



The official newsletter
of Novelists, Inc.,
a professional organization
of writers of popular fiction



novelists,
inc.

VOLUME 30 : NUMBER 11
NOVEMBER 2019

Nink Survey

After 30 years, we'd really like to know what you think



Don't forget to take the *Nink* survey!

It will be open until November 15.

Nink November 2019

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President's Voice

By Wayne Stinnett



It's November already?

An hour before sunrise this morning, I walked out of the house and headed for my office, only to feel a shiver before I got in the truck. Of course, here in the Lowcountry of South Carolina, I was in shorts, T-shirt, and flip flops. Still, I'm a Floridian, so it was pretty danged chilly. And I'm stubborn. I hate letting go of summer. The morning chill reminded me that it was most definitely fall. Of all the seasons, I think fall is the best time to reflect on what has been accomplished. With the year almost at a close, it's a great time to start planning ahead as well.

Reflection, whether at the end of the day while watching the sun go down or the end of the year, should always include planning ahead. When thinking about the past, we should always use our reflections as a benchmark to plan ahead for the coming day, week, month, or year. I chose the theme for this past conference, Planning For Success, because anyone who knows me knows I'm a detailed, goal-oriented person. At least when it comes to business. As a writer, I'm a total pantsner; I only control the time and location setting of the opening paragraph, and sometimes not even that. Then my characters take the wheel and trim the sails. This month I'm planning what I'll be doing after my term as NINC president comes to an end. As I turn the NINC helm over, I intend to not only increase my own productivity, but to branch out with a couple of collaborative efforts and begin publishing other authors' works through my business model. Do you have plans for the future? The future is coming whether you plan for it or not.

I've had an exciting year. In fact, I've had an exciting six years since I launched my new career; each one has been better than the previous, and being your 2019 president was no exception.

I can't wait to *see* what 2020 *looks* like. *See* what I did there?

Okay, bad dad joke aside, there are some cool innovations on the horizon. I can't quite see some of them yet, but I feel the pull just like I feel the tide change. Big things are gonna happen. It's time to start planning what we are going to do next year, using a clear vision for the future to better position ourselves to take advantage of new and exciting innovations when they come along.

“Chance favors the prepared mind.”

Alyssa Day will be taking over as president Jan. 1, and she has a fantastic conference programming team behind her, headed by our newly elected president-elect, Tawdra Kandle, with Lisa Hughey serving as assistant programming chair. They are already preparing for next fall’s 31st annual NINC conference, **2020: Vision For The Future**.

Speaking of the future, **membership renewals start Nov. 15**. We hope you continue to join us as we move into the next decade. NINC is only as strong as its membership; we need and value you.

I don’t yet know what they have in mind, but I’d bet that it’s gonna dovetail smoothly into the many accomplishments of this year.

Wayne Stinnett
wayne@waynestinnett.com

PS: I just got word that the CASE Act passed the U.S. House 410-6! Thanks for keeping it in front of your legislators.

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](#).

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/>

Wayne Stinnett writes your typical murder and mayhem in paradise. His characters and plots come from real people and situations he’s encountered, fictionalized to protect the guilty.

The Mad Scribbler

What do you think?

By Laura Resnick



"There are as many opinions as there are people."

—Terence, Roman playwright (ca. 185 BC- ca. 159 BC)

I've thought for many years that "the newsletter" is the wrong phrase for *Nink*, though that's what we've always called it. I think of a newsletter as a friendly, rather brief circular, something an author shares with her readers or a club shares with its members. By contrast, I feel that something as substantial as *Nink* ought to be called a "publication" or "journal" or maybe "magazine."

In NINC's early days, though, "newsletter" was exactly the right word for it.

I received my first issue of the newsletter in 1989, shortly before the first NINC conference—and before NINC even had a name. At the inaugural national conference that year, where the five founders and the founding members (roughly 100 of us) discussed and determined precisely what sort of organization we wanted this to be, our business meetings took up a substantial portion of the schedule. We hashed out by-laws, policies and procedures, membership qualifications, the focus of the organization, whether we'd have awards... and what the organization would be called. I suppose we must have also agreed at that time to title the newsletter *Nink*, but I can't remember. (It *was* 30 years ago, after all.)

The brand-new organization had a small membership and a correspondingly small treasury, so *Nink* was a modest publication back then. Yet it was also a crucial one for us. This was long before social media, and NINC wouldn't even have an e-list until years later. Our business was all still conducted by snail mail and telephone. (I got my first email account in 1993.) So *Nink*, which was produced on a shoestring, was our "virtual" community in those days, as well as the primary way the board communicated with us.

I no longer possess my copies of *Nink* from the first year (though perhaps someone reading this still has theirs?), but my recollection is that it was about eight pages long back then. Most of the content I remember was internal organizational news. Particularly in the first year, *Nink*

contained information and updates on the nuts-and-bolts work of setting up and starting to build the organization. For some reason, one of the brief bits I still remember reading in *Nink* back then was a plea from one of the founders urging members to provide their full 10-digit zip codes for the directory and the mailing list. (The ten-digit format for zip codes was only a few years old at the time, and not everyone was accustomed to using it. This was also, of course, when dinosaurs still roamed the earth.)

For years, *Nink* had a very active “Letters to the Editor” column. Today I opened and browsed a few of the oldest *Ninks* available in our [online archive](#). The first issue I randomly selected was from October 1994, five years into NINC’s existence. It’s 12 pages long, and about 35 percent of it is letters to the editor. (As it happens, I wrote one of those letters. I wasn’t surprised to see it now, since I often sent letters to *Nink* in those days.) That level of engagement wasn’t unusual. Writing to *Nink* was how we shared information and anecdotes, made suggestions and complaints, and debated topics within NINC. Writing and reading those letters was also how we got to know each other, apart from attending the conference, and how we got engaged and active in the organization.

After Ninclink was established, and as more and more members used this online listserv, the letters column faded away; by the late 1990s, its appearance in the newsletter was only occasional and brief. And here in 2019, I can’t even remember the last time we published a letter in *Nink*. But our newsletter archives remain to remind us of NINC’s past. The letters in those old issues—as well as the articles—are a window into what we focused on, celebrated, and argued about as novelists in the pre-digital publishing world and as members of a fledgling professional organization unlike any other in the industry.

The online archive begins with 1994, by the way, so we’re missing the earliest years of the newsletter. It would be nice someday to have the complete collection there.

I have been involved in *Nink* for most of its existence. The first year or two, I sent so many letters to the editor that members must have prayed for me to get writer’s cramp. Eventually, a *Nink* editor—no doubt seeking to occupy me in a more productive and less annoying way—asked me to research and write a cover story on a topic that increasingly interested writers at the time: how the major bestseller lists were calculated and compiled. I was anxious, never before having attempted journalism, and I accepted the assignment on the understanding that I might stumble and fail.

I remember the timing of this, January 1991, because I was on the phone with the *New York Times*, whose staff were irritably refusing to answer my questions, at the moment that Operation Desert Storm was launched. I still recall how surreal it was to watch live footage of the war while questioning the NYT about their opaque and subjective process of compiling the most prestigious bestseller list in the business. The NYT staff were rude and condescending each time I called them, they *hung up* on me several times, and they finally told me to stop calling because, now that our country was at war with Iraq, they were too busy to talk to me.

I was incredulous: “You’re in the *book* division. What does the war have to do with *your* job?”

They hung up on me again.

Anyhow, I really took to the process and started writing regularly for *Nink*. Back then, it was a volunteer gig. Everyone involved wanted the newsletter to be professionally relevant to multi-published career novelists, and we researched and wrote articles on our own time, without compensation. Then in 1995, when I was about halfway through writing a heavily-researched series of articles on the cover process (cover art & illustrations, cover artists, art departments, marketing & sales departments, etc.), NINC's budget could finally sustain *paying* for articles. Hallelujah! *Nink* has been a paying publication ever since then.

In the 2000s, the board further increased the budget for *Nink*, paying writers more and adding more content. As shipping and printing costs rose, limiting the budget available for content, NINC also started gradually transitioning from a print publication to a strictly digital format.

These days, *Nink* is typically 30-50 pages long with 4-6 feature articles in every issue, regular columns, and interviews, as well as organizational information. And every November and December, *Nink* is roughly 100 pages, thanks to the detailed conference reports that make it possible for all members to benefit from the information shared at every conference session.

So we have come a long way in 30 years! But the wheel never stops turning, and we want to make sure that *Nink* is always relevant and fulfilling members' needs and expectations.

With that in mind, we're administering a survey this month, asking members to share their reactions, opinions, and wishlist about *Nink* with us. Members should have received an email about this by now, inviting them to participate. The survey, which is completely anonymous, is written and administered by [WTH Analytics](#), an outside professional firm, which will also analyze the results and provide NINC with a final report.

So, if you have not already done so, please be sure to take the survey. After 30 years, we'd really like to know what you think!

Laura Resnick is a past president of NINC, past NINC conference chair, past chair and past member of several NINC committees, past NINC rep on the Authors Coalition of America, and past assistant editor of Nink. She now lives in hiding.

Letter from the Editor

By Michele Dunaway



Welcome to the first of two jam-packed issues containing conference coverage. I covered a few sessions myself, and all I can say is, "Wow!" The annual NINC conference delivered on the goods.

Like I did in 2018, I met new people, made new friends, walked on the beach, ate delicious food and embarrassed myself singing karaoke. But I was in good company throughout. The NINC conference is my go-to every September.

Registration opens Jan. 1, so make your plans now to join us in 2020.

What follows in this issue are the reports from Thursday's presenters and the reports from those who presented Friday AM. Friday PM and Saturday's reports will be in the December issue. We do not cover Night Owls.

We try to cover as much as possible for you as a member service, but as reporters frantically scribbling or typing, we are fallible, so please pardon any mistakes and note that *Nink*/NINC is not liable for those.

Starting in January, we go back to our regular *Nink* content. Have a wonderful Thanksgiving holiday for those of you in the United States, and for the rest, may your November be profitable and fruitful.

PS—Don't forget to take the newsletter survey which began Nov. 1 and ends Nov. 15. Your answers are completely anonymous.

—Michele



**PLANNING
FOR
SUCCESS**

NINC2019

Conference Reports

Growth Hack a Bestseller, Part 1: Writing a Bestseller

Presented by Liz Pelletier

Reported by Nicole Evelina

Every author wants to write a bestseller. Co-founder of Entangled Publishing Liz Pelletier told us how to do just that. Since helping found Entangled Publishing in 2011, she has edited more than 150 books, 80 percent of which have become bestsellers.

According to Pelletier, a bestseller is any book that sells more than 50,000 copies at full price. But that is getting increasingly hard to do in today's market where more than one million books are published each year, the median book only sells 250 copies, and the median author earns only \$500 per book published.

While it is important to understand the market, don't let it stop you. It is completely possible for you to be the next bestseller. But you have to be strategic about it and think about your career like a business, because you are one, regardless of how you are published. Begin by writing down your goals—these could be monetary, the number of books you want to write in a year, or cutting down on social media so that you have more time to write. Then make sure you understand your value as a writer, just like you would as the employee of a company. If it takes 60 days to write a book, that means the average author makes \$1 hour. If you can learn to segment your time between personal and business, and work smarter, your value per hour of work increases.

A new methodology for a New Age of Publishing

Traditionally, authors spend about 65 percent of their time creating, that is, writing the book; five percent on packaging: the cover, blurb, tagline, etc.; 10 percent editing; and 20 percent selling, which is all the things involved in marketing the book. Pelletier suggests we create a whole new model in which we spend 35 percent of our time planning and packaging our books; 15 percent selling; 28 percent creating; and 12 percent perfecting. But she's not advocating sacrificing the quality of your work; rather, the more time you spend on planning, the less time you will need to spend on writing and editing.

The key to this process is to focus on what matters: growth. In order to grow, you must be willing to change, so don't be afraid to rework or repurpose anything, even if you have to change many times in order to hit on what works. Hugely successful companies like Instagram and Airbnb have done this. As authors, we can do the same thing with our books by planning and editing differently. In this model, editing is thought of as more than just fixing plot holes and typos; while that is still very important, here editing is more about the story than the details. You edit the story with the sole purpose of creating a finished work that is most likely to go viral and grow quickly in readership.

How to Plan a Bestseller Part 1: Planning and Packaging

To use this new model effectively, you must forget how you think a book should be written and remember you are a storyteller and entertainer. Write your book like you are telling a story to someone who doesn't want to listen or is distracted. Start with the hook to grab their attention and engage them. You can fill in the details later as you tell the story.

1. **Planning**—When you're aiming for high concept, start with simple ideas; not with your characters. What about your book is special? You should be able to answer this in a single sentence. The easiest way to figure this out is to brainstorm: "What would happen if..." For example, "What if Cinderella got knocked up?" or "What if the awkward new girl falls for the hunky high school vampire?" You know exactly what you are getting with those concepts. You can always incorporate things happening in the news that your audience might relate to (like a book about walls and immigration) or comps like *Beauty and the Beast* meets *Taming of the Shrew*. If you're having trouble, try reading *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* by Chip and Dan Heath.

Once you have some concepts, ask your critique partners, readers, fans, family—anyone who might read your books if they'd want to read a story—about your concepts. If you don't get an overwhelmingly excited response, you may need to re-evaluate. By doing this, you are test marketing your idea like a publishing house would.

When your audience is excited about your ideas, you can develop your characters by thinking in terms of relatedness and universal traits. People like characters who they can relate to. That's why we gravitate toward the likable, the sympathetic, and the underdogs who are misunderstood and marginalized. We all imagine ourselves like that. Start with your hero or heroine and then think about who would be the perfect foil for them. One way to do this is to think about what the heroine wants and then give the hero the opposite desires, or vice versa.

Next you need to come up with an interesting and fresh, yet believable event to bring these two characters together. In romance, this is your meet cute, or your inciting incident in other genres. Like with your concept, write down ideas and test them with your reader groups.

Now think of the simplest conflict to sustain the breadth of the work. It could already be baked into your concept. But if not, questions you can ask yourself to come up with your conflict include:

- Why can't the protagonist win?
- If you're writing a romance, why can't the hero and heroine be together?
- Why should we want the antagonist to win?
- Is the conflict believable and organic?

The next thing to think about is the midpoint of your book. This is at exactly the half-way mark and is when the characters are certain they are going to win. You need to understand why they feel like everything is going to be okay and then mess that up by having the antagonist or villain do something so that everyone—including the antagonist—will have to sacrifice something to win.

You will bring all these elements together into your synopsis in this order: high concept, hook, set-up, meet cute/inciting incident, midpoint and climax. Yes, you have to give away the ending. This method should make writing the synopsis much easier than the traditional summary method so many of us dread. When you're done, test market your idea again.

When you have a winning synopsis, start thinking about your audience. Who is your "lowest hanging fruit"—the audience most likely to buy your book? Note their demographics such as gender and age range. Then think about your secondary audience and do the same.

Between what you know about your audience and your concept, you should be able to come up with some marketing hooks. These can be as simple as the genre or audience (YA), the theme (forbidden love), type of characters (vampire), outstanding traits (snappy dialogue) or even author characteristics (extensive backlist or easy cross promotion with other similar authors).

2. **Packaging**—By packaging, Pelletier means the book cover, the back cover copy and sales copy and ad graphics. If you're a self-published author, you will need to think about all of this. If you're traditionally published, your publisher should work with you on these elements.

a. **Branding:** Keep in mind that everything should be cohesive throughout from the colors and the tagline to the font and the key phrases used. You should be able to use all of it to promote this book, and at least some of it should be applicable across multiple books if you're writing a series. To do this, keep it simple, make it concrete—something that you can easily put into words and that can be repeated (vampire, spy, cowboy)—and use it over and over because if you repeat it often enough, it becomes a fact. (i.e. "the best comedy you've read all year"). Make sure it has something recognizable about it. People like things they are comfortable with.

b. **Theory of the Mind:** When someone reads a blurb and looks at packaging, they think they know what your book is about. If you can use their curiosity to find out if they are right, you can make them buy the book. This can be done through the way the book is packaged.

c. **Tone:** All of your elements must have the right tone, i.e. serious and dark for a paranormal book like *Twilight* or perhaps fun or snarky for a rom-com. Tone is also reflected in the mood and colors of your book cover.

d. **Experiential:** People like things they can imagine themselves doing or experiencing. What experience/fantasy are you selling? Your title, tagline, and blurb must convey that experience—but in a brief way because every word counts, especially on the cover. For example, a dishwasher company used this as their tagline: "You can watch TV while you wash dishes...it is so quiet."

When you write your back cover copy, you can use the quick synopsis you created above. This should not be a summary of the book, but a story that entices your readers to want to know more. Hit on your top three points most likely to sell your book and make sure everything you say either says something new or reinforces your selling points.

When designing your cover keep the points above in mind, but most of all, remember that your book's cover is its first ad. It should conform to the design principles of an ad, hit on your

main concepts and have plenty of negative/white space so the content can breathe and the viewer doesn't get overwhelmed.

[Liz Pelletier](#) has more than thirty years of experience in software engineering, systems analysis, and business management. In 2011, Pelletier channeled her love of romantic fiction and co-founded Entangled Publishing.



[Nicole Evelina](#) is a USA Today bestselling author of historical fiction, non-fiction, and women's fiction. She loved her second NINC conference and can't wait for next year!

Growth Hack a Bestseller, Part 2: Marketing a Bestseller

Presented by Liz Pelletier

Reported by Nicole Evelina

In the first part of this presentation, Liz Pelletier, co-founder of Entangled Publishing, explained her theory on how to plan and package a bestseller. In this workshop, she explained how to write and edit a bestselling book.

Bestsellers begin with intention. Focus on *why* your book will sell. What is it about? What type of readers will it entertain? Why will everyone be talking about *this* story? (It could be timely, there could be something shocking about it, etc.) Remember your salable hooks—what is it about your book that is captivating?

Once you're clear in your intention, the next thing to do is **write!** Start telling a story and finish it. Remember that it is impossible to edit a blank page. If you get a plot bunny, write it down and finish what you are working on—the bunny will be there when you get done.

After celebrating typing those beautiful words, "The End," it is important to ask your beta readers, close writer friends or family to write a review as though they were your worst Goodreads critic. You need to know the raw feelings of your readers while you can still fix any problems they identify.

Don't be surprised if you get back some pretty strong reactions. That is the point. Art *should* make you feel. People *should* be triggered. You can only remember things when they affect you strongly, and usually that is the bad stuff. Our goal when we edit is to make those feelings intentional.

Questions you might want to ask your beta readers:

- Did this feel like listening to a story from a friend?
- Does every scene feel fresh and memorable?
- Do you believe the characters had no other choices?
- Were you ever bored?
- Did you ever guess what was going to happen next?
- Did you like the characters?
- Did you like the story?
- Do you feel this story was interesting enough to be told?
- Is the story complex without being complicated?
- Is this the sort of book you'd read more than once?

Editing your way to a bestseller

You can fix just about anything your readers tell you is wrong with a book. Your goal is to turn it into a book that they would read more than once. That is the kind of book that will go viral. Here are some ways you can fix problems that might be identified in various parts of your book:

The Beginning—Boring is never good in a book because it gives the reader the opportunity to put the book down. But if your readers say the opening of your book is boring, this is a death-knell because they will not continue reading. Take any feedback like this very seriously.

A strong beginning needs:

- A strong voice
- Likeable characters
- To be authentic
- To start quickly
- To grip readers

This last part is very important. You need to give them a question they have to find the answer to so that they keep turning the pages.

The Characters—Your characters need to be:

- Likeable – these characters are vulnerable
- Interesting
- Memorable – these are the ones we want to write fanfiction about
- Relatable

If your readers say your character is unlikeable:

- Make them vulnerable.
- Soften the verbs to make a heroine likable; sharpen male verbs to make them likable.
- Have them say something nice or have a “save the cat” or “pet the dog” demonstration of kindness.
- Add internal thoughts that counteract harshly spoken dialogue or actions.

If your readers say your character is boring:

- Add quirks or flaws. This helps readers see themselves in them and root for them.
- Add more internal dialogue so readers can become grounded in their voice and form an emotional bond with them. We need to understand their struggle.
- Make their obstacles more relatable, but don’t add too many. When too many things go wrong at once, it becomes difficult to believe.
- Add hopes and dreams that don’t pertain to the story. What are their hobbies? What is their favorite TV show?

If your readers can’t relate or your character is forgettable, try:

- Limiting the initial drama. As readers, we put up a wall if we think something is going to be painful.
- Adding more visceral reactions—these help readers understand how something feels for a character. Everyone reacts differently, so vary these reactions. Some people feel stress in their stomach, others in their heart, some sweat, etc.

- Try limiting reactions. In some cases staring into the distance while you're falling apart on the inside is more powerful than dramatically falling to the ground sobbing.

If readers say your character is annoying:

- Make sure all actions have believable motivations and reactions are consistent.
- Be sure you aren't having the character react the way you would, rather than the way they would.
- Use consistent phrases for reaction beats. For example, a heroine mutters "goddamit" every time she is stumped, she will appear more consistent in her actions.
- You have to make the character have no choice if you need the character to do something outrageous.

Pacing—Every book has the same basic structure:

1. **The meet cute or inciting incident.**
2. **Challenge accepted.**
3. **The heart of the story.** This is the fun and games of the plot, the time away from the main plot to get to know the characters.
4. **The midpoint.** This is when your characters are most assured things will turn out okay. The end of this scene should feel like a roller coaster about to go down.
5. **The pulse of the story.** This is when the reader and characters know something bad is closing in. *If you have pacing problems, this is usually where they are.*
6. **The epic fail and ah-ha moment.** This is also known as "the black moment" in romance. You cannot grow without pain or sacrifice and neither can your characters. Only major life changes will change your sense of self and this is why you need a black moment.
7. **The sacrifice.** What the hero/heroine/both/sometimes even the villain have to give up in order to change. It can be a physical or metaphorical sacrifice or even a flaw in the character such as giving up ego to help someone else (think *Jerry Maguire*).

The heart of the story and the pulse of the story are the biggest sections, together totaling about two-thirds of your story. The meet cute and challenge accepted are about one-sixth, as are the epic fail/ah-ha moment and the sacrifice.

If your beta readers say your story is boring or slow:

- Add a ticking time bomb, a deadline by which characters have to accomplish a goal or lose.
- Remind the reader of the stakes or increase the stakes.
- Look for cliché, predictable, or unoriginal scenes and write fresher angles on those scenes.
- Make sure every scene ends in disaster (metaphorical or literal).
- Kill someone or something important.

- Cut every scene in the pulse of the story that isn't central to the conflict.
- Make sure the midpoint scene ends in foreshadowing.
- Make the conflict seemingly impossible to overcome.
- Add more white space.

Marketing your bestseller

In order to sell your book well, you have to understand the market. What is working now and why? What are others doing that you might be able to do as well? Who is influential? When it comes time to ask for a cover quote, be selective. It is better to have no cover quote than one from another no one has heard of.

Once you have identified your influencers (be they bloggers, readers, media, etc.) you will want to take advantage of reciprocity by giving them something in order to forge a connection. For example, you could:

1. Run a contest and give a gift to the winner, but also send those who didn't win a personalized email or gift. The key here is to not focus too much on the winner, but pay attention to those who didn't win as well.
2. Mail key influencers personalized items.
3. Mail key influencers high value promotional items. Liz and Entangled once sent 500 stuffed pigs (which tied into the storyline of the book) to support an upcoming mass market paperback release, along with early print ARCs.

When developing your ad copy, remember the publicity hooks you developed back in the first session and incorporate them. Also be sure to use phrases that convey how popular the author or book is, such as "bestselling" (add the list name if the author has hit one) "highly anticipated" or if you can count a large readership, something like "over one million readers worldwide love XYZ series." You also want to use the language of scarcity to make readers think they must buy the book quickly, such as "limited number/time," "one of the first." If you have a cover quote from someone who is well known, use it in your ads.

Once you've developed your ads, it's important to use your budget wisely. It is better to spend more than less in a short period of time. Throw a boulder into the water, not a pebble. That being said, target your ad spend based on your goals:

- Facebook is great for granular targeting or wide saturation to older readers.
- Instagram reaches millennials.
- BookBub is great for instant velocity but is expensive to maintain.
- Small blogger or website ads are only worthwhile if they reinforce another campaign.
- Industry ads work well for libraries or placement but not for reaching readers.
- Amazon ads are most effective with a large budget in a space that isn't crowded.
- Goodreads has great ad buys and newsletter campaigns but is very expensive.
- Google Ad Words is very dangerous and can be a trap unless you use exclusions.

Keep in mind that this advertising will only be effective if you've gotten the word out through public relations first.

Liz Pelletier has more than thirty years of experience in software engineering, systems analysis, and business management. In 2011, Pelletier channeled her love of romantic fiction and co-founded Entangled Publishing.



Nicole Evelina is a USA Today bestselling author of historical fiction, non-fiction, and women's fiction. She loved her second NINC conference and can't wait for next year!

SEO: An Author's Guide to Best Practices in 2019

Presented by Kimberli Bindschatel

Reported by Jennifer Stevenson

**SEO or Search Engine Optimization: the process of optimizing a website and content to be more appealing to search engines and their users.*

Kimberli Bindschatel attended her first NINC conference last year. She attended the roundtable on keywording and recognized from her experience in conversations that people weren't understanding it.

"I ended up doing 45 minutes of Q&A about SEO. Damon Suede was heading the roundtable, dragged me into the lobby, made me meet President Wayne Stinnett, and got me invited back for this year. I ended up co-writing with him." Three months later Stinnett discovered, when he Googled his name, that it didn't come up in the search. Only his Amazon author page appeared—but his website didn't. Bindschatel sent him a list of 10 things to do. He wrote, "Can I hire someone to do those things?" She recommended someone. Now he has the first spot for his name on Google and a Google Information Panel.

Website on-page SEO checklist in 2019

- mobile friendly
- optimize user experience
- build content around keywords
- proper use of headings
- create internal links
- utilize a blog
- incorporate schema
- use supporting media
- metadata
- search console & analytics

Why should you work on your SEO? Your fans already know you and know who you are. They're looking for you. Why does it matter? When we change some things to make us come up first, that means that Google has learned who we are and what we do.

It's not just that they've learned that the string of letters W.a.y.n.e. is a person. Now, since he's done that work on his site, Google knows that Wayne Stinnett is an author of Caribbean adventure; Google knows a long list of things attached to Wayne Stinnett. Now when someone is looking for a book about Caribbean adventure, Google offers them Wayne first.

We're optimizing our site so that Google knows who we are and what we have to offer. How are you known?

You can hire anybody for this, but it doesn't guarantee they know the job. Use the above 10 things as a hiring filter. For example, if they don't know what schema is, you don't want to hire them.

Then we'll go to Amazon and see how to optimize Amazon pages. How we do AMS ads is informed by this.

Search Engine Optimization is the process of optimizing a website and content to be more appealing to search engines and their users.

Why should you have a website and be publishing content online? Bindschatel gave this quote:

"A website is a powerful extension of your brand. They are a vital business asset to have in the digital era we now live in. Perhaps the biggest opportunity with a website is having control of the look, feel, and content to build and connect with your audience."

—Riley Holbrook, digital marketing specialist at LaLa Projects

It isn't enough to know what SEO is. That's why you need an expert.

Q: Can you recommend someone?

A: Bindschatel said she worked with Riley Holbrook, digital marketing specialist at LaLa Projects.



Courtesy of [Moz Beginner's Guide to SEO](#).

SEO needs questions

1. Is your site mobile-friendly?

Google uses mobile-first indexing, which means that when they crawl a website they predominately look at the mobile version for indexing and ranking. Three years ago, Google decided to prioritize mobile-friendly locations. As more and more people are using their smartphones to navigate the web, websites should be mobile-optimized for both Google and users. They won't catalog you if you're not mobile-friendly.

2. User experience, or UX

Some of Google's ranking factors for consideration include page speed, bounce rate, and average time of session. A fast page loading speed allows Google to crawl your site easier and makes it convenient to visitors.

3. Keywords

Keywords allow you to create and optimize content around how people are searching for information. Use tools like Google Keyword Planner or Ahrefs to research what and how people are searching. Moz Keyword Explorer is an option; they offer 10 searches per month for free.

Revisit your keywords every six months. Why? For example: iPhone got a new app called Siri, then other apps were created, then Amazon's Alexa. These apps changed search behavior dramatically. Now you're in a human-talking-to-a-human mode. Queries changed to, "Where do I find dinner in this town?" When we had to type it in a box, we translated our oral question to a written question; we understood that were searching via a text form. We searched for "Tampa restaurant." Siri and Alexa changed our queries overnight. They also changed how we should look at keywords. The zeitgeist changes as well; new buzzwords arise, and some old words fall out of favor.

Yes, you can hire someone to do this. If you don't like sorting data, you can find an expert to search for you.

How that works: Bindschatel's character is a federal agent, fights crime, has adventure and romance, and loves animals. "My expert said, list all the things you can think of that would matter. She'll run those words through [the tools mentioned above] a few times. She'll look at which ones are searched and how often, and discover what synonyms for the words I gave are most common. For example, "woman hero" is more frequently searched than "female protagonist."

Searches are based off keyword research on-page. Your metadata should be optimized using select keywords. Be careful not to overstuff, otherwise search engines may penalize you. Your content should be clear and natural to read. This is how they recognize a real site versus a fake site. There's no reason anymore to "stuff" keywords. At the beginning people did it, and Google figured that out.

4. Properly used headings

h1, h2, h3, h4 headings on your website are very important. Use them with the keywords. Take that keyword knowledge and build your menus around those h-tags. What's most important goes in h1, next important in h2, and so on. A professional SEO expert will discover the order of the keywords, as well as the keywords.

It's important to reach a balance between writing hooky marketing copy and getting keywords into it. Bindschatel said, "I wrote metadata (copy) for about 10,000 pages on Ford's website. (Windshield wipers are not sexy.) It's a puzzle. As you practice, it gets easier and easier to hit the points."

5. Internal site links

External links are important but internal links matter too. Make sure if you have multiple links internally, the internal links (to pages *inside* your site and between pages in your site) all work.

6. Use your Blog

A blog is a great place to get your keywords in. Google loves to see active sites. Healthy websites are active. Frequent posting and updating of content lets search engines and users know you are real. Incorporating keywords in a blog reinforces the messaging to Google of who you are and what your site is about.

Blog daily if you can. Google says you can't do it enough.

7. Incorporate schema

Schema markup is structured microdata that you can add to HTML pages that tells search engines more specific information regarding the content on-page.

Schema is a language, it's microdata tags that Google comes up with on the backside in HTML. Google will understand it much better than ordinary text.

To test a prospective SEO expert, ask them if they can work with the schema. If they look blank, don't hire them. It's part of the programming language behind the curtain. It's attached to your HTML. Its tag is on everything. Google recognizes it, and then it doesn't have to analyze your site to find the same information.

Q If you go into "view HTML," can you see the schema?

A: It's at the code level. Possibly below HTML level.

Schema helps Google catalog your site.

Q: If you have Wordpress and if you use All-in-One SEO or Yoast; they'll add some keywords to your schema.

A: It'll do some but not all of this. I recommend All-in-One SEO.

8. Supporting media (images, video)

If you have images or video on your site, whenever you upload a photo, name it properly with keywords. Make sure they're the proper size and resolution so that they load fast. Add alt tags. All that stuff is Google-readable. If you put up a video on your site called Image123, Google thinks this could be porn, or it could be stolen. Be sure to compress media and add keywords in alt tags.

9. Metadata

Every page of your website should have metadata. The metadata is what appears in search engine results pages (SERPS). You want to make sure it's of proper length, includes keywords, and is enticing to click. If you don't include SERP, Google will attach its idea of the metadata to those pages (the stuff that appears in small dark print under the first line of a Google search and the https://). This is SERP.

Things you can do to optimize SERP:

10. Set up Google Tools to record data for future decisions

Once your website has been created and or optimized, it is critical to set up Google Search Console and submit a sitemap. This allows you to tell Google your site is ready to be crawled. Google Search Console is free. Give them your Gmail address. This tells Google that, Yes, I'm a real human with a real site, please go look at my site. They'll give you a code to use. Google Search Console gives valuable data of how your website is performing in Google search results. Key data to analyze is what keywords are giving you clicks and impressions, what pages are ranking, and average position.

Sign up with Google Analytics. Properly setting up Google Analytics allows Google to track and record data that can help you make educated decisions when optimizing your website.

Google Analytics can tell you the pages on your site where people are getting stuck, where they're lingering, where they're leaving from. You get lots of traffic information.

Working with creative professionals

Bindschatel recommends [LaLa Projects](#) for creative solutions for web design, WordPress website development, digital marketing, and SEO. She recommends Holbrook there. He made the PowerPoint for her NINC presentation.

Optimizing your Amazon detail page

Here Amazon uses the same ways Google uses to read keywords and other things. How do we optimize that? We can't change the HTML or use schema or address h1-h2 headings at Amazon. However, you can stuff your keywords for each book.

Each "keyword" space on Amazon has 50 characters. Use them all if you can! Research keywords for your book so that the ones you use are really good. Line them up so they combine as well as possible in the optimal order.

For example, consider “female sleuth action mystery romantic suspense.” “Female sleuth” is one keyword. “Action mystery” is one keyword. “Mystery romantic suspense” is one. “Romantic suspense” is one. This isn’t keyword stuffing; it’s just best use of the space. Invoke the words in the order where they occur in the multi-word keyword.

Q: These are keyword phrases, yes?

A: Yes.

Q: What are the odds of someone getting “romance love triangle adventure tropical island” in one string?

A: I’ll get to that.

Bindschatel offered her latest release as an example in exploiting metadata on her Amazon detail page. Her title is Operation Wolf Pack: A suspenseful, outdoor crime adventure in the Rocky Mountains of Idaho (Poppy McVie Mysteries Book 7). Everything after the colon is the subtitle.

Bindschatel says, “My mentor friend SEO analyst says that subtitle is the most premium space after your title.” She tries to get a location into her title or subtitle to optimize the coolness of her setting. Consider what that subtitle might be for any other title on Amazon. “We believe our title, subtitle, description, and whole book are scanned for keywords by Amazon. There’s no way to know for sure.”

Q: That works for an ebook, but Amazon won’t let you do that for a paperback.

A: It will. I put the whole subtitle string in very tiny print on the cover. That allows me to use a subtitle that long. The “rule” is that the subtitle has to be on your ebook, and maybe on your print edition. Sometimes she gets away without the tiny-print subtitle on her print edition.

Q: Do you need to include that subtitle in your ISBN application?

A: I don’t know.

Q: I just added a subtitle [to my book in KDP] and did not need a new ASIN or ISBN. Amazon put it right through.

A: You don’t need a new ASIN unless you are republishing the book. An update is okay.

But if it doesn’t match your print book cover, you may have to re-upload. Although I’ve changed something in the subtitle of a print book and gotten away with it.

You could also get it taken down if Amazon decides to flag it. Just a warning. It’s best if your full subtitle is on your ebook cover.

Keywords can also be used for AMS ads. Here are some stealth keywords you’ll find handy.

- Book book book
- fiction
- Romance novel

These three keywords are backside metadata, behind-the-curtain keywords. Amazon attaches them to our book. This helps Amazon identify what the product is. Another product will have those keywords as well, when you target the other product. Bindschatel targets extremely specifically on each ad. She'll have 2,000 ads running at once, because she is testing a single keyword or character name or book title with each ad. "Don't confuse Amazon by stuffing too many disparate keywords into one ad."

Now you can inspect books on your also-boughts and use their keywords to assist your own books.

If you check the keywords of your best also-boughts and use them to target an ad, consider that your product has something that could be called algorithmic DNA. You want your keywords to match the keywords of a product you are targeting. This is Amazon's goal, to serve products that are relevant. "If you like this, you'll like that." There will always be an ad on your book's product page; the keywords on your product page and in your book will help determine whether that ad is really relevant to your book.

Bid really low (a couple of pennies) on Book book book, fiction, and Romance novel, because you want to match your keywords to theirs, including these behind-the-curtain keywords.

Q: When you do ads and you get a click, AMS will tell you which keyword got you the click.

A: There's no way we can get a list of keywords attached to the product we are targeting. If I'm targeting [Nicholas Sparks'] *The Notebook*, we can't find out what the keywords are for that book. However, we can look at query strings. Look at product page: character name, setting, and other common words. But it's correct that once you run the ad, Amazon will tell you which keyword was clicked on. I think it's more important to have your keywords match the product you're targeting than merely that they get clicked on.

Q: So if you use keyword book and urban fantasy, it'll match you with urban fantasy, not just books. They'll seek highest relevance when serving the ads.

A: Yes, but my goal here is to match their string for the target product. I also don't think the ads at the bottom of the screen are related to the original query you made, but instead to the product you are currently looking at. Consider matching that product's keyword string.

Q: For each ad, look at one specific target, and make it as relevant as possible.

A: Yes. You then know how the keywords are performing by looking at your dashboard, not by going inside the ad to analyze or check each search term. I think that your question is good but it isn't within the scope of this workshop.

Q: What if you run that AMS ad for a specific author? How many keywords should I use and how should I target them?

A: I might target just an author; or just a title. I might target the author and all their titles, or a specific series. I might want to associate with their latest release, which will get a ton of traffic.

Q: About uploading media onto your website, I recommend you compress it and use good titles in the media metadata. There are organization plug-ins for your media that will compress images and add the additional keywords that you can attach to each media piece: Would that be useful?

A: Yes.

Q: How do I use the alt tag?

A: Name the file “book cover” at least. You want Amazon to understand what it is. If you have a cheetah in the image, use that word in alt tags. So “Book Cover” and the word “title.”

Q: Do you use an underscore or something to connect the words “book cover” and the word “title.”

A: Yes.

Q: Can you tell us more about LaLa Projects?

A: What LaLa offers is a site overhaul for \$10,000-\$12,000. He also sells books on his site. It’s a very complicated process. Riley did all the things I mentioned earlier. You can have an audit done and that’ll be super fancy as well. If you want to do it yourself, call Riley at LaLa and see what he suggests. He’ll probably advise you.

Q: About filling in the seven keyword spaces...what’s too much?

A: You don’t want to stuff, but use it. Let’s say you have a page in your website that lists your favorite animals. Maybe Google doesn’t pick up that I especially love giraffes and cheetahs. If I have a separate page for those two animals, Google sees that those are important to me, and those will be higher priority. And I’ll get higher on searches involving those animals.

Q: How do you sign up for Google Analytics and Google Console?

A: Go to Google and it’s easy.

[Kimberli Bindschatel](#) is a thrill seeker, travel adventurer, passionate animal lover, and author of the Poppy McVie Mystery series. She also co-writes the Charity Styles Caribbean Thriller series with Wayne Stinnett.



*[Jennifer Stevenson](#) is the author of five funny series: *Liars in Love*, *Backstage Boys*, *Hinky Chicago*, *Slacker Demons*, and *Coed Demon Sluts*.*

Advertising: The Best of the Best, Part 1

Presented by Mark Dawson

Reported by Janis Susan May Patterson

Mark Dawson's presentation was in four parts:

1. Why advertise?
2. Readthrough
3. Reader funnel
4. Ads, using his experiences as examples

1. Why advertise?

Advertising is essential if you want to compete with others in your genre, especially since the “mysterious case of the disappearing also-boughts” on Amazon.

Dawson reported he had a dip in his earnings on Nov. 18 with nothing changing on his side. The dip was noticeable enough that he had Amazon UK audit his account, but with no results. He asked other authors and found 400 who had also had sizeable drops too. This is about the time the also-bought carousel disappeared. He concluded it was part of Amazon's push to increase ad dollars, making the also-boughts replaced by sponsored ads.

Dawson is working to get his books into Germany, which along with Spain and France is an up-and-coming market. He is unknown in Germany, so he got a short 50K- to 55K-word book trilogy translated and launched late in February this year. He was only selling 30-40 copies a day without ads, but later got three times that with ads.

2. Readthrough

Readthrough occurs if the reader likes the first book in a series and then buys all.

Dawson's example—book 1 retails at \$2.99; it's in KU and part of a four-book series.

Readership—book 1: 50 percent, book 2: 70 percent, book 3: 80 percent, book 4: 90 percent.

3. Reader Funnel

This is a marketing concept, and it's a useful way to visualize readers and ways to find them. The graphic showed a large funnel on top feeding into a smaller funnel beneath, which in turn fed into an even smaller funnel.

Level 1 (large)—cold

Level 2 (middle)—warm; have interacted

Level 3 (small)—hot; engaged

Dawson's main ad places are Amazon, BookBub, and Facebook. He drops all ads into the top level of the funnel; if the reader buys one from a particular ad, he becomes a fan (newsletter subscription, etc.) and goes to the bottom level where they get the newsletter and hopefully become insta-buyers. If the reader interacts—clicks, etc.—he goes to the middle, where Dawson hits them with targeted ads to buy the book; some will, some will drop out. The top is constantly replenished with new ads and the cycle repeats.

Results of ads through the Reader Funnel

Cold:

Sales ads: 60 percent

Engagement and research ads: 30 percent

Mailing list growth: 10 percent

Warm:

Sales: 90 percent

Mailing list growth: 10 percent

Hot:

100 percent in terms of ads

4. Ads

AMG—Amazon Media Group

Pros:

- has curated access to the Amazon ads console
- massive scale
- ad placements unavailable elsewhere
- allows retargeting
- off-Amazon ads
- weekly strategy calls
- detailed reports
- assistance with stores

Cons:

- very expensive—minimum spend is \$40K monthly
- no visibility for KU effectiveness
- reports occasionally don't match KDP
- massive geographical variations in effectiveness

AMS—Amazon advertising

Pros:

- self-serve access to Amazon ads console
- readers here are searching for something to read
- is increasingly powerful
- retargeting (likely coming soon)
- off-Amazon ads (likely coming soon)
- easy to use

Cons:

- variable reporting
- no visibility for KU effectiveness
- limited to U.S.

Amazon algorithms do not look at:

- Dwell time on page
- Anything after purchase
- Potential future earnings/readthrough

Amazon is interested in how much money it is going to make and says "to ensure a good customer experience we try to show ads that are most relevant to customer's search and browse experience."

Compare what you are selling with your keywords; are they related?

Bids

Are you selling what you are bidding for?

Bid high, though it doesn't automatically guarantee your placement, but it must increase your chances. Bidding includes cost per click (CPC). Set your maximum daily budget (he recommends \$10-\$20, though you can try a high (\$10K) bid, but there are no guarantees. Do keep a daily eye on your dashboard!

Do close targeting; increase your relevance by digging into what comparable authors are doing; review their books and test their procedures; run and harvest their keywords. Do put book titles into keywords.

Automated ads are likely to be the best performing and likely to require the least work.

Whatever kind of ad you chose, do the work. Download the detailed reports as Excel files. Examine which keywords have performed the best. Run those in manual ads. Continue.

Do your deep research—Excel reports show what search terms customers use.

If you are running a big campaign you must win your own name; this is essential for AMG. Check their rules page.

Be protective; keep competitors off your product page. Go into your console and upbid on your name.

Target your traffic—where are the readers going? You must be there waiting for them in such places as BookBub/Feature Deals; Kindle First Reads; Prime Reading; film and TV news where you will check your genre charts.

Just as an aside, Dawson admitted that he spends +/- \$40K a month on advertising with an expected return of +/- \$60K.

Mark Dawson is the bestselling author of the John Milton series and the founder of the Self Publishing Formula.



Janis Susan May/Janis Patterson is a 7th-generation Texan and a 3rd-generation wordsmith who writes in mystery, romance, and horror. Janis and her husband live in Texas with an assortment of rescued furbabies.

Advertising: The Best of the Best, Part 2

Presented by Mark Dawson

Reported by Rochelle Paige

[Self Publishing Formula's](#) Mark Dawson jammed a ton of information about marketing philosophy, Facebook ads, and BookBub Featured Deals into his second session. He started by covering a philosophy of marketing that helped set the framework for why certain ads work better for different groups. Cold audiences are those who don't know who the author is but like the kind of books they write. Warm audiences have indicated an interest in an author's books by clicking on an ad. Hot audiences are where an author's superfans live. They subscribe to the newsletter and follow on BookBub. These are the readers who insta-buy an author's books.

Facebook ads are sophisticated, large, easy to scale, and can be tailored to each of these audiences. They're always innovating, which can be good or bad when they change everything. Since they're a powerful tool to reach readers, authors need to adapt to what they offer.

Authors can implement very precise targeting, layered on top of each other (i.e., author, geographic region, age, Kindle). Facebook ads can also be successfully scaled since they're not as discerning as AMS; if you have money to spend, they'll spend it. There are a wide variety of ad placements between the newsfeed, right-hand side (not recommended), video, IG, and messenger.

Dawson shared with the audience how he runs his retargeting, which is a powerful way to find a warm audience and serve them ads. First, he runs an engagement campaign to encourage interaction in the form of likes, comments, and shares. They're often targeted at readers of comparative authors. He also uses the tools Facebook provides to analyze his audience to see what they like in order to find people with congruent interests beyond books. For example, if his engaged audience likes a particular television show, he can target it as an interest. Another option Dawson does is a lookalike audience where he uploads his newsletter—Facebook analyzes their accounts to generate an audience with similar interests and behaviors. Then he layers interests and behaviors associated with Amazon and Kindle on top of the fans of the television show and the lookalike audience to ensure they're also readers. The ads he serves to this cold audience generate interest, which brings them to the next level. Once those readers have engaged with Dawson's ads, he hits them with a retargeting ad where he tries to sell them a book since they've converted from cold to warm.

Dawson also runs Facebook ads to his hot audience by uploading his mailing list to create an audience. His goal is to reach readers who didn't open their newsletter or didn't one-click and forgot about the release. These ads are his second hit reminding them to purchase the book. They're the most profitable ads to run because the audience has already proven to be interested in purchasing. However, it's important to keep an eye on the frequency because these ads can

run through the audience quickly. Once they've seen it three times, it's best to refresh creative or kill the ad.

He's also found great success with Facebook ads around the world, in both English versions and translations, since those audiences often get served fewer ads and tend to be cheaper. Building audiences in other countries requires some flexibility, though. Authors need to make sure the authors being targeted as an interest have a presence there. Also, mailing lists might not have enough subscribers in each country to build a custom audience, but they can still be used to build a foreign lookalike audience based on subscribers in the United States.

Facebook ads do best when they have social proof, and Dawson provided a method to help obtain accelerated social proof. Authors can season their ad before using it for a different purpose:

- Set up a traffic campaign as a dummy.
- Turn it off once it's approved.
- Use the ad ID in an engagement ad, tell Facebook the goal is to get likes, and have all ad sets pointing to the same ad.
- Collect social proof in the form of likes, comments, and shares.
- Turn the ad off again and then use the ad ID in a traffic ad.

For example, Dawson was able to get 444 likes on an ad for only about \$100 using this method.

Dawson shared that he would prefer to gain a newsletter subscriber over a sale because he could potentially sell them 10 books after giving them a free read for signing up to his newsletter. He recommended using Lead Generation ads because the reader never has to leave Facebook to fill out the form. He suggested a low spend around \$10-20 a day and using a service like Zapier to automate the process of moving them from Facebook to the mailing list.

Authors who aren't already using the Facebook pixel are missing out on the opportunity to build new audiences and calibrate landing pages and conversion ads. Dawson recommended that authors "put it everywhere." In addition to the author website, forwarding services like Readerlinks and companies like BookFunnel allow for the use of the pixel. They just can't be used on retailer links.

Dawson had some additional Facebook advice:

- Authors of series should consider utilizing carousel ads because they help remind hot audiences that there are other titles in the series.
- Each image and button takes them to a different book.
- Authors can utilize split testing with a reliable audience to create winning ads
 - Test image first with copy the same
 - Then once the winning image is found, test creative by changing copy
 - Pick winning image and copy based on CTR, CPC, and then maybe CPM
- Try orange, red, and yellows

Dawson recommended [David Gaughran](#) as a good source of information for BookBub ads before sharing that BookBub Featured Deals are still the best return on investment even though they're difficult to get.

[Mark Dawson](#) is the bestselling author of the John Milton series and the founder of the Self Publishing Formula



[Rochelle Paige](#) is the NINC Conference Sponsorship Chair and writes romance in a variety of sub-genres: contemporary, new adult, paranormal, and romantic suspense.

What's New at BookBub?

Presented by Katie Donelan and Carlyn Robertson

Reported by Jennifer Stevenson

This year, [BookBub](#) is rolling out two new tools promoting audiobooks: Chirp limited-time audiobook deals, and ad campaigns for audiobooks.

Chirp

NINC members will get early access to these new tools in beta. They are not available publicly yet, but are being tested with a handful of partners. BookBub is expanding the beta group to NINC members who were present at the conference. "We want to hear from you about what works well and what features we can add to make them effective for you. Email your thoughts to us, it'll be helpful for us. Sign-up forms are coming soon."

Chirp is a retailer. It is a different brand from BookBub, and authors must sign up separately from BookBub. BookBub subscribers are being invited to sign up for the newsletter, and there are hundreds of thousands of sign ups already. Cover prices of audiobooks in the Chirp newsletter range from \$22 to \$24; sale prices range from \$2.99-\$3.99.

As with the BookBub featured deals, Chirp members give their category requests and get new letters every day. When you click through, you are taken to a buy page at Chirp, not to one of the other retailers. If you buy books from Chirp you can listen to books through the browser, or download the Chirp app to your device and listen there.

The Chirp host page is changing all the time while it is in beta.

The focus is on the deals, which are the only audiobooks offered in the email. These deals are also featured at the top of the page on the website. Readers can buy other audiobooks at Chirp, though the prime real estate goes to deals.

To be eligible for a Chirp feature, put your book up at [Findaway](#). Findaway distributes everywhere, has a self-publishing arm, and both accepts existing audiobooks and offers audiobook production services. They are offering special terms for new customers at this conference.

Audiobook ads

In the past you could advertise your audiobook to book readers via BookBub, but you couldn't target audio. Now you can target audio listeners. Since you will have your books up at other sites besides Chirp, you can advertise any retailer at Chirp: Amazon/Audible, Kobo, Chirp, Nook, and GooglePlay.

More about Chirp audiobook deals

Chirp audiobook ads are the same self-serve auction platform ads, sold by impressions, as BookBub ads. There are no discounting requirements for audiobook ads. Ads can be targeted by genre, author, and retailer preferences. Adding a retailer link to ads targets users of the retailers. You can select genre and author targeting, and then add categories to narrow down your target audience. It's suggested that you try a lot of author targets to see what works. Statistics now show the performance for multiple author targets.

The audio audience is much smaller but the results are exciting. Case study: *Arsenic in the Azaleas* by Dale Mayer. Mystery & thriller readers were offered a 99-cent deal: 3,300 audiobooks were sold. Then those who downloaded or clicked on that ad were sent a follow-up email offering book two at \$4.99 (regular price). Result: 230 audiobooks sold.

How to submit your book

Go to the Bookbub partners dashboard. Submit an audiobook deal. You can keep managing the ads from BookBub. Choose a title, when you want it to run, and suggest a category. Look at narrator platform and accolades (if you have a famous narrator with their own platform) and bear them in mind when submitting.

There are key differences from BookBub's ebook Featured Deals. The editorial review process includes platform and content fit, reader reviews, awards, and blurbs. "We're still learning about Chirp member preferences. Sometimes they differ from what works on BookBub. What works on BookBub may not have much bearing here." The editorial review process also involves examining audio quality of the submission, looking for a good listening experience, and reader reviews of the audio quality.

Chirp categories for Featured Deals include editor's pick, general fiction, mysteries & thrillers, romance, science fiction & fantasy, classics (a new category that is not available in the BookBub ebook categories), kids and young adult, nonfiction, and Christian fiction & nonfiction. You can't submit to Editor's Pick, but our editors will help find the right category for you. These categories will definitely expand over time. "You can suggest a category, but as with BookBub features, we'll make the choice of best fit."

Editorial reviewers will also recommend a deal price and will give a couple of different options. So far they're seeing great results for prices higher than those common on the BookBub side. The deal price must at least be below the regular price. You can choose among several and they will narrow that. Platform, length, and category affect their recommendation.

A major difference with Chirp features and ads is that they arrange the discount. In BookBub Featured Deals for ebooks, you must do the price-dropping at all your retailers. With Chirp, they contact the retailer and arrange for the price drop.

There is an up-to-two-month submission window. So submit on Oct. 1 for a December slot. "We don't sweat the timing too much as we are so new. We'll try to make it work with your marketing plans. If you submit in the latter half of the month, and we have still got slots open sooner, you could get that."

Editorial review can take up to two weeks to get back to you about your submission. They'll write back to you, confirm your promotion details, write the blurb, and contact the retailer to lower the price. There are **no fees** to run a deal on this in beta! Send a letter.

Q: How long will the beta process run?

A: We have no set timeline in mind. Join the earlier the better.

Q: How long must we wait between Chirp deals?

A: Haven't decided yet. Lots of requirements are up in the air.

Q: What if our audio is exclusive at Audible?

A: If you're exclusive at Audible, you can use the ads tool.

Q: Will you be promoting second or later books in series, not just first in series?

A: When we know what works, we'll let you know.

Q: Will there be price matching at Audible if we're available on Chirp?

A: No, no price matching.

Q: How long does the Chirp feature last?

A: Unlike a BB Feature, where you get one day, in Chirp it's in one day's newsletter, but the Chirp site leaves the sale open for a month.

Q: Do you work only with Findaway as a distributor right now?

A: Yes, right now.

Q: Is Tantor working with Findaway too?

A: Yes, if the audiobook is available through Findaway.

About BookBub ads for audiobooks

BookBub ads are a self-serve auction platform. You bid against other advertisers to get one open email and one opened website (per click). Your ad sits at the bottom of the daily email. There are also dedicated spaces on our blog and at BookBub.com. There are no requirements or editorial selection process. You can target your readers based on genre, author, and retailer preference. "We think our targeting is fairly granular." You can promote your new release audiobooks, first-in-series audiobooks, discounts, and more.

How to run BookBub ads for audiobooks

Select a book format for your ad, either ebook or audiobook. Upload custom creative (images) in size 300x250. Add retailer links to target your listeners. Your ads can target Chirp

U.S. users. The buy link is included in all occasions of your ad. You can target Audible U.S. and Apple U.S.

Select genre and author targeting—using the same data as for BookBub ads. Author targeting is a better way to get clickthrough than targeting by genre. Your ad will reach anyone who follows that author or has ever clicked on that author or said “want to read” that author’s book.

Testing is the best way to try out different target authors. Check retailers. Look at also-boughts. Genre targeting also works, but it helps to narrow it down to combine genre targeting with author targeting. Adding a category will narrow it further.

You can now view statistics for multiple author targets, look up specific authors if you’ve added multiple authors to a single campaign, look at ad details page, click on the aggregate statistics tab, and view all authors targeted. Any author who has 1,000 clicks can be targeted. If you target more than one author in the same ad, a reader may get that ad a couple of times.

Best practices for audiobook ads include only serving CPM ads (clicks per thousand), and bidding low—average winning bids are between \$6.02 and \$11.01. The earlier you join, the cheaper the audiobook ads will be. Signal the book format in your ad image. The image should have square audiobook cover in it. Use a **Listen Now** action button. “We recommend an audiobook button.” Include an earbuds or headphones icon on the image. Include any awards received by your book or narrator. “We encourage using the narrator’s name in your ad if they’re well known.”

For any BookBub ad, these concerns are recommended: Include a strong hook. The deal price should be the lowest you can manage. Use popular tropes. Include quotes from other authors or reviews to increase clicks. Use comparisons to similar books or movies—but be accurate! Include review counts or other social proof.

Run a lot of tests

“Our best tip is test, test, test. It’s the only way to definitively make a good ad.” Edit only one element at a time. Start with low budgets—\$10 to \$20 is good. Compare your CTR to cost. Continue to test and optimize, rinse, and repeat.

Q: If someone clicks on an ad, will they ever see that ad again?

A: Don’t know. Good question.

Here are some possible uses, examples, and cases for running a Chirp ad: Promote a Chirp Featured Deal that you have submitted for either in the Featured Deals email for one day or on the website for a month. Set your own promotional price on Findaway and promote it to listeners across dealers. Promote limited-time deals initiated by retailers. Promote full-price audiobooks.

Q: Have you done any testing with audio box sets?

A: Not that I know of, but I am guessing that would be a huge hit—more books for same price—that would be an enticing image, to see lots of books in one image.

Q: I understand the limit for application is, “BB will not present an ad to someone more than four times.” Is that limit the same for audio?

A: I believe so for now, but it might turn out to be different later.

Q: If someone is interested—if they open the featured deal email on Tuesday, then open the same email Wednesday, will the link still click them through to the deal?

A: Yes.

Q: Does anyone do an ad for an ebook and its audiobook?

A: We don’t know, but that would be an interesting test.

Q: If you’re not on Findaway, and you include all the links for each retailer, and if the prices don’t match because we lowered the prices at the retailers ourselves, will you pull that link, as with BookBub?

A: Yes.

“We’re still learning. See our blog to see news of our testing and updates.”

Q: Can NINC members who are not attending the conference sign up for the beta program?

A: If you have audiobooks you’d like to promote that are available for sale on Chirp via Findaway Voices, please email BookBub at partners@bookbub.com! You can also keep an eye on their Partners Blog at insights.bookbub.com for updates as their audiobook promotion tools become widely available.

Email BookBub at partners@bookbub.com for more questions.

[Katie Donelan](#) is Head of Partner Relations at BookBub. [Carlyn Robertson](#) is responsible for partner education on BookBub’s Partners Team.



*[Jennifer Stevenson](#) is the author of five funny series: *Liars in Love*, *Backstage Boys*, *Hinky Chicago*, *Slacker Demons*, and *Coed Demon Sluts*.*

Planning for Success: Getting It All Done

Presented by Sarra Cannon

Reported by Michele Dunaway

For Sarra Cannon, when she signed up to be a writer, she didn't know she was signing up to be an entrepreneur. She wanted to write, and now she is a full-time writer. She went indie in 2010.

However, she said, once you publish, your schedule becomes all the things on your list and writing can fall through the cracks because there are so many things on our shoulders. Then we also get distracted paying attention to what others are doing. Cannon said the more successful she got, the more stressed she got. It stole her joy. She found herself not loving writing. There's a million questions to answer. She said writers are already professional decision makers, like in where our characters live and what they do. We make 10 times more decisions than the average person. Now we also have to be a marketer, an advertiser, a social media guru, an art director, a publishing professional, and a CEO and their assistant and a statistical analyst.

The modern writer then becomes driven by fear because of the questions we have:

- What if I choose the wrong path?
- What if I don't make enough money?
- Will people like my books?
- How can I find readers in a crowded market?
- Should I do what everyone else is doing?
- What if I can't keep up and it falls apart?

Success didn't cure her fear but it instead paralyzed her. She said it was burnout. She'd pushed herself. She was stressed. It wasn't joyous. It led her to a year of not writing.

The system she shared was her way of finding joy. She then asks the audience, "Are you trying to do it all?"

Many heads nod as she shows them a horizontal bar graph showing seven projects all in various stages of completion.

"What happens," she said, "is we work on project one and then we get distracted and you go to the next projects and nothing gets finished."

It's starting but not finishing. She mentions context switching and for authors to Google it, saying that you lose productivity.

So how do we get things done?

The secret is knowing you can't. You need to come up with answers to what you're doing and why you're doing it.

Here she shares her favorite quote from Todd Henry (*The Accidental Creative*): “You need to create space for your creative process to thrive rather than expect it to operate in the cracks of your frenetic schedule.”

She says we chose writing because it fulfills us. She says to get control of your to-do list and your time comes down to these four steps:

1. Picture
2. Prioritize
3. Plan
4. Perform

Picture

She begins with a quote from Oprah Winfrey: “Create the highest, grandest vision possible for your life because you become what you believe.”

People often skip the picture step, but it’s important because everyone has a different vision for their life. You need to define what success means for you. When you picture your ideal life and career as an author, what do you see? She gave examples here of the one who wants to be home and writing, or the one who wants to do tons of book signings. How do we want to feel? Do you want to do marketing or not?

Your career is a journey. Your ideal vision for your life and career is your GPS system. How specific is that route? Is it turn by turn? Or are you simply headed south (a direction she used as Florida is south, not as in south having a negative connotation). We are often guided by our desire to be successful but we don’t think we simply make a decision based on the moment, not our own GPS. She advises to go home and really think about where you want to be. Be aware. Don’t blindly follow. Don’t make decisions from fear. Use your internal truth of your own vision.

Prioritize

Keeping with the theme of quotes, she uses Steven Covey: “The key is not to prioritize what’s on your schedule but to schedule your priorities.”

This involves decluttering our brains. Make three lists:

1. What do you need to do? All your responsibilities, future commitments, ongoing activities.
2. List all the things you “should” do. Things you’ve seen other authors doing or things people have told you to do.
3. List all the things you’d really like to do. Things that sound fun or that you really want to try. Things you find would benefit your business.

She tells the audience her lists are just business. Other lists can be personal (like chores). She says to keep these lists separate. She shows a slide of three sample lists.

Prioritizing your careers means following your internal compass. She asks herself two questions: 1. What moves me toward my vision? 2. Does it have a long-term or short-term impact?

Her chart then looks like this:

Moves me toward my vision	2. IMPORTANT TASKS These are you long term priorities. Essential to success	1. SWEET SPOT These are your top priorities for the moment.
Doesn't move me toward my vision	4. UNIMPORTANT Cut all of these from your schedule forever.	3. DANGER ZONE Do these only if you have a short-term need that trumps your long-term vision.
Priority Box	Low short-term impact	High short-term impact

This helps her make choices. Every choice you make means you're not making a choice for something else. We often choose high short term impact but they don't move you toward your vision.

Example: Research Amazon ads and set promo budget. Depending on your ideal vision, this may be in one of the four spots. Things become personal to you. Sometimes you don't know if it's a one or a two. Don't get caught up in the details.

After you do this, you mark the 4s from the lists you created (need, should, like to do). Then highlight your lists as to 1 or 2 using colors.

Plan

"Once you have mastered time, you will understand how true it is that most people overestimate what they can accomplish in a year and underestimate what they can achieve in a decade." She used this quote by Tony Robbins to lead into telling the audience that we often beat ourselves down, and are harder on ourself than anyone else. Step back and look at the long term, not the short term.

It's about the journey.

How much time do you really have? Example, October has 31 days. 30 days x 2,000 words to reach goal. But life happens. Must plan for time off. Look at time realistically. Now you're like at 19 days after family, health, etc. You can't expect to max yourself every day. It's a journey. Don't expect yourself to be super human.

Michael Jordan said, “Focus like a laser. Not a flashlight.”

Once we know our schedule we look at one to two goals. These then break into projects and projects into tasks.

A **goal** is that “what.” What are you trying to accomplish? Goals are measurable and specific. Goals can be completed in a specified amount of time. A **project** is the “how.” How are you going to accomplish your goal? A **task** is the “action.” What tasks would you take to complete your project?

- *Sample goal:* To publish quality books in order to increase my income to an average of \$5000 a month by December 31, 2019.
- *Sample project:* to complete the rough draft of the fourth book in my series.
- *Sample tasks:* Outline my novel. Create character arc sheets for each character. Write 2,000 words each working day.

She uses a Kanban board but does hers top to bottom. She color coordinates every project. If it's not on the board, she said, she doesn't worry about it. She moves everything from top to bottom, and her weekly tasks are under a header called Get it Done and when done the sticky notes move to Awesome Job.

She works on a quarterly, 90-day system because 90 days is enough to accomplish something. You can break it into 30/60/90.

Here she mentions [Amber McCue](#) as a resource.

Cannon also says to email her (Cannon) for a free template.

Perform

Nelson Mandela said, “Vision without action is just a dream, action without vision just passes the time, and vision with action can change the world.”

Cannon mentions here that she created a planner HB90 system, and mentions her [YouTube channel](#) and that she offers a course. She schedules all her tasks in a planner. To follow your vision, you must give yourself time.

She uses performance tools to help herself, and calls these as follows:

- Theme Days
- Batching Content
- Scheduling
- Writing Sprints
- Writing Retreats
- Accountability partner

Theme Days mean she works on whatever that day's theme is. Batching means she might write all four of the month's newsletters that day. Writing sprints are 20 minutes at a time, break, etc.

She mentions [Gretchen Rubin](#) here.

She says your system can be as simple or complex as you want it to be. Remember, don't be busy. Stop being ruled by fear. Be a master of your time.

You can reach her at heartbreathings.com.

Sarra Cannon is the indie author of more than twenty-five Young Adult contemporary fantasy novels, including her bestselling Shadow Demons Saga. With close to three-quarters of a million books sold, Sarra is also passionate about helping fellow authors learn to self-publish in a way that puts joy and creativity at the forefront.



Nink editor [Michele Dunaway](#) did as many conference reports as she has cats. She's changing up bios each time too so you aren't bored.

Books are Made to Be Heard: Audiobook Success with ACX

Presented by Hannah Wall

Reported by Rochelle Paige

Are you interested in learning how to succeed in one of the fastest growing segments in the publishing industry? Then the *Books Are Made to Be Heard: Audiobook Success with ACX* workshop was geared toward you. Hannah Wall, director of marketing communications for Audible, kicked off her presentation by sharing some impressive statistics. With 24.5 percent growth and nearly three billion audio hours downloaded in 2018, she quickly made a strong case for indie authors to include audio in their publishing endeavors.

Amazon has several divisions within the audio realm. They recently launched Audible Originals, exclusive audio titles similar to long and short form podcasts with subjects including theater, journalism, and literature. These are listening experiences that aren't tied to a book experience. They're produced in the Audible studios, and their team is seeking pitches for innovative ideas that haven't been published yet. Members can select two Audible Originals every month, in addition to their audiobook selection.

Audible Studios is Amazon's editorial option for audiobook production. They're a more traditional publishing option where authors submit a pitch to sell audio publishing rights to Audible. There's no upfront cost to produce since Audible Studios will produce and distribute your title.

For those looking for more control, ACX may be the best option. It offers the flexibility to cast the voice of the narrator from 100,000 talented professionals, provide editorial feedback on the product, market the title, and receive royalties monthly. Authors can also choose to participate in Amazon's audio subscription service for romance titles.

As Wall said, Audible Escape is another way Amazon is "shaking up how people listen to audiobooks." It's a subscription service that lets romance fans consume as many enrolled titles as they want each month. Subscribers can take out up to 10 audiobooks at a time, listen to them, and return them to make other selections.

Why should authors choose ACX to produce their audiobooks?

- Started in 2011 with a mission to make sure more audiobooks were produced
- 160,000 audiobooks have been produced via ACX in eight years
- Offers 40 percent net royalty if exclusive to Amazon and iTunes

When authors choose ACX, they're in charge. They can make sure the audiobook fits their brand, from casting to the cover. The casting script is their words, which helps them find the

best narrator fit. It's recorded on their timeline and within their budget. They can do dual, or even multi-cast, hires of narrators, including working with Audible-approved producers. There are currently about 400 who've received Audible's stamp of approval. ACX has also recently launched their Royalty Share Plus program, where authors can set a lower per finished hour rate but also share royalties for the lifetime of their book so they can attract a higher caliber of narrators.

How can authors grow their audiobook reader base?

This is what most authors are interested in learning, and Wall offered many suggestions. First, take advantage of the enhanced promo codes. One hundred codes, 50 for the U.S. and 50 for the UK, can now be obtained from within the ACX dashboard once the title is available for sale. The codes are specific to the title and cannot be used to obtain other audiobook titles. Redemptions are tracked, codes can be marked as shared for better tracking. The codes can be used for review teams or giveaways, and they're a great way to build wonderful reviews on titles.

Hannah also suggested audiobook pre-orders to time release with other formats, which can currently only be done manually through ACX customer service 14 to 90 days in advance. It is not asset-less, since audio files must be in hand to go through the review process. The ebook pre-order must also be live so it can be matched to the audio.

Amazon has also created a new marketing tool for authors, called creative graphic ads. These graphics are generated by Audible in different sizes, optimized for social media. To create them, they pull in your cover, title, and metadata. Authors can contact support to request them, although some are sent automatically. Traffic to product detail pages is "significantly higher" when using these graphics per the data Amazon is seeing.

Wall emphasized that audiobook advertising isn't the same as ebook. Audiobook fans are on-the-go multitaskers. The narrator's performance is front and center for them, so the voice authors select can make or break an audiobook. Length is also an important factor to subscribers because they want to maximize their credit. Six to 12 hours tends to be the sweet spot, and many listeners go above their purchase plan by 16-17 titles per year.

Some additional tips for success

- Add back matter links in ebooks for the audio and use bounty referral links for tracking and extra income.
- Leverage the 30-day free trial for readers who aren't audiobook fans. Authors still get paid if their readers do the trial with their title.
- Utilize the Audible Author Page, which can be used as the author's audio homepage for promotions of the full catalog.
- Aim for simultaneous publication, that way your promo dollar spend is for all three formats instead of just one.
- Add an audio header on your website, and be sure to include audio links to each book's page so the distance between promotion and purchase gets shorter.

Using [Amy Daws](#) as a best practice example for launching audiobooks, Wall discussed the importance of thinking about how an author plans to market their audiobook from day one. Daws brings readers behind the scenes by asking her narrators to do some clips while recording, which she can then use as promo later. She also does narrator reveals, because they're the star of the show for many audiobook fans. Authors can take advantage of the audition or review file clips in their promotions. For more marketing suggestions, check out the audiobook marketing roadmap on the Audible ACX YouTube Channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/AudibleACX>).

[Hannah Wall](#), Director of Marketing & Communication for ACX, connects authors with audiobook producers to create amazing listening experiences.



[Rochelle Paige](#) is the NINC Conference Sponsorship Chair and writes romance in a variety of sub-genres: contemporary, new adult, paranormal, and romantic suspense.

Harnessing Market Forces to Sell More Books

Presented by Alex Newton of K-Lytics

Reported by Pam McCutcheon

By using raw data scraped from Amazon, Alex Newton of k-lytics.com helps authors learn what categories on Amazon are underserved, which have strong sales (but maybe more competition), and what the hot niches are currently.

Of course, trends change over time, and the best time to get in on a trend is when the demand is high and supply is low. For example, in 2008, reverse harem novels had a lot of Google searches, but very few books were available on Amazon to purchase (an unserved interest). This category started taking off around 2011, became a high-profit niche in 2018 when a lot of new entrants jumped in on the trend, and now has reached maturation; the supply is meeting the demand.

If you're interested in learning what unserved interests exist now, check [Google Trends](https://www.google.com/trends/) to learn what people have been searching for over the past several years. Keep in mind that a category as a whole (such as paranormal romance) may be trending downward, but a subcategory within it (shifter romance) may be trending up. The next wave Newton sees trending is in Academy Romance.

In the latest market numbers, ebook sales for traditional publishers are down 3.8 percent, but indie indicators show an increase in ebook sales. This seems to be primarily based on the rapid growth of Kindle Unlimited (KU). The KU fund has increased 19 percent per year pretty consistently over the last several years, along with an overall growth in ebook sales. The share of KU books in the Kindle book supply is fairly constant at 30-35 percent and this figure represents 50 percent of the "earnings potential" inherent in sales ranks. In 2016, KU titles held 45 percent of the Top 100 rankings in the 30 main categories, but KU titles now hold 62 percent. The average payment is \$4.65 per 1,000 pages.

Newton also discussed the various sales formats (ebook, print, audio, etc.). The format share of Top 100 sellers in each category has changed. Ebooks have increased, but audio has increased quite a bit as well, which is leaving print a lonely third.

Eighty-seven percent of the money goes to the Top 50,000 books. Of the Top 100 rankings, indies comprise 30 percent, Amazon imprints 26 percent, the Big Five 21 percent, and other 21 percent. Of course, this varies by genre, with the top ranking books in romance, SF/F, YA, and mystery/suspense/thriller being mostly indie, while the nonfiction and biography/memoir top slots are held mostly by the Big Five traditional publishers.

Here are the percentages of books in the Kindle store Top 100 by genre:

- Literature/Fiction: 32 percent
- Romance: 18 percent

- Mystery/Thriller/Suspense: 17 percent
- Nonfiction: 7 percent
- SF/F: 6 percent
- Teen/YA: 3 percent
- Other: 3 percent

Newton urged attendees to learn from the Kindle All-Stars. Last month (August), there were 162 All-Star authors with a total of 3,700+ ebooks. To find out who they are and what they write, visit <https://www.amazon.com/b/?node=11085390011>. However, what goes up must eventually come down. He took a look at the Top 100 to see how they ranked over time. Though they initially start out between #1 and #100, after a month, these books generally rank in the 17,000s; they rank in the 39,000s between one and six months; 89,000s at two years; and 116,000s at three years. As for publisher types, he found that Amazon imprints have the most stamina, then indies, then the Big Five. KU titles have more stamina than non-KU ones.

He also took a look at the KU All-Star authors to see if they are one-hit wonders or power writers. Only 4 percent have only one book, 21 percent have two to 10 books, and 75 percent have 11 or more.

So, experience pays; 35 percent of the All-Star authors have had five or more years since their first publication.

Interestingly, the formats on the bestseller list vary widely, with romance being 96 percent ebook, and SF/F having only 61 percent ebook but a whopping 31 percent audio (the rest is print).

The number of Amazon Short Reads (up to 200 pages) is growing. Newton's statistics show that bigger is better—the longer the story, the higher the sales, the better the sales rank, and the higher the average review.

He also looked at how long people wait after the last book in a series is published to put out a box set. The answer: 22 percent do it within two months, 16 percent within two to four months, 11 percent within four to six months (meaning half publish within six months), and 17 percent wait a year or more.

The most popular box set size in the Top 500 is between three and five books, and the three-book box set earns the most royalties. As for those who received the biggest share of royalties in the Top 100 box sets, 33 percent offered an implicit discount of less than 20 percent (e.g., three books at \$2.99 in a \$9.99 box set), 17 percent offered a 40-49 percent discount (five books at \$3.99 in a \$9.99 box set) and 15 percent offered more than 90 percent discount (three or more books at \$2.99 offered at \$0.99).

The average prices of books in the Top 100 by category are trending up. Currently, the average book sales price is \$8.23 for biography/memoir, \$7.48 for nonfiction, \$5.74 for mystery/suspense/thriller, \$5.16 for teen/YA, \$4.96 for SF/F, \$4.96 for literature/fiction, and \$3.44 for romance.

The most *frequent* price point by genre plays out this way:

- Romance: \$3.99 (27 percent) and \$0.99 (26 percent)
- SF/F: \$4.99 (21 percent)
- Mystery/Thriller/Suspense: \$4.99 (16 percent) and \$1.99 (17 percent)

The *highest yielding* price points for non-KU books by genre:

- Romance: \$0.99 (25 percent) and \$3.99 (13 percent)
- SF/F: \$4.99 (28 percent)
- Mystery/Thriller/Suspense \$4.99 (about 30 percent)

Finally, he showed attendees how to learn how much competition you have from other Amazon advertisers targeting your keywords. First, type in the keyword and click on one of the books that show up. Once you're looking at the book's details, scroll down to the carousel titled "Sponsored products related to this item." Take the number of pages in the carousel, multiply by the number of items on each page, and you'll see how many people are competing for that keyword. Example: I put Police Procedural Mysteries in the Kindle Store search box, and clicked on *Dark Sacred Night*. Multiply 109 pages of sponsored items times six books per page, and that shows approximately 654 other people targeting that keyword phrase.

There are an estimated 5,891,257 English books in the Kindle store and 70,000 titles added each month, with a 14 percent growth each year. So how can you get ahead? Well, one way is to check out Newton's charts, which compare sales rank against competition to show hot cells and niches as well as competitive bestsellers, and also the nonsellers, slow cells and niches. Newton has reports for sale by subgenre, but also has some free ones you can check out at k-lytics.com/free-report.

Alex Newton is the founder of K-lytics.com, a leading provider of book market research. His research from analyzing millions of books has helped thousands of authors to spot opportunities, sell books in attractive market niches, and optimize their book marketing.



Pam McCutcheon is the author of romance novels and how-to books for writers under her own name, and the Demon Underground YA urban fantasy series under the name Parker Blue. A former engineer, Pam/Parker now works fulltime as a writer, editor, speaker, and in an assisted self-publishing business.

Analysis of a Thriller

Presented by Tom Colgan

Reported by Michele Dunaway

Tom Colgan began his session by defining terms. He said that when it comes to a thriller, there are all these questions. He said that he searched the term domestic thriller on Amazon and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* comes up as one of the results.

He then mentioned authors: Robert Harris, David Baldacci and Tom Clancy, and that any book that thrills is a thriller, and he personally doesn't think about it (definitions). He discussed Mark Greaney, who wrote with Tom Clancy but has eight books of his own, the ninth one in first person.

Let the authors do things, Colgan said. "Have brave writing." He also mentioned C.J. Box here as someone who will do anything to his characters.

A Question and Answer session then began and lasted the rest of the hour.

Q: How can you jump from romance to thrillers?

A: One way is domestic suspense. Colgan mentioned *The Widow* by Fiona Barton. Robert Ludlum is another example. The key is solid suspense in a domestic thriller and that it has series potential. He cautioned, "Don't ask me what I want. The market will have shifted after you write it."

Q: What wrecks a thriller?

A: Cheating the reader. You must come up with something. If they are boxed in with no way out, it better not be something simple.

Q: What seems to sell well and what's on the way out?

A: On the way out are unreliable narrators and things like the Da Vinci Code style books. However, he mentioned someone will come along and with the way they tell it, it will be big again. What is selling well is Lee Child and Jack Carr style books.

Q: What motivates you to take a chance on a midlist author?

A: A great story will motivate him. It's always about the writing and the story, and remember that thrillers are always plot driven.

Q: What about humor in thrillers?

A: Colgan brought up Robert Crais' Elvis Cole books. Colgan said if you can carry it off, it's great. (And yes, he knew the answer is a bit of a cop out.)

Q: Is the structure of a mystery or a thriller really different? Because many thrillers seem to use a mystery structure.

A: It's really hard to define a thriller and a mystery. A mystery is about who done it. A thriller is how it's done. Lee Child is clearly a thriller. It also depends on how heavy the mystery is. "We look at packaging." You don't want to sell it the wrong way.

Q: Promo to keep selling books? Series? Stand alone?

A: It depends. It usually comes with the idea. It won't hurt a bestselling author to do a stand-alone once a year.

Q: Is there room for strong female leads?

A: Yes, but it's tricky. He mentioned *Stumptown*, a TV series he's watching that's based on a series of graphic novels by the same name. (Reporter's insert for clarity: *Stumptown* features Dax Parios, whom Wikipedia describes as "a strong, assertive and sharp-witted army veteran who has a complicated love life, gambling debt and a brother to take care of in Portland, Oregon. Her military intelligence skills make her a great private investigator, but her brash, unapologetic style puts her in a league of her own, landing her in the firing line of hardcore criminals while not quite in alliance with the rules and objectives of the local police.")

Q: Action-oriented books versus psychological books?

A: Depends on the writer.

Q: How do we submit? (Someone mentions offering their firstborns here, and Colgan jokes he has enough of those).

A: He prefers it sent via an agent. He wants the full manuscript as it comes electronically. If not, he wants a cover letter/query to come first with the author background. Then he'll request the synopsis and rest. They're always looking for new material.

Q: Can you break out in the genre with no track record? What piques interest?

A: All the bestsellers started at some point. Airport stores are full of well-known authors like Clive Cussler, but the market has shifted. We (Berkley) talk all the time about discoverability. It comes down to the idea and the story. He says while he does "pooh-pooh" the definition of thriller, he does define it by being plot heavy. He's involved because of the plot. He has an editorial meeting every Tuesday at 11 a.m., his favorite hour of the week. The first thing that hooks them in the meeting is the title, but the first thing they talk about is the plot. If you go to writers conferences and he hears the story, that's what he wants to see. He then tells the audience of meeting a man in Albuquerque who tells him the story of his mother, who at age eight camped out in tents in the backyard with a friend. The sky becomes bright and there's a tremendous noise. Her mother comes out thinking it's the rapture. What the light and noise turned out to be was the Trinity test, but in 1945, no one had a reference. Now if we see bright

lights and hear a loud noise we think atom bomb. Colgan said that story has stuck with him, but the author took an amazing story and didn't write it.

Q: Agent says high concept hook must be there. Yes or no?

A: Colgan mentioned Robert Harris—beautifully written. High concept makes it easier to market and launch the book. One sentence. At his company there's the editorial meeting, they buy it, then three launch meetings (spring, summer, fall). Example: Selling *The Martian* was easy to explain: Group leaves Mars and guy they thought was dead wasn't and was left behind.

Q: There's a question about the brass door.

A: We have a lot of authors in that want more. It's heavily weighted to women, and to domestic suspense. He mentions Lisa Unger.

Q: How much does track record matter?

A: Previous sales do matter. Debut thrillers start off fresh. "We will make the case. This will break out." While low previous sales make it harder, they've done it. "It's definitely difficult when you had sales and things decline. That's hard, but not impossible, but harder."

Q: How about indie sales?

A: They do carry weight. The question asked is what price point? 30,000 at \$4.99 weights better than 30,000 at \$.99. He mentions Grace Draven who has moved from indie to traditional.

Q: How do geographical thrillers fare?

A: It depends on what you're writing. But American protagonists are a help.

Q: What are mistakes indie suspense/thriller make when selling on Amazon?

A: Colgan said he'll answer this and then there will be 1,500 examples of how he's wrong, but not spending money on the cover is the biggest mistake. It's the first thing people see, but the cover doesn't sell the book. The cover gets you to stop. It's the copy that sells the book. A huge mistake is not writing good copy. It's not just a plot summary. Don't get too much plot/synopsis. Make it captivating. Make it SEO. Copy is hard to write. Indies should hire a freelancer. Even if you are a good writer, you may not be a good copy writer.

Q: What problems in manuscripts do you see?

A: He didn't want to be too low level, but the number one thing he sees is the info dump. Number two is characters saying things like "As you know we got here because..." Another thing is that secondary characters aren't developed, there's no real sense of place and dialogue is weak. Info dumping is especially bad in sci fi.

Q: Colgan is asked to expand on secondary characters and sense of place.

A: Tons of energy go into the protagonist, but everyone else is a shadow. Sense of place means a lack of description. Was the chair hard? The air fetid? Where were they? Many times

you can't tell. Use snappy dialogue. Read it aloud. No real person uses the word foiled unless they are cooking chicken. Bond villains aren't real people—your characters shouldn't sound like Bond villains.

Q: How much swearing is allowed in dialogue?

A: If I point it out, there's too much. Only thing that makes me a better editor than author is that I'm a step back from it. Very rarely is there too much swearing.

Q: Opinion of Wattpad and finding authors from there.

A: He has no real opinion. He's not looking for writers there.

Q: Is there a shift from international suspense to domestic (Paula Hawkins, Gillian Flynn)?

A: Some big book comes along that really changes the market. We do respond to that and then we oversell it, which then ends the trend. At the same time we do it, we do sell other authors.

Q: Clarifying that unreliable narrators are out.

A: Yes. We think they're done. Then again, a year or two they might be right back.

Q: How about medical thrillers?

A: Not a lot of those since Robin Cook. Those have to be a good author. The author's background being in the field may help. The market for med thrillers (or any slow market) we ask ourselves do we love this book enough that we could push it?

Q: How do you know something is overdone?

A: Sales have slacked off. We've talked to accounts. We also have focus groups. Ultimately, though, it's an editorial decision. We look to target those people who will buy the book.

Q: Do you accept submissions from indies? Do you go after them?

A: He said they will go after indies, especially as junior people build their list. It's more category driven. However, most indies aren't interested in being trad anymore. Independent publishing has forced them (Berkley) to bring the author in more. Much more open to author opinion on cover, etc. Electronic has helped make it easier to change things like the cover. Editors want to be responsive.

Q: Characteristics of good thrillers.

A: Compulsive readability that makes you miss your subway stop. He said this happened once when he was reading *The Last Policeman* (a mystery marketed as a thriller). What causes this compulsive readability? It's not always action.

Q: Someone asked about the high concept of Mark Greaney and Gray Man.

A: Gray Man is the world's greatest assassin but he has a conscience. Mark is daring in how

he writes his character—he's a CIA agent whose government betrayed him and he has an execution order out on him. The book subverts your expectations.

Q: What about antiheroes?

A: Gray Man is one. However, be careful. Too much of antihero—not redeeming. Can't warm up to the hero. There must be a core. Jack Reacher is used as an example of having a core. Jack Reacher kills scores of people but he stands up for the downtrodden.

Session ends.

Tom Colgan is the vice president, editorial director at Berkley. He has worked with such bestselling authors as Tom Clancy, W.E.B. Griffin, Mark Greaney, and Janet Evanovich.



Michele Dunaway is your Nink Editor.

NINC-ovators Panel

Presented by M.L. Buchman, Sarra Cannon, Wayne Stinnett, and Yumoyori Wilson

Reported by: Cidney Swanson

What do you get when you bring four bestselling authors to Ninc and put them on a panel? NINC-ovators! M.L. Buchman, Sarra Cannon, Wayne Stinnett, and Yumoyori Wilson provided insights into the out-of-the-box thinking that has allowed them to enjoy sales and income from unusual areas.

[M.L. Buchman](#) writes romantic suspense, thrillers, and science fiction, although his primary genre is romance. Several years back, he challenged himself to publish one short story (5,000 words to 20,000 words) a month, making them available to readers on his blog. When initial response was good, Buchman made this a regular habit. He sells the ebook short fiction for \$2.99. He has created a Patreon subscription as well, which gives readers the chance to get the stories one week early, while also saving a dollar off the full \$2.99 price.

Buchman's short works of fiction are purposefully set within the worlds of existing novels, which means he has a ready audience built in. Buchman makes sure to release print and audiobook versions of the work at the same time the ebook comes out, and highly recommends doing this, even though it means planning ahead since it can take three weeks for audiobooks to publish and go live. With BookFunnel's recent addition of the delivery of short audio works, Buchman will be offering delivery to his listeners via BookFunnel. At the end of the work, he provides an excerpt from a novel set in the same world, giving readers somewhere to go and make another purchase.

The response to his short fiction has been overwhelmingly positive, providing him with a valuable revenue stream in all three formats.

[Sarra Cannon](#) writes young adult and new adult fantasy and has sold over 750,000 copies of her books since 2011. In addition to her work as an author, she established a YouTube channel for authors called [Heart Breathings](#), which now brings in substantial income. Her channel has 20,000 viewers, which has led to sponsors contacting Cannon and asking her to evaluate products such as planners online.

On her Heart Breathings channel, she speaks to authors about productivity and use of time. It took her six months to hit 1,000 followers and 240K watched minutes (two metrics YouTube tracks prior to offering monetization opportunities), and as soon as she was eligible to monetize her channel, she said yes. Initially, she used her affiliate income to purchase things such as a better audio mic, better ring light, and to hire out her branding, but now it provides steady and reliable income. Through her channel, she has launched two courses for authors (HB90 Bootcamp and Publish and Thrive) as well as producing a planner for sale. Between her planner and the courses, she makes a low 6-figures income, separate from her income as a novelist.

[Wayne Stinnett](#) (2019 NINC president), after serving in the Marines and driving trucks, has been publishing his Caribbean-set thrillers since 2013. Stinnett is a firm believer in planning, and he preschedules his editor a year at a time. He notes that creative types sometimes resist planning, but they shouldn't. His success is directly attributable to his planning and meeting of deadlines.

Because of the setting of his fiction as well as a long history with watercraft, Stinnett has turned to several creative avenues for advertising his books and making additional income from book-related items. Stinnett's writing-adjacent projects include a Ship Store on his website where he sells shirts and coffee mugs alongside his books. He outsources the shirt and mug printing and fulfillment with [Woo Commerce](#), using [Print Aura](#) for tees, mugs, totes, pillowcases, or anything else he wants to print. He sets up the pricing so that every item in his store has a \$2 profit margin. This way he can quickly estimate how many items he has sold in any given month.

In addition, Stinnett advertises where his readers and listeners (fans of Caribbean adventure fiction) are likely to hang out, utilizing Attitudes and Latitudes as well as placing book ads on the app [Pirate Radio](#).

[Yumoyori Wilson](#) is a former pediatric and geriatric nurse who writes urban fantasy as Yumoyori Wilson and young adult as Avery Song. She used to read during night shifts and had once written fan fiction while in high school. In 2017 she decided to do some writing for fun. Wilson initially hoped to earn \$100-\$400 a month, but by following the coaching of an author she connected with, she was able to make \$8,000 her first month, doubling that soon after. She quit her nursing job to write full time in January 2018 and has released over 30 titles. She hires out her advertising due to her busy writing schedule.

Following these summaries of their "Ninc-ovations," the panelists were asked to share any hacks or ideas they had for the coming year. Cannon's biggest advice is to balance your career. For example, she balances her author work and fiction work by keeping to a schedule of writing fiction from 9 a.m. to noon. From 1-3 p.m., she does work related to her YouTube channel. She is a fan of batching, or doing similar tasks all at the same time. Thus she will record four videos one after the other, changing her hair and tops to keep it fresh. During the week the video is released, she does the editing and finalizing of the video.

Buchman mentioned that [BookFunnel](#) will distribute audiobooks up to two hours in length, which is a sample or a short story. For those interested in producing works of short fiction, he recommends producing short story collections of five stories which are put into a bundle after having been released singly. For next year, he plans to go into translation.

Cannon has a goal of building a community. She described "Blue Ocean" strategy, explaining that if the water is shark infested, there will be blood in the water, meaning that if you don't feel you can compete with sharks, you can instead find your own blue ocean where you can connect with a community. She started doing weekly Facebook Live sessions, and over time the number of people who showed up jumped significantly. She now enjoys 3,000-5,000 views in the week following her Facebook Live, and 700-800 comments. She recommends hosting these on your author Facebook page and not in your group to increase the visibility. She does promote the event on both locations, however. Additionally, she notifies her fans via her

newsletter and on Facebook. Thirty minutes before going live, she posts a short video inviting fans to join her in 30 minutes. After, she shares the video to the group as well as downloading it in order to put it up on YouTube. IGTV is another option she plans to use this coming year.

Stinnett recommends authors have a look at his motivational book *Blue Collar to No Collar*, which he hopes will get people to try doing the best they can. His plans for the coming year include beginning to publish other authors' books as well as his own. Stinnett also advocates strongly for audiobooks, for those authors who haven't already begun publishing audiobook versions of their titles. In his case, his audiobooks outsell his paper copies 10 to one. He believes audio is the future; for commuters and those who drive for a living, they can easily listen to a book a day.



Cidney Swanson is an award-winning author of young adult sci-fi and fantasy. *Saving Mars* was named to Kirkus Reviews Best of 2012 and was an honor book for the SCBWI Spark Award 2014. A confessed *Star Trek* and Shakespeare geek, Cidney lives in Eugene, Oregon with her husband, kids, cats, and entirely too much rain.

Creating Large Print Books in Vellum

Presented by Brad West and Brad Endelman

Reported by Jennifer Stevenson

Topics covered at this presentation by the creators of [Vellum](#) included large print, Kindle generation, a sneak peek at new features, and Q&A.

How and why large print?

Ask your friends, “How many of you change font display to larger than smaller?” Almost all of them do. Those people are the market for large print. As big as this audience, it’s underserved. Look at how few large print books there are in bookstore or library. This is a great reason to have print-on-demand.

Large print titles are quick, inexpensive to add, and quick to set up. There are some added expenses, mostly for a larger cover. If you plan for it, you can get your cover creator to do your larger cover at the same time as your regular-size cover.

Joanna Penn/Penny Appleton did some older-audience books with her mother, and tested large print. Her numbers showed 12 percent paperback sales, 52 percent ebook sales, and 36 percent large print book sales.

What makes a book large print?

West showed the audience images of a standard 5.25x8-inch paperback and a large-print paperback. Ordinary font sizes range from 10pt to 11pt. Large print is 16pt font. The page size is about 15-20 percent bigger. Without larger format trim, the larger print looks funny. You want to keep the page count from growing. The page count already goes up when you go into large print. Larger page size helps reduce larger page count. West suggests you use a very faintly slimmer margin on the outside and slightly tighter line spacing when you scale up the font. These strategies keep the page count down.

Changes required for large print

Things you’ll find changing with a large print format include font size, headings, title page, and page numbers; page size, in order to make room for larger text; scaled down margins, which can get more text on a page; and slightly tighter line spacing.

How do you make these changes to your existing regular print book?

You click on “large print,” and Vellum handles it all for you.

Go to **Print Settings**. At the top of your screen are popular trim sizes. Suppose your default is 5.25x8 inches. Under that is a **More Options** button, which gives you a full set of trim sizes. At the bottom is a row of large print options, such as 5.5x8.5, 6.9, and 6.14x9.21 inches. The last size listed is the most economical.

West gave a demonstration of formatting a large-print book. The book was loaded in Vellum. He chose File: Print: select Large Print. Done.

You can make changes beyond this point. For a longer book, you may remove some back matter (such as an excerpt) to keep the page length down.

Printing costs example:

<u>Size</u>	<u>Length</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>List Price</u>
5.25x8	262 pages	\$3.99	\$6.66
Large print	380 pages	\$5.41	\$9.00

Be aware that your large print customers are used to paying more.

Cover

You'll probably have to go back to your cover designer and ask for a variation. Indicate in the artwork that it's a large-print edition. For example, ask them to add a sticker toward the top of the cover design.

Categories are different

KDP gives you a dedicated checkbox for large print. This still allows you two categories for the actual genre. Ingram Spark doesn't have this checkbox. You may have to put it in the subtitle for Ingram Spark.

The most common question we get is about links. You can use in-store links such as "Please leave a review."

Q: Do you have a button to exclude the sample chapter from the print edition?

A: Yes.

Kindle Generation

Vellum has been making some changes to Kindle generation. This month, in anticipation of some changes to your Mac, specifically concerning macOS Catalina and its relationship to the flow of epub to KindleGen to mobi formats. Be aware that KindleGen is not optimized for your Mac and needs to be updated. Warning: the majority of our users keep up to date with Mac OS, so we needed to keep everybody up to date on this [Catalina].

Up until last month, Vellum 2.5 always made a Kindle.mobi file. A few weeks ago we released Vellum 2.6, for generating a Kindle.epub file. You can now upload the Kindle.epub file to KDP. The feedback we received was that you will still need a mobi file for ARCs. You can still upload it [the epub]. It's more time consuming, but it'll work. Next week, Vellum 2.6.2 will again generate mobi files.

You should install Kindle Previewer, which is a desktop application from Amazon that updates every two months. This is a huge app. Don't try to download in a hotel room. It is the best way to preview your Kindle book. This is also the only way to view it with enhanced typesetting. Definitely you'll need this to generate mobi files in Vellum 2.6.2.

Q&A

Q: How do we get Kindle Previewer?

A: Vellum will tell you to download it, will give you a link, and will wait while you download and install it.

Q: Is the problem that we won't upload mobis anymore?

A: No, that's not the problem. The tool Vellum has used has not been updated. The problem is only with ARCs so we are addressing it in Vellum 2.6.2.

Q: Has delivery cost gone up?

A: No. It's a mobi file inside an epub file. It should be the same cost.

Q: With 2.6.2, will we have both epub and mobi files?

A: No, we'll have a switch. You can have a mobi file (default) or you can switch to epub.

Q: Most of us use BookFunnel. That system there will still work to convert to ARCs?

A: Yes. But we still strongly recommend you use Kindle Previewer to check how your book will look.

Q: Is there a difference between Kindle Previewer with Vellum on your desktop and looking at the book online?

A: It's about the enhanced typesetting tech, which only displays when the book is delivered to readers.

Q: Once 2.6.2 is updated...

A: If you were on vacation all of September and came back, you wouldn't notice a difference. The same system will still work in older versions of macOS, but we wanted something that would work with the new version.

Sneak peek at new Vellum features

Brad Endelman talked about these features: Full Page Image, for images that occupy a full page of the book.

The most popular use is title pages. Users asked for a title page font to match the cover image font. In our current version, the image only reaches the margins of the text space. It's not full bleed. In the new release, you can now add an image on the title page with the sexy new font to match the cover font, and which does full bleed. This feature is called Full Bleed and Full Page Image. We haven't worked out the interface/menus to create that.

In order to get full bleed on the pages, you want to make sure that when the pages are cut, the image extends all the way to the edges. So you must provide an image that is larger than the page size, so that when the pages are cut, some of the image will be shaved off.

Thus, Vellum has to increase the page size of your whole book. This means that when you turn on full bleed for an image, it adds to the size of your book page.

When you turn on Vellum you choose “bleed” to make sure that’s taken into account.

You can’t do this on chapter heading pages. Just for the full page. You could put full pages in a box set for the title pages of each volume within the box set. The chapter heading pages “flow.”

Q: Are you going to be able to adjust the size of the header on large-print editions?

A: Do you mean larger than the default?

Q: Yes.

A: We’ll put it in the wish list.

Q: Do I understand that when you click “full bleed,” it expands the white space but only “behind the curtain?” It doesn’t change the specs you selected?

A: Yes, it’s larger only on the PDF. But that’s trimmed back. It doesn’t change the specs of the book size you chose.

Q: Reason I asked about the bleed—I get comic book pages inserted into the books I create. I want to know if my comic artist needs to resize her art to fit.

A: No need to resize. You may want to, but...

Q: Make sure what size she works to when she submits.

A: Yes.

Q: When do we get a Windows version?

A: You can use Vellum on “MacInCloud.” We aren’t affiliated with them, but they allow you to access a virtual Mac on your PC. Many users use it for Vellum. Vellum is already installed on any MacInCloud service you rent. We don’t recommend using MacInCloud. Some people are fine with it, some can’t use it at all. The person who has written the most about it is Paul Teague. He shows how to generate a book on MacInCloud and view the results on PC, and so forth. Vellum is installed on those servers; you can try it for free. MacInCloud is inexpensive when rented by the hour. The link is: <https://www.macincloud.com/>. Paul Teague link: <https://paulteague.com/how-to-use-vellum-on-a-pc/>.

Q: What is the cheapest Mac hardware I need to buy to run Vellum?

A: Go on our [purchasing page](#), or email us. Go to compatibility page for the current version to see which one to get, to make sure it’ll last you a while. That page lists the Mac models and notes which ones and which years are going to be optimal. MacBook Air is a nice machine that’s portable. Older models not too expensive. MacMini with a keyboard switcher is popular. There are no additional requirements beyond being able to run the current version of macOS.

Q: Are there any deals right now for NINC members?

A: No, there are no deals right now.

***Brad West** and **Brad Endelman** are the creators of Vellum, which has been used by thousands of authors to create beautiful books.*



*[Jennifer Stevenson](#) is the author of five funny series: *Liars in Love*, *Backstage Boys*, *Hinky Chicago*, *Slacker Demons*, and *Coed Demon Sluts*.*

Writing the Breakout Novel

Presented by Tom Colgan, Danielle Marshall, & Liz Pelletier

Reported by Nicole Evelina

This panel of editors discussed in a Q&A format what a breakout novel is and how to write one.

Q. Please tell us a little about yourself and some of the breakout novels you've represented.

Danielle Marshall: I'm with Lake Union, an imprint of Amazon Publishing. Before I was with Amazon, at Simon and Schuster I edited *The Secret*, which became a part of the cultural zeitgeist. At Lake Union my biggest success has been *Beneath a Scarlet Sky*, which appeals to a wide variety of breakout audiences and book clubs, which are great for word of mouth.

Liz Pelletier: I'm the co-founder and publisher at Entangled. One of the breakouts I've worked with is the Lux series by Jennifer Armentrout. Our mass market paperback line has also featured many breakouts. All have been Top 10.

Tom Colgan: I'm the editorial director at Berkley. Our latest breakout was *Next Year in Havanna* by Chanel Cleeton, who changed directions from romance to women's fiction.

Q. What are some strategies, tips, and techniques you have for authors on writing a breakout novel?

Marshall: Spend time on the content and write a book from the heart that people will find memorable and moving. Focus on quality over quantity. Don't write to market because by the time you finish the book and it gets published, the trend will be over.

Pelletier: I totally agree. That's the most important thing. Packaging is second most important. You need to have a fresh beginning or meet cute that you can put in the packaging, a story that will make you laugh and cry, and an ending that is memorable, that you can't stop thinking about. Even a mediocre book with the right ending can become a bestseller.

I will make one exception to writing to market: a self-published author can do that because they can produce their books much faster.

Colgan: You can't fake it and write to trend. You have to love your story and feel it from your heart. If you write something that speaks to you, it will speak to the reader.

Q. What is the magic to a book being a breakout novel?

Marshall: It's the type of book that when I'm not reading it, I'm wishing I was or after it is over I have to tell everyone about it. However, when I was a book buyer, there were slow-burning back list bestsellers that became that way from word of mouth, so it can go both ways.

Pelletier: If you can make us stop answering email and texts or be anxious to get out of a meeting to get back to it, you've got a breakout. When I'm editing one, I know when I find myself having gone 50 pages without actually editing because I'm so busy reading. You know it when you read it and you can't put it down.

Colgan: It can be something you wouldn't normally read but you are so compelled to read it that you have to.

Q. Okay, so that is the reaction we want to achieve. What do we need to put in the book to give you that reaction?

Marshall: Listen to yourself, write what you are passionate about. Then when you show it to your beta readers/critique group, listen to their feedback. Go back deep inside and ask yourself which pieces of feedback resonate with you and are consistent from person to person. Those are the ones you should definitely think through. Also, understand who your audience is. What are the other two books your readers are going to buy? That will help you refine what you put on the page. Know what their hallmarks of really great fiction are.

Pelletier: A great story is written like you were telling it to me. It will have your natural voice and cadence to it. If I was going to tell it to my significant other at the end of the day, would they want to hear it? How would you tell it? Simple is better. Think about that one story you always tell at a cocktail party. When you're telling it you gauge the reaction of your audience and you edit it or add hyperbole next time to garner a better reaction. Do the same thing with your book.

Colgan: Voice, plot, and character. Liz said it all.

Q. How do authors go from midlist to bestseller? Can you give us an example of someone you successfully broke out?

Colgan: [Mark Greaney](#). He's a hard worker, now No. 5 *New York Times* bestseller and a home-grown Berkley success story. But he was a build over time.

Pelletier: We went from publishing 50 books a month to 10-12. My entire list is a collaborative project. For my midlist authors, we look at why they didn't break out and I give them advice on how to improve, such as changing their voice, genre, etc.

One breakout success story is [Avery Flynn](#). She was with us (with another editor, not me) and wasn't going to renew her contract with Entangled. I looked at her books and pointed out one thing she could improve: she was writing all her heroines just like herself: strong, always having the answers, beautiful, and opinionated. That's not what her readers want. They want someone relatable. I asked her to stick with us for one more book, on the condition that she does the book my way. We came up with an idea together and it broke her out.

Marshall: You need the right editor and business partners who understand you because what you think you are good at may not be what you are really good at. Sometimes you need to pivot in content in order to break out. For example, [Mark Sullivan](#), who wrote the historical fiction hit *Beneath the Scarlet Sky*, had written thrillers and had written with James Patterson in the past but wanted to do something different. When I read *Beneath the Scarlet Sky* I was haunted by it, but I really didn't want to take on the work to change his genre because it is hard. But we did.

Also, Tom is right. Immediate success isn't the only way to break out. It could come by building your audience over time and perfecting your craft.

Q. What genres/categories are poised to foster the next breakout book?

Pelletier: All of them. One we think will do it is a YA that releases next year titled *Crave* by [Tracy Wolff](#). A lot of YA books have been failing because the heroines were older women in feminist rage because the authors were tired of the hero rescuing the heroine. That's not what your average YA reader wants, so we gave them what they are asking for. We pitched the book just based on cover and even Netflix was interested before the book was written.

Marshall: Uplift, which is what I call feel-good books that give you a ray of joy and self-discovery because we are living in a dark, divisive world.

Colgan: All categories. The whole nature of a breakout book is that it comes from nowhere; it's a surprise.

Q. Who should midlist authors who want to break out talk to about what to do to break out?

Colgan: Start with your agent. They are who is responsible for the direction your career is taking.

Pelletier: Not your readers. They are already your fans. Also, don't rely on your beta readers. They might be guiding you the wrong way. Keep them dissatisfied and wanting.

Talk to your agent if they are editorially minded or have a lot of experience with books of your type. Your editor can also give you great feedback because they are motivated by money. Do they think they can break you out with this and why?

Marshall: I know someone is going to ask, "what if you don't have an agent or editor?" so I'm going to address that. You have a valuable resource in your writing community, the writers whom you trust. Reach out. So many are willing to help and give you honest feedback.

Questions from the audience

Q. You mentioned growing an author book over book. How do you choose with whom to do that? It seems to me that today publishers are willing to dump you faster if you don't hit it out of the park rather than give you a chance to grow.

Colgan: What is your definition of "hitting it out of the park?" Your numbers might be only okay or you may be getting great reviews without the sales and we still keep you on. Sometimes it is editor enthusiasm for the author. Sometimes we can collaborate with the author to find bigger ideas.

Pelletier: This could be answered a number of ways depending on circumstance. Sometimes it depends on what the publishing strategy was to begin with. Some authors need a large backlist. Sometimes the author isn't professional so they are let go. In other cases your publisher knew you were going to be someone to grow or they thought you would break out and you didn't. Or maybe you have an editing weakness that you didn't address.

One thing you can do before you sign your contract is ask your editor, "Am I an author to grow or a tent pole to breakout?" Your agent can tell you what the size of your advance means and what happens if you don't sell enough.

Marshall: For every author who is standing out front, there are 100 to take their place. I don't even talk to an author before I feel like I could work with them for five books. Sometimes I

have to cut people loose after two because we don't work well together. Writing is not a stable career. It has to be something you do because you love it. When you find the right story, you will know it. There are a lot of contributing pieces of data that determine whether or not we move forward with an author.

Q. How much does previous publication history affect whether or not you move forward with an author?

Colgan: With a medium or not so great track record, I ask myself, "How good is the book? Did they finally find the right story to tell?" It's really hard when you had high expectations for the first book and it didn't do well. That is hard to come back from.

Marshall: I look at all kinds of things. Sometimes a low sales track can be explained by packaging or something else. I would read the other books and try to figure out what didn't make them work. Was it marketing? I'm looking at all the factors. If you have five out of six things I'm looking for, your book content is most important.

Pelletier: If a track is soft, it will be hard to get a mass market paperback, but digital would be a good option. I love an author who hasn't broken out. We can figure why out together. Sometimes that means using a pen name or moving to a different format or genre. The key is to have a really good story to tell. For self-published authors, a lot of times there is not enough marketing budget.

Q. You are using the terms "bestseller" and "soft." How do you define those?

Colgan: It depends on the book and the expectations. There is no specific number. We look at all the factors to determine the definition for that particular book.

Pelletier: Soft generally means bad sales. It depends on what your print run was and how many returns you had. You can also look at it in relation to other authors' sales, especially if you are self-published. Each book is like starting a new business. In business the way to success is removing friction in the marketplace. You have to have a story or a way to get around your weaknesses.

Marshall: For me it is all about expectations. We look at first-year sales. Soft could mean multiple books with us and declining sales. There are no magic numbers of reviews and sales to be a bestseller or have soft sales. The only magic is the story you wrote and our ability to partner with you and sell it.

Q. What is your best advice to authors who want to break out?

Colgan: Know what you want to write, be familiar with the market, and be brave about the way you want to do it.

Pelletier: Do your research and learn your craft. In this saturated market spend 35-40 percent of your time planning the book. Look on KU. How many books sound just like yours? How will you position it so it doesn't feel like the others, but is familiar enough that readers can relate to it? Why are people going to read it?

Marshall: You must work on your craft. That is the only way you can become a breakout. Don't succumb to fear or anger, otherwise it will show up on the page. Write from an open-hearted, authentic place.



Nicole Evelina is a USA Today bestselling author of historical fiction, non-fiction, and women's fiction. She loved her second NINC conference and can't wait for next year!

Building Your Team: Freelancer Panel

Presented by Mel Jolly, Marsha Zinberg, Amy Atwell, Kate Tilton, & Diane Garland

Reported by Michele Dunaway

Mel Jolly moderated the workshop. After bios, she asked the panel what each person was doing now in terms of their freelancing.

Marsha Zinberg: I've been consulting and editing the last five to six years. My company is [The Write Touch](#). When I left Harlequin, the publishing landscape was changing. Authors I knew were needing services in order to become hybrid. I enjoyed consulting, but expanded as authors needed text refreshers as they received books back from 25 years ago that needed to be updated. I have a background in continuity, so a lot of these strengths I brought with me.

Amy Atwell: I started [Author EMS](#) in 2011. Many authors didn't understand how to create the functionality of epub and I was talking to people who wanted to go after Apple but needed to get to Apple via Macbook. Now we focus on the print interior and ebook formatting. I do a lot of hand touching. We don't want problems with the file to get in the way of the reader experience. I have a background in retail and in uploading and metadata. I send my clients all sorts of changes and updates in categories and library sales processes. In 2020 I will expand into coaching and online.

Kate Tilton: I started [Kate Tilton's Author Services](#) in 2010. I focus on consulting work. I have two types: onetime consultations and monthly consultations. The onetime can be as simple as onetime coaching while the monthly means I work with authors throughout their process.

Diane Garland: I came from a reader background and developed a niche. I deconstruct your book. I break down every fact, detail, piece, character building, and rules of world building. If I deconstruct the next book in your series, I look for continuity. I'm the last person to see it compared to the rest of the series. I've got a special education background, which required me to break things down and be analytical. I've been doing my company [Your WorldKeeper](#) for four years.

Mel Jolly: I began in 2009. I started as an assistant, and now I am a [coach and consultant](#). I look at the big picture and now I teach courses.

Here Jolly surveyed the room as to how many assistants were in the room and how many authors. The ratio was about 2/3 authors and 1/3 assistants.

Q: Audience question for Garland about her work.

Garland: I do series bibles. I do all the continuity. I do bibles both for series and for standalone. The standalone is done by my authors in case they want to write a sequel, they don't have to go back and look through things.

Q: Question regarding service/price ranges.

Tilton: I have a consulting rate for monthly and a rate for the onetime services I offer. What you pay for depends on the experience of the freelancer you are hiring. More experience equals more money you will pay.

Zinberg: One of the biggest challenges of freelancers is to figure out pricing. It's done by what you want. For example, for a developmental edit for a novella up to 30,000 words could be X price, while a novel up to 65,000 words could be another price. All categories of edits are broken into word count/length. I also have an hourly rate for things that don't quite fit. I'm an old-school editor. I do consulting on every part of the book. I don't do packaging or marketing.

Q: I've noticed that freelancers are very specialized. You may go to five or six agencies to get editing and marketing, etc. Are there agencies that have all of the services?

Jolly: Tricky question. You pay for convenience of not going and finding someone. We will refer to others. We have a freelancers Facebook group.

Atwell: Marie Force has ebook formatting fairies [<https://marieforce.com/fairies/services/>] and they do cover design referrals. [The Killion Group](#) is another who does cover design and formatting. I'd ask yourself what tasks you want to do and what you are good at. Where are you on the control spectrum? It's your product, your brand. I have no background in cover design or web. Freelancers are honest about what they do.

Tilton: Most service providers will tell you on their site what they do. You can email them and they will let you know if they can help. If not, referrals are a huge part of our business.

Q: What do you call what a traditional main editor does? Like cut here or tighten there?

Zinberg: This is a developmental edit. You used to get a revision letter in traditional publishing, so a freelancer will do similar. However, be careful as the terms change, for instance from North American and England. Clarify what they mean. For instance, a line edit in North America is called a copy edit in England.

Q: What do clients do that frustrate you? What is your biggest frustration?

Zinberg: I schedule an author and they don't deliver when they say they will.

Atwell: I must have a specific deadline or you fall to the bottom of the priority list. So be sure to have a deadline.

Tilton: Communication is a huge thing. Listen. We do our best work when you talk about things. Listen to the advice we give, or why are you hiring us?

Garland: Scheduling. Indie file for me arrives like after final edit. To receive your files and get "I need this tomorrow," or I send comments to an author asking for clarification and I don't hear back. Or they don't respond until the next book. Respond back.

Jolly: When people don't pay me. I do the work and bill. It may feel like a lot of money going out for the client, but I also need to pay my mortgage.

Jolly here asked a question of the panel: *What are warning signs that you may not be a good fit for a client or that a client won't be a good fit for you? Or tips for clients to know how to work with you and you them?*

Jolly: I do different payment structures. My courses you pay upfront. For clients I will bill after, but for projects I will bill 50 percent up front in advance. As to advice to authors, ask your author friends, "Is this normal?" Don't put too much down.

Zinberg: Communication is key. Even if we start by email, I will phone. I ask for a deposit upfront to hold your place in line. I don't do horror. Not that there's anything wrong with it; it's just not for me. I want material I enjoy and have expertise in. Not to say I won't take a project out of my wheelhouse if it's interesting.

She emphasized again that you get what you pay for and that edits take time. She makes at least two passes.

Atwell: If freelancers miss a deadline. I work with formatting, so that arrives after edits and cover. When I get it last minute it's because someone dropped the ball along the line.

Atwell then told a story of someone she knew who worked with a freelancer, but the freelancer kept putting the work off. She offered the following advice:

Atwell: When you are emailing with the person, do not accept their apology and say that's okay. This person had paid via PayPal, and PayPal went through all the email correspondence and this showed it was okay that the service hadn't been delivered. It was finally her credit card that got the charge removed for the work not being done. But she lost a good six months trying to get it resolved. Have awareness. You are paying them. Stand your ground for your rights. Know your refund policy. My guarantee is my files will upload on all major platforms.

Tilton: Make sure you get along.

Garland: Agree ahead of time what you expect. I go into detail. I will ask you what you want me to focus on, beyond what I will do. Let me have what I need to do upfront. You may say one thing and the freelancer thinks another. Understand what they are talking about so that it's not a vocabulary error.

Q: What are common things you help the author with?

Jolly: Newsletters. One of the most important things you can do. Also website updates. It's like a red sock in white laundry. You dread it. These are things you are afraid of. You can take energy to power through it or you can let it go and hire someone.

(At this point, one of Jolly's clients speaks up and says she sees Jolly as a boss. She helps with business plan and big picture.)

Jolly: I have gone into career coaching. I can see from an eagle's eye. Coaching/counseling—not a doer of things—but we put a plan together. Sometimes authors are overwhelmed and it's hard to make a plan. And it sucks energy. What are you going to put the energy toward? I assume at one point you liked writing.

Q: Question on documents/contracts used.

Jolly: Hiring tip: I do project-based contracts. Ongoing contracts with ongoing clients. Protects the client and me.

Zinberg: I offer a letter of agreement (one page) that sets out due dates, etc. Most clients are trusting and sometimes it's verbal. The deposit is good faith. I don't think I've ever been late with delivery.

Atwell: I have terms of service on my website. General terms of use. If I need, for instance, your log ins (like to KDP), I send an email addendum. I'm an agent of your publishing company and I represent you. I also have a price list on my web.

Tilton: This can vary depending on the service provider and basics agreement. What they offer/want.

Garland: I'm trusting. Deposit and balance afterward.

Q: Biggest punctuation/plot pet peeves?

Zinberg: How much time do we have? [Laughter.] My job is also to fix those. But there seems to be a trend not to use commas. I'm a big believer in proper punctuation. I want the reader to instantly understand your book. I use The Chicago Manual of Style.

Atwell: Use spell check.

Jolly ended the presentation by saying that if you have questions, "Contact us."



Michele Dunaway is your Nink editor. She loved seeing all of you at the conference.

Reach More Readers by Publishing with Barnes & Noble Press

Presented by: Julie Braunschweiger, Susan McCulloch, & Albert Wu

Reported by: Cidney Swanson

Julie Braunschweiger, Susan McCulloch, and Albert Wu set an upbeat tone at the beginning of their presentation by describing how thrilled they are with the new ownership of Barnes & Noble. James Daunt, the new CEO, is a dyed-in-the-wool book lover.

Barnes & Noble Press's goal is for its platform to be super simple for authors publishing in both paper and ebook formats. Paper is a growth sector for the company. The platform for creating paper books is fast and easy to use, in part because of the feedback provided by authors. The trio noted they genuinely appreciate getting feedback. The team encouraged authors who are nervous about creating paper versions of their ebooks to start out by creating a bound family project, pointing out that the holiday season is a great opportunity for these kinds of "vanity" projects.

How to market your book to B&N Readers

McCulloch directly addressed the fact that there is some sentiment that Nook is dead or dying. She agrees that the market has shrunk and the ownership has changed. However, even though they have been quiet recently, the company is still putting out new devices and great reading apps which can be used even without a Nook reader. The reading app now syncs up personal libraries across devices. McCulloch suggested that authors encourage readers to download the apps, offering some possible wording: "Download the Barnes & Noble Nook app so that your books are with you all the time, right where you left off!"

The team emphasized that by going direct to the new and improved Barnes & Noble Press platform, your royalty rate will be the highest at 65 percent for books priced \$2.99 and up. Print royalties is 55 percent of list price, minus print cost. By inputting page count, you can see what it will cost you to print.

Wu was given the job of combining print and ebook uploading platforms, and the company decided to do a complete redesign for the whole website, resulting in the snazzy new dashboard, which Wu describes as very robust. It can be filtered by daily, weekly, and monthly view. Authors can view the top five bestsellers, and coming soon, you'll be able to check your series books by series instead of one at a time.

Creating high quality paperback or hardcover editions

B&N Press currently offers dust jacket and printed case for hard covers, which are perfect for your biggest fans. These generally go on sale within 96 business hours. There are 20 trim

sizes available, with choice of glossy or matte cover, and for interiors, both regular and premium color. Personal copy ordering or advanced reader copies are available as well. A metadata cloning tool will allow authors to go from ebook to hard cover.

As a side note, the team suggested ordering prior to end of October for Christmas and holiday sales. They use Ingram for printing, and there is a crunch time for the holiday season.

What B&N does for You

B&N Press offers dynamic merchandising programs, which all NINC attendees can sign up for. This includes opportunities such as emails that go out to Nook subscribers offering 50 percent off on a title. Although space is limited for this particular opportunity, it is a good one to apply for. The ad goes out on Saturday and the title is discounted for two days.

In addition, there are other more broadly available opportunities such as “Top Indie Favorites,” a bimonthly program featuring 60 selected titles. **Free Friday** is a Bookbub-style email that goes out weekly. Braunschweiger has established great relationships within the B&N merchandising team, so she can really help indies. When authors have a great holiday sale or new title or a BookBub Featured Deal coming up, they should reach out to her.

Uploading in paper will place your title in the catalog for B&N stores to order. In-store placement opportunities are coming soon, and eligible indie authors will be able to be featured in coordination with an author event, if desired. Sales of books will probably be on consignment basis, with the author bringing copies of their books into the store.

Tools and tips

- B&N Press is releasing new books much faster than they have in the past.
- B&N Press has resources, articles, and guides for such areas as how to write copy, create covers, and so on. They partner with trusted third-party sites such as Reedsy to further assist authors. Inkubate is a new third-party partner company which will generate other genre readers for an author on a paid basis.
- Soon, customizable samples will be possible so that instead of featuring the first five percent of your book, you can upload your own version of a sample.
- Print preorders are available now, and these require a cover but no interior. Just be sure to check the preorder box when setting this up.
- You can now use a file-correcting tool. If you have small errors, the file-correcting tool will fix them. Additional tools exist to help an author to match colors.
- The dashboard now offers ebook coupon codes and BOGO offers. Select a start and end date for the promotion. Select one or all books within a collection. Assign your own unique code and share it with readers on social media and in newsletters. This allows your readers to get a discount without price-matching headaches.
- The promotions tool is by invite only, because Braunschweiger is the only person who manages it. This will give you merchandising authorization through a “Manage Promotions” button on the “Create a New Book” page via a drop-down menu that lets you apply for promo.

- “My Series Page” management tool will group the titles together to allow you to see how they are doing. (Coming soon.)
- Also coming soon: learn about your Nook readers and see how many total visitors you have and how many total purchases. Detailed also-boughts are coming, along with other In-Depth Analytics.
- Stay in touch by offering guest posts on the community space called Barnes & Noble Press Blog. On your FB page, do daily posts. Quirky, fun posts and collections are shared on the B&N FB page and the Nook page.
- If you’re already in expanded distribution with Ingram, you will have to use a new ISBN to upload to the system. There is a checkbox to say if a book is already on sale through Ingram, in which case they will suppress the Ingram title so you get better percentages by going direct.
- Wu says they are attempting to create a table that will show you your customers, and whether they continue to buy more of your books or not. This is in testing right now. If you want to be a beta tester, ask Albert Wu to become one. BNPressAuthors@BNPress.com is a generalized email to send to.
- In response to a query from Mark Lefebvre, McCulloch said that she is the account manager for all Nook providers (such as D2D), and that she wants to provide opportunities for authors who upload through D2D.

The team finished by emphasizing that authors need to be telling their readers about B&N Press and encouraging them to buy books from B&N, which will provide a positive-feedback loop for all parties.

Julie Braunschweiger is senior associate for Barnes & Noble’s self-publishing platform. Susan McCulloch is senior director of Omnichannel and Digital Content Operations at B&N. Albert Wu is the director of product management for Barnes & Noble Press.



Cidney Swanson is an award-winning author of young adult sci-fi and fantasy. Saving Mars was named to Kirkus Reviews Best of 2012 and was an honor book for the SCBWI Spark Award 2014. A confessed Star Trek and Shakespeare geek, Cidney lives in Eugene, Oregon with her husband, kids, cats, and entirely too much rain.

Forensics for Fiction: Make Your Crime Pay

Presented by Geoff Symon

Reported by Janis Susan May Patterson

A federal forensic investigator for 24 years and now a consultant for the Department of Justice, Geoff Symon wants to help writers make their crimes and solutions realistic. He says a writer needs:

1. Love of writing
2. Knowledge of their craft
3. Education of what they're writing about

Symon says the No. 1 question he is asked about writing is how to solve an “unsolvable crime.” His advice is to “solve your crime before you commit it.” In other words, work backwards. This holds true even for pantsers, as they need a street sign of where they're going; all writers must know the direction in which they are going.

According to Symon, the worst thing for any reader, the thing that completely destroys the reader's expectation of a mystery, is when at the end of the book the protagonist suddenly guesses who the villain is with little if any detecting and no basic proof.

One thing that Symon stressed was that it is blood **spatter**—not blood **splatter**. Use of the wrong word can completely destroy the credibility of the writer. Someone asked if blood spatter could be faked; Symon admitted it could, but it would be very difficult to do it credibly. If one wanted to destroy blood spatter evidence, it would be much more efficient to flood the area with more blood, obliterating the pattern, or you could try to clean it up, which would destroy directionality.

Another question was what is the minimum number of building stories one would have to fall in order to die; Symon's answer was “it depends.” People can drown in a teaspoonful of water if it is properly placed; in a fall, circumstances matter. You can fall off a four- or five-story building and live—there are even reports of a very few skydivers surviving a many-thousand-foot fall when their parachutes malfunctioned. Conversely, people have died from a simple trip and fall.

Someone else asked in what places on the body could one be stabbed then live long enough to say something before dying. He said you can talk as long as blood is not on your vocal cords. You will live as long as there is oxygen in your body. When there is no more oxygen, your heart quits beating and you die. Some stab wounds allow the victim an appreciable amount of time before death; on the other hand, if the throat artery is cut, you get arterial spurts and bleed out very quickly.

There are two kinds of death examiners/officials, and these can vary by county or state law—a coroner and a medical examiner. A coroner is an elected official who is not required to have

a medical degree or any forensic training. A medical examiner (ME) is a doctor who generally has some forensic training.

In court, the prosecution and the defense will both use forensics in their quest for a verdict, and each can call their own experts—each of whom can come up with their own answers, and both can be right. Also, there are experts who will say what you want for enough money. Dueling experts should be regarded with deep scrutiny, and good characters will ask questions.

Symon recommended a documentary called *The Staircase*, which he said was fabulous, where in a case the “expert’s” credentials had expired and he had never worked on blood spatter. Symon was less than kind about another documentary called *Making a Murderer*, saying it was junk.

There are five manners of death:

1. natural
2. accident
3. suicide
4. homicide
5. undetermined

When the circumstances and investigation do not prove an exact cause, many coroners and MEs will go with undetermined, as it is a “safe” verdict. For someone who falls down a staircase, for example, with no definite proof of either accident, suicide or homicide, the death is ruled undetermined. By contrast, a body found in a plastic bag on the side of the road should be ruled homicide.

A case illustrating this was the 30-ish Angels baseball player who mysteriously died recently; it was temporarily called undetermined. It took over a month for the lab to determine the cause was an overdose. No autopsy report can be issued until all test results are in, which takes time—sometimes months—because of lab backlogs. In spite of the instantaneous results shown on TV, fingerprints can take two to three weeks, while toxicology usually takes a month. We don't have enough labs, but we have too much death.

Everyone wants DNA, but while the test itself usually takes less than 48 hours, results can take weeks or months. Sometimes a case can jump the line, but it's rare, and usually involves important people, political pressure or extraordinary circumstances. There are hundreds if not thousands of rape kits sitting around waiting for testing due to incredible backlogs. The writer can play with the wait time if he comes up with a credible reason.

Regarding accuracy, Symon says that as writers, we are the gods of our universe; what we say goes, but just know there are weasels in this world who will call us down for inaccuracies. So we should be as accurate as we need to be, and do our research! Accuracy is indeed important, but as writers we shouldn't be a slave to absolute accuracy.

What about the crime scene? The crime scene force is everyone who's there: lead investigator (who is indubitably the boss); photographer; scene sketcher; first responder; and evidence collection technicians. Sometimes there can be 15 or more people at a crime scene, which is far too many to handle believably in fiction. Our characters must earn their spot on the

page and we mustn't overload our scene with too many characters, so we can shrink 15-20 people into one or two or three. As writers, we are allowed to take shortcuts, but they should be believable and deliberate, not necessarily cheap or easy. Do your research.

Where do we go for research? Start with the internet and use the right questions, but since anyone can post anything on the internet don't believe everything you find there. It's better to go to experts in the field. Be polite and maybe gush a little. If they don't have time for you, be gracious. Most agencies have a PIO (Public Information Officer).

Who does blood spatter analysis? A blood spatter expert; most federal agencies have access to one, but if you're a small town, you can **usually** borrow one. It's called a "consult."

Regarding DNA—it is found only in certain cells and is widely used in genealogy, paternity tests, and criminal investigations. There are both state and private DNA testing labs. State labs' standards are set by law; with private labs you can set your own parameters, but they do have to meet some level of standards. Red blood cells don't have DNA, only white ones. Spit tests use DNA from epithelial (sloughed-off skin) cheek cells. Most DNA is nucleic, taken from skin cells and white blood cells, and it is the most fragile. Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) is from bone marrow and the inside of teeth, which will last pretty much forever. mtDNA only tracks through the female line, though—males don't register. If you have a cold case and only mtDNA you cannot identify a specific criminal—just the family.

Locard's Theory of Interchange states that everything which comes in contact leaves a part of itself behind and takes with it a part of what it has touched. This is one of the keys of forensics. Everyone who touches a crime scene contaminates it, so that's why the lead investigator tries to keep the scene as pristine as possible by marking the boundaries with crime scene tape and limiting those who have access. No one can enter the scene without the permission of the lead investigator in charge of that case, who has final say over the scene.

Crime scenes with just bones versus those with fresh(ish) bodies are treated exactly the same way. Police are not allowed to interact with bodies or bones; they must call the coroner or the ME, to whom the body now belongs. No one else is allowed to touch the body.

Body fluids used to be called serology and were used extensively in death investigations until around 1996 when DNA became available.

When do federal officers step in on a state crime? What is the jurisdiction? It depends on the crime. For example, kidnapping is a federal offense. Murder is (usually) a local one. In the Jon Benet Ramsey case, the feds were called in at the beginning because it was believed that it was a kidnapping. When her body was found, the feds stepped back because as a murder case, the locals had jurisdiction. When in doubt, contact a law enforcement office for clarification.

Geoff Symon has written three reference books for writers: *Autopsies*, *Blood Spatter*, and *Crime Scenes*.

Geoff Symon is a 20-year federal forensic investigator with direct, first-hand experience investigating cases including murder, suicide, arson, kidnapping, bombings, sexual assault, child exploitation, theft and financial crimes. He has specified and certified training in the collection and preservation of evidence, blood spatter analysis, autopsies and laboratory techniques.



Janis Susan May/Janis Patterson is a 7th-generation Texan and a 3rd-generation wordsmith who writes in mystery, romance, and horror. Janis and her husband live in Texas with an assortment of rescued furbabies.

The Standout Writer

Presented by Becca Syme

Reported by Nicole Evelina

The slides from this presentation are available at Betterfasteracademy.com/NINC2019.

We all want to be a standout writer—that is, someone whose books, voice, style, plot, etc. is memorable. Success coach and founder of the *Write Better-Faster* and *Strengths for Writers* courses, Becca Syme, believes this begins in the mind of the author, which then makes the book memorable in the mind of the reader.

If someone asks you to recommend a book that has XYZ characteristics, the author of the book you think of is a standout. Over time, the more people who remember a book, the more it becomes part of “first memory,” or “shared mental real estate.” Think about *The Crown* or *Sherlock Holmes*—we may not all think of the same version, but we have a shared reference point. You want to become that reference point so that people recommend your books. That is the only way to stand out in this saturated market. You want to be in the top 1 percent of your specific writing area.

If you want to get an idea of how to master your field, read *The Dip* by Seth Godin and/or *Mastery* by Robert Greene.

Becoming a standout writer begins in your semiconscious mind

In order to become a standout, you must master your psycho-subsystems—cognitive processes that can determine our choices. Some of our choices we have control over (what we wear—these are conscious), some we don’t (our heart beating—these are automatic), and some we don’t always choose (breathing—it’s pretty automatic, but we can also hold our breath—these are semiconscious). Syme’s presentation focused primarily on semiconscious states and how they can make you break out.

Whether you realize it or not, there are reasons behind everything you do and they play into your writing. This is especially true if what you’re trying to do matches the way your mind works, your capacity, etc. Not everything works for everybody. All the things we learn from “experts” who write books and speak at conferences work for them because of who they are, not who you are. That’s why it is important to understand how your mind works and what your strengths are.

If you focus on increasing your strengths, rather than your weaknesses, you add to your innate potential and you will feel like you are at the top of your game. When you work on the areas in which you have innate potential by developing them with great teachers, you have expanded your capacity. You should focus on what you have a high potential to develop. That is how you get to the top 1 percent.

Using Gallup's CliftonStrengths assessment

How do you find out what your areas of innate potential are? By taking the CliftonStrengths assessment test. This test usually costs \$49.99, **but if you contact Becca Syme** (assistant@betterfasteracademy.com, Twitter - [@beck_a_tron](#) or Facebook - [@rlsyme](#)) **she will give you a code for a discount.**

Once you've taken the test, you'll know what your top strengths are out of the 34 sets of traits, grouped together with a "theme name" to help quantify the thrust of that innate potential. They are bonded in pairs and the test ranks them 1-34, with the lowest numbers being your strengths.

There are six main areas that each have their own sub-strengths. However, they are not exhaustive and you shouldn't feel bound to them. (Syme goes into some of these in her [QuitCast for Writers](#) on YouTube as well as in her [presentation slides](#) p. 58-91. There are seven more strengths in the slides than are listed below.) These lists and definitions are based on what she covered during the presentation.

Character Development

- **Empathy** – You have the ability to feel other's feelings and name them. You are able to put emotion into a character that makes them feel real.
- **Developer** – You can understand the steps a character has to take to grow throughout the book. You can make your character arcs feel so realistic that readers think of your characters as people.
- **Individualism** – You are able to tell the unique differences between people. Your characters feel like they are your reader's best friend because they have unique traits that are relatable, yet all your characters feel different.
- **Includer** – You want to invite everyone in. You have a warmth and depth to your voice. You bring a level of tolerance and acceptance of diversity to your writing.
- **Input** – You have the ability to take in information and categorize it.
- **Learner** – You want to learn everything and take all the classes. You learn quickly and truly love knowledge. You have characters with different occupations or details about them that stand out, yet are relatable.
- **Relator** – You have the capacity to build and understand trust in a way that others don't. As a result, you can very effectively write characters who we don't trust. This is a good thing for readers because they can't get enough of this type of character.

Plot Development

- **Activator** – You can easily turn thought into action and excel at making things happen. You write fast books.
- **Arranger** – You like to move things around and make sure everything fits. You have complicated plots.
- **Analytical** – You can see forward and select the correct path for your characters from all the options.

- **Connectedness** – You can make two ideas come together to form a new one.
- **Developer** – You can understand the steps of a plot in order for it to grow throughout the book. You can make your plot feel so realistic that readers think they are living it.
- **Strategic** – You are always looking to push barriers. You can quickly weigh alternative paths and determine the one that will work best and most efficiently.

Shock Factor

- **Competition** – You have the ability to motivate yourself and others to a higher standard of performance. You create a culture of winning and an aspiration to be the best.
- **Ideation** – You are a creative thinker and bring new and fresh perspectives to your subject. Your innovative approach to problems is a source of new and valuable ideas.
- **Individualization** – You notice and appreciate the unique characteristics of each character and can customize your approach accordingly, positioning them to do what they do best.
- **Significance** – You want to have an impact on people and enjoy being the center of attention.
- **Strategic** – You are always looking to push barriers. You can quickly weigh alternative paths and determine the one that will work best and most efficiently.

Consistency

- **Achiever** – You like to be good at what you do and have a strong drive that comes from inside. You can be intense and energetic and are often the pace-setter.
- **Belief** – You have an unlimited store of powerful drive and direction that comes from being aligned with the things that matter the most to you. Your unwavering foundational principles can raise the ethical standards of those around you.
- **Consistency** – You like the same thing to happen all the time and thrive on fairness.
- **Discipline** – You are all about routine and love things that are organized and orderly. You meet deadlines and take one slow step forward constantly.
- **Deliberative** – You need time to think in order to make the right decision. Your ability to create needs time and space in order to create depth.
- **Focus** – You possess great clarity and have the ability to avoid distractions that would divert your attention.
- **Responsibility** – You take ownership when you say you'll do something.

Marketing

- **Arranger** – You like to move things around and make sure everything fits. You have complicated marketing plans.
- **Connectedness** – You can make two ideas come together to form a new one.
- **Communication** – You have the ability to put thoughts into words and get to the message behind the words.
- **Individualization** – You notice and appreciate the unique characteristics of each reader and can customize your approach accordingly, positioning them to do what they do best.

- **Input** – You have the ability to take in information and categorize it.
- **Learner** – You want to learn everything and take all the classes. You learn quickly and truly love knowledge.
- **Significance** – You want to have an impact on people and enjoy being the center of attention.
- **Strategic** – You are always looking to push barriers. You can quickly weigh alternative paths and determine the one that will work best and most efficiently.
- **Woo** – You can connect with others and help other people connect, even if you have to draw others out of their shells. You couldn't imagine not marketing. It is genuine to you. An example of someone with woo is romance author Zoe York.

Depth

- **Analytical** – You can see forward and select the correct path from all the options.
- **Connectedness** – You can make two ideas come together to form a new one.
- **Context** – You have great perspective and unique ability to understand the link between where you or your characters have come from and where you/they are going.
- **Deliberative** – You need time to think in order to make the right decision. Your ability to create needs time and space in order to create depth.
- **Ideation** – You are a creative thinker and bring new and fresh perspectives to your subject. Your innovative approach to problems is a source of new and valuable ideas.
- **Input** – You have the ability to take in information and categorize it.
- **Intellection** – You think a lot. When you have time to ponder and process, wisdom and clarity result. You make a great sounding board for ideas.
- **Learner** – You want to learn everything and take all the classes. You learn quickly and truly love knowledge.
- **Relator** – You have the capacity to build and understand trust in a way that others don't. As a result, you can very effectively write characters who we don't trust. This is a good thing for readers because they can't get enough of this type of character.

Now that you know what your semiconscious processes are, don't fight them; work with them, align with them. Pick your top five strengths and start developing them. If you're willing to do that, you will experience near-perfect success in them.

Questions from the audience

Q. Can your strengths be changed by trauma or external circumstances?

A: Gallup says no, unless you have a brain injury. But if you experience a trauma, they may change for a brief period. Your first test is your most accurate. Your core personality is cemented at age 24, but your strengths may evolve over time as you become more familiar with the language of your traits.

Q. Are strengths different for those who should be traditionally published vs. those who should be indie?

A: Yes. This is because they require different skill sets. But that is too complex to discuss here. Contact me if you'd like to discuss privately.

Q. Can strengths conflict?

A: Yes. They can be opposites, but occur together frequently. The tension between the two produces growth.

Q. How can co-writing teams learn to use their strengths to become stronger together?

A: Contact me privately. I frequently coach writers and writer/assistant teams.

Becca Syme (MATL) has been a success coach (primarily utilizing Gallup's CliftonStrengths) for thirteen years. She's coached 2000+ authors and creatives through her Write Better-Faster and Strengths for Writers classes. Becca is the co-host of the DBW-nominated Smartypants Book Marketing Podcast and the host of the QuitCast. She is also a NINC member and a mystery author.



Nicole Evelina is a USA Today bestselling author of historical fiction, non-fiction, and women's fiction. She loved her second NINC conference and can't wait for next year!

Expand Your Audience Using Amazon

Presented by Tricia Gallagher and Ashley Wells

Reported by Tawdra Kandle

Why should authors consider publishing with [Kindle Direct Publishing](#), the leader in ebook sales? How should authors go about doing it? Tricia Gallagher and Ashley Wells, two members of the Amazon team, presented a workshop about the latest additions to their platform, including preorder term updates and series numbering advantages.

KDP, which offers ebook and paperback publishing for authors, sells books in 41 languages that are spoken by over 3.5 billion people. In May, the company launched support for traditional Chinese language in ebook form.

The presenters mentioned several key advantages to publishing with KDP, among them free enrollment and marketing, global reach, competitive royalties up to 70 percent for digital books and up to 60 percent for paperback books, and the ability for the author to retain rights.

Ease of uploading and creating viable and effective sets of metadata for books were also touted as prime reasons authors should choose to work with Amazon. Wells and Gallagher explained in detail how documents, covers, and other book data should be uploaded.

First, the author must create a Kindle Direct Publishing account, including the author's name, address, tax information, and banking numbers for payments. Next, the book's metadata is entered. This includes the title, the series name, the number in the series, keywords to help Amazon index the book correctly, and the appropriate genre(s).

At this point, Wells and Gallagher announced something new: books in series may now be numbered with zeros and decimals. This news is significant because many authors like to include a prequel (henceforth numbered zero on the series page) as well as novellas or short stories which up until now have not had a logical spot in the series ordering.

Once the metadata has been added, the interior content of the book and the cover are uploaded on the next page. Another bit of news was that KDP now permits assetless Kindle preorders, meaning that it is not necessary to upload a placeholder file on KDP if the final copy of the book is not yet completed and ready. As this had been an issue in the past, with placeholder files inadvertently going out to readers on release day, the presenting team expressed relief that now, they allow the final version of the book to be uploaded as late as four days prior to publication.

When the final Word file is ready, KDP offers what was described as an easy and streamlined way in which to format the book for publication. Kindle Create enables authors to upload one document that can be turned into a professional, quality book. Kindle Create formats for both ebook and paperback, and both images and hyperlinks can be inserted into the digital file as well.

Additionally, Kindle Direct Publishing can help authors create eye-catching covers for both their ebooks and paperbacks. Uploading a completed cover is also an option. As the presenting team pointed out, it makes sense to publish both ebook and paperback at the same time, as physical copies of books are appealing to a large percentage of the reading audience. The paperbacks can also be used at events, for author website sales, and social media giveaways.

As the next requirement is setting the date of publication, Gallagher and Wells shared another update: now KDP permits preorders to be created up to a year before the publication date. Also, there will be no penalty imposed on an author who must push back the release of his/her book up to a month. This grace is allowed one time per title.

Previewing the book file is the next step in the publishing process. Authors are encouraged to examine their books closely prior to publication to avoid mistakes or issues with the formatted book.

Once the author pushes the publish button, the KDP quality control process begins. Amazon checks both the ebook and the paperback formats for quality issues and confirms publishing rights. If there is some question about the author's right to publish that work, KDP contacts the author via email.

The author support doesn't end after the book is live. Kindle Direct Publishing is now offering a new beta dashboard for reporting sales and royalties. This site is mobile-optimized and allows users to see graphs in line or bar charts. It also displays data for more than one book on a single line graph so that authors can compare books and see title-level trends. Launched in May 2019, the new dashboard also includes a listing for Kindle Unlimited page reads, a royalties estimation, a list of top earning books and how earnings are trending for the current month. The royalties are in a single currency. KU authors can also opt to estimate their royalties based on an anticipated amount of money in the KDP Select Global Fund.

Amazon has recently launched its Kindle Unlimited program in South Africa, Hong Kong, Israel, Chile, Argentina, the Philippines, South Korea and Taiwan. Prime reading is now available in Canada and Brazil as well as in the United States.

KDP Select offers authors opportunities for expanding audiences while earning higher royalties, utilizing promotional tools and opportunities only open to KU authors and reaching more readers than non-Select authors seemed to reach. This program does require a ninety-day exclusivity contract.

Among the promotion tools are the Kindle Countdown Deal, where a ticking clock on the book's page allows the author to increase the price in increments, while earning royalties based on original price. Free Book Promotion allows a book to be free for five days over a 90-day period.

KU gives readers who sign up unlimited reading of enrolled books for \$9.99 a month. It is currently available in 20 countries, and the program is targeted to readers who want to try new authors risk-free. Authors, meanwhile, are paid a prorated share based on number of pages reads.

Over \$800 million has been paid to authors since the launch of the program five years ago.

Authors and publishers can upload and sell books with content and metadata written in 41 languages.

Among the free marketing opportunities mentioned by Wells and Gallagher was Author Central, where authors can create their Amazon author pages, update their profiles with bios, pictures, videos and blog feed, claim their books, and manage descriptions, editorial reviews, and more.

Amazon owns Goodreads, the world's largest community of book lovers, over 95 million members strong. These readers discover 18 million books every month, and 92 percent of their reviews are 3 stars and higher.

The presenters recommended five ways to drive followers to an author's account on [Goodreads](#). First, it is necessary to become a Goodreads author by creating an account and claiming a profile. Authors should shelve, rate and review books, advertise using giveaways, interact with readers using Ask the Authors, and share insights on their own books using Kindle notes and highlights on Goodreads.

Giveaways at Goodreads are the equivalent of a mini-ad campaign, noted Wells, with the entry requirement usually being a reader adding the book in question to a To Be Read shelf. These giveaways help readers discover new authors and build buzz about books, as the entrants' friends are notified of their shelving. The cost of the basic giveaway package is \$119, while the premium giveaway package is \$599.

The presenters touched briefly on other Amazon entities related to publishing, including audio books created and published through [ACX](#). Authors can easily turn their books into audio files, which they narrate themselves or hire a professional narrator. These audio books earn royalties up to 40 percent.

Amazon Advertising was another topic mentioned by Gallagher and Wells. Sponsored ads were touted as a self-service solution, offering pay-per-click ads with a variety of placements and search results. The ads are mobile optimized, budget friendly, and easy to create. Authors can promote ebooks or paperbacks, gaining visibility and boosting sales.

Lock-screen ads are another option offered, which promote titles on devices. These are generally served based on genre or interest.

Overall, the KDP presenters advised that the new Amazon ads dashboard is easier to navigate, with more advertising reports, including targeting and search term reports. They recommend allowing an ad to run four to six weeks before trying to identify trends, increasing budgets or bids for campaigns or keywords that are performing well, and examining both the KDP dashboard and the ads campaign reports for a clear picture of the ad's performance.

Wells closed the session by mentioning KDP resources, listing among those the help pages and topics, [KDP University](#), which launched in 2018 and is a suite of resources designed to help authors take their best book to market; KDP Jumpstart, a streamlined, sequential approach to publishing on KDP which includes live webinars, a video library, and finally, the KDP Community.

Finally, KDP announced a new way to share quotations from books within the Kindle iOS app. It's called Kindle Quotes, and it allows readers to easily highlight a quotation within a book they are reading with the app and then share that quotation, written on a selected background, with their friends and followers on social media. Gallagher noted that this would be yet another way to raise awareness of an author's books.

Ashley Wells works with the Kindle Direct Publishing Author Relations Team. Tricia Gallagher helped start KDP University and enjoys sharing information with authors.



Tawdra Kandle is a USA Today best-selling romance author with over 80 books released. Her titles include new adult and adult contemporary romance; under the pen name Tamara Kendall, she writes paranormal romance, and under the pen name Tessa Kent, she writes erotic romance. And yes, she rocks purple hair.

You're Gonna Need a Bigger Story, Part 1:

The Bigger Picture

Presented by Houston Howard

Reported by Nicole Evelina

Over the course of two dynamic presentations, Houston Howard, co-founder of [One 3 Creative](#) showed NINC-goers how to create an idea that is optimized for multi-platform adaption from inception. This is detailed in his book, *You're Gonna Need a Bigger Story*.

However, before getting into the how (that's the second part), he explained why such a change in strategy is needed.

As we all know, we're living in a time of great change, and change is happening faster than ever before. Plus, we're creating and consuming content (especially with the help of technology) more and faster than ever before. For example:

- By 2020, five billion people with 50 million household devices will be connected to the internet.
- In 1992 texting began. Today, the number of texts sent each day exceeds the population of the planet.
- More people on earth own a cell phone than own a toilet.
- 95 million photos are uploaded to Instagram every day. And it's not just the younger generations. Women 45+ are the fastest growing demographic.
- 400 hours of video is uploaded every 60 seconds. That's 1.3 billion videos a day.
- 1.3 million pieces of content are added to Facebook every day.
- More unique information has been generated this year than in the last 5,000 years.
- One new book is added to Amazon every five minutes.

Instead of just competing against other writers for our readers' time, we're now competing against TV, movies, streaming video, video games, podcasts, radio, etc., as well. This has become so strong that movie studios now move major releases from weekends when video games drop so they don't lose viewers.

All of this technology has changed the communication methods, psychology, brain chemistry and response expectations of our readers. They want everything now, and in shorter bites.

Most of the things that run our lives every day have only come into existence in the last 10 years. The democratization of production and distribution of content, especially enabled by the internet, has changed the scope of history. The market is so crowded because everyone can self-publish a book, music, video, etc. When supply is higher than demand the creator has to

improve quality and decrease price to compete. We've traded problems. We used to not have the means to create and release content, now we have a visibility problem.

Because of this, having a multi-platform strategy is very practical. Warren Buffet once said the only way to operate in a commoditized market is to have a branded ecosystem. That means greater volume—you have to get aggressive and put out more content and diversify.

Superstory: What does it look like?

Howard calls this multi-platform strategy your Superstory. It begins with thinking bigger than a novel. In Superstory, you extend your story into multiple platforms and surround your novel with other things that can help it compete. You also start thinking of yourself less as a novelist only, and more as a cross-platform storyteller.

Superstory is NOT:

- Promotions or advertising.
- Online tools like new media / digital.
- Multimedia (franchising, merchandising, etc.) in which you are giving your audience the same content in a different format (i.e. the movie version, the comic book version, etc.)

Superstory IS:

- Continuing your story over multiple platforms (a.k.a. transmedia).
- Each new piece of content is a piece of a puzzle, something unique that is only explored there and leads to something else. It is all part of the same story, but the story is expanded in a coordinated way. (i.e. anthology of the backstory of minor characters in your book series.)
- So it could be that the book tells the story, the movie continues the story, then spins off into a video game, and ends in a comic book, so that they all work together to create a different experience for the fans.

Think about *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. It began as a movie, got much more back- and front-story as a TV show and then continued on past the finale in the comic book realm with new stories.

Disney, Amazon, and Apple are training young people to expect a new way of engaging with entertainment on multiple platforms, so we as content creators have to be available to them where they are. We have to feed the marketplace.

But in order to find new fans you have to use new mediums. Don't think product. Think brand. The more you diversify, the more volume and access to people you have. The people you reach through a podcast may never have found you through a novel alone, and those who download your app may not have found you through a novella.

This is a model that works in any genre and will turn a fan into a customer seven times over in ways they never expected. Think of your novel as the front door of your house. If that is the only way into the house, you limit your market. You need multiple points of entry into your house—you have windows, a chimney, side and back doors, a garage door, maybe even a

connecting cellar. Create multiple points of entry and shift the platform to reach more people than ever before. One could be a podcast, another a short story, then an Alexa skill, or a social media account related to your characters. The possibilities are endless.

In order to create a brand, you have to have vision and engage in planning because you need to plant the seeds for other media in the books so that everything is interconnected with purpose. This is what the next section of the presentation, presented in the December issue of Nink, will get into.

And yes, anyone can do this, even if you are an indie author with no team. In the next article, we'll talk about ways to collaborate with film schools, songwriters, podcasters, etc., or even learn these skills yourself.

Co-Founder of One 3 Creative, [Houston Howard](#) has advised entities such as Mattel, Disney Imagineering, Reliance Media Works, West Coast Customs, Samuel Goldwyn Films and Harper Collins Publishing, as well as designing a number of transmedia-focused projects for Fox, the CW, TNT, Slinky, and the writers of Toy Story.



[Nicole Evelina](#) is a USA Today bestselling author of historical fiction, non-fiction, and women's fiction. She loved her second NINC conference and can't wait for next year!

Is Your Author Website Pulling Its Weight?

Presented by Caro Bégin

Reported by Karen Fox

If you care about increasing your income, a living, optimized website is a valuable tool for every author. It can be considered your home turf where readers come to find out more about you so be sure to use every external opportunity (newsletter, ads, blog posts, back matter, etc.) to send traffic to your website. Note: A Facebook page is not considered a good website for an author.

Start by using fonts, colors, and images to convey your brand and/or genre, but don't overdo it or clutter your pages. No more than two fonts. Be sure your website is mobile-friendly as Google won't list your site in the top results unless it is. A page must be viewable on a mobile device without scrolling or pinching. Once you've decided on all the design criteria, consider the items that should be contained within your website:

- About you
- Contact page
- Books List
- Social media, such as a blog (optional)
- Events and booksignings
- Free books (if applicable)
- Search
- Legalese

Every page within the website needs to contain a call to action (CTA), such as subscribe, buy or attend/join. It's best to have more than one of these on the home page with the most important one above the "fold line," which is the information that appears on one screen. Note that you can change your CTAs, so pick a goal for each page.

Images should be optimized to below 150kb in size. A reliable website should load fast. Bégin recommends <https://pikresize.com> as a free site where you can reduce images.

In addition, be sure you have an SSL certificate you can use with your site. This provides the https:// portion of a URL. Many website hosts offer this certificate as part of their hosting package. If not, you may need to purchase a certificate on your own.

Design your home page with an eye to the "fold line." The device on which the website is viewed will change what shows above the "fold line." At the top of the page, be sure to include a header area with your name, menu, and main image/slideshow/other. Below that should be the beginning of your main content and the top of your sidebar.

Underneath at the bottom of the page is the footer, which can contain your media links. The last item on the page is an area for your legalese and disclosure information.

The menu should not drop down more than two levels as a visitor will find it difficult to navigate. Instead of listing every book, jump to a book page that shows all of them or break it into genres, e.g., Science Fiction, Fantasy, or by series name. Your menu should, at a glance, give the reader an idea of why they came to your page. Resist the urge to be cutesy with menu item names.

The sidebar location should be consistent—either left or right on every page. This is a good place for your newsletter subscribe button, latest release, blog categories, social feeds or awards.

The footer has become the catch-all for a variety of items. This is where you can list:

- Site map
- Social media links
- Media kit
- Affiliate disclosure
- Contact
- Site credits
- Facebook Pixel
- Google Analytics

This should appear on the bottom of every page along with a separate GDPR information/legalese notification.

While designing your site, avoid gimmicks. Keep your themes and plug-ins up-to-date and be sure to backup your website on a regular basis. When sending people away from your site, such as to Amazon, open in a new window so your website will remain in their browser. If using videos, load them on YouTube, then embed a YouTube widget to display it on your website in order to keep your loading time quick.

Your books page is probably the most important. You can list all your books on one page or have pages for series. However, each book needs its own page as well. Above the “fold line,” you should put the book title, cover, genre, sales blurb and a link to purchase. Below the line, you can include other books in the series, reviews, awards, audio clip, or an excerpt.

For those authors with wide distribution, Bégin recommended using Draft2Digital’s free [Books2Read](#) tool to list all your books/audio books sales locations with one link. This tool is intelligent enough to know to present an Amazon.ca link to a Canadian visitor.

A book series page should reflect the tone/genre of the series. Be sure to list all the formats available to the reader and give each book in the series its own page.

Another type of page used for books is the landing page. This is generally when you’re giving away a book for signing up for your newsletter, an upsale from purchasing another book, as a landing place from an ad, or as part of a promotion. The landing page is a stand-alone page and should open in another window. It has no menu, no sidebar, and no other information except that necessary for the offer. In many cases, it will link to a tool like [BookFunnel](#) to serve up the requested book.

Bégin also discussed promo pages on a website, which are used in a shared promotion with other authors. This can be with a large or small group (select wisely) with a special sale offered for a limited time. It helps to have ads going at the same time as this promotion. A reader is more likely to buy if they see a great collection of books at an amazing price. For more detail on how to set up this type of promotion, read Bégin's slides (the link can be found at the end of this article).

She touched briefly on Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and suggests using on-site and off-site optimization for this. On-site, you should try to use your keywords/phrases in titles, subtitles, URLs, or descriptions. As for off-site optimization, point back to your website in as many places as possible, including ads, back matter, blog posts, email, and articles.

WordPress has a free plug-in called [Yoast](#) to help with SEO for a WordPress website.

Along with her website presentation, Bégin mentioned how to make money off your website by using affiliate links from all the bookstores where your book is offered. Note that if you're an Amazon affiliate, you can't post reviews from Amazon on your website or link to an Amazon author profile. They also forbid use of their affiliate link in emails or ads. You can only link to your book on Amazon, nothing else, and they do review those links. You also need to get so much income from your affiliate link within a set period of time or Amazon will shut down your link.

You can, however, also benefit from Amazon's 24-hour cookies. If a reader buys your book from your affiliate link, then goes on to buy more Amazon products within 24 hours, you will see dividends from that.

Only get affiliate accounts for countries where your books sell. Otherwise, they will be discontinued when no one uses them. Be sure not to use unapproved trademarks or logos.

Again, you can use Draft2Digital's free Books2Read tool to consolidate all your affiliate links into one URL that the tool intuitively sorts out when used.

Bégin offers an article on her website that goes into more depth on using affiliate links: <https://gocreate.me/how-to-earn-affiliate>.

As the final part of her presentation, Bégin discussed setting up direct sales on your website where you can also offer exclusive content or bundles. If your book is part of Kindle Unlimited or Audible, you are not allowed to direct sell those items. Read through your contracts before setting this up to see if direct sales are allowed. In addition, you need to have created trust with your readers before offering sales at your website. The easiest way to do that is via your newsletter.

She mentioned a few direct sales tools, such as PayHip, Selz, WooCommerce, Shopify, PayPal and Patreon. In her opinion, [PayHip](#) was the least costly and easiest to set up. Combined with BookFunnel as a delivery system, you should reap the most profit. If you intend to sell print copies, investigate shipping costs as they vary across the United States in addition to overseas. Start by setting up your shop with just one book to work out all the bugs.

If you wish to sell audio files, Bégin recommended using Authors Direct from Findaway. They handle collecting payment and delivery of what can be very large files. Go to <https://authors-direct.com> to sign up for this option.

In summary, Bégin mentioned a WordPress theme she designed especially for authors to use. Called Parallax v2.0, it's available for \$399.00 on <https://gocreate.me/themes/parallax-for-writers/>. Until December 31, 2019, NINC authors can use the code NINC2019 for 15 percent off the overall price.

The briefing presented at the workshop and other information can be found at <https://gocreate.me/ninc2019>.

Caro Bégin is a French-Canadian writer and web developer. She writes fiction under two pen names, so she understands the challenges that authors face while marketing their books online. Her web expertise and teaching experience make her uniquely qualified to help authors with their websites. Visit [GoCreate.me](https://gocreate.me) to learn more about Parallax for Writers, a powerful, intuitive, and affordable WordPress theme built especially for authors.



[Karen Fox](#) lives in the Colorado mountains where she can watch deer and wild turkeys from her office. She's sold nine novels, three short stories, and one novella in the paranormal romance or sweet romance genres. She's currently writing her latest book for the Dogwood Series.

Newsletters: Never Run Out of Things to Say

Presented by Chasity Jenkins-Patrick & Kathy Williams

Reported by Cidney Swanson

Chasity Jenkins-Patrick and Kathy Williams run [EssentiallyChas.com](https://essentiallychas.com), which has managed branding and content for traditionally and independently published authors since 2008. Having made every mistake (and success!) in the book, they're eager to share tips for keeping content fresh and relevant in author newsletters.

Most authors, when faced with the task of composing an email, believe they have nothing to say. Jenkins-Patrick and Williams emphasized that the readers on an author's reader list all signed up because they *want* to receive regular emails from the author. Authors must provide content, regardless of whether they feel like they have anything worth sharing.

Subject lines

The most important part of any newsletter is the subject line. If it isn't interesting, it's delete-able. Start with a snappy subject line that grabs a reader's attention or otherwise make them curious enough to open it.

Subject lines that work well might offer something that is special or scarce, or they can invite reader interaction by asking a direct question. Since most mailer platforms allow for split testing of more than one subject line, it is a good practice to do a/b testing to see what resonates with your readers. If an author is having a hard time coming up with a catchy subject line, they can simply use that space to tell the reader exactly what to do: **Open Now** or **Order My New Release Today**.

For romance writers, references to the hero of the story can get great results. She used a subject line reading, "Is this guy too handsome?" It worked well because the particular readers loved hot guys and enjoyed providing the requested feedback.

Regardless of the genre in which an author writes, using one or more of the following in subject lines will increase open rates. Personalize by using the recipient's name. Mention a sale. Create a sense of urgency by referencing a limited time offer. Make your readers curious with provocative subject lines such as, "You don't want to read this..."

Pro-tips for subject lines:

- Be cautious when including personalization, because many readers won't capitalize their names, and this can make an email look unprofessional. (E.g., "Hey chas, Open this email now!")
- For now, emojis work well, but this could change quickly, so keep up with trends in subject line composition.

- For authors who know the demographic of their readers, try using quotes or lines from pop-culture that is relatable. (E.g., 80s-era readers will relate to 80s-era music and movies.)

Email content

What should authors actually include in a newsletter? Jenkins-Patrick advocates for being personable rather than getting personal. An author should consider who they are as an author and then pick out a few things that represent them, such as a love of shoes or gardening or rummage sales. These are all relatable without being too personal, which is something the pair discourages. They also discourage ever sharing a home address. Instead, rent a post office box in the next town over.

Several things should be included in every email. The opening paragraph should contain a greeting such as a simple, “Hello! How are you?” Next, tell the reader why you are emailing, then lead them toward taking a single action, and finally tell them goodbye. For authors who want to include more, offer a brief update on what you’ve been up to lately.

Action points

- Always have a reason to email readers and provide a clear call to action.
- Try running a “Just Because I Love Readers” contest with a giveaway.
- Wax poetic about something you love that shows up in your book, and then offer that book as a free download.
- Authors who are reluctant to make “giveaways” the focus of their newsletter can always add the giveaway in a P.S.

News to include

Patrick-Jenkins and Williams break “news” down in two categories: New News and Old News. *New News* can include a cover reveal, an audiobook release, contests, sneak peeks, and exclusive content.

Old news can include things like an older release that is offered at a sale price. Readers enjoy “Throwback Thursday” type news as well as any exclusive features about existing books.

It’s important to keep emails reader-focused, and things like contests and polls do this well. Book recommendations from author to reader work well, but authors can also ask their readers for book recommendations for upcoming vacations using a subject line such as: **Help me pick something to read . . .**

A holiday greeting is an opportunity to express gratitude for readers or simply an opportunity to remind readers that it’s Pumpkin Latte season or National Donut Day. Above all, authors should aim at being personable and relatable. Mention your love of donuts (relatable), not your newest Jimmy Choo’s (unrelatable).

Jenkins-Patrick and Williams provided the following ideas as templates for authors:

Throwback Thursday email

- Pick out a book in a series that coincides with a new release in that series.
- Talk about how you relate to the character and why / in what ways.
- Tell readers **why** you wrote that first book.
- Mention a hardcover release or audiobook release of that title, if appropriate.
- Or, choose to feature an older title that is free.

Simple release email

- Let readers know what is new.
- Include a cover image with links, keeping it short and sweet.

Thank-you emails

- In the week after a new release, send out a thank you expressing gratitude for readers' purchase of the title. If it made any bestseller lists, mention this. This could be making the *USA Today* list or just ranking in the top 100 on Amazon in a category or subcategory.
- In this email, remind readers of the next release coming up and any giveaways or contests for that next release.
- Tell readers about the contest winners from a pre-order contest.
- Keep it short and sweet.

How often should authors send email newsletters?

For authors who made a promise about how often readers would hear from them, stick to that promise. Send your emails at the same time on a regular basis, and you will train your readers to expect your emails.

Analytics

Jenkins-Patrick and Williams shared the following rates for email performance:

- Bounce rate should be below 1 percent
- Open rate should be about 30 percent
- Click rate should be 5 percent
- Unsubscribes should be below 1 percent
- Spam markings by readers should be below 0.1 percent

These are overall averages, not for individual newsletter sends.

The pair wrapped up their presentation with the following pro tips

1. Write and schedule in advance.
2. Resend a second email to all unopened subscribers.

3. Break content into brief sections rather than bulky paragraphs.
4. Make sure there is an unsubscribe button.
5. Be consistent: say when you will write and follow through.
6. Watch your favorite authors and see what you like about their newsletters.
7. Segment your email into those who always open your newsletters and the entire group. The entire group gets only new release emails, while your biggest fans receive more frequent contact.
8. Use only one call to action.
9. Use a consistent branded headshot image with logo or author name.

Finally, there will always be times an author feels as if they have nothing to say. Jenkins-Patrick and Williams provided this bonus list of ideas:

- Top 10 lists Recommendations
- Q&A
- FAQ's (about your books)
- Events
- Review Quotes
- Graphics
- Behind the scenes pics
- AMA's Ask Me Anything's (with google form to collect the questions)
- Recipes (if it applies to you or your books)
- Pinterest boards (inspiration or dream boards)
- Funny stories
- Inspirational stories

*Chasity Jenkins-Patrick is the owner of [Essentially Chas](#), a boutique marketing agency for authors where she has combined her passion for reading with her marketing expertise. **Kathy Williams**, the marketing manager at [Essentially Chas](#), has extensive experience in communications, social media, content management, and brand management.*



*[Cidney Swanson](#) is an award-winning author of Young Adult Sci-Fi and Fantasy. *Saving Mars* was named to Kirkus Reviews Best of 2012 and was an honor book for the SCBWI Spark Award 2014. A confessed Star Trek and Shakespeare geek, Cidney lives in Eugene, Oregon with her husband, kids, cats, and entirely too much rain.*

Using Big Data Insights for Higher Royalties

Presented by Alex Newton of K-lytics

Reported by Laura Phillips

Big data can mean a lot of things, depending on when, where and who's doing the talking. Alex Newton, CEO and founder of [K-lytics](#), a book market research provider, talked about big data in terms of books, specifically information gleaned from analyzing market information, primarily on the Amazon platform.

A management consultant for more than 20 years for Fortune 500 companies, Newton has a knack for analyzing reams of information and turning it into charts and explanations that make sense. In the last five years, he's analyzed data on millions of books to bring the power of "Big Data" to the indie publishing world and has helped authors spot opportunities to sell books in attractive market niches and optimize their book marketing.

Newton noted three types of data that can be useful for authors:

- Individual insights—that is, what's working for you.
- Insights gleaned from working with author friends—tactics that, according to the group, work or don't work, according to their combined experience and observations.
- Insights and patterns that emerge from gathering data on thousands of books. This was the focus of Alex's workshop.

Some highlights:

- Indie publishers average 30 percent of the top 100 rankings in the Kindle Store. Amazon imprints average 26 percent, and the Big Five publishers average 21 percent.
- In market share by genre, indies claim 61 percent of the top 100 slots in both the romance and science fiction & fantasy categories. Indie teen and YA titles claim 57 percent of the top 100 slots in that category. Amazon imprints claim 34 percent of the top 100 slots in mystery, thriller & suspense and 29 percent in literature & fiction.
- Newton also looked at the share of Kindle store top 100 rankings by genre, including about 50,000 top 100 titles analyzed over three years. During that time span, romance titles claimed 18 percent of the slots, followed by mystery, thriller & suspense with 17 percent. Titles under the literature and fiction heading claimed 32 percent of the slots. Science fiction & fantasy titles claimed 6 percent, and teen & YA got 3 percent.

Bestseller list by format – September 2019

It probably comes as no surprise that Kindle sales dominated in the romance genre, with 95 percent of sales on Amazon that month. Audio sales on that platform comprised about 4 percent of sales, with hardback and paperback sales negligible, according to Newton's analysis.

Audio sales were higher, at 15 percent, in the mystery, thriller & suspense category, with Kindle sales comprising 80 percent, and the remaining 5 percent in hardcover and paperback.

The split in science fiction & fantasy was 61 percent Kindle, 31 percent audio, and 8 percent other formats. LGBT book sales were 75 percent Kindle. The literature and fiction category had 78 percent Kindle sales and 14 percent audio. Book sales in the teens category were 63 percent Kindle, 16 percent audio, and the rest mostly paperback. Kindle market share on the Amazon platform in a few other categories include 47 percent for comics & graphic novels, 42 percent for Christian books & Bibles, 41 percent for history, 33 percent for religion and spirituality, 33 percent for biography & memoirs, and 29 percent for travel.

Key points about audio

- Only 4 percent of romance sales on Amazon are audio.
- Audio sales are about 39 percent of the science fiction & fantasy sales on that platform.
- Audio sales are more than 10 percent of sales in the teens category, in mystery, thriller & suspense, and also in the literature and fiction category.
- More than 30 percent of the biographies and memoirs sold on the platform are in audio format.
- Audio market share in self-help is 44 percent.

In business and money, audio market share is 45 percent.

KU and the bestseller rankings

Just how much dominance does the Kindle Unlimited program have over the bestseller lists by category? A lot, if you're looking at fiction titles, according to Newton's statistics. KU page reads increased from 38 billion in 2016 to 57 billion in 2018, and is estimated to reach 65 billion by the end of 2019. By category, KU titles filled an average of 76 of the top 100 slots in both romance and science fiction & fantasy, and 78 percent of the teen and YA category top slots. KU titles filled 63 percent of the top 100 slots on average in the literature and fiction category, and 56 percent in mystery, thriller & suspense. KU had less influence in biography & memoirs (34 percent) and non-fiction (39 percent).

KU influence in a sampling of romance categories showed the highest shares in various lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender categories (about 77 percent), followed by American historical (62 percent), African-American historical (61 percent), and Christian fiction romance (57 percent). At the lower end of KU influence was romance action & adventure (23 percent), teen & YA LGBT romance (19 percent), and graphic novels (2 percent).

Series

Across the board, the series share in the top 100 rankings grew just 2 percent in the last three years against standalones. In categories in 2019, more science fiction & fantasy series titles placed in the top 100 rankings than standalones, with 55 percent of the slots going to series titles. Teen and YA had a similar split series books making up 54 percent of the top 100. Mystery, thriller, & suspense came in at 49 percent for series titles (up from 42 percent three years ago), and romance at 40 percent (up from 37 percent three years ago).

Short reads on the rise again?

Short reads comprised 24 percent of all English language Kindle titles in May 2015. That number slipped slightly to 23 percent in February 2017, then eased upward to 28 percent in February 2019, and rose to 32 percent in the last 90 days, according to Newton's data. He noted that short reads represent just 7 percent of the top 24,000 displayed books, "so there are a lot of non-selling junk shorts."

An analysis of the average sales rank of the top 20 in 24 genre bestseller lists over several days shows that:

- Short reads in the 65-100 page range had the best average rankings, the most estimated sales per day per book (3.5), and the best average customer review (4.4).
- Short reads in the 1-11 page range had the lowest sales rank, averaging just .3 estimated sales per day per book, with an average customer review of 3.8.

Box sets

Newton analyzed the box set listings on Amazon in several ways, considering whether authors are using box sets to build a new audience now vs. breathing new life into their backlists. He considered how long authors waited after the publication of the last book in a series to include that book in a box set. He looked at pricing and at estimated royalties.

Highlights from his analysis of box sets that made the top 100 rankings include:

- 49 percent were published within six months after the last book in the series, with 22 percent published within two months.
- 17 percent were published more than 12 months after the last book in the series.
- 22 percent of box sets weren't part of a series.

Of the 500 top ranking box sets:

- 32 percent included three books, 22 percent included four, 13 percent included five, 8 percent included six, and the rest had just two or had seven or more books. Four percent included more than 20 books.
- Three-volume sets earned 42 percent of the royalties for box sets. Four-volume sets earned 20 percent of the royalties, and five-volume sets earned 14 percent. Sets with over 20 volumes earned just 3 percent of the total royalties for box sets.
- 39 percent of box sets were discounted 90 percent from the total cost of buying the books individually. Fourteen percent were in the 80-90 percent range. Nine percent had a 60-70 percent discount, and 7 percent were discounted less than 20 percent.
- In terms of royalties earned, 33 percent of the royalties came from box sets with less than 20 percent discount, for example, three \$3.99 books in a \$9.99 box set.
- 17 percent of royalties came from box sets with 40-40 percent discounts, for example, five \$3.99 books in a \$9.99 box set.

- 15 percent of royalties came from the 99 percent discount group, typically box sets sold at 99 cents with three or more books, each individually sold at \$2.99 or more.

Pricing

Average pricing in the top 100 rankings shifted the last three years in most categories, with some ending up lower and some significantly higher.

The highlights:

- Mystery, thriller & suspense pricing averaged \$5.58 in 2016 and increased slightly to \$5.74 in 2019.
- Science fiction & fantasy averaged \$5.51 per title in 2016, dropped to \$4.87 in 2017, and was at \$5.00 in 2019.
- Literary & fiction averaged \$4.96 in 2016, increased to \$5.03 in 2018, and dropped back to \$4.96 in 2019.
- Romance pricing averaged \$3.03 in 2016 and increased to \$3.44 in 2019.
- Teen & YA averaged \$4.54 in 2016, increased to \$5.41 in 2018, and dropped back to \$5.16 in 2019.
- Biographies and Memoirs averaged \$7.40 in 2016 and increased to \$8.23 in 2019.
- Nonfiction in general was at \$6.55 in 2016 and rose steadily to \$7.48 in 2019

The most frequent price points by genre were:

- Romance – 26 percent at 99 cents, 22 percent at \$3.99
- Science fiction and fantasy – 21 percent at \$4.99, 14 percent at 99 cents
- Mystery, thriller & suspense – 17 percent at \$1.99, 16 percent at \$4.99, 10 percent at 99 cents, and 10 percent at \$3.99

Tropes and themes

Post-apocalyptic books seem to be doing better than dystopian titles, with 76 percent of the monthly royalty share for those two similar themes going to the post-apocalyptic group. Which apocalypse sold the most? In terms of estimated royalties, EMP (electro-magnetic pulse disasters) were most popular, followed by attacks, disease/illness/pandemic plague stories, then zombies, cold, storms, desert themes, wasteland themes, virus/bacterial/biological themes, nuclear disasters, aliens, and so forth. In terms of book numbers, zombies had a 22 percent share, followed by disease/pandemic/plague at 14 percent, attacks at 10 percent, and so on.

The bestselling theme in clean romance was bride/wedding/marriage at a 40 percent share. Billionaires and other rich/wealthy themes claimed a 26 percent share. Other popular themes included second chance, true love, fake marriage, mail-order, secret baby/pregnant/unwanted baby, matchmaking and arranged marriages, and medical romances.

For more information about genre trends, book market analytics, and Newton's tools, look online for Newton's [blog](#).

Alex Newton is the founder of K-lytics.com, a leading provider of book market research. His research from analyzing millions of books has helped thousands of authors to spot opportunities, sell books in attractive market niches, and optimize their book marketing.



Laura Phillips spent more time than enough time with data analysis in her 15 years as the business manager of a niche software company and now prefers leave the analysis to the experts while she writes and tends to the livestock on her farm in the Ozark Mountains.

Acts of Submission

Presented by Carol Saller

Reported by Michele Dunaway

Carol Saller opened her workshop to a smaller but dedicated group of grammar enthusiasts who enjoyed every word. She first told them that she knows style from three perspectives:

1. As a copy editor who has read multiple works and as a published author herself; she's been on the other side.
2. For 20 years she read every question sent to the [Chicago Manual of Style's Q & A](#).
3. She wrote *The Subversive Copy Editor*, and Carol uses social media to keep in touch with changes.

She then outlined her expectations, and said that indie authors should replicate the same steps, and that your relationship with a copy editor should be a friendly relationship with some savvy.

She mentioned *Writing Fiction, 10th Edition*, with Janet Burroway and gave a long quote: "Spelling, grammar, paragraphing and punctuation are a kind of magic: their purpose is to be invisible. If the sleight of hand works, we will not notice a comma or a quotation mark but will translate each instantly into a pause or an awareness of voice; we will not focus on the individual letters of a word but extract its sense whole. When the mechanics are incorrectly uses, the trick is revealed and the magic fails; the reader's focus is shifted from the story to its surface."

Good writers have good relationships with their copy editors. Indies delegate, but the more you know, the more you give your true self to your readers. You want good connections with your reader because of (1) moneymaking and (2) as an ideal, reading enhances the quality of life.

Traditional publishing will have multiple editors such as signing and an acquiring editor. These will work for the publisher and help writers revise and complete the manuscript. They offer contracts, assign books to copy editors, and work with design, production, and marketers.

The copy editors will fine tune the book that is under contract and will work directly or indirectly with the writer. In indie publishing, you are often not an editor of your own book. Your editor is someone you hire. A copy editor can be you or someone you hire.

Copy editors go through the document to improve presentation. They look at spelling, grammar, punctuation, and style, such as hyphenation, punctuation, capitalization, abbreviation, numbers, etc.

While there are software programs out there, copy editors provide a human touch. Human copy editors know what audience you are talking to and each house has its own style. MLA, AP,

Chicago are all different, and there is no single one that is right. Correctness is a malleable quality.

She provided some examples, such as that in the *Chicago Manual of Style* it would be eighty-five cents while in AP Style that would be 85 cents. Use of the oxford comma is also different. Chicago uses it while AP Does not.

She said grammar is more set in stone, but it's also flexible. Copy editors will use a style sheet, and she gave a pro tip to go to [The Editing Podcast](#), season 1, episode 7, for "Style Sheets for Writing and Editing."

The copy editor also checks for accuracy, logic, voice (rhythm, syntax, etc.) and cohesive narration. The copy editor also prepares the manuscript for typesetting. Copy editors should clean up extra spaces, tabs, apply headings, etc. Basically, formatting.

An indie published author will hire out for all of this.

She said copy editors do not rewrite. If they meddle and you feel that it's wrong, ask the signing editor to intervene.

If you are indie, when you hire a copy editor clarify what you are getting. You may be wanting a developmental edit instead if you are revising.

Copy editing is not proofreading. Proofreading is done casually by someone looking over your writing at any stage and proofreading considers all areas for improvement. Proofreading can also be more formal, as in traditional publishing where it's the last stage before publication. It's comparing the typeset proof to the final manuscript. It's not editing or rewriting. This is normally the writer's responsibility. The proofs come via PDF files.

Another tip was to listen to *The Editing Podcast*, season 1, episode 8, "Page Proofs and the Proofreading Process." She also suggested "Can You Pass a Proofreading Test" on [The Subversive Copy Editor Blog](#).

She next discussed how to be a loveable author, which is her best advice to authors. Everyone knows, she said, to follow the submission guidelines and don't be a diva. But here's how to prepare for copy editing. First, don't "design" your book. The early stages of copy editing require a MS Word manuscript. Any designs you do will be undone by the copy editor when the copy editor has to format the book.

Do make notes for the copy editor. Anything that's right that a copy editor might think is wrong—let the copy editor know this first before the copy editor begins. No one has your synopsis or book, so the copy editor will not know things like jokes, or jargons, or different spellings, etc.

However, she said, consider reworking if your copy editor can't figure it out. That means a reader may not be able to do that either.

She told a story here of a modern version of Ponce de Leon who'd lived forever. The accent came and went so she put the accent everywhere. The author only wanted it when it wasn't in present day. She had done a find and replace, but she had to go back in and redo one by one. She wished the author would have made a note of this.

She said to tell your copy editor by putting notes into [Brackets] or use comments or footnotes. Type these separately.

She said to also follow instructions. Communicate delays to your editor and give advance notice. Do your homework and have a professional level of understanding. Be informed. Be in professional organizations. She learns about the latest books via social media.

Sometimes, she said, you have to endure copy editing. It's important, though, to know that when you are in the copy editing stage it's time to stop messing around with your book. You need to ask how and when to send changes. Also, learn how to identify passages without using page numbers. The text will move. So identify your passage like, "Chapter 3, paragraph 5," or "Just before 'devoured by locusts' (orig. p. 92)."

Continuing to be a loveable author, she said to learn to negotiate with strength and grace. Sometimes you have to forgive copy editor lapses. So, "Chill and sleep on it." Even if you don't like the editor, ask yourself, "Will others think like this?" when reading your book. Copy editors can be rigid and uninformed. The trick is to know when to negotiate (example, if the copy editor makes your dialogue too formal.) Pick your battles and explain in clear terms.

A tip she gave was not to hire another copy editor to second-guess the first. Unless your new person can use the style sheet, it becomes a mess. The sad truth is that most writers misjudge their consistency.

Be forgiving when people find errors. Banish your ego. Even in her book after three copy editors she still found two errors (so far).

The ultimate is that you want your reader to come up on top.

Q&A

Q: Creative writing part versus grammar correction while writing

A: Not your job to worry about it while writing. There are different ways to approach your reread. Her cardinal rule for copy editors is before they ask the author to Google.

Q: Authors run into young copy editors. They don't know Victorian concepts. When I interrupt dialogue, can I use an em dash? I hear different opinions where it goes.

A: In *Chicago Manual of Style* there are many different ways. She'll have to look it up because the distinction is if a person breaks off to do something versus the writer interrupting dialogue to interject an explanation.

Q: What is WIT?

A: It's a style manual but has had no revision since the 1970s.

Q: My character speaks in italics.

A: You must use italics in your manuscript, not an underline. (Also no two spaces.) Both underline and spaces say you're old. Use as few italics as possible. Make the emphasis through your phrasing, not italics. Try not to lean on it. It becomes overdone and becomes irritating for readers. Take out all italics and ask to be read. See if it works without. Same for the explanation point (!). Shouts are the only reason to use those. Too many dilute the manuscript and it becomes almost melodramatic. There's power in the period.

Carol Saller is a longtime contributing editor to *The Chicago Manual of Style* and author of *The Subversive Copy Editor*. Her posts on language and writing can be found at *The Subversive Copy Editor* blog as well as at *CMOS Shop Talk* and the *Lingua Franca* blog. As a creative writer, Carol has written books for all ages of children, mostly recently the YA novel *Eddie's War*.



Michele Dunaway lives in the Midwest. She's already seen snowflakes. 2020 registration for the beach starts Jan. 1.

Building A Successful Podcast

Presented James Blatch and John Dyer

Reported by Nicole Evelina

Even though they say podcasting is the new blogging, it isn't for everyone. In the words of presenters James Blatch and John Dyer, "It is a slog. There is a relentlessness to doing it. It's like producing a radio show." And they should know. They are the co-hosts of the wildly successful podcast *The Self-Publishing Show*, which has had 193 episodes and 1.3 million downloads.

Together with Mark Dawson, they also helped create the SPF community, including a series of online classes for indie writers.

While they are huge advocates of podcasting, they want writers to know the realities of running a podcast and exactly what it takes in terms of time, skills and cost, and what kind of ROI they will get out of it.

Things to think about when considering beginning a podcast

The first thing to ask yourself is, "Is it worth it for me?"

For **nonfiction** writers, the answer is likely to be yes because you have built-in material and it will be easier to get guests/experts on your show. You already have a mailing list and are selling products, whether they are books, workbooks, courses, etc. A podcast can help you grow your brand, establish your expertise, generate more leads, and get more sales. Examples of successful podcasts by nonfiction authors include Pat Flynn's *Smart Passive Income*, Chris Ducker's *Youpreneur*, Tim Ferris' *4-Hour Work Week* and, of course, the presenters' own *The Self-Publishing Show*.

For **fiction** writers, the answer is less clear—except for sci-fi writers. They and their fans "love to talk about nerdy things" so there is a built-in audience. But for most fiction authors, it is more difficult to find engaging content. However, you should at least think about it. Hosting a podcast could bring you story content/ideas, help you improve your craft and/or your marketing, give you greater visibility to readers, and maybe even help land deals. Examples of fiction writers who are using their podcasts successfully include: Sarah Painter of *The Worried Writer* (audience: writers). Paul Teague of *Self-Publishing Journeys* (audience: writers), and Daisy Buchanan of *You're Booked!* (audience: readers).

Other questions to ask yourself before making a decision:

- **Do I want this? Or do I feel pressured** because "everybody's doing it" or "they" say I should? If you want to do it, you are more likely to be successful than if you are doing it out of a sense of obligation.
- **Do I have the time?** This is important because a properly produced podcast takes time. Following are estimates of how long it takes Blatch and Dyer each week to do their

podcast. (But don't let this scare you, they give tips later on for how to reduce this schedule for beginners.)

- 30 mins research
- 90 mins for an interview slot
- 60 mins for the wrap before and after the interview (Batching is your friend. Record 4 or 5 wraps in a row.)
- 90 mins editing (outsourced)
- 60 mins for creating banner, title,
- 60 mins for copy for email and ads
- 60 mins for distribution

If this scares you, there are things you can do to cut down your time. For example, you could dedicate two days a month to nothing but your podcasts for that month and knock them all out at once. Or you could outsource some of the work to professionals (editing, for example) or a virtual assistant.

- **Do I have the skillset? Or am I willing to learn?** As a podcaster, you will need to be the producer who comes up with the subject, books the guests, etc., the presenter, the interviewer, the editor and the distributor. (More on what each of these entails later.)
- **Would alternatives be better?** Is there another way for you to reach a new audience and/or get your information out there that will suit your life better?
- **Am I comfortable as a presenter? Will I find it enjoyable?** Sure, everyone is a little awkward at first and you will get better with time, but if you find the idea of listening to your own voice abhorrent or aren't comfortable being recorded, this might not be the best idea for you.

So, you've decided to do this

If you've decided to move forward with podcasting, the first thing you need to do—just as with your books—is to analyze your possible **content** and audience. What is buried in your books that you can talk about? What principles lie behind your books that could bear in-depth exploration?

Think about your **ideal listener**. You have to give them something they will want to take notes on while listening and talk to others about. Think about who that reader/listener is and create an avatar/persona for them. Plan your content around them, around what would most interest them and get them talking.

The next decision you need to make is the **format** of your podcast. You should be consistent on this. There are four main types:

1. **Single-person presenter** – This is where you are the only one talking in a monologue style. This is especially good for conveying information, news or giving reviews.
2. **Zoo** – This is a group of three or four people talking. Think about the way morning radio shows work. This is usually pretty informal and works well for news, comedy and storytelling.

3. **Guest/Interview** – This is where you will have a guest or guests on that you will interview.
4. **Scripted Monologue** – Think of these like old-fashioned radio shows from the 1920s and 1930s. This is dramatic storytelling. You can have music in the background, use sound effects, etc.

You will also want to think about if you want to be **sound-only or include video** as well. Even if you go with sound-only, you will want to create a card that represents your show for uploading to YouTube. (More on that later.)

You will also need to think about how you are going to end each show. Your ending should always include a **call to action** for your readers, something you want them to do. This could be participating in some kind of regular giveaway, downloading a PDF starter pack or free book that you offer to all listeners, or maybe even an episode-specific giveaway (i.e. a PDF containing 12 misconceptions about [whatever the subject of your show was]).

You will also want to decide on your distribution methods. There are many options available including Spotify, Amazon Music, YouTube, Facebook Live, Apple Podcasts, Google, and Stitcher. You may also want to have an RSS Feed, which is a web location that allows your podcast to be updated through all channels.

Similarly, you will want to decide if you are going to use a **hosting platform**. Popular ones include [Audioboom](#), [Blubrry](#), [Simplecast](#), [Spreker](#), [Libsyn](#) and [Squarespace](#). All cost from \$5/month based on size of your files and how many times per month you distribute. The presenters recommend Libsyn because it makes it easy to get onto Google podcasts, Apple and Spotify, plus you can use the link it gives you anywhere, including your website. No matter which platform you choose, you will need to upload to [Stitcher](#) and YouTube separately.

How do I do this, exactly?

First, it's a good idea to launch three episodes at once to give yourself a head-start. Let's walk through each of the steps and look at what you need to think about/do in each.

- **Preproduction** – This is everything you do before you actually record your episode.
 - a. First, you will need to determine what your subject will be, exactly what you will cover and book your guest. If you need help coordinating calendars online, try [Acuity](#) online scheduling.
 - b. You will want to write your questions and send any pre-questions to your guest, such as how to pronounce their name, what they would like to talk about (if you are using an open format), etc.
 - c. You should also prep your guest. It is wise to recommend that they use an external mic, headphones, and take the interview in a room that doesn't echo.
 - d. Make sure you have the proper equipment, at the very least:
 - i. A computer with a built-in microphone.
 - ii. A [Zoom.us](#) account for audio recording. You can use Skype but it is unreliable.

- iii. Screen recording software such as Screenflow (Mac), Camtasia (PC), Quicktime (Mac).
 - e. If you want to upgrade to a fancier setup consider:
 - i. Noise reducing software such as Audition, which is part of Adobe Creative Cloud to remove any hiss.
 - ii. And external microphone such as NT USB by Rode, Yeti Blue, Step up: XLR or a Sony 6000, which will synch up your audio and video.
 - iii. A boom arm to help you easily move your microphone as needed.
- **Production** – This is when you do your recording. It's a smart idea to have your intro and outro scripted and have bullet points of what you are going to say or questions you will ask during the interview in front of you so you don't lose your train of thought. But don't be so scripted that it sounds like you're reading from a prepared list. It's okay to ad-lib. If you are interviewing someone, be sure to listen to their answers. This is what turns an interview into a discussion, a real conversation. And sometimes it can even generate other ideas for a separate interview and you can have your guest back again.
- **Post-Production** – This is where you:
 - a. Edit (recommended software Adobe Premier Elements or iMovie (Mac))
 - b. Add the intro and outro.
 - c. Export your file as an MP3 or MP4 if you have video.
 - d. Create your title card for use on YouTube and other areas. It should be succinct, appeal to your audience, and echo the branding. It should include the title of your podcast, your subtitle or tagline, the host's name(s) and artwork that makes it stand out.
 - e. Write the summary / description that you will upload to the distribution sites.
 - f. Distribute.

Another thing to consider is including a transcript. This is important for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as well as because some people just like to read rather than listen. You don't want to alienate part of you audience. But you don't have to do it yourself. There are alternatives that involve artificial intelligence such as [rev.com](https://www.rev.com). You will still have to clean them up a bit, but it beats listening and trying to transcribe by hand!

Also, just like with social media or a blog, be sure to check back for feedback/comments and respond in a timely manner. Using [Disqus](https://disqus.com) on your website is very helpful for this.

Continuing education

If you want to learn more about how to run a successful podcast, there are many online courses and tutorials. Blatch and Dyer recommend Pat Flynn's YouTube channel *Smart Passive Income*, particularly an episode called "[How to start a podcast 2019](#)." If you want to learn new skills, try [Skillshare](https://www.skillshare.com).

*After extended careers as a teacher and film and video regulator in London, **John Dyer** set up (and still manages) a successful UK-based video production company. Writer **James Blatch** is a former BBC Television News reporter and presenter and a former film examiner for the British Board of Film Classification.*



[Nicole Evelina](#) is a USA Today bestselling author of historical fiction, non-fiction, and women's fiction. She loved her second NINC conference and can't wait for next year!

Turbocharging Sales on Amazon

Presented by David Gaughran

Reported by Nicole Evelina

The slides for this presentation are available at <https://davidgaughran.com/ninc2019/>.

This article pertains to Kindle Unlimited only, so if you're an author who is wide, you can skip this one. Gaughran promised he wouldn't mind. *(There are three tips that apply to wide authors, so look for the bold word **NOTE**, if you want those.)*

First, the answer to the question everyone wants to know: how do you target KU subscribers? The answer: You can't.

So how do you take advantage of the four million page reads each month on All-Star bonuses and 10 million for title bonuses? The secret is visibility.

Gaughran's Winning KU Strategy

The strategy has five main elements:

1. Get aggressive on price.
2. Run multiple discounts.
3. Push hard with ads (Facebook, BookBub, Amazon).
4. Sacrifice all for visibility. This is what triggers Amazon to send emails to KU subscribers.
5. Big risks = even bigger rewards.

Part 1: Preparation

You have to have solid branding on your series so that people can see how they tie together. Similarly, you should have consistent categories across all books in a series and have perfect series metadata. Be sure to look for new categories, make sure you are using smart keywords and that your strategy is algorithm-friendly.

Before you run a promotion, make sure your series pages look right because they can break or not form properly, especially when you have new releases. If this happens, you can contact Amazon, but it will take time. You may want to just reinput your series data and make sure everything is spelled the same.

More information on all of this is available in Gaughran's free book *Amazon Decoded*, which you can get on [his website](#). He also recommends a [free webinar](#) he did on Reedsy about Amazon's popularity list.

Part 2: Algorithms

These include:

1. **Sales rank** – This is influenced by your number of sales and time, nothing else. Your rank will decay by half each day. One borrow is equal to one sale, no matter what anyone else has told you.
2. **Popularity list** – This is a 30-day average and has a four-day delay, so if you start a promotion on a Monday, you likely won't see it in the popularity list until Thursday or Friday. Free books are counted on this list, but borrows are not. Prime reading promotions really help this list.
3. **Recommendation engine** – The popularity list powers KU recommendations. Top also-boughts are also displayed when you purchase a book.

For all of these, you want to target buyers not borrowers and are aiming for consistent sales over four to five days (or seven for countdown promos), not massive spikes. After your promotion, you will experience high rankings for at least a week and up to a month as part of the halo effect.

Part 3: Strategy

You have a lot of options that are algorithm-friendly. For example, you can run simultaneous discounts, deeply discount your books in favor of visibility, or do countdowns or free runs. Gaughran recommends mixing in free with discounts occasionally because it gets you a different set of readers. However, for long-term strategy he recommends pricing at \$0.99 because in countdowns you still get 70 percent royalties. He recommends using multiple discounts because when readers buy multiple books on discount they get emotionally committed to a series rather than letting it sit on their Kindle.

He showed a series of examples for promotion plans. **NOTE:** These can be used by authors who are wide as well—just don't be as aggressive on price drops and don't attempt Plan D.

Plan A

- Book 1: \$0.99 – countdown
- Book 2: \$1.99 – countdown
- Book 3: \$2.99 – manual drop

Plan B

- Book 1: Free
- Book 2: \$0.99 – countdown
- Book 3: \$2.99 – countdown

Plan C

- Book 1: \$0.99 – countdown
- Book 2: \$1.99 – countdown
- Book 3: \$2.99 – countdown
- Book 4: \$4.99
- Book 5: \$4.99

- Book 6: \$4.99
- Book 7: \$4.99

Plan D

- Book 1: Free
- Book 2: \$0.99 – countdown
- Book 3: \$0.99 – countdown
- Book 4: \$0.99 – countdown
- Book 5: \$1.99 – countdown
- Book 6: \$2.99 – countdown
- Book 7: \$2.99 – countdown
- Book 8: \$2.99 – manual

Plan E (use only for a backlist series that isn't moving using other tactics)

- Book 1: \$0.99 – countdown
- Book 2: \$0.99 – countdown
- Book 3: \$0.99 – countdown
- Book 4: \$0.99 – countdown
- Book 5: \$0.99 – countdown
- Book 6: \$0.99 – countdown
- Book 7: \$0.99 – countdown
- Book 8: \$0.99 – countdown
- Book 9: \$0.99 – countdown

The key takeaways from these are that aggression (often) pays and that switching up tactics keeps things fresh and nets new readers.

Part 4: The Juice

Middle books in a series are notoriously difficult to sell, but can be used to reach both new readers or established fans through series ads. There are several types of series ads and Gaughran has tips for each:

1. **Facebook carousel ads** – Gaughran likes these because they give you plenty of opportunity to tell the reader what your call to action is.
 - a. You can put it in a button and link directly to your series page.
 - b. You can also mention your series in the copy, i.e. “swipe to see the whole series.”
 - c. You can use a visual to show three so you can see there are more deals on other books. Just put in the price tag in the top left corner and you'll be able to see the tags for the first and second images. (He suggests testing this on mobile.)
2. **When designing ads** – You will want to use 3-D book covers and use all of the covers in the series if you can. He does note that these ads are hit and miss. But you can always turn them off if they don't work.

3. **Facebook series page ads** – These are standard Facebook ads that go directly to your series page on Amazon. These are good because people don't see any sponsored product ads or other distractions. Also, if your reader already owns a few of the books in the series, the page recognizes that and updates the total price to reflect what the reader needs to buy in order to complete the series. **NOTE:** Wide authors, you can use these ads.
4. **BookBub series page ads** – These direct people to the series page just like the Facebook ones above do. **NOTE:** Wide authors, you can use these ads.

You can also use series page links in emails to your mailing list and in newsletter swaps. To avoid getting your emails sent to spam, use the minimum number of links and images. Also sign up to your own email to test that it doesn't go to spam. If you Google it, you can find lists of words that add to your spam score. This is discussed in the book *Newsletter Ninja: How to Become an Author Mailing List Expert* by Tammi L. Labrecque.

Putting it all together

So, how do we bring together all of this pricing and promotions information into a successful promotion? David offered three "KU Killer" promotion plans depending on how much risk you want to take.

Conservative

- Book 1: \$0.99 countdown (promote using swaps, free sites, standard ads)
- Book 2: \$1.99 countdown (promote using series ads)
- Book 3: \$2.99 countdown (promote using series ads)
- Book 4: \$3.99 new release (promote using your mailing list)

Moderate

- Book 1: Free (promote using swaps, free sites, standard ads)
- Book 2: \$0.99 countdown (promote using series ads)
- Book 3: \$1.99 countdown (promote using series ads)
- Book 4: \$2.99 new release (promote using your mailing list)

Aggressive

- Book 1: \$0.99 countdown (promote using swaps, free sites, standard ads)
- Book 2: \$0.99 countdown (promote using series ads)
- Book 3: \$0.99 countdown (promote using series ads)
- Book 4: \$2.99 new release (promote using your mailing list)

Novelist [David Gaughran](#) has helped thousands of authors publish their work through his workshops, his blog, and his writers' books: *Let's Get Digital*, *Strangers to Superfans*, *Amazon Decoded*, and *BookBub Ads Expert*. He has also created marketing campaigns for some of the biggest self-publishers on the planet.



Nicole Evelina is a USA Today bestselling author of historical fiction, non-fiction, and women's fiction. She loved her second NINC conference and can't wait for next year!

Planning to Thrive

Presented by Sarra Cannon

Reported by Alyssa Day

Sarra Cannon is passionate about the word "thrive" and she believes it's "one of the coolest times, ever, to be an author." In this session, she shared what she has learned over the course of a career that includes writing and publishing more than 25 young adult contemporary fantasy novels, including her bestselling Shadow Demons Saga. With more than three-quarters of a million books sold, she's also passionate about helping fellow authors.

She says she's still learning, and she loves to help fellow authors learn to self-publish in a way that puts joy and creativity at the forefront. She does this through her successful YouTube channel and her blog [Heart Breathings](#), where she talks about everything from productivity to plotting. Cannon also teaches classes on how to plan for success in publishing, and she brought her proven strategies for planning, fighting that sinking feeling of being overwhelmed, and successful scheduling to NINC 2019. In fact, she was so excited to come to NINC that she brought her entire family, including her three-week-old daughter.

First, Cannon pointed out that it's easier than ever to become overwhelmed by the current state of the industry. She cited a statistic that there are more than three million books published each year now, including the "all-you-can-eat buffet of free books" that is Kindle Unlimited. In traditional publishing, advances are dwindling and disappearing. Advertising costs are skyrocketing. As authors, we are in a constant state of information overload. Adding to all that, we have the issue that our readers' time is at a premium.

What's an author to do? She posed the question: How can we thrive despite these challenges?

Cannon defined "thrive" as to prosper (make money, must be able to sustain your writing career), flourish (take control of your own career, not just operate in survival/reaction mode), and progress toward or realize a goal or dream despite, or because of, the circumstances or opportunities at hand.

She then set forth seven key principles to help NINC members plan to thrive.

First, authors should create their own definitions of success.

She cited Albert Schweitzer, who said: "Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success."

The most important decision authors can make in their publishing careers is to decide how they define success—and it differs for each author. It's also too easy to make the wrong choice and decide to define success based on another author's version of success.

Cannon told of her own experiences early in her career. She'd started writing because she loved it, but then she got caught up in comparing herself to others in her various writer groups

who were making more money. This led her to compromise her own definition of success. She made good money but did so by way of bad creative choices that she later regretted. She lost readers, too.

"This is what happens when you let fear control you," she said. "I hit those \$30,000 months, and then I thought the new house and car would make me happy, but it didn't. The key to finding the success you truly want is to be happy first, and then work to achieve success."

Her key point: You don't have to wait for that moment of success to be happy.

First, ask: What does a successful career look like to you? What does it *feel* like? And then find a way to that career or make a new one if you need to do so. "There are so many choices and so many paths in publishing today, so you don't need to go someone else's way," Cannon declared. "There are more ways to reach readers, genres that have opened up, multiple paths to publishing, and nothing standing in our way except—sometimes—ourselves."

The problem, though, is that "you go where you're pointed." If you're not aiming yourself in a direction, you won't get there. When you ask yourself where you'll be in 10 years, you won't know unless you've pointed yourself in that direction.

Second, don't let fear be your master

Cannon's slide quoted Babe Ruth: "Never let the fear of striking out get in your way." Her next slide was a quote by Eleanor Roosevelt: "You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing you think you cannot do."

Her point was that authors cannot let fear, rather than joy, compromise their goals. "FOMO is a thing! The fear of missing out or choosing the wrong path," she said. "It adds stress and pressure to constantly be afraid, and it's difficult or impossible to write when you're stressed out so badly."

However, if you know what you want, it will cure a lot of fear, because you'll have confidence in yourself.

Cannon combined the next two tips:

Third, surround yourself with support (not negativity) and Fourth, stop comparing yourself to others

Stop comparing yourself with others. All it takes is one bad day and then seeing your author friends talking about their extreme successes to trigger "comparisonitis"—the death of creativity.

Cannon offered several strategies and tips to avoid the dreaded comparisonitis:

1. Commit to becoming more aware of when you're comparing yourself to someone.
2. Step away from people/situations that trigger negativity and/or comparisonitis.
3. Focus instead on what makes you feel good.
4. Recognize that you're often comparing yourself to an illusion (Someone claims to write a book a week? Maybe they do, maybe they use ghostwriters. Someone else claims to make a huge amount of money per month? Maybe they do, but maybe they're spending half that on advertising.)

5. There will always be someone achieving more or doing "better." If you look for it, you will find it. Stop using it as an excuse to be mean to yourself.
6. Write out affirmations about the work you're doing.

Cannon emphasized that "the only person you should be comparing yourself to is you."

Fifth, mind your business

She meant this as, "Pay attention to your business." Her slide quoted Peter Drucker: "If you can't **measure** it, you can't **improve** it." Cannon stated the importance of keeping on top of all aspects of your business. She cited the following things to track:

1. Sales numbers
2. Income and expenses
3. Ad spend
4. Social media analytics
5. Submissions
6. Word count average (or median)
7. Time

Sixth, learn to effectively manage your time

First, she said, create your definition of success — your idea vision for your life. Then she showed a slide that gave several tips for how to best accomplish this:

- First create your definition of success/ideal vision for your life. Use this as your GPS system. (think long term)
- Next, create 1-3 goals that point you in the direction of your long-term vision.
- For each goal, determine a handful of projects that will help you achieve that goal.
- Break each project down into small tasks that can be completed in a single session.
- Each week, decide your main tasks and get it done!

Seventh, write what you love

Cannon concluded her presentation with the advice, "If you really want to thrive, write what you love. You can do it for much longer term than writing something you don't love." She cited the downward trend of her books she wrote only to keep up with other authors, and yet she has sold more than 600,000 copies of her Shadow Demons Saga that she loves writing.

She also put up a slide with a quote from famed science fiction author Ray Bradbury: "You must stay drunk on writing, so reality does not destroy you."

However, she offered the caveat that, of course, this is a business, so it's a good idea to pick the most marketable idea you love to write. She gave an analogy that she would love to design airplanes, but she'd have to actually learn how to be an aerospace engineer in order to do so, not just jump into the career. She then compared that to seeking out and choosing a market in which to write. Authors should be deliberate about packaging their work in the most marketable way, know their target market(s), and know the challenges of those markets.

In closing, Cannon quoted a book titled *Regrets of The Dying* by Bronnie Ware: "I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me." She encouraged the audience, "If you have the desire, you can make it happen."

Cannon's YouTube channel, where she discusses all things planning, can be found at youtube.com/heartbreathings, and you can sign up for her courses at heartbreathings.com.

Sarra Cannon is the indie author of more than twenty-five young adult contemporary fantasy novels, including her bestselling Shadow Demons Saga. With close to three-quarters of a million books sold, Cannon is also passionate about helping fellow authors learn to self-publish in a way that puts joy and creativity at the forefront.



Alyssa Day is president-elect of NINC and is currently enjoying the end of her year as 2019 conference programming chair with daily chocolate and champagne.

Write to Market Masterclass

Presented by Chris Fox

Reported by Jennifer Stevenson

Chris Fox has written many novels, but is best known among authors for his *Write Faster, Write Smarter* series. From *5,000 Words Per Hour* to *Plot Gardening* to *Write to Market*, Fox has engineered a road map to take any writer from hobbyist to professional. He has used this model to sell over 300,000 books through Amazon and Audible since 2015.

Fox covered these topics in this presentation: What writing to market is, how to reach your readers through symbols, writing to trend vs. inventing a genre, and how to identify your audience.

Fox: "If you understand who your audience is, you can print money. You won't have to work so hard."

He has earned half a million dollars since October 2014 on 69 books. He has written to market in science fiction. His May 1 release has already oversold everything he has ever written, because he wrote it to market.

An early great experience was running a 21-day novel challenge. He kicked off a YouTube channel announcing that he would write to market, post a chapter every day to Amazon, then post a video reporting his sales.

The times when he doesn't make money are the periods when he doesn't write novels. At this time, he's not releasing faster, but he is making more money than ever by mastering his backlist and appropriately reading his audience.

There are three tenets to writing to market:

Tenet #1 Identify your audience before you start writing.

Learn their age, hobbies, likes, favorite TV shows. For example, how old is your audience? "I vividly remember seeing a video on TV of the plane hitting the tower on 9/11/2001. If your audience is 16- to 19-year-old kids, they won't see the video the same way. They weren't alive. If you know the cultural touchstones of your audience's age group, you can reach them."

Tenet #2 Understand the emotional resonance your audience is seeking.

"If I read horror, I look for a different experience than I get from cozy mystery. In your genre, what are people looking for?" Think about your readers when you started reading. Think about yourself when you started reading.

Fox tells the story of how he became the kid on a milk carton, or, Why did eight-year-old Chris read epic fantasy? "When I was eight, I was on the back of a milk carton. My parents were divorced; my father lived in Scottsdale, mom lived on a houseboat in California. My brothers

and I spent one month in the summer with my mom. One year she wanted to keep us kids. She sued for custody and lost. Mom refused to accept the decree. I got a phone call from Mom saying, “Get some food, grab your brothers, meet my boyfriend at his boat on the far side of the island.” I grabbed toys, put a dozen Twinkies in my backpack, grabbed my brothers, and ran across the island. We lived on the run for a year. I became my middle name, he became his middle name, we moved to a new town every three weeks, new school. Eventually Mom had used up her social capital and had to go home. Mom was arrested. My brothers and I went into the foster system until Dad got re-awarded custody. Mom went to jail.

“Eight-year-old Chris had no agency. He saw horrible things happening and could do nothing. When he started reading fantasy, he could start as an assistant pig keeper or a hobbit, and he could see that kid grow into power and have agency. He could see that, ‘it does get better, Chris.’ I devoured a 100,000-word epic fantasy a day from age eight to age 22. Fantasy was a lifeline for me as a kid.”

You probably have a similar story that’s tied to your reading habits. Look at your first reading. What really got to you?

Get to the root of why our readers read. You’re not trying to reach 43-year-old Chris, you’re trying to reach eight-year-old Chris, who had that vulnerable experience. If you do these things correctly, people can’t put your book down.

Tenet #3 Write what you love.

Find the sweet spot between stuff you want to write and stuff that will sell. If you write in a genre you hate, it’s a recipe for unhappiness. He recounted the story of Scarf Man, who wrote erotica though he hated it, because he thought it would succeed.

Symbolic recognition

Reaching people requires you know what they are seeking. Symbolic recognition is how we reach them. Every word, color, and number is a symbol. Everything is coded into your brain; it has [emotional resonance.] It creates a bucket in your head that you put facts into about what that symbol means to you. If you come from a foreign country, a red light may mean nothing to you. Reach the symbol in the other person.

Light is radiation that your eye turns into symbols. We look for patterns when light bounces into our eyes. We see Mom’s face and learn that that light pattern means food. That pattern accumulation builds up knowledge and associations.

Your lizard brain responds to the sight of a rattling snake on the path. You have a symbol in your mind that says “snake danger poison.” Was it a snake, though? What if it was just a stick? Your body up filled with chemicals the same as if it was a snake, with the same emotional responses.

If we use symbols in the same way, we will reach people.

We reach readers with powerful symbols. They’re different in every genre. Spaceships, power armor. Dragons, crowns, thrones. Importantly, you’re not trying to get a symbol that 43-year-old Chris will respond to. You want a symbol that eight-year-old Chris will respond to. The reason *Stranger Things* works is that we see a lot of symbols of things we remember from

childhood; we like that, we fire a neuron to a part of the brain that we haven't fired in a long time.

According to Fox, what I take from all this is that if I show someone an image of the right kind of dragon, the reader's brain will wake up.

His first write-to-market series was the Void Wraith Saga. Every cover element is laden with symbols. On his latest release, the spaceship is the biggest part. First, you see a 3D box set, which says intuitively, I'll get six long novels (with fat spines). Nobody wants to get into a series until it's finished. Then you notice "The Complete Saga" so it reassures you. Fox put it out in May and it's killing it. Ninety-nine cents for six books is a great deal.

You make your brand recognizable. For example, a certain typography says "BV Larson book," so he doesn't change it.

Your homework assignment is to find out: What are the symbols in your genre? How did you get into reading it? What are the symbols in that genre? How can you tap into it?

Writing to trend vs. creating a genre

Fox didn't cover creating a genre in his book *Writing to Trend* because first he had to figure out how to do it. It's easier to write to market when you're following a trend. You can work out the tropes of all that's there—cover elements, etc.

If you create a new genre, if you do it well, it's hard to copy. You can establish yourself as the milestone in that genre.

Writing to trend

Take as examples a book cover from Alex Rivers (*Agent of Enchantment*), Linsey Hall (*Undercover Magic*), and McKenzie Hunter (*Renegade Magic*). Their covers are about PNR girls with swords. When you're breaking into urban fantasy, the symbols aren't super subtle. On all three covers, the heroine has either a hand-fart (this is a term of art and means a flame in their hand) or a weapon. Fox read those because he was looking for power, and these ladies have power. I have to imagine girls need a similar kind of coming-of-age story to the kind I needed. The girls are powerless and they mature and claim agency. There are a lot of other symbols. The next symbol you'll notice here is that in the cover illustrations, all three take place at night. Why? If you read urban fantasy, you may have never been out in that night world before—maybe you never went clubbing. It's full of mystery and promise, where illicit rendezvous and crime happen. These urban fantasy covers are tapping into that.

Now title: All three of these ladies' titles have a word for the power that the character has: Enchantment, Magic, Magic. So visually you get the message that the character has power, and verbally you see a word meaning their power. Let's look at the other part of the title: *Agent of Enchantment*, *Undercover Magic*, *Renegade Magic*. So you have an FBI agent, you have an undercover character, a detective or law enforcer, and third you have a renegade—she doesn't need an agency, she's on her own. They're similar in those ways. Breaking in, you could choose to use the same symbols; you know they work. If you want to turn the industry on its head, come up with a second set of symbols that promise the same thing. Fox says, "Maybe I'd use that kind of title, but I'd use a different symbol. Sometimes I do that, and I fail. I tried a series in

military-SF where I put mechs (giant robots) on the cover, not starships. I did okay, but didn't sell nearly as well as I wanted to."

When he wrote *Hero Born*, he tried to go out of market and invent a new genre. He couldn't afford a good cover. He told a cover designer: Hunky guy, eyes of power. He came back with "creepy uncle Phil peering over a fence." This was Fox's superhero/alien abduction series. But what he got was a bad cover for a TV show that failed.

He tried again in 2017 with more success. He synthesized a new market: Space Fantasy. He took everything he liked about epic fantasy and put it somewhere it had never been. He had never read an epic fantasy that had the same resonance in this new setting.

SF readers want camaraderie. Fantasy readers want agency. Some of his covers have SF symbols, but primarily he used fantasy symbols. He's got mechs and spaceships and planets, but also dragons and swords. He chose the power armor for one cover because his existing audience was science fiction. If it had been his first book, he'd have started with a dragon. Fox says, "I now see other good space fantasies coming out. Some people were copying me right away but didn't understand doing the emotional resonance thing."

A new genre fragments over time

A popular image in literary role playing games (LitRPG) is the main character trapped in a video game. This is the most popular SF/F genre to emerge in our lifetime. The term LitRPG was trademarked by someone, so the term GameLit is now the pop term. This market has 500-600 good novels in it already. Take advantage of your lead when you do start a new genre. It'll fragment. Stay ahead of them by knowing your market.

Become your target reader

This task is like full-on Dungeons & Dragons role playing. You must create an identity in your head. You don't necessarily know how old this person is, or what they do for a living, or how they differ from you. Maybe they're in a job they don't like, or they don't make money. What you know is, what situations is this person involved in? How would they react in an adventure?

Occasional versus habitual readers

Ask yourself, "Is my reader an occasional reader?" A habitual reader is eight-year-old Chris. All he does for fun is read. That's his primary form of entertainment. The up side to that reader, for authors, is that they devour everything we've written. The down side of habitual readers is that they forget you very quickly. In the next six months, they will have read 180 books between your releases. They're wonderful if you write for KU.

Fox is really seeking occasional readers. This reader has a job and kids, watches Netflix, does other things beside read. Sometimes they'll read. They may not pick up a book all the time. These readers are super crazy loyal. They'll buy every book at full price and then tell everyone. These are your readers, your bread and butter.

You can get superfans among habitual readers but they're much rarer. Habitual readers are broke. They can't afford to pay for all their books when they read one or two books a day.

Occasional readers are not price sensitive at all—they will pay full price. Both kinds of readers are useful. Ultimately you want a mix, but it's smart to figure out where the bulk of your readership lives.

Age, gender, and occupation

Once you have an idea about which are your readers (habitual or occasional), you can learn these further details about them. You can be surprised. The largest consumer group of Fox's audiobooks is long haul truckers. There are three million of them, and they're in the truck for many hours a day. "It was a complete shock to discover they were my fans."

Study your comments and reviews to see who these people are. Click on their accounts at Amazon and Facebook and see what else they read, where they live. Stalk them. Follow your readers' trail. If you can't stalk them, interact.

What are their favorite movies? Based on age group, ask what they like right now, last year, then their favorite movie in 1990, 2000, 2010, etc. Build a list of their favorite movies. Now you can analyze those movies. You can reach all the way back into the 1950s and find symbols and tropes that trigger nostalgia for them. Once you know, repeat those tropes in your books.

Repeat this for your fans' TV shows. Some TV viewers aren't readers, but most readers are TV watchers. They'll tell you. Repeat again for games: are your readers gamers? Images from their favorite games will get to them. Come up with hundreds of questions for them. "Did you like *Star Wars The Last Jedi*? *Dancing With the Stars*? *Pokemon*? *Cooking shows*? *Lonesome Dove*?" If they love cooking shows, they'll love a book with a recipe in it.

You have just made a giant list of symbols which double as keywords. All those things you mined can be used as keywords.

Q&A

Q: I'm anxious to follow breadcrumbs. I don't know how to start. I know age, gender, genre preference. But how do I get to "Do they like Lonesome Dove?"

A: Great question. Do you have a Facebook group?

Q: I do have a Facebook ad set.

A: That's a great start. Knowing their age. My gut instinct is they don't care for Lonesome Dove.

Q: They're thriller readers.

A: Thriller readers? Not into Lonesome Dove. Put together a survey, phrase it in different ways, survey them, share stories of your own childhood, see how they respond. Tell them how old you were when you read X, how old were you? They'll tell you.

Q: In the UnCon someone said, on Facebook, put up a simple question every week. Or a question: "Hey, Ponderosa or Maverick?"

A: That's phenomenal advice. Every week you have a new piece of info to add to who these people are. Once you think you have a clue, you check in with your audience, did you guess right? Symbols can be easier to suss out, especially if you're inventing a new genre. Once you know your genre, it's easier.

Q: Is there a way to research symbols?

A: Most of the stuff I found was really high level. Joseph Campbell is really accessible. His video interview with Bill Moyers is two hours of talks on symbolism.

Q: Tied into the weekly question, is this ongoing for you?

A: I hired a community manager and she hosts polls for me. She asks questions like “What was your favorite game from the ‘90s?” Facebook notices that engagement, and the more it grows, the more it shows your stuff to your audience.

Q: Go over the metrics you mentioned. Say you’re researching a new genre to break into or trend. You look at covers for the top 100—what are the metrics you’re looking for? How do I determine if it’s a good symbol or bad symbol? Do I go by bestseller rank?

A: Bestseller rank yes, but click on the book. Check reviews. Look for those reviews that are emotional; what do they reference? If a lot of reviews mention a dragon incinerating someone, hey, boom. If you’re writing to trend, capitalize on that trend.

Q: Have you heard of Jennifer Barnes’ work on [The Id List](#)? She kind of reverse-engineers those tropes and symbols: find them in yourself and chances are they resonate for your fans, because they’re your fans.

A: No, but what I’m doing is similar. Psychoanalyze yourself. If you know what impacts you, you’ll know what impacts your audience. If you’re in a position to look back at yourself then you’ll learn a lot that helps in this process.

Q: You’re using words and symbols to reinforce words and symbols. Will a word (as a symbol) have as much impact as visual symbol? Where do you put the most weight?

A: I don’t know enough to say definitely. Visual is the way now. Most people are visual / intuitive. The cover starts the impact. It’s only successful if you hit them with both.

Q: I’m curious about your creating a genre: what is behind that?

A: I created a genre based on what I wanted to write. I know a lot about starships and dragons. When I did the research, I thought, what’s important about that symbol, what elements matter (to me), and how do I tap into those? When I started [my second series] I had to replace the first 10 chapters, which at first emphasized the mil-SF part and not the dragon stuff. The fantasy elements turned out to be more important, and I re-engineered the front end of the book accordingly.

Q: I’m creating a new genre myself. What was your experience getting reviews the way you wanted?

A: Mil-SF fans were disappointed in my series because there was not enough mil-SF and there were too many dragons. 50 percent loved it, 50 percent hated it. The guesswork was expensive—I had to replace covers and stuff. It’s helpful if someone has gone before. If you’re doing a brand-new mashup, if it’s Steampunk, did you look at this guy or that guy?

Q: I definitely have a bunch of symbols. This particular mashup has great mashups on both sides. It's an unusual combination. I'm hoping it invokes curiosity. People will ask, "How will this work?" They've never seen it before.

A: The symbols you pick will really matter. Pick strong symbols.

Q: You say your first book was received 50/50. How was the second book received?

A: I totally weeded them out. The fantasy fans who were also mil-SF readers loved book two. Check out what the lovers read. Not the haters.

Q: I'd just like to say thank you. I read Write to Market, followed your guidelines, and I'm doing well!

A: I love success stories.

Chris Fox has written more than 20 novels. He resides in Marin, California, which can be found "by following the scent of entitlement until you reach the town with teens driving Teslas."



Jennifer Stevenson is the author of five funny series: Liars in Love, Backstage Boys, Hinky Chicago, Slacker Demons, and Coed Demon Sluts.

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>

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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/>

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

[2017/01/2017_New_Member_Welcome_Packet-public.pdf](http://ninc.com/system/assets/uploads/2017/01/2017_New_Member_Welcome_Packet-public.pdf)

Member discounts

NINC members are eligible for certain professional discounts. A complete listing of these can be found at <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/member-freebies-discounts/> 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
- 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

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- [Complete committee member listings](#) are available on the website. Many committee positions are open and looking for new volunteers.
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 - Logistics: Karen Fox
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Address changes may be made on the website.

Nink Newsletter

November 2019 edition – Vol. 30, No. 11

To request reprint rights or to submit an article proposal, please contact [the editor](#).

Publication: 12 issues annually. Available in PDF, mobi and epub formats. Public issues redact NINC members-only information. To change subscription preferences, please contact admin@ninc.com.

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