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President's Voice

By Tawdra Kandle



Somehow, it's November. I'm not quite sure how this happened, but we're down to the final two months of this very interesting year.

In many parts of the world, mine included, this is a time of year when we are called to a practice of gratitude. We should be mindful of thanksgiving always, but personally, November and December make me more keenly aware of all for which I should be grateful.

All of us who are members of Novelists, Inc. have an extra cause to be thankful; we are part of profession or avocation that allows us to express our thoughts and feelings, our passions and our beliefs, through a vehicle that also brings pleasure to others. The worlds we spin and the characters we create offer readers both inspiration and escape.

Some years ago, I was privileged to hear Douglas Grisham, stepson of well-known Christian apologist and author C.S. Lewis, speak on the topic of writing. He was of the opinion that as authors, we have a responsibility to our readers, to offer them not only the best-crafted story but also a tale that inspires deep thought and noble action.

As a romance author, I'm not sure how often my books have caused any deep thought, but the truth is that even the fluffiest love story has the potential to change lives. Characters who demonstrate bravery, humor, and kindness offer hope to a weary world. And simply finding fictional folk to whom we can relate can make a difference to those feeling utterly alone.

Our profession often requires long hours of solitude. We may sit in front of a computer screen creating worlds and interacting with pretend people, not conversing with real, live human beings for long stretches of time. It would be easy to forget that what we do will ultimately affect those real, living human beings; our books will, we hope, make people laugh, cry, hope, despair and sigh with contented joy—or in some cases, might cause them to mutter curses at us before they throw the cliff-hanger book across the room!

I don't know if others feel this way, but I believe that during times of stress and upheaval in the wide world, we novelists have an even greater responsibility to write stories that inspire significant, positive action. That action can range from simple acts of daily kindness to voting in political elections to taking potentially dangerous stands against injustice and tyranny.

This is something we should take seriously, but it should not be a burden; rather, it is a privilege for which we can be thankful.

I'm deeply grateful that I'm allowed to share what's important to me with my readers, to offer them stories of imperfect characters who live through challenging circumstances and demonstrate the courage of their convictions—who choose the harder right rather than the easier wrong. I hope my words inspire. I'm sure you share that hope with me about your own work.

Finally, in this season of thanksgiving, I'm so very grateful for all of you, for your patience and support and kindness as I've fumbled my way through 2020. I can't promise that my second year of NINC presidency will be without stumbles, and I'm sure I'll continue to need your gracious understanding. Thank you for being part of this organization, this community of creators and word-crafters. I'm so glad that we all have each other. May it ever be so!

—Tawdra Kandle

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.

About NINC

NINC remains committed to serving all of our members, regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, religious/spiritual beliefs if any, ability, nationality or age. It is NINC's desire and goal to make sure that every author member feels welcomed and accepted and heard.

About Nink

Nink's goal is to provide our readers with high-quality articles that offer critical business advice, marketing how-tos, advanced craft coaching, or strategy to continue building a career, all geared to established authors. All members should feel confident that Nink provides something for them. We welcome pitches and submissions from all members; [propose an article](#) or submit a [letter to the editor](#).

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](#).

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/>

You're Not Broken

Be your own writing champion

By Denise A. Agnew



Writing challenges can convince you that you're broken. The excitement you once enjoyed creating stories feels as if it has vanished. Since Covid-19 arrived at our doors, many authors have been looking for ways to cope.

If your creativity has diminished or completely disappeared, you may think it will never come back. Take heart. Writer challenges are rarely permanent if an author explores what is happening with their particular situation.

It is easy, when you're not feeling well and negative thoughts are threatening to keep you down in the dumps and uncreative, to throw your hands up and surrender. It is tempting to wallow and decide it's just the way it is. Most of us have done this at one time or another, and we don't always realize that the messages we tell ourselves are half the problem.

My challenge for you is to dig deep and to not buckle under to despair.

Discover what's really going on

Writing challenges are different for everyone, but there are things you can consider and questions you can ask to discover the origins behind your particular situation.

Overcommitment/setting boundaries

- Make a list of commitments you have in your life and see if you are shoving aside your writing in favor of doing everything else first. If you discover you're overloading your plate, make a list of what you might trim or eliminate in order to make more time for creativity. Your sanity is worth it.
- Are you volunteering in organizations you no longer enjoy? This is a tough one. Often people feel that if they've committed to volunteer in an organization, that they have to stick with it no matter what. I have personal experience with joining an organization and sticking with it way after the luster and enjoyment was no longer there. In 2019, I

significantly scaled back my commitment when I realized I no longer enjoyed the group the way I had for the last 10 years. It freed a lot of time.

- Do you feel guilty carving out writing time? Many people are family first, everything else comes second. While this can seem virtuous, there are pitfalls. You've heard the old saying that says if momma isn't happy, no one is. I guarantee if you are dying to write, but have abandoned it because other people are demanding every second of your time, any subsequent dissatisfaction and depression will manifest itself in negative ways. You may give up on your writing dreams. Ask yourself if you are training other people to expect certain things of you. If you don't carve out writing time, no one else is going to give it to you. Boundaries are important. Are your children remote schooling at home and your spouse also working at home? Are you working another full-time job at home and also trying to shoehorn in writing? If any or all of those things are in force for you right now, you may need to set new boundaries with those around you. If others don't know that writing is still important to you, they may either encroach on your writing time either by accident or design. Decide now that your writing is important and put it on your schedule. Even if you don't have as much room to write as you did before, dedicated space on your schedule can keep creativity alive.

Lean out of your comfort zone

- Are you afraid to create in a different genre or approach your genre at a "riskier" angle? Have you told yourself it might reveal something about you that feels shameful or that other people won't like? What are you not saying in your writing that you want to say?
- Own your writing. Writers want to please the reader. Sometimes, though, writers forget that in order to be happy as writers, we have to enjoy what we do the majority of the time. If others disapprove, we have to find it within ourselves not to give their approval weight. Many writers have externalized their writing so much that everything on the outside dictates whether they are creative or not. Eventually this will backfire and the creativity dries up. Be your own champion. That means please yourself first when you write and everyone else second.

Carve out some peace

- Are you worried about the state of the world? There is no doubt there are worldwide concerns overtaking space in most of our heads. Now is the time to realize that you can't spend 100 percent of your day allowing those subjects to overwhelm, depress, and deprive you of your creativity. Feeling guilty if you aren't thinking about writing 100 percent of the day doesn't serve your creativity or your mental health. Find some time to switch off that outside world and refresh your body and mind creating.

Stay open to new perspectives

- Our egos can get in the way. We become jaded and even sometimes proud of our cynicism. What this can do, though, is lead us to see our world in narrow parameters.

We think we've seen it all and therefore we can't learn anything new. Unwillingness to stretch our minds into new genres, or new ways to refresh our current genre can lead to creativity disappearing.

- Be willing to listen to new craft techniques and ideas if your creativity is waning or drying up. Consider if a technique might work, and try it. If it doesn't work for you, all is not lost. Chuck it and move on to the next.
- On the opposite side, avoid using craft classes as an excuse to never write anything. There are many writers who have spent years taking craft courses and never finished a single manuscript. Recognize when it is time to put those courses to the test by writing and finishing something.
- Write what you don't know. One way to branch out in creativity is to decide it is okay to write what you don't know and research it. If you've always wanted to write about a subject or situation you haven't experienced, go for it. There's nothing stopping you but the willingness to stay open. Being curious and researching can energize your creativity and excitement for a project.

Recognize your own power

- You've got great ideas. Somewhere along the way, though, you may have convinced yourself you don't. For some people, this stems from long-held self-esteem issues. If you think self-esteem issues are getting in the way of your creativity, it might be time to discuss them with a mental health professional who can help you navigate those waters.
- You're not alone. Too often writers believe that everyone is creating like gangbusters but they aren't. Take heart. Most writers who've been in this business a long time have encountered bumps along the way. Recognize that writer's block doesn't form because you're a bad writer. Many famous authors have complained about writing difficulties over the course of their careers. You're in great company.

Denise A. Agnew is the award-winning author and screenwriter of over 69 novels and several optioned screenplays and television series. She's written in a variety of genres including horror, romance and historical. Over the years she's also enjoyed participating in archaeology and archery. Reading is a huge love! She was fortunate enough to live in England and Hawaii and travel throughout the UK and Ireland. Agnew is also a producer, paranormal investigator, Certified Creativity Coach, Reiki Master, and evidential medium. She lives in Arizona with her husband and a mini schnauzer. You can find her at www.deniseagnew.com and www.agnewcreativemedium.com.

The Mad Scribbler

Diversify

By Laura Resnick



"Are the big publishing houses really only in the business of selling books to white people? That's not a very sustainable model, if true."

— Justine Larbalestier, novelist

Penguin Random House (PRH), the largest publishing company in the U.S., sent a letter to its authors this autumn asking them to fill out a survey that would "ask you to indicate aspects of your demographic identity, including race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and disability."

Participation in the survey was voluntary. An individual's information "will not be shared beyond a small group of Penguin Random House employees responsible for conducting the survey and analyzing the results," and it will not be used for marketing purposes. PRH explained, "The information will be used solely for the purpose of assessing the diversity of the contributors to our publishing programs, and understanding our progress towards our goal." The goal stated in the letter is to "increase the number of books we publish, promote, and sell by people of color as part of our D&I Strategic Plan." (D&I = Diversity and Inclusion.)

Right around that time, Simon & Schuster promoted Amanda Armstrong-Frank to the role of director of workplace culture and diversity initiatives. On the same day as the S&S announcement, HarperCollins named Gisselda Nuñez as its new vice-president for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Despite publishers being people who deal with books and therefore would presumably have someone on staff who knows something about writing, there is a lot of dizzying corporate-speak in the publishers' statements.

HarperCollins describes Nuñez's new responsibilities with phrases like "partnering with our recruitment team on strategies and best practices" and "partnering with executives and stakeholders throughout the business to drive decision-making and engagement."

The Penguin Random House letter to authors says about its survey: "Providing answers to these interconnected questions about identity offer additional lenses for any further assessment of the diversity of our publishing program without the need to return to authors and creators repeatedly."

Simon & Schuster's president stated that Armstrong-Frank, an employee there since 1994, "will be an agent for change" who will "partner with me in helping to facilitate conversations and access to senior management, building targeted development programming and expanding management participation in our extensive recruitment outreach to pools of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) talent."

As a big-biz ignoramus who finds that sort of syntax stressful to read, I have no opinion about how potentially effective these various plans might be. But it seems like a good thing that major publishing companies are exhibiting a desire to move with the times—or perhaps I should say, catch up with the times?

Reading about these developments, I was reminded of something I heard top-selling author Jayne Ann Krentz say in a speech many years ago (I paraphrase): Authors lead the way and publishers follow, not the other way around.

For example, when award-winning best-seller author Suzanne Brockmann sold her first book, a romance novel, her editor at Silhouette Books required a change. A secondary character in the novel was gay, and the editor said, "You have to make him straight."

Brockmann replied, "You can't be serious. It's 1992. The real world is filled with gay people." One of them, in fact, was Brockman's own son.

The editor insisted, the author resisted, but finally the editor said (accurately), "Other publishers won't let the [character] be gay, either. That's just the way it is."

Brockmann reluctantly made the change to the book. But she also began a years-long effort to include (see: inclusion) gay characters in her romance novels, first introducing them as off-screen characters, then as secondary characters, and finally as protagonists.

In 2008, 16 years after she was advised to erase a secondary character or she'd never sell that first book, her romance novel *All Through the Night* featured a gay FBI agent who falls in love and marries the man of his dreams; the book made the hardcover *New York Times* bestseller list. Brockman recounted this, and other experiences, in a 2018 [speech](#).

Problematic experiences have long occurred across a wide range of demographic characteristics—race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and disability—among authors, characters, and (wait for it!) people who know how to read.

In the 1990s, my old college roommate (an African American attorney) told me how hard it was to find stories for her two young sons that featured boys like them; most children's books were about white kids. Yet all these years later, I still see numerous interviews with current children's book authors who say they started writing for the same reason; they'd discovered it was hard to find books featuring characters similar to their own children or students.

"Why was it easier to find aliens or unicorns than people of color or realistic women?" wrote N.K. Jemisin, a best-selling African American writer, reflecting on being a science fiction/

fantasy reader. "I began to realize that the exclusions I'd noticed were not just a matter of benign neglect... These were conscious choices on the part of the genre's gatekeepers. This was deliberate, ahistorical, scientifically nonsensical, exclusion... When we did appear, the roles we took were limited, non-threatening to the writer's sense of superiority: the thug, the slave, the exotic sex toy."

After publishing about a dozen sf/f short stories, Jemisin acquired an agent who submitted her first book, *The Killing Moon*, an epic fantasy novel, to publishers. Various editors praised it as well-written and engaging, but said they were rejecting it because they weren't sure how to market it [maybe as epic fantasy?] or who its audience would be [um, epic fantasy readers?].

Written in 2005, *The Killing Moon* was published in 2012; it was nominated for a Nebula Award and won the World Fantasy Award. Jemisin says that during the years after she first starting submitting the novel, emerging discussions about race and gender started persuading some genre editors that there might be an audience for her work besides just "her people." She also credits her acquiring editor, Devi Pillai, who was "one of only two editors of color in SFFdom." Jemisin has since become the only writer to win the Hugo Award for Best Novel three years in a row (for her Broken Earth trilogy).

Moreover, even when publishers didn't balk at acquiring novels about characters who weren't white, they might nonetheless "whitewash" the books. There are many [examples](#) of this. One of the most prominent instances (it made national news at the time) was a YA novel called *Liar* by Australian author Justine Larbalestier. The protagonist was a black girl, but the U.S. cover featured a white girl—and this was a deliberate decision, not a careless mishap.

"This cover did not happen in isolation," Larbalestier [wrote](#) in 2009, the year the U.S. edition was published. "Every year at every publishing house, intentionally and unintentionally, there are white-washed covers... Authors have told me that their books with black covers are frequently not shelved in the same part of the library as other YA—they're exiled to the Urban Fiction section—and many bookshops simply don't stock them at all. How welcome is a black teen going to feel in the YA section when all the covers are white?"

A recent *Publishers Weekly* survey found that 84% of publishing employees are white, while only 60% of the overall U.S. population is white. As Justine Larbalestier has pointed out, only selling books to white people isn't exactly a sustainable business model.

Which is presumably why, as the *New York Times* [reported](#) last week, "Publishing houses across the industry are making senior-level hires and structural changes to try to make their companies, and the books they acquire, more diverse—racially, ethnically and even geographically." I guess even publishers, who I've sometimes suspected of not reading, can see the writing on the wall.

[Laura Resnick](#) writes novels, nonfiction, and short fiction.

Letter from the Editor

By Michele Dunaway



Welcome to the conference issue!

I wish I could have been there, and I'm so grateful to those who reported on sessions. As *Nink* editor, I've had a sneak peek, and I think you will learn a lot in the pages that follow. The NINC conference is my go-to every September, so not being able to be there because of the pandemic bummed me out. I'm hopeful that when registration opens for the 2021 conference, all will be smooth sailing.

Please note, reporters do try to cover as much as possible, but as reporters are frantically scribbling or typing, they are fallible, so please pardon any mistakes and note that *Nink*/NINC is not liable for those.

All the reports for this year's conference are in this issue; in December, *Nink* will return to regular articles.

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

–Michele



Conference Reports

The Psychology of Fandom

Presented by Jennifer Lynn Barnes, Ph.D.

Reported by Tamsin Ley

Jennifer Lynn Barnes, Ph.D., is a leading expert on the psychology of fandom and is the author of more than a dozen young adult novels.

Barnes began by defining the word fandom focusing on three key aspects of the definition:

A **self-identified collective** of individuals who are **highly invested** in a **media property or celebrity**.

Getting readers to invest is based on how universally appealing a book is (audience size), read-through to other books (audience retention), and word-of-mouth. Note that audience retention can also be affected by long release gaps or price changes.

So what types of people have a tendency to become fans? Most readers experience emotion about a book, but a fan actively does something with that feeling after finishing the book. According to Barnes, fans will invest in their chosen media by contributing intellectually, emotionally, and imaginatively. This investment exists along a spectrum, and true fandom is at one extreme.

So what makes readers become obsessed? What makes them want to reread a book, talk about it, or think about it? What kinds of properties do they get obsessed about? What activities do people do when they get obsessed? Not all people are likely to do these things.

According to Barnes's preliminary data, people who are wired to engage in fandom rank high on some key traits:

- Transportability – this is a measure of how “sucked in” a reader gets with a story. Fans will forget the world and envision themselves within the story.
- Empathy – this is broken into two elements, perspective-taking and fantasy. Perspective-taking is how prone someone is to get into a fictional character's head. Fantasy is how much a reader feels like he/she is one of the characters.
- Openness to experience – this is about a reader's imagination outside of the words on the page.

Other traits in Barnes's study, which rank equally for readers whether they engage in fandom activities or not, include a need for closure and a need to belong. Barnes's data is still inconclusive about how the need for cognition ranks between fans and non-fans.

As authors, we need to generate action steps to encourage people to become fans. A dedicated fan might create fan fiction, fan art, music, participate in cosplay, develop wikis, or participate in fan theories. But there are also fandom-adjacent behaviors. This means, for example, people who may not engage in cosplay may still wear a t-shirt bearing a logo, or instead of writing fan fiction, they may daydream in private or talk with friends about the book.

To encourage fandom, Barnes suggests providing readers a world to travel to (transportability). Think about this along the lines of building a theme park around your book. For example, Hogwarts was as much of a draw as Harry Potter was in that series. If you removed your characters, would people still want to visit?

Next, inspire perspective-taking by making readers want to get inside characters' heads. Barnes used an example of what she called "shipping." Derived from the word relationship, shipping is a fan's desire for two or more people/characters to be in a relationship, either romantic or platonic. Readers who engage in shipping are confident they can read a character's emotion, and there is a lot of fan fiction dedicated to shipping secondary characters of popular books. There are also fans who engage in parasocial relationships—one-sided relationships where it feels like the fictional character returns the emotion. We like to feel special to those we love. For instance, in *Sherlock Holmes*, Watson is Sherlock's number-one best friend, but fans may feel that they are number two. Barnes suggests giving readers someone to puzzle over and figure out by *not* feeding fans all the character emotions. Leaving space for fans to theorize on their own encourages shipping.

Because fans get emotionally involved with character plights, Barnes suggests providing a whirlwind of emotions, both good and bad. Include an array of personality types in your story and encourage readers to form a relationship with the characters or to identify with them by making characters relatable. Studies show that fans bond with characters who are "Like me, but **awesome**." Barnes used the example of the characters in the TV show *Grey's Anatomy*, where Meredith Grey is "just like me, but a brain surgeon."

Another thing to offer readers is new experiences, again, both good and bad. Some ambiguity and gaps in the story are good. Leave room for interpretation and give readers something to puzzle over and think about even after the story ends. This engages their imagination and encourages "co-authoring." Fans will imagine backstories for characters, different paths the story might have taken, alternate endings, what happens after the story ends, and other things. They may even have resistance to authorial authority and argue about what happened versus what they believe should have happened. Barnes asserts that *any* strong reaction is a good thing because it means someone has immersed themselves in the story and is talking about it. Characters who are difficult to understand can encourage readers to create theories about character motivations. They may imagine how characters would act in other circumstances, or think they know a character in a deeper manner than appears on the page. Fans are drawn to characters they need to puzzle out.

Allow characters moments of reflection in the text itself. This also allows readers to reflect on how the story applies to their own life or how they might act in the same situation. Fans who rank high on the reflection subscale connect what they read with things in their real life and discover things about themselves in stories. Invite readers to co-author, reflect, fill gaps, and

mentalize. For instance, on social media, you might post a meme contest asking fans to share a GIF they think best summarizes a particular character's (mysterious) past.

Barnes used a list of popular television series to talk about common properties of media with large fan bases. She used fanfiction.net as a source. Of note, 11 of the examples were speculative fiction, six of the remaining shows were police procedurals, and two were medical.

Overall, there was a case-of-the-week trend or a serialized structure to these shows. Barnes has several theories about why this works. First, each episode has its own end goal instead of an overarching end goal, making the focus about characters and relationships rather than plot. The procedural shows ration out character moments, giving delectable bites that make the audience crave more. They also offer multiple POVs, giving the audience several entry points to identify with characters, engage in shipping, or develop parasocial relationships. And finally, the media often focuses on teams or family/surrogate family, complete with a parental figure.

According to Barnes, a family or team focus is a near-universal fandom enabling property. These relationships are often multigenerational and include not only traditional parent/child dynamics, but also characters such as vets/rookies or teachers/students, with separate storylines for each generation. This allows the stories to be temporally expansive, covering a span of time other than the current moment through the use of flashbacks or a then/now structure.

The media discussed was also emotionally expansive and included moments of humor, angst, and fluff. They contain a multitude of love stories, with lots of couples in the show. The friendships are intimate, and there is at least one love story that is non-romantic. For instance, the series *Supernatural* is a brotherly love story, and *Sherlock* is about the relationship between Sherlock and Watson. Even *Grey's Anatomy* uses "You're my person" to focus in on the friendship between its main characters.

Harkening back to the "Just like me, but awesome" example earlier, these stories focus on special people. Consider what makes your character special or awesome. What are they the best at? Are they a surgeon? Do they have a Broadway voice? Make them relatable, but give them a "superpower."

And finally, take a look at your story world. What makes it special? Is it interesting even if the characters are not present? If the setting isn't the special thing, then perhaps the special thing for your world is sparkling vampires and shapeshifting wolves. Take a look at the properties of your genre and see how it might fit in to these parameters.

In summary, fandom-enabling properties of the media Barnes discussed tend to be episodic and ration out the good stuff; focus on a team or family; have multi-generational cast and storylines; be temporally and emotionally expansive; and contain a multitude of love stories. The focus is on special people and a special world.

Using the properties discussed above, Barnes provided some ideas for specific activities authors might do to help develop a fandom for their books. First of all, make it easy for your fans. As a group, fans are often in several groups at the same time. Model the behavior you would like to see and give prompts. Encourage people to engage in fan fiction, fan art, fan theories, fan criticism, cosplay, and theme parties.

Fan fiction

Be aware that fan fiction often doesn't actually resemble the source material and often has no plot or contains simply fluff. Examples might include a missing scene that explains a character's behavior, a shift in focus from the plot to a character, or even transplanting characters into another world. Fan fiction writers might expand the timeline to show the character's future children, shift attention to secondary characters, or even turn the villain into a protagonist. Dialing the emotions up to ten is common, as is writing sexy times. And self-insertion is a very common theme for fan fiction, particularly if your book includes a tight knit group your reader can mentally insert himself or herself into. Make certain your book includes evidence that people can become part of this group! Common self-insertion setups might be the introduction of a super-special person, or a character who needs our help or protection such as a little sister, or perhaps a love interest.

Fan art

Think about your book and consider who or what you are giving your fans to draw. Does your book describe striking visuals, such as scenes or characters? How might the book be filmable? Fan art might not only include drawings or paintings, but things like fan casting. Ask your fans what famous actors they think should play your characters. Once a fandom has a number of popular fan casts, fan art and even videos tend to proliferate. Other fan art might include creating playlists or crafts like crochet. Fans might create a collage of your crime scene or draw outfits for your characters. The possibilities are endless. When fans do create these things, be sure to acknowledge it. Share it, link it, retweet it, and it can lead to even more fan art as other fans seek recognition.

Fan theories

What are you giving fans to theorize about? Puzzles, unanswered plot threads, even how an unfinished story or series will end are good ways to engage. Barnes used the example of *Game of Thrones*—the series poses the question of who will end up on the Iron Throne and how? Fans also enjoy romantic theorizing—who will end up with whom. Think about what essay topics might work for your book. Team Edward or Team Jacob? Are there any themes or real-world issues that pose questions for your book? Encourage fans to share their theories. Readers don't need to share the same reactions! Let them take sides and talk about it.

Cosplay

Make easy and identifiable costumes for your characters. This doesn't need to be extreme. Does your book include school uniforms like *Harry Potter*? Does your main character always wear tweed jackets and smoke a pipe? How could someone dress up as your characters for Halloween?

Theme parties

Along with the idea of cosplay, Barnes talked about the idea of theme parties. Use the book branding to create invitations. What sort of food and wine would be served? What will the party aesthetic be? These can even be virtual events with people sharing photos and memes. Be creative.

Remember that the first step to building a fandom is to write a fandom-enabling series or book. If the elements are not there to begin with, it is difficult to retroactively put them in.

Does your story feature a special world that readers will want to visit? Special people who readers can fantasize about being? Characters who are hard to understand and/or hard to form relationships with? An outsider being allowed into that special world, where they are given the rare opportunity to become close to the special people, even though they are hard to understand and form relationships with? What about mysteries and puzzles? Does your story include wonderful/horrible things and new experiences? Humor, angst, *and* fluff? A tight-knit family or team with a multi-generational cast? A story that extends into the past? A multitude of love stories, including platonic love stories? Messy, complicated relationships and emotions?

Does your story give the reader **everything** they want?

Fulfill the desires of readers of your subgenre while also offering fans something specific to latch onto about your books. Break away from the pack. Bait and foreshadow, but hold enough back so the reader can bring themselves into the picture and personalize the experience.

Help your fans identify as fans. Fandom is a collective, so give them some place to go and start talking to each other. Model this kind of behavior yourself. Promote and praise efforts by fans. And last but not least, get out of the way. You are no longer the lone authority on your books.



Tamsin Ley wanted to be a biomedical engineer once upon a time, but experimenting on lab rats doesn't always lead to happy endings. Now she blends her nerdy infatuation of science with character-driven romance and guaranteed happily-ever-afters. She has published over eighteen science fiction and romance titles. She also loves horticulture, cooking, and is a secret zombie prepper.

What's New in Vellum

Presented by Brad West

Reported by Tawdra Kandle

Brad West, one of Vellum's creators and co-owners, presented a virtual workshop at the September conference, sharing what's changed and improved in the book formatting software since Vellum's appearance at the 2019 NINC conference.

The first innovation is the ability to include a full-bleed image in a book. While a standard image usually is the same size as a text block, there are often circumstances which call for a picture or a map in a print book that spans a full page—or even two full pages side-by-side. [Vellum](#) now offers this ability to customers who have upgraded to the program that includes print formatting. West cautioned that the image used must be a PDF file that is larger than the pages of the books. In bleed settings when uploading the interior file to KDP, the author should be sure to choose **bleed**. Using a full bleed image gives authors the ability to add a dramatic opening page to their books.

The full-bleed image options are limited to print books, but the next update is specific to ebooks. These are internal links. While web and store links, already standard on Vellum, take the reader to someplace on the internet, internal links lead the reader to another section of the book itself. The technology is the same as that used to create the table of contents. This ability is especially appealing to non-fiction authors, but it can also be used in box sets to allow readers to jump to the books they particularly wish to read.

These link options are found in the same place as web and store links within the program. The words to be linked should be highlighted and then the internal link option should be selected, at which time another part of the book can be chosen to complete the process.

Yet another change is a new feature specifically for multi-author anthologies. Vellum has now made it possible to create a collection of short stories by multiple authors and assign a different chapter to each author. The author's name appears under the chapter title (or story title), and in the print version, the applicable author name appears on the page headers within the chapters. The author names also appear in the table of contents.

There is a special guide to creating a single author or multi-author anthology on the Vellum help page.

West noted that there are imminent changes to the Mac platform, which is currently the only operating system on which Vellum works. A new version of the Mac operating system is coming soon; Big Sur will offer a different appearance and new features. Also, Mac computers will soon be using their own processors instead of Intel. This will require existing programs to be updated to work. Vellum is striving to be ready for both of these changes so that the software will continue to be compatible with both Big Sur and the new processor.

As a special sneak peek only available to NINC members, West shared a "coming soon" feature that will be unveiled by late 2020: Vellum will offer the ability to specify whether the author wants a call to action or any other content to be included in ebook only, print book only, or in both versions. This is especially helpful for calls to action such as newsletter sign-ups which might be hyper-linked in an ebook but should not be included in a print book. West noted that this change was suggested by members at the 2019 NINC conference, observing that the company appreciates the input of our membership.



Tawdra Kandle writes romance, including contemporary, paranormal and erotic. Since her debut in 2011, she has released almost a hundred books and is a USA Today bestselling author. Married for over thirty years, she lives in central Florida.

Market, Data, and Trends Update

Does the Book Market Need a Vaccine?

Presented by Alex Newton

Reported by Tamsin Ley

Alex Newton is the founder of [K-lytics.com](https://k-lytics.com), a book market research company that helps authors understand what Amazon categories are underserved and where trends may be leading the book market.

Data about fiction bestseller lists came from Newton's analysis of more than 1 million Top-100 rankings on Amazon, which he parsed right up to the last minute of his presentation. Much of the information in this article is best understood alongside his K-lytics graphs. If you would like to view the slides that accompanied the presentation, you can download them at [K-lytics.com/ninc](https://k-lytics.com/ninc).

Newton began by discussing sales of print books, which dipped 29% late March of 2020. In light of the pandemic closing bookstores during those months, a drop is to be expected. However, compared to 2019, sales were still 21% higher for the same time period. Year-to-date, sales of print books are up 6% over 2019.

Even bigger growth was seen in the ebook market. When the pandemic hit, Google searches for "coronavirus" skyrocketed. Within a week, search interest for "ebooks" on all subjects also surged by 100%, with searches for children's books soaring even higher. The trend appears to be continuing on an upward trajectory. Some genres showed drastic changes. For instance, books about infectious disease sold well during this period, while sales of books about foreign travel went down.

Payout totals for Kindle Unlimited rose month by month. Newton projected that The Kindle Select Global Fund will continue to grow, and that by the end of 2020, the payout will have risen 25% over 2019's year total. He pointed out that no other industry has this sort of growth rate, and that even traditional publishers (Association of American Publishers) have reported increases in ebook sales so far this year, up 14% in the first seven months of 2020 compared to last year. However, Kindle Unlimited's payout *per page* is down due to the increasing number of books competing for a share of the pot, and continues to trend downward.

Despite the lockdown, the market showed substantial growth in the number of titles published in 2020, with a significant bump in published titles in April of this year. Some authors delayed publication, but it also appears that many accelerated their release schedules and possibly new writers took the lockdown as a chance to write and publish. As of the presentation, there were over seven million English titles published on Amazon.

In light of the above information, Newton posed the question: Do we need a book vaccine? The data says "no." The climate now is good. Ebooks and audiobooks have been growing steadily on Amazon since 2017 and continue to show positive growth across all genres.

The percentage of ebooks sold continues to remain high in comparison to other formats. Romance tops the list at 94% ebook sales. Literature and fiction sells 80% as ebooks, followed closely by mystery, thriller and suspense at 79%. Sci-fi and fantasy sales were 68% ebooks, and teen/YA were 53%.

Kindle Unlimited continues to dominate most categories, and there is a high saturation across most fiction for Kindle Unlimited titles. Romance represents 84% of the KU share, up 2% compared to 2019. Young adult holds 80% (down by 3%). Fantasy holds 71% (down 10%) and literature and fiction holds 70% (up 2%). Suspense holds 65% (up 4%). Non-fiction and biographies & memoirs were the only two categories with less than 50% market share in KU, at 46% and 41% respectively. Total market share increased from 44% in 2016 to 54% in 2019 and reaching 56% so far in 2020. By weight, Kindle Unlimited has grown 65% in that time period. Why is this? Newton believes it is because psychologically, Kindle Unlimited books are perceived as “free” to the buyer. Both the large market share and the buyer perception drive sales rank with the algorithms on Amazon.

Series titles in the Top-100 rankings showed slow growth, trending upward from 21% to 25% between 2016 and 2020. Science fiction and fantasy leads the charge with heavily serialized titles in the Top 100, followed closely by young adult and mystery, thriller, and suspense.

Most bestseller lists are dominated by what Newton called cover clichés. As a case example, he pulled up an image of “vigilante justice fiction.” The similarities between the covers was striking, with 40% of books in the Top-100 rank featuring a shadowed human figure. Another 32% had a person on the cover. The final 21% were predominantly large fonts and symbols. This trend toward similar cover conventions holds true for about 60% or more of the bestseller lists for each respective genre.

The good news is that the number of top authors or publishers reaping profits showed no sign of “industry consolidation” in Newton’s data. In fact, the Top-100 rank still shows great variation of both publisher and author names, and unique author names are achieving success.

The distribution of Amazon’s store-wide Kindle Top 100 rankings by genre remained fairly steady, and there continues to be a high indie presence in romance, science fiction and fantasy, and young adult categories, which comprise 67-71% of those titles. Across all categories, indies hold 35% of the Top-100 slots, followed by Amazon Imprints at 32%, the Big Five at 19%, and other at 14%. Romance, science fiction and fantasy, and young adult categories are heavily dominated by indie titles, and prices for romance appear to be increasing.

As for catching trends and opportunities, Newton pointed out that the book market is not the fashion industry; trends do not come and go over overnight. Data shows sales and market share hold steady for many years. Drivers for market trends tend to be the big screen and TV. One example he showed was book sales for vampires. *Twilight* gave a boost to an already-growing market, and interest has continued with other highly successful series such as the *Vampire Diaries* and authors like Bella Forrest. (Apparently, vampires never die!) A second example is how Google searches for “Billionaire Romance” rose sharply after the publication of *50 Shades of Grey*. Trends are a matter of supply and demand. On a graph of Google search interest, “Billionaire Romance” took about five years before supply started to catch up with demand. Other trends have come about through author-driven developments. The recent

Paranormal Women's Fiction category is a prime example of a group of authors working together to create a new market category.

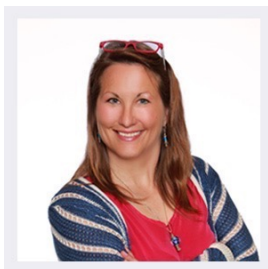
Newton suggested several methods to identify upcoming trends, including Google News Alerts, Facebook groups (search for "trend," "latest" or "what's next"), movie databases, and of course his K-lytics reports. He also demonstrated how to use Amazon to keep an eye on preorders. (In the Kindle store, there is an Advanced Search tab along the bar on the top right that will allow you to search for upcoming releases by date and keywords.)

In a market filled with over 7,000 Kindle genres, Newton correlated book categories with a high ratio of sales versus competition and was able to point out some market trends to take note of. Teen/YA dystopian romance was trending downward in 2019, but since the lockdown has reversed its descent. Paranormal romance is still ranking high but trending down. Clean and wholesome romance displays the highest resiliency and has been climbing the ranks steadily since the lockdown in March. In the mystery, suspense, and thrillers category, psychological thrillers have been steadily rising and continue to do so in 2020.

At last year's NINC conference, Newton was asked about foreign markets, and he took the request as homework. His preliminary data for the Kindle German market indicates sales ranks by category look very similar to the US market, with literature and fiction carrying the greatest sales volume, followed by romance novels, then mystery, thriller and suspense. However, Amazon.de treats erotica as a separate store, which can distort numbers since those books are displayed with a category rank only. The same may hold true for romance novels. He will continue to develop data from foreign markets.

In closing, Newton encouraged authors to write to market without losing the love of the craft or writing outside of comfort zones just to meet a trend. The data shows you have time. As the election nears, we will likely see some non-fiction categories become more competitive, but fiction readers may not care, and those categories are not your competition. Keep in mind, however, that advertising costs may be higher during this time.

He also offered NINC members a bonus Christmas report which can be downloaded at [K-lytics.com/christmas](https://k-lytics.com/christmas)



Tamsin Ley wanted to be a biomedical engineer once upon a time, but experimenting on lab rats doesn't always lead to happy endings. Now she blends her nerdy infatuation of science with character-driven romance and guaranteed happily-ever-afters. She has published over eighteen science fiction and romance titles. She also loves horticulture, cooking, and is a secret zombie prepper.

Expand Your Readership with Kindle Direct Publishing

Presented by Tricia Gallagher

Reported by Katy Madison

Education Program Manager Tricia Gallagher works with authors to help them understand how to use Amazon's KDP website to make the most of their author journey.

Tricia Gallagher wants to teach us how to create the right metadata recipe to best sell our books on Amazon. With millions of shoppers on Amazon, the readers are there for all sorts of genres. It is just a matter of getting our books to the readers who want them.

We need to optimize our author page and series pages to drive people to find your book. Traffic and conversion equal sales. So how do we find the correct recipe to get sales?

The **Metadata recipe** includes:

- Categories
- Keywords
- Title
- Author
- Subtitle
- Description

You want to find the right ingredients to make the best recipe. Gallagher says that some of the mistakes they see are metadata that is too broad—keywords and categories that don't match resulting in books ending up in the wrong categories. While there isn't a magic recipe, there are some best practices to figure out what your recipe is.

Categories

When choosing your genre, you want to drill down to the most specific category in the BISAC codes. By selecting the most specific category the broader categories above it will be included. Choosing the right category can be challenging when your book crosses genres, but keywords work with the BISAC categories to place books in Amazon's categories. (Amazon's categories for a book will show up on the left hand side of the book's product page.) You can look at comparable books to yours to see what categories they are in. You can drill down even farther for subcategories and can call KDP to add categories.

If you put your book in the wrong genre, it may create a disappointing reader experience. You don't want to keep changing your categories, because constantly changing categories may make your book less discoverable. If you do change your category, you should wait at least a week before measuring results.

You may not be placed in the appropriate Amazon categories if your keywords don't align with what is expected for your genre.

Keywords

You should be using generic words that relate to your book. You have seven slots. Do not use any punctuation or stop words. Words like "and," "also" or "because" don't help. Don't repeat words that are in the title, subtitle or description. They are already taken into account. You cannot use any temporary or subjective words or phrases, such as "Brand New" or "Available Now." You cannot include other author names or book titles in your keywords.

The keywords slots allow up to 50 characters per line. However, there is a 210-byte limit for the keywords. (Most letters are one byte.) The system will ignore any keywords that are over the limit. The system will automatically include synonyms and spelling variations, but not misspellings. Keywords can and will be recombined into other combinations. Try to put them in the order that would be best for combination. If you are uncertain what keywords to use, you could check reviews on Goodreads or Amazon to see what words readers use to describe your books. Look for what readers search for.

Titles

Titles should be succinct, memorable, convey genre, and easy to say. You want to intrigue the reader. You want the reader to tell friends and family. You don't want a title they will be embarrassed to share. The title *My Dog Max* won't return a lot of unique search results. You will end up with dog food and other pet items. *Good Grief Gumballs* is, on the other hand, unique, conveys genre and humor, and only returns a few items that aren't the book itself.

Subtitles

Subtitles can convey more info about the book. However keywords stuffing will hurt traffic. For example: *Good Grief Gumballs: A Beginning Reader Adventure* is an example of a good subtitle. *Good Grief Gumballs: A beginning reader humorous best friend adventure* is an example of a bad subtitle.

What else impacts search results? Review ratings and conversion rates are taken into consideration when returning results. How frequently an item was purchased impacts search results.

You have 10-20 seconds to grab your reader's attention when they see your page. Readers look at the page in an F pattern. Once a reader is intrigued, they are more likely to stay on the page.

The cover is the first thing that grabs a reader's attention. You want to make sure it conveys genre. Look at the top 100 in your category to see what is selling. If your cover doesn't align with others it may be in the wrong category or you might need to rework your cover. The cover should also be unique and convey the author's brand.

Description

This should be concise, relatable and evoke emotions. That will help keep the reader on the page.

You can also include an editorial review or an author or industry influencer quote on your Author Central page. (If you don't have an Author Central page, you should get one immediately.) You also want to include your author bio. (You can create a unique bio for each book on the detail page on Author Central.) If you write in more than one genre, you should include a specific bio for each genre. For example, if you write romance, and how-to books, your romance bio should be touchy-feely. Your how-to bio should convey your authority. Include social media and website links in your bio.

Other than the overall rating, the customer reviews do not impact search results, although they can be a source for keywords. If you have several reviews saying the content is not what was expected, it can be an indicator of a wrong category or cover. One- and two-star reviews help a reader identify if the book is right for them. It also gives legitimacy to your product.

All these together should make the best **recipe** to sell your book.



Katy Madison has a bit of a split personality. Her light side writes humorous Regency and her dark side writes Gothic Historical Romances.

Decoding the Secrets of a Bestseller

Presented by Alessandra Torre

Reported by Janis Susan May Patterson

New York Times bestselling author [Alessandra Torre](#) is co-founder and president of [Authors AI](#).

The tagline for this year's NINC conference is "The Future Is Now."

That couldn't be more right. The future is not only now, it is right now! Assisted by a charming sketch named Marlowe—the image of the AuthorsAI assistant, president and customer—Alessandra Torre spoke on the growing role of artificial intelligence in creating magnificent, best-selling books. Author of many books in genres from young adult to suspense, Torre has had three books optioned for film.



Marlowe, the "face" of AuthorsAI, helps writers write books readers love. Marlowe reads and provides statistical feedback on submitted books, with an impressive 83% accuracy of reading and predicting NYT bestsellers. Her name was taken from the "bestseller-ometer" in the book *The Bestseller Code* by AuthorsAI founder Dr. Matthew Jockers. Since writing the book, Dr. Jockers has completely revamped and expanded the AI functions to fit today's popular fiction marketplace, making Marlowe now an impressive 91% accurate!

For examples in this presentation, Torre used *50 Shades of Grey*, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, *The DaVinci Code*, and *The Great Gatsby*.

Thirty years ago it was posited that there was a common shape to bestselling novels. Now it is accepted that there are several plot shapes to popular fiction, the most common being the following:

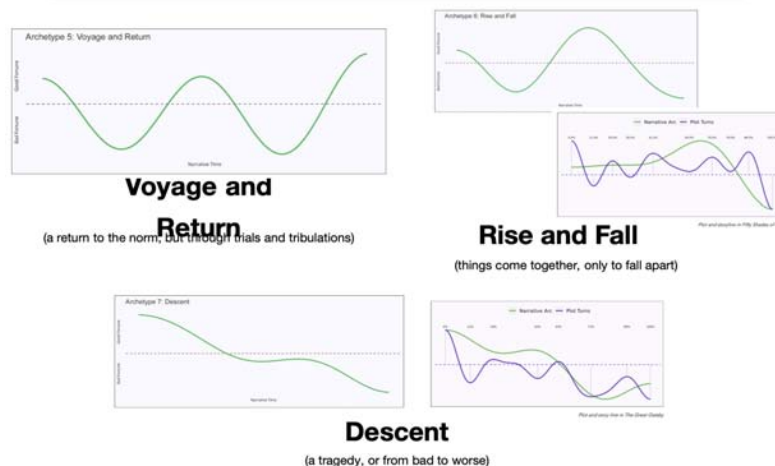
- **Emergence** – journey through difficult times to a positive outcome
- **Man in the Hole** – someone gets into trouble and gets out of it
- **The Quest** – tale of continual struggles along the way
- **Rags to Riches** – coming-of-age or underdog story, from low to high

Plot shapes of popular fiction



- **Voyage and Return** – a return to the norm but only through trials and tribulations
- **Rise and Fall** – things come together, only to fall apart (this is used in lots of cliffhanger books)
- **Descent** – tragedy from bad to worse

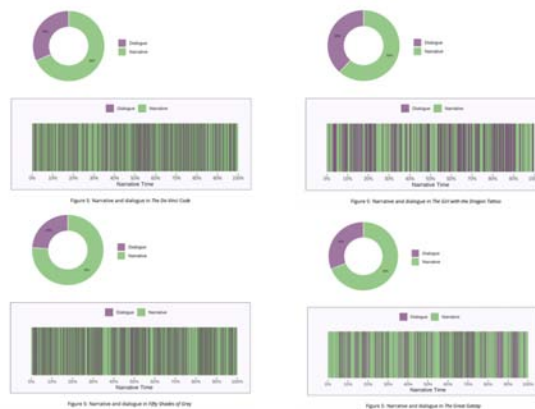
Plot shapes of popular fiction



Bestsellers also have a regular (regular-ish) beating rhythm. Beats are moments of action, ideally placed 10% of the manuscript apart. In the examples given, *The Great Gatsby* did the worst in regular beats and *50 Shades of Grey* did the best.

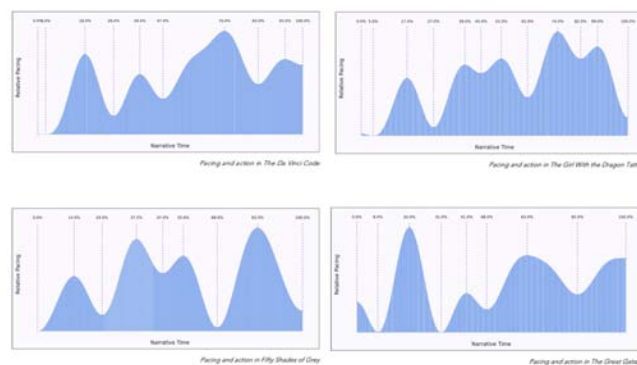
Historically, bestsellers have approximately 25-35% dialogue, which ideally should be spaced out. Each of Torre's examples show this. In this chart the purple is dialogue and the narration is green.

Dialogue



Pacing is different from beats and utilizes both narration and dialogue; you don't want the reader's heart in her throat all the time from non-stop intense action as she flips the pages rapidly, but neither do you want her to turn the pages incredibly slowly because she is on the verge of getting bored. There should always be a nice mix of slow(ish) and heart-pounding action.

Pacing



Marlowe can even give sentence statistics—i.e., how long and complex the sentence is and what grade level it is. Ideally sentences are between two and 10 words. The average of all

sentences is between nine and 13. Grade level can vary; three of the example books are at grade level 7; *50 Shades of Grey* comes in at grade 4.7. The complexity level of all four books is from 2.45-2.7.

Readers love and identify with a character who needs something. They want strong, confident characters with a driving force. They do not want characters to be exactly the same, but instead varied, memorable and with strong personalities.

Strong and varied characters



Basically, the bestseller decoded is an intriguing plot, even pacing, strong characters and good storytelling. Among other things, Marlowe will judge a story on dialogue, how many adverbs/adjectives, use of passive voice, sentence structure, use of clichés and character tics. Marlowe has a vocabulary of more than 1,400 word clichés, so can find and tell you how many times the character uses one. *The Great Gatsby* had less than 15; *50 Shades of Grey* had more than two pages.

The future is indeed now. Although AuthorsAI does not do a traditional line edit, it can definitely help with the mechanics. AuthorsAI is browser-based, not a download and offers three levels : Marlowe Basic (free, a totally basic report); Marlowe Pro (\$199/year for two credits a month which do not expire as long as you maintain your membership) which is best for established authors; and Single Report (\$89 one-time payment).

However...! Torre generously offered a code for **one free pro report** for NINC members only. The coupon code is NINCPRO, and the offer expires on January 10, 2021.

AuthorsAI is also opening Bingebooks.com, a service they refer to as a “better Goodreads” that uses AI to help readers find the books they love. It’s coming soon, and there’s an email sign-up service on the website where you can sign up.

Torre ended with a quote:

"A bestseller isn't born, it's carefully created through sharp plotting, strong and varied characters, perfect pacing and intelligent edits."

—Lao Tse

Don't settle for the status quo.

Contact information:

www.Authors.ai

[Facebook.com/groups/authorsai](https://www.facebook.com/groups/authorsai)

[Twitter.com/authorsai](https://twitter.com/authorsai)



Janis Susan May/Janis Patterson is a seventh-generation Texan and a third-generation wordsmith who writes in mystery, romance, and horror. Once an actress and a singer, Patterson has also been editor-in-chief of two multi-magazine publishing groups as well as many other things, including an enthusiastic amateur Egyptologist. Patterson's husband even proposed in a moonlit garden near the Pyramids of Giza. Patterson and her husband live in Texas with an assortment of rescued furbabies.

Look, Listen, Subscribe:How to Take Your Kobo Sales to the Next Level

Presented by Tara Cremin

Reported by Hallee Bridgeman

Tara Cremin (senior manager at Author Experience) is responsible for the overall author experience on [Kobo Writing Life](#) (KWL), from optimizing current features to looking for new avenues of growth.

During the height of social distancing and distancing at home, Kobo encouraged people to stay home and read with the hashtag #stayhomeandread.

The initial surge of sales they saw in the early weeks of the pandemic have continued and even accelerated, in all our markets, including Canada and the United States. Sales are up between 35% and 130% over last year.

Michael Tamblyn, CEO of Kobo, delivered 10 million free ebooks to readers who were isolating, encouraging staying safe but also getting out entertainment. This allowed them to reach people who might not have tried digital reading yet.

One in four books published on Kobo come through [Kobo Writing Life](#), which is the indie portal to publish.

Exclusive promotions

If you don't see the promotions tab in your dashboard, email the team and they will get it there for you. Promotions are generally focused on books written in English. Clicking on the promotions tab allows you to apply for key featured spots.

- **Free promotions:** A new add carousel is the "Free First in Series." The read-through is great on that page. The most searched term on the Kobo site is the word "free." Anyone who types in free in the search bar gets redirected to this page.
- **Daily ebook deal:** This is the most prominent feature on the deal page. You can apply to be featured. It is the most expensive promotion and the most competitive one to get into. Don't be discouraged if you don't get picked. Be encouraged to apply again and again.
- **Fill up your library for fall:** This promotes 50 titles under \$5 each and allows you to get your books in front of targeted customers.

Promotional tools updates

They've added an additional comments box up to 350 characters that is new to say what you want them to know about the book. If you're launching wide for the first time and you've been with another company exclusively, let Kobo know. They may want to help you build your Kobo audience.

Library sales

Library sales are reporting directly in your monthly sales report. Set your price higher for library because it gets purchased once then distributed to several readers.

Promotional opportunities to librarians are available. Different themes are offered once a month.

In February, Overdrive combined indie books and traditional books into the same catalog. The result is a 40% increase in library sales since March.

<https://www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/2020/5/5/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-reading-part-2>

Audiobooks

If you don't see audiobooks in your account tabs, then let them know and they will add it. There is no exclusivity required to be part of their audiobook production.

Let Kobo know when you're releasing an audiobook to see if they can offer you some promotion. They aren't in the promotions tab yet, but they're coming so keep an eye out for them. Their "buy more, save more" promotion with ebooks was extremely successful and they're looking at doing something like that with audiobooks.

Subscription service

We're becoming more and more accustomed to subscribing to media. Kobo started KoboPlus in Canada with a revenue share model. The subscription fees are divided by the reading value and subscription fees have no exclusivity required.

All of subscribers go into the pot for a portion of the total revenue. Then they calculate the total time each book has been read—a measure of time that readers are actually consuming your book, because page reads are not a static number and ebooks don't have actual pages. This allow them to do ebooks and audiobooks the same because it's total minutes consumed. Total revenue and total minutes consumed then gets divided, giving the value.

You can contact Tara at: Tara.cremin@rakuten.com



Hallee Bridgeman is a best-selling Christian author who writes action-packed romantic suspense focusing on realistic characters who face real-world problems. Her work has been described as everything from refreshing to heart-stopping exciting and edgy.

Book Brush Tutorial: Popular Features and Hidden Gems

Presented by Corey Alderin

Reported by Sue Phillips

Corey Alderin is the co-founder of [Book Brush](#), a graphics-building platform. As lead developer, he is focused on building and maintaining a user-friendly tool for authors to create professional graphics in all areas of book production and promotion.

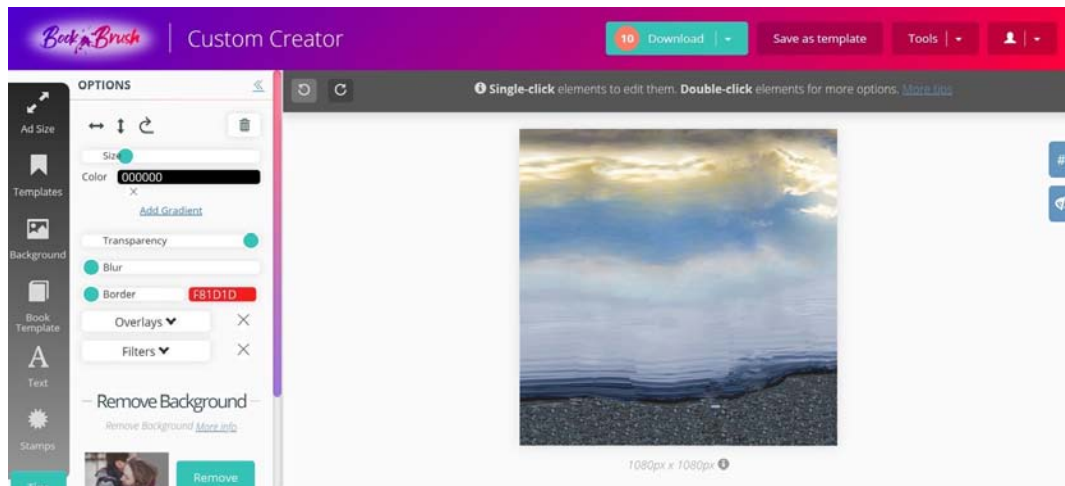
The Book Brush workshop was an interactive presentation in which members were encouraged to bring their laptops to create their own graphics using the free trial offer on the [website](#). This free trial will allow 15 downloads. On the front page, the header menu displays the options: What Can I Create?, Custom Creator, Instant Mockups, Cover Creator, and Box-Set Creator.

As in the workshop, this article will take you through step-by-step tutorial for creating a Facebook ad. Alderin pointed out everything is editable, starting with a template, which can be switched later. Background and text are also editable. The author's book cover or a cover graphic from a book designer is considered the best choice for the background.

Begin with "Custom Creator," select the Facebook icon, and choose a template from several sizes and styles.

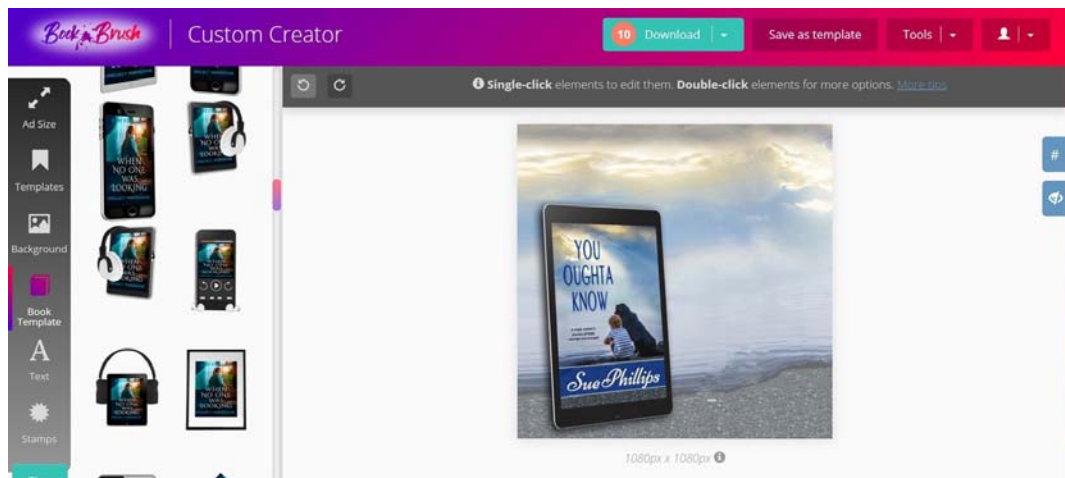
Background

Upload your own background or choose one of hundreds available on the site. Ex: Search for "castle." The book cover image **without text** can serve as a background. Expand, enlarge and/or move around the image for a good visual. *Special note: Studies show faces receive the best click rate.* The background should be blurred or use the transparency feature to allow the text to stand out instead of competing with the image. Click on "Edit" button to enhance the background image with overlays, added color/tints and filters.



Book Template

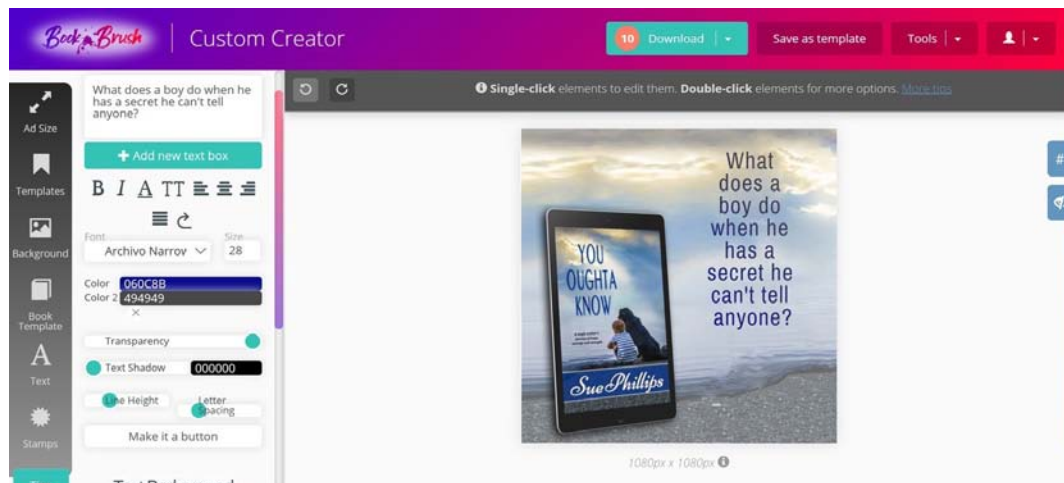
In the left menu box, click on “Book Template,” which offers choices of ebook, print, children’s, spiral, etc. There are also images of a watch with a blank space for the cover, a hand holding a reader with a blank space for the book cover, and many cover templates for sneak peeks of the cover. After clicking on a book template, the next step automatically shifts to uploading the author’s book cover or choosing one that has already been uploaded. As a subscriber, this area holds all the author’s book covers for future graphics. When the cover is chosen, the website takes a few seconds to create the 3D image and place it on the ad where it can be enlarged, moved around or deleted.



Text

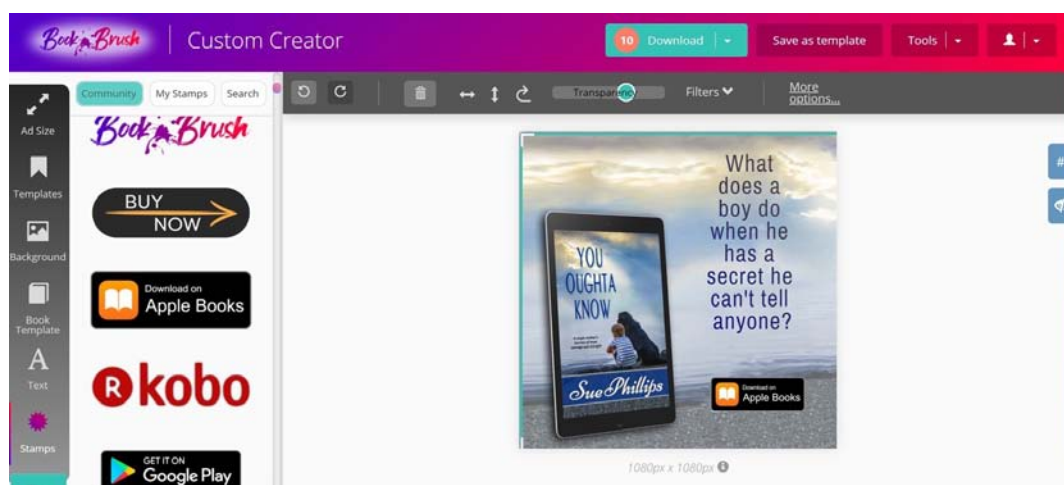
In the left menu box, open “Font.” Select “Add Text Box.” The box will appear on the ad in the default size, position and font. Size and position are moveable. To change font, click on “Edit Text Styling.” In the new menu, click on the drop-down box to choose a font or scroll

down to “Add More Fonts.” The site claims to have 1,000 fonts. Choosing one will add it to the initial drop-down box and be saved to the subscriber’s account. If the author has a specialized font (ex: the book cover title), it can be uploaded and will be saved to the account, as well. *Note: Common mistake is too much text. Don’t write a synopsis.* Multiple text boxes can be created. A text box can be changed to a button in the font menu. Text and text background colors can be changed. For a quick way to edit the font, click on the text box for a limited menu bar above the ad box.



Stamps

Social media logos, retailer logos, hands, blank stamps, page-turner image, bestseller, banners. Text can be added on top of stamps. *Note: Facebook mobile platform cuts off some of the image. Double-check on a phone and modify for best result.*



Save as a template to edit and use again. Templates can be saved into folders. Ex: Each book can have a folder with graphics for ads, blogs, social media posts.

Images can be created for postcards, bookmarks, websites, newsletters and a CTA in the back of an ebook. Ex: “Hi! Don’t forget to leave a review!” However, graphics increase file size that affects the delivery rate, lowering the profit.

Check out community templates for design ideas, searching by genre or platform and switching out bits and pieces from these templates. Images can have the background removed if the front and background are distinct, such as a picture of a black dog on a light background. This option is included in any of the paid plans and will cost one credit. The entire process of creating graphics on Book Brush is very user-friendly. Look in the lower left corner for access to more tips. Also, free video tutorials are available on the website.

Other features available from Book Brush

- **“Instant Mockups”** are pre-designed scenes with a blank space for the book cover. Ex: Image of someone reading a book. A mockup can be used as is, by placing your book into the image or uploading the mockup to Custom Creator to edit. Brand with your own marketing image using overlay of text, stamps, etc. Easy-to-follow steps. Note from website: this tool is only available on the Gold Plan or higher but a few images are available to test in trial mode. A good suggestion is to click on “All Free” to create seven mockups with the book cover. A download prompt will deliver a zip file to your computer.



- **Videos** – In Custom Creator, ads can be enhanced with video effects. Alderin touched briefly on this feature to show an example. Video backgrounds are only available on the unlimited plan. For a tutorial, go [here](#).
- **Box Set Creator** (different from Custom Creator) – Upload full print book cover. Follow prompt, “Do you need to create your own spine?” The spine can be captured from the print cover or from any part of the cover image without text. (Blur the image as previously explained in the creation of the Facebook ad.) Add text box for title and author name. Community templates of spine text are available on the site. Save in Book

Brush. Repeat steps to complete all necessary spines. Chose a box set. Select the number of books. Select book spines. Save the box set in a template or in “My Stamps.” To use your boxed set image in an ad, save it as a “stamp.” Then use that stamp as your ad graphic. This replaces using the book template feature and creates a nice ad for your boxed set.

- **Cover Creator** – Templates are available for ebooks, print and audio. The “Color Picker” to match the cover image is still being developed. The free trial allows a walk-through to see how easy it is to make a cover, but a purchased plan is required to download the finished cover. More information on creating a print book cover is available [here](#).



Sue Phillips is the award-winning author of women’s fiction, narrative non-fiction and time travel romances. A journalism major and a student of metaphysics for over thirty years, she loves to explore diverse issues and out-of-the-box ideas. Phillips lives in Nevada with a menagerie of pets, including a Disney Dalmatian named Pongo.

Self-Publishing: The Evolution Will be Digital

Presented by Draft2Digital

Reported by Hallee Bridgeman

At [Draft2Digital](#), Dan Wood is VP of operations; Mark Lefebver is director of Business Development; and Kevin Tumlinson is director of Marketing and Public Relations.

Digital is the new normal, especially in the wake of a sharp post-COVID dip in printbook sales. The supply chain is under high strain, brick and mortar stores were closed and many have been slow to open, and that caused digital acceleration, including ebooks and audio books. While shorter books are selling, longer books are in high demand.

Source: <http://www.publishingtrends.com/2020/07/digital-printing-the-new-normal/>

With that new trend, Draft2Digital sales overall have gone up 12.54% this year, with Tolino breaking records at a sharp 48% increase, and subscription services increasing by 24%.

Another change caused by the pandemic is the lack of movie productions and the demand for in-home streaming took a sharp rise of 45%. Because of this, now is a great time to try to get film rights.

You can get more Draft2Digital content at their brand-new podcast: <https://selfpublishinginsiders.com>. Each week brings a new industry insider, expert, and influencer.

They also announced that Draft2Digital will now split payments to all of the authors in a box set. The organizer of the box set will determine the percentage that each author receives. NINC has the first opportunity to sign up for beta testing and can do so at this link: <http://d2d.tips/psbeta>

The maximum number of authors allowed is 50, because the minimum percentage they can pay a collaborator is 2%. If a percentage of a collaboration is to go to a charity, then the charity can register for a Draft2Digital account and receive their portion directly from them.

The presentation included the charts for sales by genre and country. Those charts can be found in the presentation at this link: <http://d2d.tips/ninc2020>



[Hallee Bridgeman](#) is a best-selling Christian author who writes action-packed romantic suspense focusing on realistic characters who face real-world problems.

Advanced Email Marketing

Presented by Alessandra Torre

Reported by Janis Susan May Patterson

Alessandra Torre is multi-published author with three books currently optioned for film.

Why is email marketing important? Alessandra Torre says email marketing is a direct connection with your readers. More than that, you have full control over what information you are sending out: to whom it goes, what it says, what and how many images you can use. You decide on the consistency of releases and how your mailing list is segmented.

Email marketing—or, if you prefer, a newsletter—is inexpensive, with most providers free for 1-2,000 subscribers. If you go over that, you will probably have to pay, but it is still a bargain for the reach and control you get.

For example, Torre had 31,000 Facebook followers and with 13 posts she gained 230 clicks on her books. With an email newsletter, she had 29,000 followers, but with just two emails she gained 1,806 clicks. She also knew how many had clicked on which specific item, such as a retail link or her website.

With email newsletters subscribers are either true fans, giveaway chasers or looky-loos. Your challenge is to convert all into true fans.

Your email should contain

- A personal greeting, such as Dear Jane. Try to collect each reader's first name (and remove last name from contact form—using Dear Jane Smith is neither personal nor friendly.) If you don't have their first name, find a default field such as Hi, There or Hi, Reader.
- Unique content. Your email is your direct line of communication with the reader. You should write your newsletter yourself instead of delegating it to your assistant. This is your chance to talk personally with your readers.
- A clear call to action. Some emails are (and should be) just friendly check-ins, but with important news such as new releases, etc., you should tell them clearly what you want them to do: buy the book.
- Your emails should always have a compelling subject line and preheader text.
- 90% should be fun content and 10% be promo. However, fun content can also be promotional—maybe a deleted scene, imaginary casting, fun factoids, etc., but straight sales pitches should be 10% only.

- Choose selective imagery—be choosy and don't be image heavy. Some email providers will filter out mails with too many images as trash/spam.
- Use short paragraphs and bullet points.

How should your email look?

- Simple design. Don't make your reader work to see what you want to show them.
- A careful font choice. Your readers will see your email on a variety of devices, and not all devices support all fonts. Choose a basic, across-the-board font instead of an exotic one that might turn up as pure gibberish. Torre prefers a 14 point font, left justified.
- Don't use more than three different fonts. Remember, links and bolding each count as a font choice.
- Be sure to preview and test emails before you send. See what your readers are going to see.
- Use a consistent layout, such as a standing head (the design with your name at the top of each page) that fits your brand.
- Your email should be mobile-device optimized. You should check it to make sure.
- Be selective and use no more than 3-4 links per email. More links can lower deliverability by some email providers.
- Have a provocative headline—something that will make the reader want to open the email.
- Be sure your links are clean. And use retailer-direct links, instead of sending your reader to a landing page. You can have a single newsletter which will use all retailers' links, or you can segment your mailing lists according to their favored retailer—one list for Apple buyers, one for B&N, etc.
- Do your due diligence in choosing your newsletter provider. Torre prefers Active Campaign, though it can be expensive for a large number of readers. She also likes Mailchimp and MailerLite, which she thinks is especially good for beginners.
- Do not use standard communication email companies such as Gmail or Yahoo; not only do they get sent to spam filters often they do not have the metrics and analytics you need to keep your campaigns as efficient as possible.
- Don't send your readers' names out in the header of the email; always put their names in the BCC (Blind Carbon Copy) field.

How often should you send an email?

- You should create a contact calendar; this is a promo plan. Are you going to do weekly, monthly, quarterly? Torre says she likes every other week for herself, but once a month is great, unless there is something special that rates an add-in, like a new release, movie sale or cover reveal.
- You don't want to be an author who contacts her fans only when she wants them to buy something. It's good to stay in touch; they're your friends, but you don't have to be too personal.

Make sure your email gets delivered

- Be sure that less than 40% of the email is images and that there are less than 3 fonts (remember, hyperlinks and bolding count as 1 each).
- Avoid spam triggers such as "free" (hard to avoid, but be selective and no caps); !!! or \$\$\$ (multiple anything's are bad) or ALL CAPS (screaming at the reader; use very sparingly).
- Ask for replies.
- Ask for whitelisting, though it is better to ask to be added to their address book; lots of people don't know how to whitelist. Sample wording : "This next step is super important! To make sure you never miss an email, whitelist us by adding *"your mailing address here"* to your address book."
- Increase engagement by asking questions, such as have them submit names for a new pet, or what color you should paint your office. These are small and basically unimportant things, but ones that create a sense of engagement between you and your readers. In one newsletter, Torre gave an excerpt from a book and three covers; the reader could click to guess which cover matched the excerpt. Everyone received an answer and a longer excerpt; those who guessed right were entered in a drawing for an Amazon gift card.

It's now delivered, so get it opened

What does your address look like? It should be Author Your Name, or Your Name Author. Don't use your company name. Also put your name in the subject line so there's no question of who it's from.

Increase your readership with compelling subject lines

Use compelling subject lines, something that will intrigue the reader enough to open the email. Ask a question that starts a dialogue and then follow up on it.

Give your emails a test

Mail-tester.com will let you send an email and will give you a score to see what you can do better. Be alarmed if your score is below 9. The service is totally free.

What to do with Unopens?

- Resend; this should be done at the end of Day 3. If possible, change the subject line. Every provider except Constant Contact allows you to resend.
- You can run test subject lines; this can be done on a smaller list.
- Bad subscribers can hurt your open rate and your email reputation, and, depending on your provider and the size of your list, cost you money.
- You should always make it easy for the reader to unsubscribe. It's the law that every newsletter have an "unsubscribe" link; don't make yours too prominent, but not too hard to find either.

Clearing your list

Pick a time period for culling unopened, such as if your reader has not opened an email in a year. Then try one more personalized email. If the reader does not unsubscribe herself, Torre recommends that you **unsubscribe** that name rather than **delete**. If you unsubscribe it, that address goes into “cold storage” where it can be reactivated if desired. If you delete it, if the reader wants to resubscribe sometime in the future they might not be able to. Sometimes unsubscribing the dead wood is the easiest way to increase your open rate.

Where do you find your subscribers?

Readers are everywhere. Put links to your newsletter signup everywhere—on your website, in books and social media. Additional opportunities are at book signings, through giveaways (10% of giveaway sign-ups convert to readers) and Facebook ads.

Put sign-up forms on the top bar in your website and at the bottom of every page. You can also put a pop-up on your website when someone visits, but be careful that it appears only one time per month to each visitor. You don’t want to drive them away.

Don’t overthink this! You have to find what works for you.

Lead magnet

Now that you have someone looking at your newsletter, how do you keep them coming back? Some favorite ways are to give them content not available to non-subscribers, such as deleted scenes, character interviews or even a bonus holiday scene. If you do a giveaway, Torre recommends Book Funnel. It handles everything for you. Depending on the size of your promotion it can be free, but sometimes there is a fee.

Segmentation

Sometimes it is good to separate your readers into distinct groups for better interaction and targeted marketing. Are your readers primarily interested in audio books, print books, ebooks, specific vendor choices, specific genres, whatever?

In addition to keeping a large master list, you need to find out who comes from where and why in order to reach them most efficiently. One of the best ways to segment is by their retailer, so you can target sales and such on a vendor-specific basis. This is especially important with Amazon, where if they are exclusive you can segment by KU or non-KU. Torre sent her readers an email with links for them to click and that did the segmenting for her.

Email automations

- Always send a welcome letter, one at a minimum but Torre does three, where you introduce yourself, share fun facts about yourself and your writing, and pitch your book(s). You can ask the reader if she wants the full newsletter (and make it sound good) or just new release announcements. If they don’t want newsletters and don’t open them, it hurts your open rate.
- Torre’s checklist for her three emails are: (1) Hey, did you get this book/magnet? (2) (a nudge) If you haven’t, here’s why you should, (3) Use the contact to pitch another book.

There is more information and additional resources for writers on Torre's website:
www.AlessandraTorreInk.com



Janis Susan May/Janis Patterson is a seventh-generation Texan and a third-generation wordsmith who writes in mystery, romance, and horror. Once an actress and a singer, Patterson has also been editor-in-chief of two multi-magazine publishing groups as well as many other things, including an enthusiastic amateur Egyptologist. Patterson's husband even proposed in a moonlit garden near the Pyramids of Giza. Patterson and her husband live in Texas with an assortment of rescued furbabies.

Optimizing Your Author Website for Search Engines and Users

Presented by Debra Lanning of LaLa Projects

Reported by Sharon Hamilton

Debra Lanning is the founder and creative director of LaLa Projects, a web design and online marketing business that delivers creative solutions and fully integrated brand plans.

Optimizing your author website for search engines and users

Many authors focus solely on the “look” of their website and often neglect how their website works, i.e. SEO tools. It’s one thing to have it be a good user experience, but it should also be helping you drive traffic to you, your brand and your books.

Lanning gave us some tools to use if we are doing our own website/SEO management, as well as definitions and things to think about in considering whether or not you should hire someone else to do it for you. A good website functions better when it is built from scratch with all the correct bells and whistles. However, either way the author chooses to go, whether it’s upgrading their own site, or having someone else upgrade or build from scratch, you need to know what’s involved and why.

Some common issues/problems

- Website not mobile-friendly.
- No navigation.
- Not enough content (excerpts / audio feeds).
- Current WIP (Work In Progress) not connected to a preorder link, or variety of purchase options on all available retailers
- If you have multiple websites (author website, blog, shop) consider combining them into one main website.
- Does your website connect to an online store?
- Does your website connect to a blog?
- User pathways blocked / not delivering pathway, broken links.
- Book covers / titles uploaded not so SEO friendly.
- Unorganized digital assets. For example, multiple email accounts, multiple domain names, or if assets are registered or managed under multiple providers.
- Not enough keywords used in descriptions of series and books.
- Website headings not properly ordered on a web page or post.

- Website loading too slow, leading to page abandonment.
- CTA (Call to Action) not appearing “above the fold.”
- Too many clicks to get to an actionable item.

Examples

Lanning used several examples of website problems for different authors that were upgraded, re-created or fixed. One example she used frequently was for author [Wayne Stinnett](#). One fun feature is Stinnett’s “beard-o-meter” which tracks his current WIP. Readers can follow, preorder and get involved in before the book comes out. She combined three separate sites, including his online store, into one main clean website for ease of use and maximum SEO.

Other examples:

- <https://deborahwilde.com/>
- <https://authorsharonhamilton.com/>

SEO (Search Engine Optimization) terms

- url: Uniform Resource Locator
- http: Hypertext Transfer Protocol
- http(s): Means domain is secure
- Domain Name – the website address
- Slug – part of the url that comes after the .com

Lanning discussed the importance of several more terms:

Content (videos, pictures, text), file names (tell the search engine what kind of a file it is so knows how to direct traffic), alt tags (using short description or adding keywords to image), key words, focus keywords, website headings, schema markup, and SERP (Search Engine Result Page).

Please visit [SEO & Website Terms](#) to learn more.

Content is king

Lanning reminded the audience that *content is king* — you want descriptions, even descriptions of images and links to be keyword rich. It helps Google find the page to optimize.

Make the content matchy-matchy — make all the content match, then repeat the topic throughout the page.

Infuse everything with your focus/keyword phrases. First sentence of any good description should be heavy with focus keywords. Example she used for Stinnett’s book, *Fallen Out*, the title is infused with the key words “A Jesse McDermitt Novel,” also “book by author Wayne Stinnett” to help discoverability.

Do-it-yourself SEO tools

Google Search Console

<https://search.google.com/search-console/about>

Yoast plugin

<https://yoast.com/wordpress/plugins/seo/>

Google Keyword Planner

<https://support.google.com/google-ads/answer/7337243>

LaLa Project Worksheets

[SEO Metadata worksheet](#) (can be found on the [LaLa Blog page](#), free download).

Conclusion

In short, a good website has good SEO and good user experience. And to achieve this, the author needs to pay attention to a lot of little details (yes, a lot). She used examples and gave us more details of these terms, other useful links, and descriptions of what LaLa can do for the author in the handout below.

For some, just hearing these terms and definitions makes our eyes roll. That's a pretty good indication there is some work to be done! Whether we pay attention or not, the search engines never forget. And even for the experienced author, a tune-up for SEO is always a good idea, just to make sure we get every tool available to us to use.

The handout for the presentation at NINC is located [here](#).



NYT and USA/Today Best-selling Author [Sharon Hamilton](#)'s SEAL Brotherhood series have earned her author rankings of #1 in Romantic Suspense, Military Romance and Contemporary Romance. Sharon also writes sexy paranormals in two series: Golden Vampires of Tuscany and The Guardians.

The Popularity Effect

Presented by Dave Chesson

Reported by Janis Susan May Patterson

Creator of Kindlepreneur.com and the forthcoming PublisherRocket.com, entrepreneur and former U.S. Naval officer Dave Chesson works to help authors gain insight on how they can optimize marketing for their books.

For many, Amazon is an impenetrable jungle of numbers, algorithms and arcane systems, but luckily for writers, Chesson is working to make things more understandable.

Kindlepreneur.com is in the business of information collection; it sends crawlers through Amazon to mine data 24/7. It maintains its own servers to hold this new data. It collects historical data on all 11,000 categories, the ever-changing number of competitors, sales trends and even the best time of year for a certain genre. This information is not just for the United States – also included are the German and United Kingdom markets.

In its searches, Chesson analyzes historical search data in the market, seeing increases in searches and areas of interests, including the overall health of keywords. This leads to projections for future trends in the market as well as trend analysis on book sales and genres and new phenomena in the market.

The “popularity effect” takes effect when a book shows signs of consistent or gradually growing sales, or conversions (purchases from browsing or click-throughs). When this growth is sustained sufficiently long (not a great length of time, days instead of months) Amazon will automatically start showing that book more keywords throughout their store.

Keywords

Keywords are (no pun intended) key. When a term/keyword does not sell, Amazon will put other words in based on a number of things, some of which are not truly applicable. For example, one of Nora Roberts’s romances was “expanded” into a horror category!

If you have keywords in the seven keyword metadata, Amazon will notice and take into account words in book description and even in the Look Inside feature. This can be a very good thing, or — depending on some of the words — very *interesting*.

There is a big difference between title/subtitle and your seven Kindle keywords. There is definitely a symbiosis between the title and subtitle. The reader should always be able to tell the book’s genre from title/subtitle. The cover is also important, but it’s sometimes hard to say from a cover alone exactly what genre/subgenre a book is. That makes the subtitle much more important.

The seven keyword fields do not mean one word only; there are approximately 50 spaces in each field, all of which can be filled out, either with single word ideas or multi-word descriptors.

As an example, Chesson used litRPG Game Lit (literature role playing games). If 1,000 shoppers type the above into Amazon's search engine every month Amazon notices and gives the category expansive treatment. This is the popular effect in action; when a book shows signs of consistent or gradual growing sales or high conversion rate, Amazon will analyze how your keywords work, then broaden terms to include more choices.

For example, if your original keywords are Litrog / gamelit / d&d lit / necromancer and your book reaches a conversion rate of 48% (standard acceptable conversion rate is 32%) Amazon will expand your keywords beyond what you have already used. In this example, Amazon expanded the keywords into dungeon master / magic the gathering books / ready player one / dungeons and dragons / game literature / dungeon lord / war mage / wizard duel / Arthurian fantasy / orcs & goblins. When people search, this expanded set shows more of the same type, even if they aren't looking for exactly what the product is.

And they can expand again to fantasy / lord of the rings / epic fantasy / fantasy books / free fantasy books / wheel of time. These keywords are even further away from the original meaning, so if the conversion/search rates dip too low for Amazon to accept, it will go back to the previous keyword set.

Amazon is testing books all the time, collecting information and adjusting ranks. A good rule of thumb is that for 270 clicks, there are 130 sales, that is a 48% conversion rate. This affects your rankings, but Amazon will not change your rankings based on price. What counts are sales. Neither does Amazon like perma-free. While a short KU five-day free type promo is counted in your rankings, perma-free is not; it is pushed down. Amazon does not like free.

Choice of keywords is largely dependent on your subject. There aren't many keywords for an airfryer — or even a book about airfrying — but by contrast there are an almost limitless array for a romance novel. There is no correlation between keywords and sales — they depend on the genre/subject of the book. Whatever the book is about, though, once the sales go up, Amazon gives more keywords.

Usually it takes six to eight days for the Amazon popularity effect to take effect. It is more of a gradual process. The source of the sales doesn't matter; they can come externally, from actual Amazon ads, email advertising, website, ad sites, whatever, or they can come from a customer simply scrolling through the site. A sale is a sale.

The effect of a promotion spike on keyword indexing is that if there is a quick spike in sales over a day or two, it probably won't mean an increase in keywords. Long term big sales and new keywords are good, but a quick spike usually won't result in any change. Four years ago this would have been different, but now — no. The algorithms are always evolving. Book promotions alone are no longer effective. Stacking promotions can be sometimes, but they are not guaranteed.

A well-planned book launch with multiple promotions and tactics can be a very effective key to good sales and continued growth.

Effect of a good book launch vs. keyword indexing

Amazon likes new books better, and there is a definite “honeymoon period” where Amazon gives them more love and more chances to prove themselves. However, there is a time factor for Amazon’s love for a book.

A well-planned and timed book launch has a greater effect on sales, but never forget there is a time factor that plays against books. This is the end of the honeymoon period. Short spikes in sales don’t affect this, and book promotions alone are no longer effective, though stacking promotions does show sustained growth. A well-planned book launch with multiple promos and tactics is more important today than it has ever been.

Amazon ads

Remember, it doesn’t matter where the sale comes from. Amazon ads can maintain or even increase overall sales consistently. An increase in sales will increase the number of keywords your book will show up for naturally, even without ads.

Amazon adds all ad sales to overall sales. There is no way to count ad sales alone, which means you can’t tell which ad for which book sparked the sale — if any. However, ads do help even if you can’t tell which ones.

No matter how they get to your sales page, if 10,000 visitors come but only 1,000 buy, that does hurt. Clicks without sales will not raise the rankings. Clicks do affect your ranking to a point, but it is conversions and sales that ensure it.

There is a good free course on Amazon ads available at AMSCourse.com.

Tools used

In figuring out ad campaigns and effectiveness, Kindlepreneur.com used historical data on all 11,000+ categories, trends in the market, market reports, historical data on Amazon searches, historic pricing, also-boughts in Amazon ads feature, and author-specific keywords.

Chesson has just begun a new experiment — PublisherRocket.com — to analyze the science of sales even further. He has done some experiments with Amazon heatmaps, starting with where and how long people’s eyes rest on what parts of Amazon sales pages, as well as gathering data on what shoppers look at and click on the most. He has paid people to sit in front of a computer and look at Amazon pages while the computer recorded their eye movement, length of looks and what they looked at. Although there is not enough data obtained yet (Chesson said, “Thanks, Covid!”), he is still working and said he might put it in his presentation next year if he is invited back. Chesson was very vocal in his liking of and admiration for NINC.

Final thoughts

Don’t forget to put important stuff in Editorial Reviews!

If you have a quantifier (i.e., NYT Bestseller, *USA Today* Bestseller, Best-selling Author, etc.) use it.

Send books for editorial review to those (such as friends you see here at NINC) who write the same genre, and be prepared to give the same back to them.

And one final caveat

Always remember Amazon is not in the business of selling books. They are in the business of making them available.

"We don't make money when we sell things. We make money when we help customers make purchase decisions."

—Jeff Bezos



Janis Susan May/Janis Patterson is a seventh-generation Texan and a third-generation wordsmith who writes in mystery, romance, and horror. Once an actress and a singer, Patterson has also been editor-in-chief of two multi-magazine publishing groups as well as many other things, including an enthusiastic amateur Egyptologist. Patterson's husband even proposed in a moonlit garden near the Pyramids of Giza. Patterson and her husband live in Texas with an assortment of rescued furbabies.

BookBub Q&A

Presented by Audrey Derobert and Carlyn Robertson

Reported by Violet Howe

Carlyn Robertson is responsible for product marketing and partner education on [BookBub's](#) Partner Relations Team. Audrey Derobert is an account manager on the Partner Relations Team.

Chirp promotions

Beta testing is over, and authors can now promote their Chirp audiobooks through BookBub ads!

[Chirp](#), BookBub's audiobook retail site, features limited-time deals in audio similar to BookBub's Featured Deals for ebooks, and with over one million members, Chirp has partnered with Findaway Voices as its exclusive distributor.

Authors can find the audio option on the ad set-up form, and only books with a Chirp URL will be allowed. Promotion ideas include targeting the next book in a series or setting a discount in Findaway Voices and promoting that. For now, audiobook ads are for US listeners only.

BookBub ads related-author targets

BookBub now offers the ability to target related authors when setting up an ad. After the initial author target is chosen, a new tab option will suggest authors with a similar audience. Although the audiences may have some overlap, the potential for discovering new readers increases, especially if the ads target authors with large followings.

Best practices for BookBub ads

Images and targeting have the two biggest impacts on the success of an ad. Successful strategies include the following:

- Make the text easy to read, and don't include too much text. Keep it simple and legible.
- Make the genre obvious. Indicate the genre and/or the mood in the text. Make sure the cover signals the genre.
- Use the book cover.
- For the Call to Action, use a button as a visual aid even though it won't be clickable. Use Buy Now, Read Now, or Learn More.
- A short, snappy blurb with a really strong hook works best.
- Emphasize the deal price to entice readers. Free garners the highest click-through rates, followed by 99 cents.

Chirp ads for 99 cents and \$1.99 get the highest conversions.

For more clicks, target narrow audiences. The category and author together work really well.

With CPM Bidding, you pay per 1,000 impressions. Use this strategy for running tests, for short campaigns, or to maximize reach or spend. Serve A/B ads randomly for a clean comparison.

With CPC Bidding, you pay per click. Use this strategy for long-term drip campaigns, or if you're focused on the return on your investment (ROI). Figure out your sales conversion amount to determine your ROI. There is a bidding calculator on the BookBub blog to assist.

Run tests to improve your ad results. Edit only one element at a time when testing. Start with a low budget of \$5-10 per day and use CPM bidding. Compare the click-through rate and the cost and continue to test to optimize results.

Q & A with audience

Q: How much do reviews count when selecting a Featured Deal?

A: We compare all submissions coming in and choose the best fit. We do look through reviews for any indicators of quality issues such as grammar, typos, etc. We also look for any mention in reviews of popular tropes and themes. Because reviews are important to readers, they are important to our editors, and we do take them into consideration, but there is no minimum number of reviews to be considered for a Featured Deal.

Q: How do you get a Featured Deal? What might enhance your chances?

A: The only thing that would disqualify you are the minimum requirements to be included: discounting, page length, and how often the author has been featured. We are looking for books that keep readers interested, so we search for submissions that are best for engagement. Reviews are helpful for the reasons listed above. Having popular themes or tropes highlighted in the book's description is helpful, as is discounting the book in as many regions as possible. We also look at retail availability, since those books available in wide distribution can reach more readers, which makes the book more competitive.

Q: If I'm not a known author, should I even bother submitting for a Featured Deal?

A: Yes! We turn books away every day due to the sheer volume of submissions, so keep resubmitting. You can submit the same title once every 30 days, but you can submit a different title in the meantime. Please don't think you're going to bother us by resubmitting. Circumstances might be different the next time you submit, and your chances might be better. Try submitting for 99 cents first, and then if you aren't selected, you can resubmit as free.

Q: Can BookBub add a box to tick on the submission form to indicate if you're willing to accept international-only deals?

A: When submitting, you can state in the comments section if you are **not** interested in an international-only offer, and then we won't offer it to you.

Q: If we take an international deal, does that help us get a US deal?

A: Historical performance counts, so if the book did well with an international deal, we will take that into consideration.

Q: What percentage of books only in KU are accepted for a Featured Deal compared to the number submitted?

A: We've committed to readers that they will get book deals every day, and when a KU book is accepted, it means readers who are not in KU don't get a book that day. For that reason, we favor books in wide distribution that can be available for more readers. It often depends on how many submissions that day are KU and how many are wide. If the majority of submissions we're going through are KU, then that can change the likelihood of having a KU book accepted that day.

Q: If I run a BookBub ad for an action/adventure book, what is the percentage of readers who click on the ad vs. the Featured Deal of the day?

A: We don't want to cannibalize the Featured Deal, but we also want the ad to be successful. Keep in mind, the Featured Deal is tied to a category, but the ads aren't. So, a reader might see different ads, and they may not have the same category as the Featured Deal.

Q: Would you consider approving a brand-new box set releasing at 99 cents?

A: Our discounting requirements are that the book price is discounted at least 50% of its predominant price for the previous month. So, if you launch a box set at 99 cents, you would need to have it on pre-order for at least twice as high in order to be considered for a Featured Deal. And we do look at reviews for the individual titles in a box set if the box set itself has no reviews.

Q: Can a Pre-Order Alert be followed by a New Release Alert?

A: Yes. A Pre-Order Alert can be sent if the author has at least 1,000 followers. It is sent on select dates and costs 2 cents per follower. The New Release Alert is sent to followers if you add a new book before, on, or within 7 days of its release. Both of these alerts are for US followers only. A Featured New Release Alert is similar to a Featured Deal. It is sent to the entire category audience once a week. It has page limit requirements, but no discount requirements. See BookBub's website for more details.

Q: How can we best use BookBub ads?

A: BookBub ads are the best way to generate steady sales over time. The general strategy is to have a low-budget ad campaign with a narrow or wide audience. If you bid on clicks, you can build steady sales over a longer period of time at a lower cost. The budget can be as low as \$5 per day. We suggest you target the first book in a series.

Q: Do you have any tips or insights on recommending books as an author?

A: Recommending books can get you more visibility. You get boosted in the discovery algorithm if you recommend regularly, which means you're seen by your followers as well as others browsing the site. We also mention top recommendations in our weekly emails, so that can boost you and get you seen by readers.

Q: I can't recommend my books to my followers, but readers don't have a big follower audience, so how does it help?

A: It's more effective if you recommend other authors and boost each other to aid in discovery.

Q: Can you select where your ads show up to try and target new release alerts?

A: No. It can be unpredictable because it's based on which authors release on a particular day.

Q: How often should you recommend other authors?

A: Limit it to once per week or even one per month.

Q: When I submit for one category, do you consider the book for other categories? Should I suggest other categories to consider in the comments when submitting?

A: We are open to considering other categories, so yes, add that in the comments. We do consider other categories when we review. We try to determine which category is the best fit.

Q: What will increase my odds for being selected as a KU/KDP Select book?

A: Keep resubmitting, because the more you submit, the greater the chance of timing and being selected. Try to also have a competitive price point; go as low as you can go. If you're willing to try multiple price points, submit the highest first. Make sure you have reader reviews and that your cover is top-notch. It does help to have it available in as many regions as possible. The Countdown Deals are for US only, but if you're willing to take less royalty, you can submit for other regions.

Q: When you target authors for ads, you see the number of readers as opposed to the number of followers. Do readers only count as those who clicked on paid Featured Deals, not free?

A: If an author has only run free Featured Deals, then any readers who clicked are included in the targetable audience. If the author ran paid and free, we prioritize the paid clicks. Ads tend to be most successful when you are targeting the audience of similar books.

Q: How many authors should I target in my ads?

A: It depends. One strategy is to target a single author, while another strategy is to target multiple authors. It needs to serve 1000 impressions before an author shows up. If the target audience is in the red, you need to add more. If you do have multiple authors in one campaign, target authors who have about the same number of readers. If not, the author with the bigger audience will hog all the impressions.

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



Violet Howe writes romantic women's fiction, romantic paranormal mysteries, and romantic suspense.

How to Launch a Bestseller

Presented by Skye Warren

Reported by Tamsin Ley

Skye Warren is a New York Times best-selling author who has had 14 full-priced new release books hit the bestseller lists, not counting sale prices or analogies.

A good book does not sell itself, and if you do nothing to promote it, it will do nothing. Warren likened launching a book to growing peaches; if you plant a tree and it does not produce fruit, you don't ignore it. You try different water, soil, fertilizer, etc. to get it to fruit. A book is similar—nurture it well and you can help it grow and flourish.

As a demonstration, Warren presented the release plan for her book, *Diamond in the Rough*, the first book of a new spinoff trilogy. The book was available for preorder on all retailers at \$4.99, and she published a free prologue novella to drive those preorder sales. The book ends in a cliffhanger, and book two was already up for preorder on release day of book one, also for a price of \$4.99.

During the preorder period, Warren tested her book cover design using Facebook ads, looking for the most “clicky” combination of image, font, and colors. Only the author branding (the author name) on each cover was consistent. The cover image must convey the book’s mood and premise, and what you believe is the best cover may not be what your audience finds attractive. She suggests spending \$50 or \$100 on Facebook ads to get an unbiased opinion. For this release, she tested eight cover design options, each ad using the exact same text copy from a portion of the book’s blurb. (For these ads, only be concerned about comparative performance between the cover options, not the ad copy.) She considers both click-through rate and cost per click when deciding which cover image will be the best one for the book. Even if you end up picking an option that wasn’t the most clicky because you like it better, you can at least be certain you are not shackling yourself to the worst cover option by mistake. Data empowers you to make smart choices; it does not take your choices away.

The two pillars of a bestselling book launch are visibility (new readers who see the book) and conversion (those who buy the book). You need both pillars to be strong to make a bestseller. So how does an author find new readers? Warren suggested four avenues: paid ads, back matter, your fan base, and influencers.

Warren uses an assortment of ads, with most of her budget going into Facebook ads because they are scalable. She also suggested stacking Amazon ads and BookBub cost-per-click ads, but these types of ads have a cap. Relying on ads mean your book isn't good; a poor book still won't sell. Quality is a prerequisite for success, and effective marketing is how books succeed. Consider how your book appeals to **new** readers. When writing ad copy for these ads, draw readers in with familiar tropes, trends, and a very clear conflict. Wait until they are reading the book to pleasantly surprise them with your originality. If using a trope this way feels uncomfortable to you, remember *this is for new readers*. Readers want to know they will like it, and something familiar will tell them that. Use social proof such as reviews, a very clear reason why readers should get the book now instead of wait, and a taste of the character and conflict. All of this should fit into one to two sentences of ad copy. The "why now" portion is because the book is new. In addition to the pay-per-click ad platforms, she used paid newsletter bookings. The services she found useful for a new release in her genre were:

- [Elite Reader](#)
- [New in Books](#)
- [Zero Alchemy](#)
- [Pillow Talk Books](#)
- [eBookSoda](#)
- [Kindle Nation Daily](#)
- [Fussy Librarian](#)
- [Choosy Bookworm](#)

For every release, Warren said at least one of your backlist titles needs to be on sale. If the release is part of a series, then ideally the sale book will be book one of that series. If you are releasing a new series, which of your titles in previous releases is similar to the new one? Warren suggested using three comparable titles from your backlist to drive sales to your new release. Time this sale so it coincides with your release week and adjust the back matter of the sale book to include a clear call to action directing readers to the new release.

In addition to utilizing her backlist, Warren wrote a free novella-length prologue to drive sales to the release. For the free book, she suggested using a different type of cover than used on the upcoming release, which will entice different sorts of readers. A free book presents a low barrier to entry, and makes it easy to run Facebook ads with a high click-through rate. It also presents more sharing options and conversion from bloggers and readers, and using it during the preorder phase can generate sales before the book comes out. The beauty of this tactic was that it allowed her to use newsletter sites that cater exclusively to *free* books which might be closed to advertising a full-priced release. The free prologue was included inside the new release so readers do not miss it if they go straight to the new release. She also suggested not linking the free book to your Facebook group or ask your readers for reviews on it—**only** direct them to the new release.

Your fan base are those people who follow you on social media and your newsletter. These are the people who will buy your book on release week, but they are only a small portion of potential buyers. The key is to mobilize them to leave reviews and tell their friends. To appeal to your existing readers, you must make sure to connect it to your other books or at least to the tropes you are writing, because that is what your fan base already enjoys reading.

One suggestion Warren made was to do a giveaway on your Facebook page asking people to read an excerpt on your Goodreads page. Make them scroll through a picture, the description, and the excerpt to enter the giveaway. Warren says that book trailers will not get new readers, but will excite your existing fan base. A book trailer tells them that this is a big book. And the power of your newsletter is strong during release week. Send a newsletter on release day, then a couple of days later follow up with a plain text email to those who didn't open it to be certain it made it into their inbox. On Thursday/Friday of that week, send a follow-up newsletter to your entire list with new content like your book trailer, a new giveaway, a list of things you loved about writing the book, etc. Do not worry about bugging them—your fan base should be excited to hear from you.

The final tactic Warren used was to reach out to influencers such as book bloggers or other best-selling authors. You can't sell backlist here—influencers like what's new. Be confident when approaching them—*there is a book like yours that is a bestseller*. What are three comparable best-selling titles to your book? Ask your friends to help if you need to, and do not choose small titles. This is the time to compare yourself to bestsellers, and Warren takes a go-big-or-go-home attitude about reaching influencers. Approach other authors and ask for quotes that you can use in ads. Other authors will also help spread the news of your book. Warren also created gift boxes with paperback copies and book swag which she sent for free to Bookstagrammers. They shared photos of the gift box and gave her visibility from being on their feed.

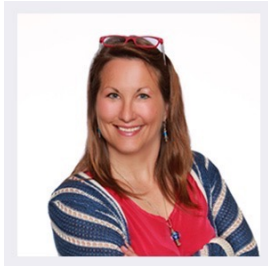
So what were the results of Warren's release plan? She spent around \$23,000, the bulk of which went toward Facebook ads. This investment came out of sales of her previous books, and she warned authors not to spend money they don't have. She worked her way up, starting from zero, and you cannot go straight to that level of ad spend. Build up and reinvest what you make. During release month she made \$38,000 plus another \$10,000 over the next two months on book one alone. She spent zero dollars advertising book two, which released just prior to the conference, and has made \$12,000 in the first week. Her total to earnings to date is around \$68,000.

The success of book one determines the success of the series, and she doesn't spend time or money on book two, although she will spend a little on book three of a trilogy. Money is made on sell-through, so always be sure in your back matter to ask readers to buy or preorder the next book as your **first** request. After that you can ask them to leave a review, join your newsletter or Facebook group, or direct them to a different series while they wait on the preorder.

Do not assume Warren's strategy won't work for your book because yours is too smart/different, etc. Readers want to know how a book is the same as something they love before you surprise them with how yours is different. Use those tropes and familiar conflicts to your advantage. If you believe you can't control your book sales, so why bother, then that becomes true. Growth and comfort do not coexist. Be bold. Be confident. Try something new.

And if you ask how you are supposed to find time to do all this, Warren says she only works for two to three hours a day. She launches over one week and then shuts it all off at the same time. Whether you work for three hours or work for eight, you will never complete all your tasks. Working less makes you focus on what is most important.

If you would like to know more about Warren's thoughts on publishing and marketing, sign up at skyewarren.com/authors for more information.



Tamsin Ley wanted to be a biomedical engineer once upon a time, but experimenting on lab rats doesn't always lead to happy endings. Now she blends her nerdy infatuation of science with character-driven romance and guaranteed happily-ever-afters. She has published over eighteen science fiction and romance titles. She also loves horticulture, cooking, and is a secret zombie prepper.

Amazon Advertising for Authors

Presented by Eli Brewer

Reported by: Katy Madison

Eli Brewer has been an account executive at Amazon Advertising for over three years, with over half that time spent working with KDP authors and large publishing houses.

Eli Brewer tells us that millions of Amazon customers interact daily in dozens of ways from asking Alexa to “Tell me a story” to grocery shopping. For our books, it is all about discoverability. You want to be visible to customers as they search. Amazon ads can drive relative readers to your product page.

Did you know that 67% of online shopping sessions end without a purchase? One to five searches are made before shoppers buy. Seventy-four percent of shoppers use multiple channels to make a single purchase. Readers often research on Amazon to find a book, then go to a bookstore to purchase it. You want to make sure your book is visible even if the reader won't purchase on Amazon.

Brewer makes sure his authors check all the boxes before advertising. The following steps to advertising are:

- Retail Readiness
- Harvest Demand
- Own Your Aisle
- Maximize Purchase Intent
- Engage New Customers
- Feed the Funnel

You can advertise on Amazon using the self-service with no minimum investment. Or you can pay for managed service at a minimum \$35,000 for at least two months. It is a big investment, and you need to make sure you are ready for it. The first three steps apply to both self-service and managed-service advertising. The last steps are only for managed-service.

You can find out more about how to advertise on your KDP dashboard under the marketing tab.

You want to create your advertising strategy. Understand what kind of return on investment (ROI) that you need. If you don't know what your goal is, it is hard to know when you achieve it.

Retail Readiness includes, having A+ content and having ratings and reviews. Start with Sponsored Products advertising to tap demand for similar products.

Harvest Demand by using your author name and owned title keywords. People refer to this as defensive advertising. If the search is for your name or title, you want to make certain that you and your books are appearing high in the results. However, if you are only advertising defensively, you are not getting new readers. Sponsored Products are like buying premium shelf space. You only pay when a customer clicks on an ad. Impressions are free.

Own Your Aisle includes Sponsored Products and Sponsored Brands. This is where you advertise to authors similar to you and use more generic category terms. You may want to ride the tail of an author with a big launch. If you know an author has a big upcoming release, by targeting your keywords to their book, you may be able to get a boost.

Automatic campaigns will allow you to learn what customers are specifically searching for and understand what converts. Automatic campaigns will help you find keywords that work for you. Once you know what works, you can use manual targeting. Brewer recommends starting with at least 30 keywords in a campaign. You can use author-, publisher- and title-specific words to cross-sell or launch.

Other books, author keywords and ASINs get readers to take a look at you. Readers buy more than one book, unlike when shoppers are looking at mattresses. They buy a mattress, and they are done. Sometimes conversion is not immediate. If the reader buys within two weeks of clicking on an ad, that counts.

As you climb the ladder, your costs will go up. General keywords and relevant genres will cost more per click than specific keywords tied to your book.

Brewer warns people to make sure they meet the acceptance policy. Romance authors often have their ads rejected because their covers aren't suited for all audiences.

He also recommends creating five to ten campaigns with groupings of keywords, so you can learn what works best for you. Amazon is looking for relevancy. The highest bidder on a keyword may not be chosen if the algorithm finds a more relevant match. There is no advantage for KU authors in advertising. You should use separate campaigns for different titles or genres to focus your strategy and keywords.

Leave the end date open instead of choosing a specific date. If a campaign ends, all the data disappears. You can pause campaigns as often as you need. He recommends that authors approach advertising with flexibility. He also suggests bidding high to start, then lower as needed. He also recommends higher bids for specific keywords and lower bids for more general keywords.

Some best practices include working backwards from customer experience to create your targeting by utilizing the Search Term report. You want to launch campaigns two to three weeks in advance of a publication/event and run them for a minimum of four to six weeks. Maintain a marketing mix for new and old titles. First in a series is better to push than later titles.

Sponsored brands should be thought of as end caps. This allows you to promote multiple titles. Highest click-through rates are on sponsored brands. Ads that show at the top of the page get good conversion.

Maximize Purchase Intent with managed service ads that go directly to e-readers, Fire Tablet and Mobile DSP (Demand-side platform). Brewer cannot tell us how many people buy through their phones, but he tells us that many people browse on mobile, then purchase on their computer. At this level you get title views remarketing, contextual audiences and can target people who have bought previous titles.

Engage New Customers with similarity remarketing, in-market and lifestyle audiences and look-alike audiences. The Amazon team will drill down into the data to target the best new audience for you.

Feed the Funnel with OTT (Over The Top) video ads, sampling and targeting Fire devices with immersive advertising. Fire tablets have over two billion average monthly impressions. The click-through rate is sixteen times higher vs. industry online banner ads. OTT video ads are streamed over the internet. They are non-skippable, non-clickable ads that are integrated into the experience. This is pie-in-the-sky advertising geared to make a big splash with new releases.



Katy Madison has a bit of a split personality. Her light side writes humorous Regency and her dark side writes Gothic Historical Romances.

Stuck, Blocked and Burned Out

Presented by Becca Syme

Reported by Sue Phillips

Becca Syme, a Gallup-Certified Strengths Coach, is the creator and founder of the [Better-Faster Academy](#). She has been teaching the popular Write Better-Faster course on author success alignment for five years and has coached over 4,500 authors toward better success in their careers and lives. Syme is available to answer questions via email or post to the Better Faster Facebook page. Find her at [@beck_a_tron](#) (Twitter) and [@rlsyme](#) (FB).

Special Note: NINC members can receive two free books, workshop slides, discounts on classes and other resources at <https://betterfasteracademy.com/ninc2020sbbo>

Being stuck, blocked or burned out is like having a disease no one wants to talk about, such as teenage cystic acne. Everyone has an opinion about how to treat it. And most are so wrong they are not helpful. Assumptions are based on their own experience and not conceptual theory. The wrong diagnosis of what is causing writer's block will not make the symptoms go away or will make it worse.

The words—Stuck, Blocked, Burnout—are often used interchangeably because something is not happening. The reality is that these states of being are so different that we need to understand why they are different, almost to the level of granularity. Being stuck is a little easier than being blocked which is easier than being burned out.

Syme used a metaphor of the “Slugbug” (VW Beetle) in her slide presentation analysis of the differences. When the car becomes stuck in the mud, the driver has the ability to get out of the situation by carrying tools in the trunk. When blocked in traffic, the driver has no control over a stalled car ahead. When the Bug is torched/burned out, it is not drivable, no matter how long the driver sits in the seat and turns the key. As with the driver, the writer who is stuck, blocked or burned out must understand the “why” behind the inability to move forward.

Why is it important that these three things are different? How do we use the knowledge of these diagnoses to get out of these circumstances with more efficiency? Knowing why helps the writer to move out of that place and into productivity again.

Stuck

FOUR CAUSES OF STUCKNESS

Action Stuck
(See, but don't do)
No Pressure Stuck
(Communication, Activator, Strategic)
Proximity Stuck
(Environment causing stall)
Distraction Stuck
(just not doing the work)

Four causes of stuckness:

1. **Action Stuck.** "I can see where I want to go, and I'm just not doing it." This is a disconnect between seeing it and not being able to do it. Ex: Putting off opening the manuscript because it is scary.

SOLUTION: If you can see it, write it. Use the "Five-second rule." Open your manuscript right now.

2. **No Pressure Stuck.** Syme uses the shorthand terms "Communication," "Activator," and "Strategic" from the Clifton Strengths Test. [Note: For instruction to take the test, go to <https://betterfasteracademy.com/ninc2020sbbo>.] Some writers have expectations of what they should be able to do, such as writing in little segments all the time or consistently writing every day. They become stuck when they can't manufacture enough external pressure on a regular basis. Communication writers need to process out loud. Dialogue creates pressure for them. ("I wasn't sure what I meant until I said it out loud.") Activator writers want an external catalyst to make them work. Strategist writers need a deadline and won't start writing until close to deadline.

SOLUTION: Set an external deadline. Pressure has to come from outside. Tell someone or set a deadline with consequences, such as scheduling an editor or a pre-order.

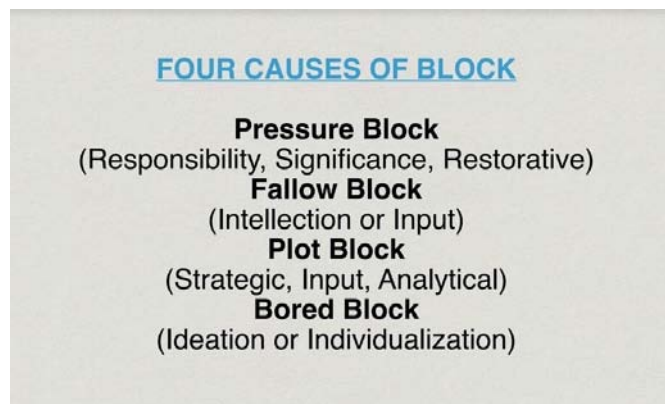
3. **Proximity Stuck.** Something in the environment causes a writer to stall, such as having kids home all day or the office is full of moving boxes. The usual writing environment has changed, causing the writer to be stuck. If a writer can wait it out, proximity issues will eventually go away. But this is not always an option.

SOLUTION: Create a clean visual space by clearing away clutter, boxes, etc. Set barriers with people who live in the home. Look for a way to create a bubble separated from whatever is causing distress and stuckness. Sometimes this requires asking someone for help to clear these things away.

4. *Distraction Stuck* is an addiction to the distractibility of life, especially when the writing is not going well. The most common advice for being stuck or blocked is “just sit down and do the work.” But this is not always easy.

SOLUTION: Open the manuscript first thing in the morning, even if work doesn’t start right away. Same as the solution for “Action Stuck,” having the manuscript open removes the mental barrier.

Blocked



Four causes of being blocked:

1. *Pressure Block*. A promise to readers to write a new book is a responsibility to deliver. But the looming deadline escalates pressure, leading to a block. The significance of the work—knowing the impact of publishing a book, great or awful—can create a block. A restorative block happens to a writer who sees all the errors that need correction and becomes overwhelmed by fixing everything. In all these cases, the level of overwhelm creates the block.

SOLUTION: Find someone to give perspective, to remind the writer where to start.

2. *Fallow Block*. A farmer’s field left unplanted and allowed to rest for a year is called a fallow field. When a writer can’t see what is coming next in the story, she needs to allow fallow time to think and/or do research. Time is needed to take in “nutrients” (info) to create again.

SOLUTION: Allow time to think quietly or take in information—incubate, curate, research, retrieve.

3. *Plot Block*. When a writer can’t figure out how to move the story forward, the book might have taken a wrong turn or the writer made the wrong strategic decision in an earlier chapter. Often this block is unconscious and takes time to figure out the problem.

SOLUTION: The only way through this block is to work backwards to the last place where the story went off track, often tossing words and scenes to begin a new direction. The thought of going backward and/or throwing out scenes can cause a block.

4. Bored Block. Writers have personality capacities to proliferate ideas. The core function of their brain is the constant need for new and different. When the writer becomes bored with the story, he assumes the reader will be bored, which is not necessarily true.

SOLUTION: Switch projects to stimulate creativity, then come back to the book with a refreshed perspective. If switching is not an option, another approach is to use external pressure to finish the story.

Burnout

Burnout is an important topic this year. Syme recommended a Twitter feed by disaster specialist, Dr. Aisah Ahmad, who said, “In 2020, we are all going to hit a wall. Some of us have already hit it where we thought we would be okay by now but we are not okay.” For more, go [here](#).

Even before this year became overwhelming, Syme noticed writers being burned out by how hard they are working to keep up with this industry. She doesn’t see this turning around and has a feeling burnout in writers will get worse. It is important to understand and be prepared.

THREE TYPES OF BURNOUT

Emotional/Spiritual Burnout
(Primarily external in cause)

Creative/Intellectual Burnout
(Primarily internal in cause)

Physical Burnout
(Primarily physical in cause)

Three types of Burnout:

1. **Emotional/Spiritual Burnout** is almost always an external cause, such as something bombarding the writer with emotional expectations. (“I expect you to respond to this right now.”) Or there is an emotional drain on the writer’s system causing a loss of energy, which is different from depression which has internal cause.

2. **Creative/Intellectual Burnout** is usually internal due to continuous use of resources and not replenishing. The writer burns out creatively because there are no stores left.

3. **Physical Burnout** is primarily caused by physical limitations—overexertion, doing something beyond physical capabilities or an underlying physical illness.

It is possible to have one or a combination of these types. Having all three is fourth type of burnout, creating a complete lack of capacity. In the past year, Syme has coached many writers with emotional burnout but not physical, able to move around but have no capacity to take in anything more from anyone. A writer can also be physically unable to write yet still have the creative energy to want to write. Understanding all these pieces of burnout help prevent it.

Building blocks for burnout

Using the metaphor of “Energy Pennies,” Syme explained, “Every single thing I do in an entire day costs energy pennies. Getting up. Making mental decisions between coffee and tea. Deciding about opening a manuscript costs a huge amount of energy. Sometimes our bank is empty, we don’t have enough energy pennies to get things done.”

Energy pennies are replenished naturally through sleep and eating. But they can also be intentionally made through restoration activities such as self-care, guilty pleasures (reading, watching TV), reconnecting with friends and families. Some people who need little wins to create energy can create a list to check off these wins. Decluttering can create energy pennies. This energy is banked for later use.

Decisions, big and small, throughout the day cause a loss of pennies. Be conscious of the use of energy pennies. Also be aware of energy-creating activities to refill the bank. A person can extend himself beyond what he thought he could do and still feel okay because he has a bank of energy behind him. If the bank is empty, burnout happens. Understanding energy pennies can be made, are bankable—but not unlimited—helps to see how the road can lead down to burnout.

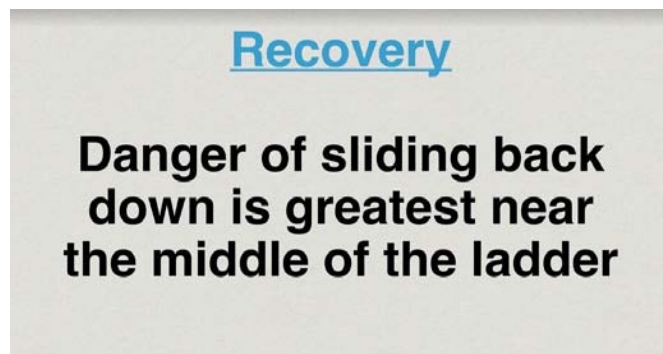
The Slide, The Pit and The Ladder:

1. *The Slide.* The road of a normal, everyday life is flat. Using too many energy pennies leads to a burn-out runway or the “slide”—a downward trajectory that picks up speed, using pennies faster, reaching the bottom of the bank faster. Making more pennies can flatten the slide. But there is a point of no return when the slide is beyond control. This is important to know because everything done beforehand makes it possible to avoid the burnout. The body instinctively feels it when it happens. Syme described how it happens to her and to other clients: “I can’t even think of doing the same thing that I’m doing anymore without wanting to escape, or without wanting to cry, or without wanting to quit. I can’t even think of continuing down this road. I start to get afraid of what’s going to happen. My body biologically does that. That’s the tipping point of no return.”

2. *The Pit* is the bottom of the empty bank. The writer cannot wake up in the morning and go back to work as usual because the energy pennies are gone. They can’t be made by simply thinking of them. At this point, the previous night’s sleep restores the pennies, but the normal functions of just getting out of bed and making coffee depletes them, leaving the energy bank empty once again. Burnout trends like depression but has an external, specific cause.

3. *The Ladder.* Think of pennies as rungs on a ladder to climb out of the pit. Adding pennies to the bank adds more rungs to the ladder. Intentionally make extra pennies to get out.

Recovery



Recovery is often two rungs up and one rung back. The danger of sliding back down into the pit is greatest near the middle of the ladder. The writer either thinks he's doing better or is impatient to be back to normal. He returns to old, exhaustive habits and then falls backward. Getting stuck in the pit or halfway up the ladder is normal, survivable and workable. Be conscious of what steals energy and what gives energy. Do less penny-draining activity and more penny-building activity. Pre-burnout—watch those pennies. Post-burnout—watch those pennies. For 2020—watch those Freaking Pennies!

Referring to Dr. Ahmad's Twitter thread, Syme pointed out we hit these walls during a long-term disaster when we think it would be over by now and wonder why it isn't. This external pressure is not going to get better for a while, so we need to stay aware of what drains us. Hug your people. Build your pennies. Whether it is personal or collective burnout, emotional or physical burnout, it is all survivable if we remain conscious of what is coming.

"Right now, all we need to focus on in this industry is being okay."

– Becca Syme



Sue Phillips is the award-winning author of women's fiction, narrative non-fiction and time travel romances. A journalism major and a student of metaphysics for over thirty years, she loves to explore diverse issues and out-of-the-box ideas. Sue lives in Nevada with a menagerie of pets, including a Disney Dalmatian named Pongo.

Success Metrics and the Elusive Why

Two Hour Masterclass
Presented by Becca Syme

Reported by Sue Phillips

Becca Syme, a Gallup-Certified Strengths Coach, is the creator and founder of the [Better-Faster Academy](#). She has been teaching the popular Write Better-Faster course on author success alignment for five years and has coached over 4,500 authors toward better success in their careers and lives. Syme is available to answer questions via email or post to the Better Faster Facebook page. Find her at [@beck_a_tron](#) (Twitter) and [@rlsyme](#) (FB).

Special Note: NINC members can receive two free books, workshop slides, discounts on classes and other resources at <http://betterfasteracademy.com/ninc2020why>

Prior to being an author, Becca Syme worked in the success coaching industry where there is an assumption that corporate business is the same as the writing business. This is not true. Applying success metrics to writing requires a coach who understands both worlds. Many writers take their careers seriously but ignore the business practices of big companies, such as organizational success management. Ex: HR personal development. As a coach, Syme brings successful business skills to the individual author entrepreneur—"Authorpreneur"—who needs an outside perspective to help execute change.

While Syme pursues a PhD in success psychology, she has taken everything learned from coaching and from authors into a study of patterns to understand how success is measured, aka "success metrics."

When Syme began teaching a customized productivity class, "Write Better Faster," authors were asked, "What are your pain points? What are you frustrated with?" The common responses were "Why am I not more successful?" and "Why have I not reached the level I want to reach?" These answers showed not only struggles as individual as each writer but also patterns—both broad (more abstract) patterns and narrow (more concrete) patterns.

Everyone, at one time or another, has felt unsuccessful at some level. This workshop posed two jobs for the author:

1. To question our (abstract) assumptions about success.
2. To discover the common patterns under a lack of success as an author.

Part One: Assumptions about success

Syme explained her own mantra, "Question the premise—QTP." Underneath every action a person takes is an assumption he makes. Ex: "I can go on Facebook really quick." Under every assumption is a *subconscious* assumption. Ex: "I am in control of my action all the time." The

reality is this same person loses 45 minutes of time without realizing it. The assumption of control to be quick is false. Another sub-assumption is that Facebook is harmless, which is not true in a psychological sense. Facebook is set up to be addictive.

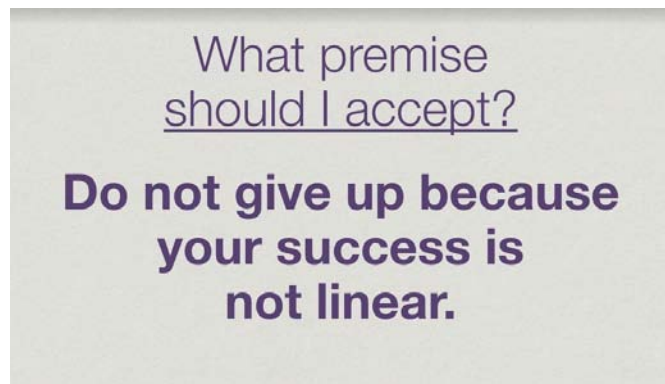
Four myths believed about success:

Myth #1 — “Success is linear, going up continuously.”

This premise produces anxiety every time the author compares sales numbers or list placement. The anxiety then produces an action to change things that may not need to be changed. Sometimes the wrong problem is fixed. If the only metric being considered is success in linear growth, an author can make decisions that knee-cap growth over the long term.

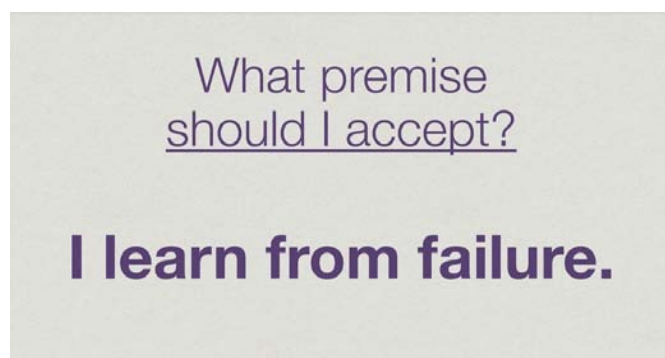
A second part of this myth is “Success should happen in a predictable way.”

Accepting these premises are catalysts to changing the thought pattern. Sometimes the writer needs to state the opposite premise as positive self-talk. Ex: “Success is non-linear. Do not give up because my success is not linear.”



Myth #2 — “Failure is the opposite of success.”

The assumption is any failures are career-ending, which is important to call out. The thought is so subconscious, writers don’t realize they’re doing it. (See Syme’s free book, *Dear Writer, You’re Doing It Wrong*, available on the website listed above.) Failures can be regenerative as well as a learning experience. Change the self-talk to “I can fail” and “I learn from failure.”



Myth #3—“Success should happen quickly.”

Most writers have heard, “If my book doesn’t sell in the first three months, it won’t ever sell.” After coaching over 4,000 people, Syme confirms there are always deviations. Some authors quit a series too soon because of this myth. There are often other issues at stake. Get outside perspective. Ask some experts. Syme added: “This is why I love places like NINC because you get to be around so many other people, and there’s so much encouragement to network and talk to each other. We can question each other’s premises as well. I even heard it last year happening around the tables in the networking area when someone said, ‘My series isn’t selling’ and another member offered, ‘Hey, let me look at your covers.’ They would look at the covers and help each other.”

Another premise that authors accept: If success does not happen immediately, it will never happen. Syme highly recommended reading Seth Godin’s *The Dip: A Little Book That Teaches You When to Quit (and When to Stick)*.

Initial success is often more about luck or timing than it is about planning or tactics. (If we stipulate that hard work and talent are already present.) **The four key metrics for success are hard work, talent, luck and timing.** There has to be an acceptance of trying again and again because luck and timing are so important.

Do not ask, “What if I never have success again?” This rhetorical question causes the writer to freeze. Instead, look at how to reclaim the success elements from the first time. Bottom line in this industry is it is not predictable.

**Initial success is often more
about luck or timing than it is
about planning or tactics.
(If we stipulate that hard work
and talent are already present.)**

A third premise to accept: “It’s always possible to find success ahead of me on the path, even if it isn’t behind me.” Many people are wired so that they read patterns based upon what has happened to them in the past. From a theoretical standpoint, this is not true. Just because a writer hasn’t had success in the past does not mean it can’t or won’t happen.

Applying this premise to a struggling series, sometimes it is best to finish the series because it needs to be finished. Or the author personally needs to finish a project even if it is not successful, in spite of advice to let it go. What is best for the author might be different from what is considered to be the “best practice” in the industry.

Myth #4—“Success is the same for everyone.”

People often look to what others are doing and try to apply it to themselves, which leads to behavior that is not good for them or for their business—unless that is a metric that they hold

upon their own. Ex: Common “wisdom” is writing in only one genre is the only way to succeed. If an author is wired to write in multiple genres, she may assume something is wrong with her and she will never be successful.

What is success? Dictionary definition: *The outcome of an undertaking, specified as “achieving” or “failing to achieve.”* It is relative to whatever a person is aiming at. Many writers don’t know what they are aiming at. If they are sensitive to the emotions of other authors, they can unknowingly assimilate goals or aims that are not their own. Ex: A writer started out wanting to write a good book, but he hears the only way to be successful is to write a book a month. So he tries to write faster, finding himself unhappy trying to achieve a goal that was not his own.

Action item: Realign yourself to what is really important to you individually which is going to actuate your fulfillment.

Success is relative to the
thing you’re aiming at.

Part Two: Common patterns under a lack of success as an author

In the first half of the workshop, the focus was on authors’ assumptions about success. It is possible to not feel successful even if there is concrete success—monetary success, fan success, platform success. In the second half, the focus was on the most common reasons why authors might not experience actual success, in the moment or in actuality.

Reason #1—Authors adopt others’ definition of success and measure themselves against them, often without realizing it. This relates with Myth #4. They don’t examine the fact that they don’t always value the same thing. They haven’t asked themselves what makes them happy.

Reason #2—Authors have expectations of themselves that don’t align with their personality. They don’t take advantage of what goes on in their subconscious brain.

The things that are instinctive or most natural for them, they don’t take seriously enough. The Clifton Strengths Success Assessment is technically a personality-driven program meant to measure success patterns with people who are wired differently. If you don’t know how to expect success from yourself personally, Syme recommended taking the test by going to the link above for a code.

We have expectations of
ourselves that don’t align
with our personality.

Reason #3—Authors extrapolate success *stories* into success *patterns*, especially from someone at a podium or podcast. Success stories and success patterns are not the same. One person's success story is not proof of a trustworthy pattern that should be followed by everyone. Often important details are left out, such as luck and timing. So a listener is not getting the whole picture.

Reason #4—Authors think tactics and outcomes are causal instead of correlative. Syme explained: "How many would say shark attacks cause us to eat ice cream? How many would say summer months causes us to eat ice cream? Just because those two factors—shark attacks and ice cream sales—happen at the same time doesn't mean they cause us to eat... Just because two things happen, we assume they are related by cause when they are only correlated.

"In the author world, let's say, 'I'm in KU and I sell a lot of books.' If those are the only two factors we focus on, then we might be tempted to assume that being in KU causes a lot of book sales.... Most of us in NINC know there is not a causal relationship between having books in KU and selling a lot of books."

"Writing to market causes the sale of a lot of books" is not a causal relationship. If it were, everyone who wrote to market would sell a lot of books. Another example: "Everyone who writes a book a month should make six-figures." It can happen. But it is not a promise. Those things can happen together (correlation) but they are not the cause. While anyone can see the nonsense in "shark attacks cause ice cream sales," authors might not see that writing faster and making more money is only a correlation, not the cause. Both *can* happen together, but one does not cause the other.

Reason #4 is especially important to study and understand. Syme recommended taking one of the myths and digging down into it. Ask the question, "What am I assuming is a causal relationship when there is only a correlation?"

Reason #5—Authors dismiss the idea that different success levels require different tactics. They observe high-earning authors spending a large amount of money on ads, and think they should do the same, even though their sales don't support it. At the same time, when they don't see results they want, they often don't analyze the actual results to find out what happened.

As businesspeople, authors need to employ the tactics of bigger companies that help growth. Most authors who reach a certain level of success do not stop to look around to learn new information to change what they are doing. Thankfully, there is a proliferation of people/companies who can consult with writers to develop tactics personalized to their own level. Ex: NINC draws these businesses, such as BookBub, to our conference who can help.

We dismiss the idea that
different success levels
require different tactics.

Reason #6—Authors ignore good advice. Not to say they can't do it their way and still make money. But if there is a pattern of many different people giving the same advice—Ex: “You need to change your covers.”)—why ignore consistent good advice? Is it possible that it could be worth experimenting with the advice?

Reason #7—Authors ignore genre and trope, but still expect to sell. (This is related to #3 Stories and Patterns.) One of Syme's authors had extreme success with his first series but had three or four series that didn't sell. He unconsciously avoided the trope-iness in his subsequent series, not realizing that's what had drawn the readers so avidly to his first series. The key is not that an author won't sell if he doesn't write to genre or write to trope. The key is that he can't *expect* sales. He can write whatever he wants and it might sell. But “might” and “should” are different words. It's okay to want to sell and also to not write to the genre or trope. Some have succeeded. Some haven't. The writer needs to understand this choice and disconnect from the expectation of selling.

Reason #8—Authors ignore their own limitations, which often leads to burn out. (Syme referenced her workshop “Stuck, Blocked and Burned Out.”) Writers must have realistic success expectations of themselves.

Reason #9—Authors act too early on “new” things without questioning the premise of why they need them. This can happen at conferences when writers hear something they think is going to help them take off. They also jump on the latest social media platform for the same reason. The best practice is to choose one platform and do it well than to try new social media, instead of spreading too thin on multiple sites.

We act too early on the
“new” things without
questioning the premise of
why we need the new thing.

Reason #10—Authors assume they should do something because “everyone does it,” spending too much time on too many things without knowing if the outcome leads to sales. Ex: Facebook parties, blog tours, spending time on platforms that do not lead to sales or grow an audience. At the end of the year, evaluate everything being done, then stop doing two of them. Syme prefers “Stop five. Or 12!” But two will do.

Reason #11—Authors trust that everyone is telling the truth all the time. Syme had a hard time including this reason because it sounds cynical. But there *are* some writers who claim to be making six figures or their ads resulted in huge sales, without offering proof to back it up. Stop to think—is there a reason they would want to inflate their own success? Are they trying to get other authors to take an action based on their success?

Reason #12—Authors don't consider all the data. Ex: Someone makes \$100K on sales and spends \$50K on ads, giving the assumption the other \$50K is all profit. How much was spent on the rest of their business? A lot of people make decisions based on data that is not complete.

Reason #13—Authors don't trust their gut, especially when getting pushback from close friends and people they trust. Ex: "I want to write psychological thrillers but all my friends tell me that that genre is too saturated." But **all** genres are saturated so why not write what you want to write? The author needs to ask himself, "Am I willing to trust my gut and fail just to know I did it the way I wanted to do it?" This applies to all areas—tactics, mindset, craft, speed of writing, genre choice.

We don't trust our gut.
or
We assume we must be wrong if
others disagree with our tactics.

Reason #14—Authors assume new information will be the key to success, instead of doing the work. People who love workshops and podcasts, believing the right information will lead to success. Instead, it comes from being willing to slog through the work that needs to be done, to be resilient in the face of not getting the outcome right now so as to have the desired outcome. *Hard work is a huge success metric.* People want things to be easy. When it starts to get hard, they allow their impatience to lead them off the road to success and go looking for the path of least resistance.

Reason #15—Authors assume this should be easy. Being an author should be easy. Learning Facebook ads should be easy. Vellum should be easy. Using a website program should be easy. Writing a new genre should be easy. When met with resistance, authors make the decision to either quit whatever feels too difficult or switch streams.

To help with these challenges, Syme again recommended *The Dip* by Seth Godin. She also has a couple blog pieces on this book. Another book is *Rising Strong* by Brené Brown.

Syme: "When we assume things should be easy, we lower our ability to practice resilience. In the upcoming year, we really need to increase our skills of resilience."

Reason #16—Authors assume they have to do all this on their own or they are the only person who cares about their business. To be in this industry, they need other people. They need perspective on their business. Their career doesn't need to happen in a vacuum. Some writers think, "If it doesn't come from me, I don't really own my business." So they don't reach out early enough for plot ideas, business ideas or marketing ideas. There are people and services available to help. Take advantage of networks. Build relationships in this industry. Look for a supportive community and rely on those people.

Syme's advice for introverts who don't know how to reach out (or worry about bothering someone): The smaller the group you can be a part of, where you can connect on an individual level, the better. Just saying out loud that you are an introvert can help identify you to

extroverts who are usually willing help. Also, paying for help takes away the concern about bothering anyone.

In the end, what does all of this mean? The question to ask is, “If I am not experiencing the success that I want, what do I do about it?” Syme encouraged downloading the slides from the presentation to have all 16 reasons and four myths for future reference. Make connections with other people who have been through the workshop or read the article so you can talk to each other about the premises.

You are not alone.

Don't do this on your own.

Action steps

1. Define what success looks like for you.
2. Look at your instincts or your most commonly received feedback with new eyes, based on this presentation.
3. Find some people who have heard this workshop or have learned the myths and reasons in this article. Form a discussion/action/support group to give each other feedback. Choose at least one of the myths or reasons that resonate with you. What can you do to correct it? Talking it over with others is best because they can offer a different perspective based upon their own takeaway of the material.
4. Pick one action you can take every day that will lead you toward more success. This decision can take time but set a deadline of no more than two days. Again, talk it over with the other writers who have agreed to be in the group.

For some authors, the most important action is writing every day (in any way). Some need marketing. Some need to take a Facebook ads class. *Commit to doing it every day for the next 30 days.*

Take action on something!



Sue Phillips is the award-winning author of women's fiction, narrative non-fiction and time travel romances. A journalism major and a student of metaphysics for over thirty years, she loves to explore diverse issues and out of the box ideas. Sue lives in Nevada with a menagerie of pets, including a Disney Dalmatian named Pongo.

Mastering Amazon's A9 Algorithm and Your Book's Ranking

What should authors do?

Presented by Dave Chesson

Reported by Janis Susan May Patterson

Creator of Kindlepreneur.com and the forthcoming PublisherRocket.com, entrepreneur and former U.S. Naval officer Dave Chesson works to help authors gain insight on how they can optimize marketing for their books.

Did you ever wonder exactly what an algorithm was—other than something that magically showed your books (or not) and decided on your (sometimes dismal) rankings? According to Chesson, an algorithm is nothing but an equation with a whole bunch of rules. It cannot make subjective decision, like on a book's quality. It can only look at factors it has observed in order to make a calculated decision.

A9 is a special brain created by Amazon that helps to choose products and which of those products to show to which customer. A9 is also special. Although a part of and linked to Amazon from its beginnings, A9 does have its own name, its own company, and even its own building with over 8,000 employees. Until a year ago, it was its own entity and was autonomous.

A9 searches on all of Amazon's websites, coming up with data that it turns into index and ranking processes. The index process is how Amazon selects what product shows up for what term. The ranking process is how Amazon selects where a product shows up within a search—first, second, third, etc. This placement is extremely important, as 70 percent of Amazon shoppers never click past the first page of a search result, and 35 percent never click past the second page. In books, 57 percent of shoppers click on the first three books in search results.

Keyword experiment

One hundred twenty books—65 percent of which were fiction—were randomly selected for an experiment. Every keyword was recorded after a special crawler was used to see what keywords they were intended for. Requested keywords were changed, based on what had been previously used, then rechecked to see how indexing and ranking had changed. Other factors such as keyword density, title, subject and subtitle were also analyzed to see how they played into the final result.

What affects indexing

Jeff Bezos described it best. “Our work starts long before a customer types a query. We’ve been indexing the text describing every product in our catalog before the customer has ever decided to search.” This close examination coordinates indexing the metadata, title/subtitle, keyword metadata, Look Inside feature, categories, reviews and book description.

Title/subtitle

Chesson advised that if a book’s subtitle is concise and subject-relevant, add it to the title rather than keeping it a separate entity.

When a book had a keyword in the title or subject, it was indexed 100 percent of the time, resulting in a 37-point increase in the rankings over when it wasn’t. In the A9 programming, Amazon does not separate the title from the subtitle, and shows them as one.

Keyword metadata

When you list a book there are seven keyword blocks you can fill in. You can use words such as fantasy, mage, dragon, war in one box; there are approximately 50 spaces in each box. Amazon will not only index on just the first word, but combinations of same two-word, three-word, four-word variations in the same box.

The words that are in your seven keyword boxes will be indexed, but all words are always helpful to finding your book in a search, including those of the title, subtitle, description and more. Chesson said that 98.3 percent of the time all the keywords listed were indexed on Amazon. Chesson also said that out of the two books which didn’t get listed for target keywords out of the sample, one simply had the wrong keywords. The other had a list of heinous and unallowable words that he “wasn’t sure Amazon would even permit.”

Again, the more words (up to the allowable spaces) you put into the keyword boxes the more index hits you have.

Look inside

Do sign up for the Search Inside the Book feature; if you do, the words in the shown sample can be indexed like keywords.

Categories

Amazon is starting to attach certain keywords to certain categories. Amazon is also indexing keyword phrases and displaying them as categories.

Reviews

Above the reviews on the Amazon sales pages are boxes saying “Read Reviews That Mention...” You can click on a box that matches your book and find other reviews. Why do you want to read reviews for other books? Because this is a cool way and place to look for keyword ideas. These don’t come from the author of that particular book, but from Amazon itself.

Experiments with A9 data showed that books were indexed for all words marked in reviews for that book, though at this time there is not enough data to say if this helps with rankings or not.

Book description

Words in your description of your book do influence Amazon's indexing decisions. Do not repeat words or descriptions; one use will be enough for Amazon to help readers find your book.

Amazon will decide what keyword, phrase or sentence fits your book even if you didn't use them and will use them as part of their search algorithm.

What affects rankings?

Once Amazon determines which items are good matches to the customer's query, our ranking algorithms score them to the query search.

Facts such as degree of text match, price, available selection and sales help determine where your product appears in a search.

Degree of text match

How much your text matches the query search is not the only measurement of findability; also to be considered are price and profitability, as well as availability and selection.

Is the more times a keyword appears on the page better? Not necessarily. Is the more a keyword matches the specific inquiry better? Maybe. The more words you put in, the less your rankings. It's all math. If you use one hundred words and one is "dragon," that is a proportion of one in one hundred. If you use 50 words and one is "dragon," the proportion becomes one in 50. The more words you put in, the more you dilute the search and resultant rankings.

Price and profitability

Jeff Bezos says, "We consider the profitability of the products we list and feature on the site." As should be expected—Amazon is a business, after all.

Chesson says they've seen perma-free books rule the rankings in the past, and then suddenly disappear. This seems to be in-line with Amazon's pricing and profitability goals.

Does price directly affect your rankings? No, but pricing definitely does affect your conversion rate.

A9's algorithms see Kindle Unlimited downloads as the same as a sale, which is why you get a higher conversion rate with KU. Amazon says there is no real preference given to KU books.

Availability and selection

Out of stock is not usually a problem with electronic and print-on-demand books, though availability could cause Amazon to give a higher rank due to them knowing that there is a higher chance of conversion if all versions exist.

Sales history

What is important about sales history is not the number of sales, it is the consistency of sales over time. A spike doesn't mean that much to Amazon, while consistent sales for six to eight days definitely gets Amazon's attention. Sales spikes do not seem to affect rankings or Amazon's preference, while consistent sales do seem to improve Amazon's ranking of a book.

During a launch it is better to spread your marketing efforts so as to minimize spikes and show stronger consistent sales—this seems to help get your book to stick in ranking naturally.

A history of preorder sales doesn't overshadow your early sales, just as consistent sales in preorders doesn't affect your launch. Preorders—if you do them—helps Amazon judge the popularity of your book.

Conversions

An Amazon spokesman said, "We continuously evaluate conversions using human judgments, programming analysis, key business metrics and performance metrics." This means the process of a shopper who searches using a keyword, and purchases or downloads certain books shows a direct correlation with the book's rankings increasing. This makes sense considering that this is the greatest indication that Amazon provided the right product and by doing so increased their profitability. When Amazon sees you doing well with certain keywords, they sometimes give you more.

The conversion rate is the biggest factor in a book's rankings. While important, you should remember that price is a tool—you have to remember how it will help to convert customers. Availability and selection are also important; you must think about adding your book to other forms, categories, etc.

While we don't like to think about it, Kindle Unlimited books do get better rankings, probably due to conversions being one of the deciding factors.

Reviews always play a large part, especially the reviews that show up on your sales page initially.

Book descriptions are your biggest factor in convincing shoppers to buy the book now.

Consistent sales during a book launch instead of one giant spike will have a greater effect on your book's rankings and staying power.

Conversions: clicks vs sales/downloads

Experiments have showed that clicking on a book increased its ABSR (Amazon Best-Seller Rank) to a point just under where sales had occurred in a certain time period, while this was also true to a lesser extent for keyword rankings as well. However, clicks can affect rankings only up to a point. Each book has one ASBR for each version—print, ebook, audible, free.

A9 keeps meticulous records. Qid is a time stamp by the second of a book's life since 1970. Checksum verifies the math history of each book—i.e., "at this time period this book ranked on X page for Y length of time." Sometimes all this information is not for general release; if you send an Amazon link to someone, if possible strip out all the data after the ASIN. There is a lot of strange information in there that most people don't need to know, such as Qid and Checksum.

Conversions: Kindle Unlimited

KU books do seem to have better love from Amazon. Chesson believes that this is because of the conversion rate, and not so much a direct factor of providing KU over non-KU options. A download thru KU is same as a conversion (sale).

Conversions: sale page heatmap

A heatmap is a readout which analyzes what people are looking at when they look at the Amazon sales page, i.e., what draws most attention (cover, title, etc) and how long their gaze stays there. Chesson has been working on this through his new PublisherRocket.com enterprise, an experiment unfortunately derailed by COVID-19.

In extant data, shoppers focused more on the three stars or less reviews, and less on the five star reviews. Three star reviews get fully read most. Second most read review is the last one on the page—people glance at first one, then the bottom one and rarely click "read more."

Reviews

Some interesting statistics: 84 percent of online shoppers trust online reviews as much a friend's recommendation, while ninety-one percent trust online reviews as much as a personal recommendation. Sixty-eight percent form an opinion after reading one to six reviews. Review grade and frequency is an indication of customer satisfaction with the book.

Practical uses: subtitle

Subtitles play a significant part in indexing and rankings, and Chesson believes they help in conversion rates as well. The customer must be able to tell what your book is about. Choosing the right subtitle is as important as choosing the right title.

Practical uses of keywords

In his experiments, Chesson found that using all 50 characters in each keyword box did index the book more often. Having specific keyword phrases does help initial rankings. Authors should use both tactics inside their keyword field boxes. Remember, there are only 50 characters per box—the system will not let you type beyond that. Reusing a word in your title, subtitle or category doesn't help nor is it harmful. It's just redundant.

Amazon will index generally within twenty-four hours. If changing keywords, do two boxes at a time, then wait three to four days and see if there's an increase in your clicks and sales. If they go down, you've made a mistake. If they go up, that's good. If no change, neither old nor new keywords were giving you what you needed.

Remember, Amazon is not in the business of selling books. Jeff Bezos said, "We don't make money when we sell things. We make money when we help customers make purchase decisions."



Janis Susan May/Janis Patterson is a seventh-generation Texan and a third-generation wordsmith who writes in mystery, romance, and horror. Once an actress and a singer, Patterson has also been editor-in-chief of two multi-magazine publishing groups as well as many other things, including an enthusiastic amateur Egyptologist. Patterson's husband even proposed in a moonlit garden near the Pyramids of Giza. Patterson and her husband live in Texas with an assortment of rescued furbabies.

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Are you taking advantage of all your member benefits?

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

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

Networking

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

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

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

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

Conference:

Conference 2020: <https://ninc.com/conferences/about-the-ninc-conference/>

(Conference 2021 information coming in future issues of *Nink*)

Newsletter

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Welcome Packet: <http://ninc.com/system/assets/uploads/>

[2017/01/2017_New_Member_Welcome_Packet-public.pdf](#)

Member discounts

We have a **new discount** to enjoy for our members. **Fixional**, an editorial tool that provides manuscript evaluation and feedback, has offered us a **generous discount** for either their personal plan or their pay by manuscript. Additionally **they will remove the word count limitations** on their personal plan for NINC members.

Fixional evaluates clarity, originality, and completeness in writing. Providing both a high-level overview as well as granular feedback, Fixional can be used by editors, publishers, and writers to augment their review and revision processes. Fixional offers manuscript suggestions and insights as well as highlighting problems in grammar, spelling and punctuation. Feedback can be customized.

The discount is 20%. (Without it the personal plan is \$19.95 monthly.) Manuscript pricing depends on the length of the work. A month long **free trial** is also available. Each NINC member will have their own personal account.

As always, information on how to access the discount is only available on the [Members Only discount page](#) (these discounts are for members *only*), where you can find a complete listing of NINC 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

2020 Board of Directors

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

- Interim President: Tawdra Kandle
- Interim President-Elect: Lisa Hughey
- Secretary: Hallee Bridgeman
- Treasurer: Pam McCutcheon
- Newsletter Editor: Michele Dunaway
- Advisory Council Representative: Lou Aronica

Advisory Council

- Lou Aronica
- Brenda Hiatt Barber
- Linda Barlow
- Jean Brashear
- Janice Young Brooks
- Laura Parker Castoro
- Meredith Efken
- Donna Fletcher
- Kay Hooper

- Barbara Keiler
- Julie Leto
- Pat McLaughlin
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- Julie Ortolon
- Diana Peterfreund
- Pat Rice
- Erica Ridley
- Marianne Shock
- Wayne Stinnett
- Vicki Lewis Thompson
- Victoria Thompson
- Steven Womack

2020 Committees

[Complete committee member listings](#) are available on the website. Many committee positions are open and looking for new volunteers.

- 2020 Conference Committee:
 - Conference Coordinator: Mel Jolly
 - Programming Chair: Tawdra Kandle
 - Asst. Prog. Chair & Trade Show: Lisa Hughey
 - Sponsorship & Trade Show: Rochelle Paige
 - Traditional Publishing Liaison: Victoria Thompson
 - Annabel Chase
- Authors Coalition Rep: Laura Phillips & Sue Phillips
- Social Media Committee:
 - Chair: Jenna Kernan
 - Rick Gualteieri
 - Lisa Hughey
 - Christine Breen
- Membership Committee
 - Sarah Woodbury
 - Boyd Craven
- *Nink* Newsletter
 - Editor: Michele Dunaway
 - Assistant Editor: Nicole Evelina
 - Copy Editor: Cynthia Moyer
 - Production Manager: Laura Resnick
- Nominating Committee:
 - Tanya Anne Crosby
 - Kathy Carmichael
 - Kristine Smith
 - Jenny Gardiner
 - Rick Gualtieri

- Technology Committee
 - Nick Thacker
 - Elizabeth Ann West
 - Jamie McFarlane
 - Erica Ridley
- Discount Program Chair: Emilie Richards
- Volunteer Jobs (Just One Thing) Coordinator: Lois Lavrisa

Central Coordinator

Novelists, Inc. c/o Terese Ramin

P.O. Box 54, Hartland MI 48353

admin@ninc.com

Address changes may be made on the website.

Nink Newsletter

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Nink's goal is to provide our readers with high-quality articles that offer critical business advice, marketing how-tos, advanced craft coaching, or strategy to continue building a career, all geared to established authors. All members should feel confident that *Nink* provides something for them. We welcome pitches and submissions from all members.

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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