework, the plot works and makes sense. Going back to *The Da Vinci Code*, *Twilight*, and *Fifty Shades*, think about what was in the plot of each of them that was believable to the characters.

Readers understand what will happen in a mystery (crime solved) or a romance (happily ever after). Your novel must be internally consistent or the readers will have issues with it. After all, no one is reading novels to read more reality. If you believe it, they will come.

Inescapable conflict

This is more than the character yelling at himself. It's built into the premise without explaining it. *Amazing Race* is done in pairs because pairs bring conflict. Ask yourself, how can you pair your characters? Example: Baptist preacher with lesbian daughter investigating a murder. How can you build conflict? Example: A villain who thinks he's a good guy.

Great stories stir the emotions

Look again at the three novels you wrote down. Now think about the emotional reaction you got from reading those. Write those down here:

Eliciting emotions is your goal; you want to elicit an emotional reaction of this level. Books with larger premises have great emotional appeal.

While you may not hang out at the watercooler anymore, the adage remains: these are watercooler books—the ones you talk to other people about because they are that good. Perhaps now it's Reddit or Goodreads, but you talk about what you're reading somewhere.

Bernhardt gave the example of Nicholas Sparks's *The Notebook*. It made people cry. You want books to pull out emotions: laughter, tears. You want them to be sentimental or heart-tugging.

There's that adage, make 'em laugh, cry, and feel like you said something. When you can produce that type of reaction, you've got something special.

Everyone wants a home run, and if you can write a book that hits all five of these, you have a rock-solid premise. Start strong rather than weak.



Michele Dunaway serves as your Nink editor.

Leverage the Power of Barnes & Noble with B&N Press

Presented by Sarah Dickman & Julie Braunschweiger

Reported by Rochelle Paige

Sarah Dickman, senior manager of business operations, and Julie Braunschweiger, Barnes & Noble press coordinator, led a workshop detailing all the new things NOOK Press has in store for authors after their rebranding to [Barnes & Noble Press](#) this past January 2018. Part of the relaunch involved the combining of ebook and print to signify their close alignment with Barnes & Noble retail stores, but that's just the beginning.

Their platform is free for authors to use, and they're now paying a 65 percent royalty on all ebook price points—including 99 cents and over \$10. They also offer the ability to create print books, which pay at fifty-five percent of list price minus print costs. Authors can make paperbacks available for purchase or just for personal use if they only want author copies without being for sale in the store. Ebooks take about 72 hours to go online, and print books are a little longer at 96 hours.

One of their new features is the ability to clone metadata for ebook to print and vice versa. This would be especially helpful for authors who are moving their backlist to Barnes & Noble Press. It's also important to note that you won't lose reviews if you switch over from a third party to direct, as long as the author and title are the same. If you run into any issues, you can email them to follow up.

They offer glossy or matte paperback covers, dust covers or printed jackets for hardcovers, competitive printing costs, and a variety of trim sizes. They're also looking to offer a smaller, mass-market size. If there's a size you're looking for, email them and ask. They have a great team in place with a lot of support now.

There are some advantages to publishing paperbacks directly with Barnes & Noble Press. Anyone can go into a store and order as ship-to-home while they're there. If you've sold more than five hundred units across your B&N Press ebook catalogue in the past 12 months, then you're eligible for a potential signing event in a store. You tell them the stores in your area, and they'll pitch it to the manager for you. If you do an event, you'll order the books and ship them to the store and get paid for any copies that sell that day. When it's done, the store may want to keep them to sell or have you take them home with you. And if you've sold more than 1,000 units, you're eligible to request a B&N Buyer Review for potential placement at a local, regional, or national level. The same buyer who places all orders for your category reviews your book. The program is still being worked on to facilitate it better since there are still some things to work out, especially with series.

Another major change from the re-launch was an update to the dashboard for improved reporting functionality. They now offer customizable reports for yearly, monthly or weekly sales. And they have better searching capabilities with the ability to filter by title, author, or ISBN. There's also a top-five bestseller widget that lets you know which of your titles are currently performing the best, and a 30-day graph to better spot trends and spikes.

One of the biggest advantages to going direct with Barnes & Noble Press is access to their merchandising programs. They have quite an impressive list including NOOK First Look, B&N Press Presents, and a few different free ebook opportunities. NOOK First Look is a two-week exclusive release to NOOK before the wide release. Barnes & Noble Press would provide a lot of promotion for the title—including rich push notification, email, on-site, and social media. Everyone has the ability to set up a preorder up to twelve months in advance. With NOOK First Look, you can do a preorder on other sites, just for release two weeks later. B&N Press Presents is a bi-monthly promotion featuring a total of sixty titles. It includes cross-channel promotion in email, social media, their website, and on devices. For free ebooks, there are promotions for Top Free NOOK Books, Start a Series for Free, Free eBook Favorites, and Free Fridays. There are also year-round themed promotions and value-based sales.

Barnes & Noble Press has also added comprehensive tools and guides as part of the re-launch. There's a variety of topics ranging from how to write sales copy to book metadata basics. For authors who are new or well versed, they're there to help you publish successfully with Barnes & Noble Press.

Need another reason to upload paperbacks directly to B&N Press? It also helps you get a yes on the merchandising opportunities. And now they offer vendor support for Canada, Australia & New Zealand authors! Plus, they added 4,000 new categories which are searchable to help you find what you're looking for.

What does Barnes & Noble Press have for us in the pipeline? They're in the process of integrating their affiliate program, Commission Junction, into the platform. They're also working with Inkubate for a program that will launch a couple of weeks after the conference. In the past, Inkubate has worked with traditionally published authors but not as much with indies. They offer reports to help authors build their platform by identifying readers who are already primed to like their writing style. Their analysis shows authors other genre readers who already like your style of writing, sales data to help gauge the size of the audience, and the metadata that you should use in marketing copy and search engine optimization to attract those readers. Barnes & Noble Press authors will receive a 30-percent discount off the report cost of \$99. The report includes three comp titles and keyword targeting.

They also have new features in store for print, including a 180-day preorder. It can be assetless, with the exception of needing a jpeg cover image. Final files would be due 10 days before release. They also plan to offer a print file correcting tool which can be used for free once per cover and once per interior when you move a print title over.

And the announcement which got the biggest reaction from the audience was the availability of ebook coupon codes. It's supposed to come a couple of weeks after the conference, but we were instructed not to share on social media yet.

Editor's Note: After the conference, news reports noted that Barnes and Noble was hanging up the "For Sale" sign. Go here for more [information](#).



Rochelle Paige is the NINC Conference Sponsorship Chair and writes 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.

Pitfalls for Pros

Presented by Marsha Zinberg

Reported by Cidney Swanson

Marsha Zinberg is a freelance editorial consultant who served as an executive editor at Harlequin for over 30 years. Currently, she does developmental edits primarily for established authors who may or may not be looking to publish traditionally. She sees similar problems cropping up in much of the material she works with, and when she speaks to editors still in the trade, she hears this same list.

Common pitfalls all editors see

Market pitfalls: Many times authors forget that their book needs to find a market. Most authors are introverted and get energy from being inside their own worlds. Eventually, however, the private world an author has created has to go outside where it will sink or swim. Often, authors fail to ask the following questions: *Who is my target audience? Where will this book fit on either brick-and-mortar shelves or online categories? To what demographic do my readers belong? What age are they? What gender?*

Genre conventions: In the case of a book of the heart, authors are often writing outside genre boundaries. These books tend to be hard to market and hard to sell. To combat this issue, the author will want to be able to describe their book using a quick logline or one-sentence blurb.

Some authors believe their work transcends genre, but the bookseller has to know where to shelve it or categorize it. In many cases, especially where an author is writing outside a genre they know, this is especially challenging. Authors must study the genre they are moving into to be sure they “give readers the same thing—only different.”

Chasing trends: Editors will always caution against chasing trends. For instance, *Girl on a Train* gave rise to a rash of domestic thrillers to the point that editors were drowning in them. In most cases, an author chasing a trend will find that their established readership isn’t thrilled with the new genre they are writing in, so it’s best to avoid chasing trends.

Novel fundamentals

Zinberg categorized an entire set of pitfalls as “fundamentals errors.” If you want to break the rules of storytelling in a fundamental way, she cautions you must have a very good reason for doing so. However, Zinberg maintains a story can be unconventional in form or presentation *if* you hook a reader with characters that are compelling.

Characters: The main character must be the obvious and natural person to experience the journey, so be sure your character can actually drive the plot. Characters must initiate the action and not simply respond to what’s happening. Even within a restrictive social environment (such as the Regency period), they must be active.

Speech: A common pitfall is to write speech patterns of 50-year-old when trying to present a 20-year-old. Language spoken by children when it is inappropriate to children must also be avoided. There’s a rate at which kids acquire words, lengthen sentences, and so forth, and a writer must respect this.

Stakes: Stakes must be high. If the source of conflict isn't major, the story will probably not work. The conflict must feel as though there is no possible resolution *and* is also plausible.

Filtering: "Show, don't tell," is still a valid piece of advice. Do as little filtering (through viewpoint character) as possible. Your characters should not be providing backstory through dialogue if at all possible.

Authenticity: Characters must speak and act in a way that is authentic to them. They reveal what is on their minds, not what is on the author's mind. Be careful not to hit the reader over the head with too much information or repetition. Finally, allow a character's actions to tell us who they are.

Premise/Theme: Zinberg advises being mindful of the premise. "Love conquers all," or "Integrity trumps immorality," are examples of unifying themes. Are all the scenes in the novel supportive of the premise? Be sure they are.

The Tricky Bits

Zinberg next discussed what she called the "tricky bits" of a novel.

Opening: The opening needs to be snappy. Authors should pull the rabbit out of the hat, as it were, rather than slowly writing their way into the story. Attention deficit is real for readers, and authors should never take for granted that readers will give authors latitude to take their own sweet time starting the action. Authors should start with the conflict and fill in the backstory later. Often it's hard to get the opening right the first time, and it is easier to fix things after the rough draft is complete.

Shifts in time: Three different time-related elements are often mishandled, especially when authors work with multiple POV's. Sometimes writers will finish a chapter with the heroine's day ending, followed by a chapter starting the hero's (now previous) day. Zinberg says this "winding the clock back" will almost always confuse readers.

A second problem she sees is when an adult narrator recounts their teenage years and then unexpectedly dips into the voice or brain of their teen self, abandoning the adult narration. Narration must come from a consistent voice.

With any sort of shift in time, Zinberg urges authors to explain the shifts thoroughly. How much time has passed? What day is it? What hour is it? Learn to transition well, with the expertise of a magician moving from trick to trick; it should be that seamless. Dozens of transitions happen in novels. The timeline must be adhered to, or the author must make very clear what's happening if the timeline isn't adhered to.

POV and shifting POVs: Point of View (POV) shifts need to be handled carefully. Readers need to know why the new character is the one now speaking. In addition, Zinberg finds that authors who don't choose the "right" POV for their story generally end up needing to do a complete re-write.

Options for POV include first person, second person, third person limited, and omniscient third person. In the final one, each set of thoughts are described from inside each character's head by an omniscient author, as in a Dickens novel. In contrast, third person limited is from inside one character's head.

Voice and POV establish the tone of any book. First person is considered the most intimate POV. The reader only knows what the "viewpoint character" knows. Second person can be intimate by virtue of inviting the reader to envision themselves as the hero of the story. In third person limited, a reader can be very close to the character since the narrator sees and knows everything the character knows *and* can further reveal what the character doesn't know.

With third person limited, you have the ability to “change the angle of the camera.” You can only know what the viewpoint character knows. However, it is acceptable to change viewpoints within a chapter, but not from paragraph to paragraph. It is risky to balance the POV between several characters as readers want a primary person from whose POV to examine the world.

As Zinberg stated, there are conventions within each genre, and these include POV. YA for instance, is often written in first person to promote a close, almost confessional feeling. Epic fantasy is a place where third person omniscient still rules the day. Romance can successfully use both first person and third person limited. If you subvert any of these norms, it should be for a very good reason, usually involving providing either intimacy or access to information.

In concluding, Zinberg shared this: “When asked why it was that God created humans, when it seemed He had gone to a great deal of trouble to create a perfect world without such imperfect creatures, Elie Wiesel’s answer was, ‘because God loves stories.’”



Cidney Swanson is Kirkus Reviews award-winning author of young adult sci-fi and fantasy, including the Ripple series, the Saving Mars series, the Thief in Time series, and more. Cidney lives in Oregon’s Willamette Valley with her husband, some cats, and entirely too much rain.

Taking it to the Next Level: Advanced Marketing Ideas

Presented by Ricardo Fayet

Reported by Rochelle Paige

The indie author publishing path has become the most profitable one for many genres. However, there are only a handful of examples of authors, like E.L. James and Andy Weir, who have become internationally famous after going that route—and only after they signed with a traditional publisher. Ricardo Fayet from Reedsy focused on ROI mindsets, offline and online display ads, publicity, and foreign rights to try and answer a question asked by a couple of high-selling authors at the 2017 NINC Conference—"How do we take this to the next level?"

Books that sell over a million copies the first year, several million over the lifetime of the book, and sell in several formats are considered to be mainstream bestsellers. They may even end up with movie deals and break the boundaries of the genre. For example, *Fifty Shades of Grey* was read by people outside of romance, and the same was true with *The Martian* and readers who normally don't choose sci-fi. But what does it take to make a mainstream bestseller? And why have there been so few mainstream indie successes?

A review of the *Publishers Weekly* data for 2014-2017 shows that there weren't many mainstream hits from authors that weren't already well-known or books that were deep in a series, albeit from traditional or indie publishing. Beyond the rarity of mainstream bestsellers overall, indie authors face additional challenges. Indie authors tend to write in niche fiction, which is harder to go beyond genre. They're also writing more in long series and universes, but the odds of a book deep in a series going mainstream are slim. Most indie authors don't want to stop a successful career to take a gamble on something possibly bigger.

If they did want to take that gamble, Reedsy has marketers who came from traditional publishing and have been on teams who've created bestsellers. Ricardo went to Rachel Cone-Gorham, a former executive marketing director at PRH, to ask her what she thinks it takes to make a *Gone Girl* kind of success. She believes "it's a perfect storm of subject matter and magic and timing and being able to tap into an ethos or energy of the collective population."

In order to attempt to create that perfect storm, Ricardo said that wide availability of physical copies of the book isn't enough. You probably also need your book to be displayed prominently in bookstores. Seeing it in window displays puts into people's minds that it's a big deal even if they don't go inside to buy right then. Getting placements like these is possible for traditional publishers, but not so much for indie authors.

Another important element to creating a mainstream bestseller is word of mouth amongst the press before the release and after. Traditional publishers sometimes use a two-tiered approach to the physical editions. They get the attention of book buyers/newspapers by sending hundreds of physical ARCs to reviewers, and then they let the success of the hardback launch bolster the paperback and ebook for the mass market. Although newspaper reviews might not directly sell books, they can generate awareness with another touch point.

As Cone-Gorham explained to Fayet, creating word of mouth for your book is all about,

“Impressions, impressions, impressions. People need to see a book several times before they decide to click.” The Marketing Rule of 7 supports this since it says that a sales prospect needs to see or hear your marketing message at least seven times before they take action and buy from you. With a full-blown marketing campaign, you would create multi-channel touchpoints for readers throughout their day so the book stays top of mind. But that would include social marketing ads on different platforms, physical marketing like billboards, reviews in newspapers or magazines, and displays in bookstore windows.

There are lessons to be learned from traditional publishing hits for indie authors looking to do something similar. Please note that Fayet provided a disclaimer here, letting the audience know this is “purely a thought experiment.” He hasn’t tested it out and doesn’t actually recommend indie authors try it.

Theoretically speaking, the book an indie author would attempt this with would be standalone or first in a series. It should be written in a genre that holds mainstream appeal instead of a narrower niche. And it should be from an author who’s already established in their genre. Beyond all of that, you should be convinced it’s the best book you’ve ever written. If possible, it would tap into an existing trend or energy, like *The President is Missing* recently did.

You’d need to be prepared to sacrifice up to 12 months for this project, which is a scary prospect for indie authors who would potentially have multiple releases they would normally do during that kind of time frame. You’d want to act like the project is already a big deal, projecting confidence at every step of the process. This also includes setting the release at a higher price—because if it’s your best book ever, it’s worth it. You would use every signal at your disposal to indicate that this book is special.

You’d also need to take your marketing to the next level, starting with the generation of word of mouth among trendsetters—reviewers, book buyers, people in the industry, newspapers, media, etc. What you need for that is a really good publicist, probably someone from traditional publishing who already has those connections. To hire them, you’d need to approach them six months to a year in advance and have a \$10,000 to \$20,000 budget. And you’d need to offer physical copies to influencers since the publishers are doing that and you’re competing against all those hardcovers and paperbacks they’re getting.

You would also need a pre-launch marketing campaign to generate excitement well ahead of the launch. You’d need professional book trailers, the cover completed six months before release, a long preorder, and all of your social media and website to focus on this title. Then you’d launch a multi-touch, pre-launch teaser campaign using advertising on Facebook, Instagram, Goodreads, Google, and YouTube where you’re not even trying to sell the book. You’re just trying to make it sound like it’s a big deal, and it’s coming soon. The pre-launch campaign would have less focus on ROI and more on making sure that people everywhere are brainwashed through their whole day about your book. You can also use all of these ads to retarget for the launch.

Then there’s that pesky distribution to bookstores to tackle. There are a few examples of indie authors who’ve negotiated distribution deals where they keep their print rights and only get access to the distribution networks, like Barbara Freethy did with Ingram. To attempt this, you’d want to set yourself up as a publisher and approach the distribution arm of the big publisher and try to get them to distribute for you. Fayet recommended starting these negotiations early and to not be afraid to give them a big percentage of print sales because you want them to have enough incentive to push your title if you successfully negotiate the deal. The way Fayet explained it, you’re giving the percentage

away because you're looking for the impression it makes to readers—to drive more and more sales.

Moving into the launch phase, you will have already done all the things to help you get attention. The more famous something is, the easier it is to get media publicity. You'd want to be sure that all publications and reviews hit close to release, your publicist is leveraging existing articles or getting you new appearances, you get merchandising on all of the e-tailers, and you retarget all of your ads using what you learned during the pre-launch period. Then if everything aligns and the magic happens, word of mouth will take over. But there's no way to directly influence that.

Fayet made his presentation slides available at bit.ly/sjninc1.



Rochelle Paige is the NINC Conference Sponsorship Chair and writes 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.

Audiobook Success in 2018 & Beyond

Presented by Kelly Lytle and Will Dages

Reported by Caroline Linden

Audiobooks are the fastest-growing segment of the publishing industry, with strong tailwinds for continued growth due to smartphones. [Findaway Voices](#), which began 15 years ago building MP3 players for libraries, has now partnered with [Draft2Digital](#) to offer authors new options to market and sell their audiobooks and ebooks in one place.

Findaway Voices is a single service to create and distribute audiobooks, open to all authors. They will help find narrators and have 25 different retail partners around the world for distribution. All Findaway-produced books are eligible for [WhisperSync](#), provided the text is substantially the same as the audio content, although Audible alone determines which books will be WhisperSynced (and there is no formal process to apply for it). They also have support for Google Home Speaker. Allow two to three weeks for a new upload to fully distribute to all retailers.

Think globally in your marketing; English is widely spoken, and non-US markets are eager for English-language content. In the last year, retailer diversity has increased to include Google Play and Kobo, plus [StoryTel](#), based in Sweden, and [Beek](#) in Latin America, which are strong internationally. Audible.com is the major player in audio sales, but they do not cover the whole market, so go wide.

There are different models for selling audiobooks. The credit/subscription model charges consumers for credits to purchase titles, such as at Audible.com. The unlimited subscription plan charges consumers a set monthly fee for unlimited listening. Authors are paid either transactionally (eg, some amount per listen) or from a pool. Scribd, Playster, and HighBooks use this model. Traditional retailers like Google, Nook, and Apple also sell audiobooks as a straight purchase.

Libraries, however, have their own set of options when it comes to purchasing audiobooks. They can purchase audiobooks (15 percent of sales through Findaway Voices are to libraries) through Bibliotheka, Hoopla, and Overdrive. When they can buy a copy, generally priced at two to three times the regular price, they then own it and can offer it to one patron at a time, forever. Alternatively, libraries can choose to not buy but instead offer access to a large catalog, and only pay per download when patrons check out an audiobook. Don't be afraid to tell your readers to turn to their local library for your books, as you'll be paid one way or the other. In the U.S., let your local libraries know about your audiobooks; they may purchase and feature them.

What about shorter content? Most audio narrators require that a work be at least one finished hour before taking it on, and the credit subscription model favors longer content. Findaway suggests bundling shorter works, like two novellas or a collection of short stories, to get to the one-hour minimum. Once produced, authors can sell and distribute the works individually and as a bundle, to provide a variety of listening experiences. They can also be used as teasers for a full audiobook.

Audible does not allow authors to set the price, but Findaway does. Not every retailer will observe it (including Audible, where Findaway does distribute). The same is true for pre-orders of audiobooks; Findaway allows it, but not every retailer does. When you change a price through Findaway, expect it to take anywhere from one day to one week to make its way through to retailers.

If you have a BookBub featured deal, contact Findaway to let them know and they will try to help coordinate promotion at the same time. Note that only one price can be set for an audiobook, but an author is always paid on that list price.

There are several outlets to advertise audiobooks, including [AudaVoxx](#), a weekly newsletter of curated recommendations; BookBub; and BargainBooksy. [AudioBookBoom](#) lets authors give away free download codes in exchange for reviews. Findaway offers 30 (or more, upon request) giveaway codes, which are specific to each audiobook and cannot be exchanged for other titles. Findaway will also support promotional discounts at Google Play and Nook for audio titles.

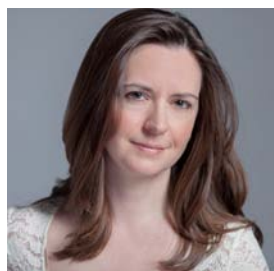
Findaway discussed three strategies for releasing a series in audio. First is simultaneous, where the audio version comes out the same day as the print and ebook versions. Findaway reports a 20-30 percent increase in sales over non-simultaneous releases. The downside of this plan is that it takes 6-8 weeks to produce an audiobook, delaying release of the other formats.

The next plan is to stagger releases, where the ebook comes out first, and production begins on the audio version. This allows an author to re-promote, and hopefully re-ignite, sales overall by having something new to promote. The downside is that some readers, who look for audio when the ebook and/or print editions come out, will be disappointed and move on, becoming lost sales.

For authors with a large backlist catalog of books to produce in audio, a drop-and-drip campaign may work best. Not only does it spread out the costs of producing so many audiobooks, it is a steady stream of releases to promote. Findaway suggests releasing the first three books of a series at once, to get readers engaged via binge listening, then release subsequent audiobooks at intervals.

If you already have books at ACX, you can move them to Findaway, although if you selected royalty share you must wait out the seven years. Be aware that ACX will auto-renew that exclusivity clause, so ask to opt out. Titles in Findaway have been picked up for Audible promotions, but both speakers concede it is hard to compete against titles coming from Audible Studios.

Findaway's latest innovation is Authors Direct, which enables authors to sell directly to consumers. It uses Shopify behind the scenes to run an e-store, while Findaway provides tax and tech assistance. Findaway takes 30 percent commission, leaving 70 percent for the author. Authors will be able to set the actual price to consumers, and have the ability to run promotions. It is currently a pilot program but they expect to expand and make it publicly available in the future. Stay tuned for wider availability of this program.



[Caroline Linden](#) studied math at Harvard University and wrote computer code before discovering that writing fiction was far more fun. Now she writes historical romance (mostly) and has won the Daphne du Maurier Award, the NJRW Golden Leaf, and RWA's RITA Award.

BookBub Fundamentals

Presented by Tyrone Li

Reported by Elle Christensen

Tyrone Li is an account rep on BookBub's Partners Team who works with self-published author partners providing advice on how to make the best out of BookBub's promotional and marketing tools. "If you've ever written in to partners@BookBub.com, I would be one of those people who answered your emails," he said. His session covered all of BookBub's products, the logistics of using each product, and strategic tips for using each product.

To get started at BookBub the first step is to create a Partner Dashboard Account. To do that, go to https://partners.BookBub.com/users/sign_in. This is also the link you will use moving forward to access and manage your account.

After you've created an account, set up your public author profile, which is free to create and manage. Benefits to having an author profile with BookBub include listing all of your books in one place, engaging with your readers by having them follow your account, and having access to BookBub marketing tools.

You'll claim your author profile by searching for your author name, and if the system doesn't find it, there is a link to write to customer service who will sort it out. Once you find your name, you will confirm your identity through Facebook or Twitter. If you don't have an account with either platform, use the link to contact customer service. This is strictly for verification purposes; your social media accounts will not be made public.

Once you've submitted your claim, BookBub will review your account, a process that can take up to a week. To qualify, you must have at least one book published, or on preorder, in ebook form. You may only have one profile per account, so if you have multiple pen names, each one will need its own account to utilize the BookBub tools.

To make the most of BookBub resources and marketing tools, you'll need to build followers. Some suggestions for gaining followers are follow buttons to attach to websites, newsletters, etc. and using other BookBub tools like having a featured deal. Check out the BookBub blogs about gaining followers.

Once you have an account, you have access to BookBub products, such as *BookBub Recommendations*, a tool available to every BookBub author for free. Recommending books is a great way to engage with your followers, boosting your exposure, and keeping you on their minds. It's also an opportunity for authors to cross-promote. These recommendations appear in weekly email digests, as well as a follower's recommendation feed. Recommendations can only be positive feedback. Utilizing this tool can drive sales.

To recommend a book, click on "review" and check the "I recommend this book" box. There are also options to give it a star rating, other information, and/or a review.

New Release Alerts is a dedicated email sent to your followers anytime you release a novel or novella. This free service is not subject to editorial review and selection process; however, it does have

eligibility requirements. Books must be added to your author profile before, on, or up to seven days after the release date, which allows you to add preorders early or whenever the book is live. Novels and novellas must be at least 70 pages and the ebook edition must release within 30 days of the paperback.

In order to take advantage of the new release alerts, it is important to keep your author profile up to date, especially your book links. If the alert is not automatically sent (this can be as late as 14 days after the release date), it can easily be requested. Please note, these alerts are only sent to U.S. followers at this time. You can find information, and more, on the partner FAQ.

Preorder Alerts is a highly targeted tool for authors. It is a paid service but it is cost effective; only \$0.02 per follower (sent to U.S. followers only). At this time, this service is only available for authors with 1,000+ followers. Preorder alerts have flexible timing. They can be scheduled as few as seven days from submission, up to 30 days. Books must be added to your profile at least eight days before the alert, so in theory, in order to have a preorder alert sent the day before release, it must be submitted at least eight days before release.

Preorder Alerts are easy to schedule. Go to the book's page on BookBub, and if this service is available to you, there will a tab that says, "Schedule Preorder." You will be able to choose a date (again, seven to 30 days from release) and will be shown an approximate fee, based on your current U.S. followers who are signed up to receive your author alerts. This amount can change if there is a fluctuation in your followers.

Featured Deals is another valuable tool for reaching power readers in specific genres. It can help drive sales to your backlist by hooking new readers, as well as potentially boosting your titles up bestseller lists. Featured Deals are books that are free, or discounted by at least 50 percent, (permafree are also accepted and are most effective if you have a series) selected by an editorial team that are sent out in one email to the subscribers of newsletters for the genres they've chosen. Depending on the genre, authors have the potential to reach millions of readers. Featured Deals are a paid service; a flat fee that differs based on genre.

It is highly recommended (but not mandatory) that the book is wide, allowing you to reach more readers and have a better click-through rate. Deals are usually scheduled two to four weeks in advance, though if you are flexible with your date, they may offer you a date outside those parameters.

To submit for a Featured Deal, first make sure you have added the book to your author profile. On your Partner Dashboard, click on *Featured Deals* at the top, and it will take you to a screen where there is a green *Submit New Deal* button. After clicking it, you'll choose the book you want to feature and fill out the form. Books must meet eligibility requirements to be chosen, such as length (40k minimum), availability, quality of editing, etc. (Requirements here: <https://www.BookBub.com/partners/requirements>). Parameters are set on how often a book can be submitted. When choosing a category, keep in mind that editors consider your book for multiple categories. Once the deal is submitted, it goes to BookBub's editorial team for consideration.

The selection process involves many factors including rating, reviews, covers, plot summary, etc. It can take up to a week for a final decision. Keep in mind that only 10-20 percent of submissions are chosen, so don't give up.

If your deal is chosen, you'll receive an email (you'll receive one either way) with a proposed

date (you may turn it down, but it doesn't guarantee you another date). It is your responsibility to make sure that your book is discounted at the appropriate time. The email is only sent on one day; however, your deal is also listed on the BookBub website and will remain there for the remainder of your sale (you will have specified an end date when you submitted your deal).

Featured New Releases emails are sent to all subscribers in a single category (unlike New Release Alerts which are only sent to your U.S. followers). This service is much like featured deals as they are sent out in a single email, chosen by editorial review, have a flat fee that is category based. However, unlike Featured Deals, these can be full-price or on sale, the date can be up to six months in advance (up to and including the day of release), and they are sent to U.S. readers only. Featured New Releases reach power readers in different genres, drive full-price sales, generate exposure, and boost rankings.

BookBub Ads reach millions of power readers in dedicated ad space and there is no editorial/selection process; any book is eligible. They are all self-serve: you set your own targeting and budget. Ads have an easy-to-use interface where you can use your own image or use the custom creative builder tool to create one.

After building the ad, you'll choose audience and category targeting (this combo will maximize specificity). Targeting is potential reach; the actual number depends on bid and budget. Next, you'll schedule the ad for specific dates or a continuous campaign. You'll also choose your budget and decide whether to spread it across the campaign or fulfill it as quickly as possible.

The ad cost is auction based. You will specify your ad campaign bid—the highest amount you are willing to pay to reach that particular reader. You can bid for impressions through CPM bidding (where one opened email = one impression) or for clicks through CPC bidding. If you are the highest bidder for the audience you're targeting, you will win impressions. For both CPM and CPC bidding, instead of paying your maximum bid, you will only ever pay one cent more than the next highest bid in the auction at the moment your ad is served. For more information on the BookBub ads auction model, check out this post on the BookBub blog <https://insights.BookBub.com/a-beginners-guide-to-the-BookBub-ads-auction-model/>.

After you've created the campaign, choose a name and double check your details. Nothing but the image can be changed after the campaign starts.

To make the most of your campaign, start with low-budget tests and a few identical, small campaigns. Using \$10-20 budgets, test a different single element in each campaign: image, targeting, etc. Check clicks and conversions, allocate the budget to the winner and continue to optimize. Note that if you are running multiple ads, they will not compete against each other.

****All of this information and more is available on the website and BookBub Partner's Only blog. You can also email any questions to partners@BookBub.com.**

The slides from the session can be found here: insights.BookBub.com/NINCFundamentals18/

Elle Christensen lives in New York City where she wakes up every day awed and inspired by her surroundings. She writes romance in a variety of sub-genres including PNR/fantasy, contemporary, new adult, romantic suspense, and more. After spending the majority of her life as a professional singer, these days she enjoys shining the spotlight on her characters instead.

You've Got the Look, Branding Strategy Part I & II

Presented by Kimberly Killion and Jennifer Jakes

Reported by: Nicole Evelina

Branding has become crucial to an author's career in every aspect from book covers to websites and swag. The experts at [The Killion Group](#) shared some of the services they offer to authors as well as their advice on how you can build a consistent visual representation so that your readers recognize your content before they ever see your name.

Book covers

For the sake of this section, let's assume you have control over your book covers or at least some say into how they turn out. The best thing you can do to make sure you get a great cover is to look at other covers in your genre because each one has conventions that must be followed.

Next, make sure your cover isn't too busy and has a clear focal point. It also needs to look good at thumbnail size, with the title and author's name readable, so online shoppers can see what they are purchasing.

Color is very important, both to indicate mood and heat level and because opposing and complimentary colors affect the eye and readability. Try using [colorshemadesigner.com](#) to get an idea of what colors might go together or work well in opposition.

Your name and series name should be in the same font and location on each cover, especially in a series, to help brand you as an author. But don't try to carry your branding over from one genre or subgenre to another. For example, romantic suspense has a very different look from historical romance.

If you're doing a bundle/boxed set, have a new cover created for it rather than reusing the cover of the first book so that readers know the bundle/box set is a different product. If you choose to use a 3-D image, the spines should come out of the box to the right and the text on the spine should read from top to bottom.

If you are changing the cover of a previously released book, you should let readers know that this book has already been published in case they have already read/purchased it. Some authors choose to add "first time in print" on the cover of new works so that people know the book is not a reissue. If you add a short story or other additional content, you could add "now with bonus content" to the cover. You can also indicate on the copyright page that it is a new edition, but readers may miss that and get mad if they are already familiar with the content.

Image selection

If you're using stock photography on your cover, the artwork can be changed so that it doesn't look like everyone else's. A professional can change dress/hair/eye colors, background, replace faces of models if you like their clothing, or replace clothing if you like the face. This means you have more flexibility than you may have imagined.

In romance, commissioned photo shoots are very popular, especially with historicals, but can get expensive. The Killion Group can arrange one if you are interested.

Back cover copy/blurb

As with the cover, the best thing you can do is read others in your genre. While there is no formula, each genre has its own expectations.

Two to three paragraphs at six sentences each is about the average length, with historicals being a little longer. You can do a lead-in line if you want; it can function as a great hook to entice the reader to continue into the rest of your blurb.

No matter what you choose to write, it's important to make your book stand out. Make sure you retain your voice as an author and show what makes your book unique. It's also important to show a little of your main character's past, and to hit on their motivation, because those things make us empathize with them. Also, be sure to at least hint at the black moment because that will reel the reader in.

Logos

Logos are visible and graphic ways of showing who you are as an author. You will want to use yours everywhere, including your website, promotional items, maybe even on your book cover. There are several types of logos:

- **Author logo**—your name art, which can be used everywhere, especially your website and promotional materials.
- **Series logos**—used instead of listing the name of the series on a book cover.
- **Publisher imprint**—if you're an indie author, you'll want to create a logo for your imprint to help establish professionalism. You can use it on your company website, as well as the title page, spine and back cover of your book.

No matter what branding elements you choose to incorporate, consistency is key, followed by authenticity. They say it takes seven touches before a reader actually buys your book, so the more you can give them a consistent message and visual, the more likely they are to remember you and click "purchase."



Nicole Evelina is a historical fiction, non-fiction, and women's fiction author whose books have won more than 30 awards, including three Book of the Year designations. Her fiction tells the stories of strong women from history and today, with a focus on biographical historical fiction, while her non-fiction focuses on women's history, especially sharing the stories of unknown or little-known figures. Nicole's writing has appeared in The Huffington Post, The Philadelphia Inquirer, The Independent Journal, Curve Magazine and numerous historical publications.

Writing the “Supergenre” Novel

Presented by Lou Aronica

Reported by Tawdra Kandle

“We have made the effort to build an audience base within a genre. Now it’s time to reach beyond that.”

Lou Aronica, editor and publisher, presented his interpretation of the “supergenre” novel and why writing one of these books can be the most ambitious undertaking of an author’s career.

A supergenre novel is one that uses some of the tropes of genre fiction but embraces more techniques than those found within that genre. This is the kind of book that is read by people who would normally never pick up a book of that genre; it extends beyond genre borders.

Aronica used three main examples to explain the power of the supergenre novel: *The Thorn Birds*, *American Gods* and *Gone Girl*. Each of these books is a genre novel but these novels are also decidedly more than that. The ambitions of these novels go far beyond the intent of most genre novels.

There are five key tools that must be employed when tackling the writing of a supergenre novel.

The first tool is **scale**. The storyline of a supergenre novel must be ambitious in terms of time, setting and/or message; it must contain more time, more landscape or a bigger message. The story must include a symbolic function that most genre novels do not. *The Thorn Birds*, for example, went far beyond a simple love story in its meaning and message. *Gone Girl* was a mystery, but it was actually more about marital dysfunction and human capability.

A non-genre novelist must find the reason to write each book. There are no preconceived notions in a book that transcends genre. Aronica suggests combining conventions and ambitions for a wider reach, to achieve something beyond the confines of the plot. It must be more than just a good story; it must affect people’s lives and go beyond entertainment. Supergenre fiction focuses outward.

Second, there must be a **focus on non-novelist qualities**, which means digging deeper into the characters. Genre fiction comes with a shorthand; every character has a unique reason for being that doesn’t come from outside the story. This also means digging deeper into sub-plots than might normally be found in genre fiction. Every sub-story should have a direct function toward bringing the reader to the main message of the novel. The author should assume that the reader has never read anything like this before and avoid genre assumptions. Genre often assumes that there is a club that readers are part of, a language they understand.

Aronica urges authors to write the story as if it’s never been told, making it more about the characters and their evolution than about the story itself. Growth of characters is absolutely essential—this is definitely not a plot-driven book.

The third tool complements the second. Aronica advocates **using less genre language** to be more inclusive to non-genre readers and to attract readers outside that genre. It’s essential to avoid clichés and conventions generally associated with that particular genre, such as heaving bosoms, fingering the perp, eyes darkening with passion or putting the suspect into a room to make him sweat. None of these clichés work in supergenre fiction.

Fourth, Aronica says, **use some tropes, but not all of them**—and use those tropes in an entirely

new and unexpected manner. The supergenre novel might include a dragon, but it won't be a traditional dragon. There might be a tortured detective, but he's not a stereotype. Even the love story, if there is one, should not be standard or expected. Use tropes sparingly—not more than one per book—and use them in new and unexpected ways.

Finally, **understand why you must write this book**. Aronica posits that in a supergenre novel, it is essential that the author knows why the world needs this book from him or her, particularly, and not from any other author. The answer to that question is the spine of the book, its reason for existing.

The essence of the supergenre novel is taking a genre trope and turning it on its head. It's important to realize that this sort of book might alienate genre readers, some of whom have grown comfortable with the predictability and routine of most genre books. When the supergenre goes beyond what is typical in a genre novel, it's possible that some loyal readers might be confused or unhappy.

To make sure you're on the right track, Aronica suggests, give the book to a friend who doesn't normally read your genre fiction. Ask that friend to note any spot where the story veers into your typical, normal genre, stepping back to the safe and comfortable instead of remaining in the riskier, outside-the-genre story.

Aronica warns that it is harder to write this kind of book as an indie author, where success can be dependent on longer series and traditional genre books. It's also more challenging to market the supergenre novel as an indie author, as its success will not rely on the normal methods of publicity and promotion. However, supergenre novels also have the potential to reach new audiences and thus expand author reach and ultimately increase success.



[Tawdra Kandle](#) writes romance, in just about all its forms. She loves unlikely pairings, strong women, sexy guys, hot love scenes and just enough conflict to make it interesting. Her romantic subgenres include sports, military, small town and new adult. Tawdra lives in central Florida with a husband, mostly grown kids, two sweet pups and too many cats. And yeah, she rocks purple hair.

Time to Jump into Audiobooks

Answering key questions to help you participate in the fastest-growing format in the industry

Presented by Cory Verner

Reported by Jennifer Stevenson

Cory Verner has been involved in close to 5,000 audiobook productions, many of those award-winning audiobooks. Four years ago, audiobooks were one to three percent of the market. It was tough to make audio work, but great for promotion. Audio was a billion-dollar industry.

Audio is now a \$3.5 billion industry, with 70,000 new titles a year. When Verner began listening to audiobooks, there were no CDs. Audible had just launched. Cassettes were the format of the day: they were volatile, unique, exponential, transformative, addictive. Within two years, Verity went from selling 80% CDs to 10% CDs. Most of their sales are now digital.

Audio is a performance, a completely different product than a book. You may sell the same book to the same person in different formats. People who listen consume more books. They don't have much time to read. There is an "audio first" readership. If you have no book to listen to on your run, you get upset.

Audiobooks exploded two years ago. If you tested something two years ago, you might want to test it again. If your category wasn't working then, try it again.

Verner presented statistics from the Audio Publishers Association Annual Report, but he explicitly requested that they not be reproduced because "the report is copyright." Therefore, all statistics referred to from that report are generalized below.

Physical recordings of audiobooks (CDs and MP3CDs) still have a place in the market. CDs are down and MP3CDs are up. The MP3CD format is so cheap to produce; it now competes with the paperback edition. An MP3CD costs \$1 to produce. The retail price is \$11.99. Amazon discounts it to \$8, an impulse buy. CDs are inexpensive to make but hard to sell.

Verner used to have five author reads (when an author reads their own audiobook) a year; now he has 120 a year. He doesn't recommend that authors read their own fiction, but nonfiction author reads could be even better than reads by experienced narrators.

How did audiobook consumption rise?

In the pre-app environment, getting an audiobook onto an iPod took 20 steps. In the current app environment, it's one click and you're listening. Before, few books were available and not all customers liked that content. Now, you have unlimited selection and many customers.

The best genres for audio, in order of market share, are SF and fantasy, self-help, humor, health and fitness, business, other nonfiction, history, biographies, memoirs, and religious or faith-based audiobooks. Then follow mystery, thrillers, suspense, classics, pop fiction, children and YA, other fiction, and dead last, romance.

Verner said that romance is a tough category for audio. The study produced the statistics for the APA report did not break out romance subgenres. He stated that he doesn't understand the difference between romance genres and neither do the people who did the survey. However, inspirational romantic suspense is one of the top categories.

Habits of audiobook listeners

Nonfiction is a fast-rising category. The Spanish-language market is booming. Audiobook listeners are evenly divided between male and female. They tend to skew younger and higher on income and education indices than the general population. Millennials are the most heavily into audio. Overwhelmingly, audiobooks are made for and consumed by adults, and they prefer their audiobooks unabridged. Audio sales seem to be bigger in Europe.

Consumers listen about evenly at home and while driving, and some on planes. About 50% pay for their audiobooks (rather than downloading free audiobooks); frequent listeners pay more often. About 75 percent of listeners do other things while listening; more multitaskers are male than female.

Scenarios for exercising your audio rights

A few years ago, an author could self-publish with no audiobook; she could sell the rights to a small publisher who would do nothing with them; or she could sell the rights to a large publisher who would create the audiobook, but give the author zero control.

Authors should ask smaller and midsize publishers for an audiobook edition. If the publisher won't make the audiobook, the author should ask to retain those rights, or offer to co-invest in an audiobook.

Sometimes authors may ask to read. It annoys audio publishers when authors want to read or get involved, but "it means the project may get done." Verner recommends that you don't fight the production company, but do stay informed about how the production is done and seek influence.

Reality check

Verner offered some basic facts before you commit: Audio is about 5% of overall publishing sales. Some genres have weak sales. Some content does not work well in audio. And if your book has low sales, audio sales will be even lower.

Test a book or two, not a 12-book series. Consider bundling audiobooks to grow your print sales. Consider a "value production" such as an ACX rights-share deal to contain costs. Think marketing. There is no way to know how well your audiobook will sell.

Production is challenging

Audiobook production costs are going up. The best talent is booked far in advance. The large players dominate. The industry is also highly specialized, with very few industry professionals and even fewer experienced narrators. Most publishers don't do their own audiobooks. Until four to five years ago, about nine audiobook publishers controlled the market. They still control most of the best talent. Verner says, "the union [Screen Actors Guild] is all over it now." SAG is good for the narrators, with set rates and health benefits, but it is part of the cost consideration.

Verner warned: don't do the production part yourself if you're reading. Don't assume it'll go fine if you hire someone; stay involved. Don't hire nonprofessionals.

Doing an audiobook yourself will take 50-100+ hours of research and setup and \$3,000 minimum. Use a production company that specializes in audiobooks. Shop around. Maintain healthy skepticism: trust but verify.

When a book comes to Verner, he does a lot of editing, proofing, and mastering. If you record it yourself and put it up, it may be acceptable to your market, but it'll be an inferior product to those made by production companies.

Verner offers this narrator checklist:

- Are they right for the genre?
- Right for the project?
- At the right price?
- Are they available?
- Are they union?
- Have they done at least 10 audiobooks?
- Have they done multiple projects with publishers? Are they full-time narrators?
- Have they any awards to their name?
- Do they want the work?

Manage your costs but make as high-quality a production as you can afford. Price it right. Verity prices higher because Audible will drop their prices around \$15 for digital. They charge \$7.49, a price point at which people will binge-buy. Even more compelling is a \$4.99 price point, although it's low. Half Verity's sales are at \$7.49.

Stay flexible

Make sure you get a nonexclusive deal. Look beyond Audible. Verner's company sells 62 percent with Audible, 22 percent direct, 12-15 percent with library sales, 13 percent physical (CD and MP3CD formats), and about one percent with other downloaders. Consider selling direct, which is a great model. You can set your own price, promote at will, and have total control. Consider also giving your audiobook away. Verity gives a lot of books away, as free drives more sales.

There are many ways of leveraging your audiobooks. Try bundling, offering a print edition with an audio coupon, selling your CDMP3 with a download code, or running a pre-order campaign. Develop a direct-download strategy. Create download cards for twenty cents each and print instructions and a code on the back to give away at public appearances.

Partner with your publisher to get them to put an audio line in their catalog, to use audiobooks for social media giveaways, and to add something unique to their PR.

Predictions

Verner predicts 20-30 percent growth of the audiobook market in the next three to five years. He believes audiobooks will eclipse ebooks in three to five years. Several more digital channels will emerge. Demographic shifts in users will open the market more. There will be greater author and

publisher interest. The talent pool will grow but also compress; that is, it will be harder to have access to top talent.



Jennifer Stevenson has published five series, 17 novels, and more than 20 short stories.

iBooks Panel

Presented by Diane Capri, Cheryl Bradshaw, and Heather Sunseri

Reported by Elle Christensen

The iBooks Panel consisted of three authors who were, as Diane Capri put it, “impersonating Apple.”

First, the panel discussed the new [Apple Books](#) platform (replacing iBooks) that was officially rolled out with iOS 12. According to Capri, “Apple is getting behind books in a bigger way than they did before.” Apple is very excited and has been working on it for two years. The company is working on staffing up and will eventually get back to doing promotions. It is important to know that these changes won’t elevate you on their own, you still have to put in the effort. According to Apple, when they tried to help build authors, it didn’t work. The author needs to build momentum and interest, then Apple assists.

The redesign will not affect desktop and laptop stores. Currently, this new store is for the iPhone and iPad only. If you do not have it on your device, you can download it from the app store. For those readers who have not updated their iOS, they will continue to see the iBooks store until they do.

The basic functionality is similar, but Apple has redesigned the app, and with the new look comes new features. Some of the changes include larger book covers and less cluttered pages. Sales and bestseller lists are easier to see and find. Audiobooks are more prominently displayed on the front page. There is also a new user feature that has a learning algorithm. After buying five books, the “For You” section will begin populating with suggested reads. Apple is also working on improving search functionality and discoverability.

Apple noted that it highly encouraged you to use affiliate links. There is no penalty to taking advantage of this tool. If you don’t have an iBooks affiliate account, you can find out more [here](#).

Authors won’t find many changes. Your links will remain active. Uploading, royalty/payment terms, book delivery process, affiliate programs (associate link maker), editorial request process (new release priorities), and promo codes will remain the same. However, Apple has requested one significant change from authors. All iBooks mentions should be changed to Apple Books, logos and iBooks clickable buttons should be replaced with the new Apple Books graphics. Suggested social media language: “Loving the new @applebooks! This is an all-new chapter: apple.co/applebooks”

Apple also asked the panel to pass along links and information for how authors can let their readers know about Apple Books.

- [Apple Books main page](#)
- [Apple Books Romance page](#)
- [Apple Books Mysteries & Thrillers page](#)
- [Apple Books on Twitter](#)
- [Apple Books on Facebook](#)
- [Apple Books on Instagram](#)

Moving onto the next subject, Sunseri, Bradshaw, and Capri shared tips and tools they have used to build a relationship with Apple and a strong Apple Books reader base. There are many things you can do to boost your visibility with Apple, and the authors on the panel recommended several ideas, things they know Apple loves:

Free books

Free is still a really viable way to sell books. Apple readers will still go and buy the rest of the books in the series and other books by those authors. There are so many free books on Amazon, people don't go on in the series as often.

Long preorders

The longer you give Apple to notice your book, the more likely they will, even if you don't let them know. With Apple Books, preorders can be as long as a year, even without a cover or placeholder file.

Exclusivity

The author panel repeatedly emphasized the benefits of exclusivity with Apple, but also noted that it doesn't have to be permanent, i.e., an exclusive preorder that goes wide after the time is up. Another idea is a two-week exclusive release on Apple Books. There are many ways to tap into marketing through exclusivity with Apple. For exclusive preorders, Apple has a dedicated page. You can contact Apple through the general email on your dashboard (if you don't have a rep) and let them know. Exclusive sneak peeks are also a valuable strategy. Another suggestion was to go ebook-exclusive on Apple, then work on the paperback and audio, and finally, go wide with all three at once.

Capri, Bradshaw, and Sunseri also shared strategies for marketing and building your Apple reader base. The first step is to find out who your Apple readers are. Use newsletter linking; ask readers where they purchase books when they sign up. Send Apple exclusives to those readers only. Try running a promotion for a new release using Google forms so you can ask from which retailer they bought the book. Use Books2Read universal links through Draft2Digital. These links keep track of clicks and where they are routed.

The author panel referred to a preorder timeline suggestion by Apple Books and added in their own ideas from their previous experiences.

- **Twelve months out:** preorder. Make it exclusive to Apple temporarily.
- **Eight months out:** free series starter (a special on another series). Remember, Apple loves free books. So do readers!
- **Six months out:** cover reveal. Try targeting Apple Books specifically. Sunseri mentioned it usually generates sales everywhere. She has found that targeting Amazon in an ad hasn't been as successful. Make sure to have all the links listed in the text on the ad. This applies to any advertising, not just new releases.
- **Two months out:** sneak peak. Release a sneak peek of the book on Apple Books for a set time period. Then use a site like BookFunnel or however you'd like to send the file and distribute it

only to your newsletter. When the release date is near, use the same sneak peek to promote the release.

- **One month out:** promo codes. Apple offers 250 free promo codes for every one of your books you sell in their store, accessible via iTunes Connect for direct accounts or via your publisher/distributor. Promo codes work on preorders too. Promo codes can be targeted to readers who know what they are, meaning they are Apple Books readers. You can use them for giveaways, etc. Keep in mind; codes do expire. Don't request them until you are ready to use them. Also, promo codes do not count as sales.

As an author, you have to keep your name out there. This is especially true for indie authors. All three panelists mentioned even if they were only to write 1-3 books per year, they make an effort to release a "title" six or more times in a year (i.e., box sets, bundled extras, etc.). According to the panel, it doesn't necessarily matter what it is, just release something to keep your name out there and keep the algorithms in your favor. However, be careful with your choices. Target specific reader bases with your releases. Bradshaw mentioned that if she doesn't stick to her genre, she doesn't target her general fan base. She uses the same name but doesn't push it with her genre fans. It's basically starting all over.

Another suggestion was to go into the Apple book store to see what they are featuring. Get some ideas for promoting. Apple is always open to ideas.

As the session wrapped up, Capri gave one final piece of advice: "There is no magic button at any retailer." Bradshaw added that Apple doesn't have preferences on a type of author or genre. It's about the author working hard to get there and then Apple will notice. Apple doesn't take money for promotions; everything is curated/editorial. They make their own decisions and are looking for specific things they think will be successful.

Elle Christensen lives in New York City where she wakes up every day awed and inspired by her surroundings. She writes romance in a variety of sub-genres including PNR/fantasy, contemporary, new adult, romantic suspense, and more. After appending the majority of her life as a professional singer, these days she enjoys shining the spotlight on her characters instead.

Membership Benefits

Need industry intel, software, or legal help? We've got you covered.

Are you taking advantage of all your member benefits?

As a NINC member, your benefits include industry discounts, newsletter and website articles, professional services directory, networking opportunities, and more.

We've compiled all of these—which you can also find on our website—into this list as a helpful reminder.

Networking

The email list for Novelists, Inc. Members: <https://groups.io/g/NINCLINK>

Join our Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/NovelistsInc/>

We offer a critique/brainstorming group: <https://groups.io/g/NINKcritique>

Follow NINC on Twitter: https://twitter.com/Novelists_Inc

Conference 2019: Planning For Success

Conference information: <https://ninc.com/conferences/about-the-ninc-conference/>

Conference Registration: <https://ninc.com/conferences/registration/2019-member-registration/>

Conference e-loop: <https://groups.io/g/BeachNINC2019>

Newsletter

Propose an article: <https://ninc.com/newsletter/propose-an-article/>

Submit a letter to the editor: <https://ninc.com/newsletter/submit-letter-to-editor/>

Newsletter archives: <https://ninc.com/newsletter/news-archive/>

Best of Nink in paperback: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/best-of-nink/>

Website (you must be logged in to access these services)

Legal Fund: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/legal-fund/>

Pro Services Directory: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/pro-services-directory/>

Sample Letters: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/sample-letters/>

Articles & Links: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/articles-and-links/>

Welcome Packet: http://ninc.com/system/assets/uploads/2017/01/2017_New_Member_Welcome_Packet-public.pdf

Member discounts

[IngramSpark](#) will give NINC members free title setup for print and eBooks until the end of the year, when the discount will be reevaluated and possibly extended. Details on the [Member Freebies and Discount page](#), along with other member discounts.

Volunteer

One of the greatest benefits of NINC is the opportunity to volunteer your talents to benefit other members—which pays incredible and unexpected dividends in networking and knowledge. Learn more about volunteer opportunities here: <https://ninc.com/members-only/open-positions/>

Open positions include:

- Social Media Committee
- Tweet Team
- Recruiting New Members
- 2019 Conference Promoter
- Anything!



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.

Founders

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

2018 Board of Directors

If you have questions regarding Novelists, Inc., please contact a member of the Board of Directors.

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2018 Committees

- [Complete committee member listings](#) are available on the website. Many committee positions are open and looking for new volunteers.
- 2018 Conference Committee:
 - Conference Director: Laura Hayden
 - Program Director: Julie Ortolon
 - Sponsorship Chair: Rochelle Paige
 - Hotel Liaison: Karen Fox
 - Registrar: Pam McCutcheon
- Onsite Coordinator: Hannah McBride
- Authors Coalition Reps: Laura Resnick & Laura Phillips
- Social Media Coordinator:
 - Dianne Drake
 - Sue Phillips
 - Laura Hayden (conference communications)
- Membership Committee
 - Chair: Sarah Woodbury
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- Volunteer Jobs (Just One Thing) Coordinator: Lois Lavrisa

Central Coordinator

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Address changes may be made on the website.

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