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 **novelists,
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President's Voice

By Tawdra Kandle



Welcome to the August 2020 edition of *Nink*. I'm happy to report that this month, I don't have any earth-shattering announcements to make. That's a relief!

Before we move on to news and updates, though, I would like to thank all of the membership for the gracious and understanding reaction to the conference announcement. We on the board were understandably trepidatious about letting all of you know that in the midst of most other events canceling plans for 2020, we are planning to meet in person. Even with an abundance of precautions taken, we were aware that at face value, this is a controversial decision. But our members amazed us with their kindness. I received an outpouring of assurance that just about everyone understands our position. No one loves this, but everyone is doing the best we can.

That attitude describes our board and conference committee too. This year has stretched all of us in our various roles, and yet I've been endlessly impressed by the cooperation, patience, humor, and eagerness to help displayed by our volunteers, our central coordinator, and our conference coordinator. Because we were so ahead of the game this year, we'd already mapped out a rough draft of the conference schedule in February. With everything that has happened since March, we've had to re-vamp that agenda at least twice, all while also working on a plan to present a virtual conference (should that have become necessary), trying to cover all of our bases with the hotel and maintaining safe practices in the age of COVID-19, keeping in touch with speakers, sponsors, and industry guests, and maintaining the usual business of overseeing an organization. Remember, too, that aside from our two paid positions, the only reward our volunteers receive is a conference comp—which most won't be able to enjoy this year, thanks to travel restrictions.

All of our volunteers and leadership staff deserve a huge round of applause, lots of kudos—and several rounds of drinks when we're all together again in 2021.

It's been wonderful to see the way our members are pulling together too. I know some people who can't be in St. Pete Beach in September are planning a series of virtual meet-ups.

Others are stepping up their participation in our Facebook group and on the NINCLoops, asking questions and offering insight to others. This is one big reason NINC exists—so that we can pool our knowledge and give every member the opportunity to succeed.

We've had some questions about the presentation lineup for 2020, and I promise that we're working hard to provide that information as soon as possible. Understandably, our slate of speakers, sponsors, and industry guests have been waiting until the last minute to make their decisions about attending. Our plan is to share the planned workshop platform within the next week or so. Watch the NINCLoop and the Facebook groups for this announcement.

Please remember that the final date to register for the 2020 conference (for current members only) *and* to cancel for this year's event is August 31st.

We are continuing to work with the Tradewinds to craft an event that will be both as safe as possible for the attendees and that will present relevant content. As I've said since April ... NINC2020 is going to look very different from prior years. We are going to miss friends who can't be with us, and we're going to have to adapt to new practices. That doesn't mean those of us attending won't have ample opportunity for networking and learning.

For those of you who won't be joining us at the conference, as always, we will be featuring the conference reports in *Nink*.

Thank you again for your support of NINC and of our leadership. Be safe and be well!

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/>

September 23 - 27, 2020



- **Conference information:** <https://ninc.com/conferences/about-the-ninc-conference/>
- **Conference Registration:** <https://ninc.com/conferences/registration/>
- **Conference e-loop:** <https://groups.io/g/BeachNINC2020/>

The Art of Gift Giving

By Michele Dunaway



To gift or not to gift, that is the question.

I'll admit, writing an article on gift giving was not on my radar, not until I had this dream where I was the only one who hadn't sent my editor a gift and everyone was yelling at me. My dream was akin to those when you feel like you are standing on a street corner naked and everyone is pointing at you. Like, I kept hearing, "You forgot the gift. Your career is over."

This dream bothered me so much I woke up, grabbed my phone, and typed in a note: "Gift giving made simple. How much and to whom."

That was Thursday, April 9, about six a.m. Then I promptly went back to sleep and forgot all about dreaming about my one of my greatest fears until almost a week later when I thought "What was that idea?" and found it in the note I'd created.

When I started in this business in 1999, I heard tales of those who spent hundreds of dollars sending their editors or agents gifts. But I didn't have an agent, and my editor that acquired me sent my manuscript off to another editor who did all my developmental edits.

I must admit, gifts and I have a long, complicated relationship, so this topic is dear to my heart. In fact, gift giving is one of the things I fear the most. Perhaps my phobia started when I didn't get the right Secret Santa gift in sixth grade. To this day I can picture the whole scene of hearing the girl didn't like her snowflake ornament. I remember the trauma and of feeling absolutely devastated and foolish. Childhood lesson learned, never give the big gift first. Also, opt out of all future Secret Santa exchanges (something I do to this day).

Given my history, you can also see why my dream about gifting was an actual nightmare, especially when you consider that the one year I sent my Canadian editor a gift card directly from the vendor, but because it was going from America to Canada, it never arrived. After a month I had to ask her about it—awkward—and then have it resent.

All this history makes me terrible at giving gifts unless I can buy off a list from a gift registry, and why figuring out anything besides a white elephant gift causes me tons of stress. In

fact, my children and I don't exchange presents for holidays or birthdays, opting to spend the money on trips and experiences instead.

This means I'm clueless as to business gift-giving etiquette. And is there really an expectation that I should give a gift? If so, are there protocols and budgetary caps? Since I'm admittedly not an expert, I crowdsourced this article on the Ninlink. Thank you to all who responded, whether or not I was able to include your full response.



What do we give and why?

Food and beverages top the list as popular gifts

From chocolates to oranges to booze, food and beverage items were a popular gift.

At NINC 2019, during a panel on traditional publishing, [Charlotte Hubbard](#) explained how she sends cookies at Christmas, and that caught my attention.

"I have sent homemade Christmas cookies to my editor for years, and because Kensington is a smallish, family-owned publisher I also now send a box to the owner, as well as to the publisher (whom I've met) and my publicist," Hubbard said. "I've started sending embroidered towels and other things to my agent, at his request—but he used to get a big box of cookies, too. I don't recall when I started, but it was probably back around 2010. I had no particular sense that these folks *expected* a gift—I just really love working with my editor, and she gets so excited about the cookies and my books, that I sensed she would appreciate them."

Hubbard pointed out that spending money shipping via UPS is a business deduction. "Folks there love these cookies! Now, I will say that boxing them nicely and then shipping them via UPS is no small price tag, especially to ground ship them within a few days so they stay fresh," Hubbard said.

One decision authors have to decide is whether to purchase or make the gifts. Hubbard chooses to make her gifts.

"I make cookies for the holidays for church donations and family," Hubbard said. "If I didn't already bake a bunch of cookies for those reasons, I might not do it."

Hubbard gets an immediate e-thank you and sometimes a handwritten note that makes it all worth it.

Another one who makes gifts is [Lacy Williams](#).

"I've gotten the best responses to handmade candy that I usually send out," Williams said. "I have a fabulous recipe for peppermint bark. However, last year I was unable to make it (life happened) and I ordered gift baskets from [Harry & David](#) and it was shipped quickly and was high quality."

For those who purchase food items, packaged products like baking mixes packaged in mason jars or gift baskets made gifting easy.

“I almost always send a gift basket of some kind from one of those companies that sends catalogs,” [Victoria Thompson](#) said. “I used to do a cheese basket, then a spa basket, and now I do [Wine Country](#) baskets. I don't send wine, though. I send my editor a chocolate basket and my agent a spa basket. In recent years, since my agent's office began publishing my backlist and stuff, I send a chocolate basket to them as well.”



Sample [Harry & David](#) Gift Basket

“I love those cupcakes in a jar and thought why not them?” [Gail Chianese](#) said. “The team was pleasantly surprised and very appreciative. At the next RWA party, I had several of the team members thank me personally and tell me how much they loved the treat.”



Sample [Wicked Good Cupcakes in a Jar](#)

Location. Location. Location.

Tying into a hometown or a vacation inspired many gifts.

“I've sent Ruby Red grapefruit from the Texas Rio Grande Valley,” [Patricia \(Pooks\) Burroughs](#) said. “I thought their reputation around here [Dallas] might be Texas braggadocio, but evidently not because one or two other people on an international email list chimed in with the same kudos. A local gift basket company closed in 2016 after 100 years, but before that I sent brownies to my agent in LA every year during the winter holidays and he raved about them!”

“My agent is Scottish and has an upscale whiskey bar on the coast of Oregon,” [Halley Bridgeman](#) said. “My husband is a bourbon enthusiast and collector and we live in Kentucky in the heart of bourbon country. At Christmas, we sent my agent a really amazing high barley bourbon that tasted a lot like an aged Scotch. He opened it at Christmas dinner and sent a message that his family really enjoyed it.”

“When I lived in Nashville, I sent my agent, my editor and senior editor Nashville’s own [Christie Cookies](#). Another year I sent packets of other Nashville-made goods,” [Trish Milburn](#) said. “My former editor loves France and has visited several times, so one year I bought her Christmas gifts while I was at the French pavilion at Epcot. I’ve also sent [Starbucks](#) gift cards with greeting cards when I needed to lessen my expenditures because of lowered income.”

Food gifts, as [Pam McCutcheon](#) discovered, often got shared.

“I only gave gifts to my editor(s) and agents while I was actively selling traditionally,” Pam McCutcheon said. “No, I didn’t feel obligated to do it—it was something I wanted to do at Christmas. Mostly, I sent gifts from [Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory](#) since it’s based in my home state of Colorado and I didn’t know their preferences all that well. Once I sent chocolate in a pottery jar and the editor thanked me, saying that was something she was allowed to keep and didn’t have to share with the entire office.”

Gifting beyond traditional food and beverages

While food and beverages were staples (especially cookies), authors often gave other things.

“My editor has also gotten a kick out of the embroidered tea towels I’ve sent her the past couple of years,” Hubbard said.



Tea towels courtesy of Charlotte Hubbard

“I like people to know they’re appreciated, without being embarrassed by overkill,” [Mary Jo Putney](#) said. “For my agent, I’ve given donations to organizations like [Heifer International](#), so I can give her a goat or chickens, which amuses her. For my agent’s excellent assistant, I give gift cards on the grounds that New York City is expensive and she can choose what she likes.”

“I started giving gifts to my editors and agents in the early ‘90s with my second publishing house and second agent and continued it from that point. At that time, I made homemade raisin bread. Since then, the gifts have evolved and changed,” [Jo Ann Brown](#) said. “When I started writing Amish books a few years ago, I sent my editor and agent whoopie pies. For the past

three years, I've donated in their names to projects that would interest them (literacy and cooking lessons are examples) through the [Mennonite Central Committee](#) because that real-life organization played a part in the books I was writing."

"I probably sent gifts over four or five years to agents and editors while we were working together," [Karen Tintori](#) said. "One year I decided to try my hand at different rubs: spicy, fish rubs, steak rubs. One year I made sweet and spicy glazed nut mix and sent that. I sent the rub recipes along with the rubs in case they wanted to recreate. Each was labeled and in a tall glass spice jar with the plastic shaker insert—the kind you see in spinner spice racks. In years when we've had no deals in the works, I've sent my agent an upmarket greeting card at the holidays. Last year, my freelance development editor, who was my editor at Atria years ago, lost her father. I looked up the local library in her little upstate New York town and made a donation in his name, which surprised and touched her."

"I sent my agent Christmas gifts," [Jenna Bennett](#) said. "Since I'm not a big drinker, and I knew my agent was healthy and a runner, I didn't want to go either the liquor or chocolate/cookies route. The first year, I sent her a small, decorated Christmas tree in a pot for her desk. She said she liked it, so I kept doing it. (Although she also mentioned that she usually got liquor or chocolate/cookies, so I was never quite sure if she truly liked it, or just thought I was adorably cute and out of touch. At that point I certainly wasn't going to change what I was doing and go for the liquor/chocolate, though, so I kept sending the trees.) I remember sending my editor some sort of fancy bookmark thing at one point, too. We'd been on vacation somewhere, and I'd noticed it, and I think I sent them one each."

"For a more personal connection, I sent a hand-quilted Star of David wall hanging to one of my agents," Burroughs said. "My mom was a champion quilter with quilts in magazines and an art calendar and fortunately she made it for me. (And one time,) a bottle of Courvoisier to an editor, since I knew she loved it."

For [Linda Rae Sande](#), a discussion in one of her author Facebook groups was about remembering your "team" at Christmastime. This prompted her first gift-giving this past December. Based on a discussion she and her editor had had about George Clooney's commercials—Sande is a fan—she gave her editor a coffee machine.

"My editor has always delivered on time and has worked for me for several years," Sande said. "I figured I couldn't lose with something related to coffee. I ordered a [Nespresso](#) machine and had it shipped direct. She sent an image of what it looked like "under" her tree. She waited until Christmas to open it and sent photos of her and her husband using it. I considered a [Keurig](#), but it wouldn't have had the same meaning."



George Clooney is now global brand ambassador for Nespresso.

Photo copyright Rainer Hosch

[Nancy Herkness](#) also looked for a tie-in when she sent gifts.

“The most talked-about gift I ever gave was something small and silly I sent to the whole team at my publisher to mark the beginning of my canine-themed *Second Glances* series. It was a tape measure shaped like a little dog. The measuring tape came out of the dog’s mouth like a tongue. Evidently, it graced many people’s desks for years to come,” Herkness said. “Last year I sent boxes of artisan-crafted candles from South Africa because I traveled there last summer ... and talked about the trip a lot so they knew that.”

[Becca Jameson](#) admits that she's horrible about sending gifts and cards, which is why Jameson chooses a cash option for the freelance editor for Jameson’s indie books.

“I asked around,” Jameson said. “Surprisingly few people send bonuses to their editors. I did find a few, though, who do, so I asked. ‘Do you give a percentage or something arranged? Is it discussed?’ I was warned not to make it specific and not to discuss it with the editor because you just never know.”

In Jameson’s mind, her freelance editor puts 100% into Jameson’s work all year, and if her editor were with a traditional publisher, she would get royalties from sales.

“So, I started sending a bonus to her two years ago,” Jameson said. “I’ve sent 1% of my income which is a super nice bonus at Christmas because in my mind I wouldn’t make as much money as I do without her. Also, my PA is invaluable to me. I also send her a \$300 bonus at Christmas. She works about 10 hours a week for me, so that’s like an extra week and a half of pay. It’s not a lot, but it’s something.”

Giving gifts as a way to say thank you

One thing I teach my high-school juniors is to write thank-you cards. The idea of thanking someone for doing something nice for you doesn’t mean you’re asking for special or preferential treatment, but rather to acknowledge people who have helped you.

“One of my friends, who is a multi-published, NYT best-selling author (meaning, she’d been around and in the know a lot longer than me) mentioned that she always liked to send a

‘thank you’ to her publishing team for each book,” Chianese said. “I thought that was a lovely gesture as I know it took a lot of different people to get what I wrote to the finished product. And, it’s always nice to say thank you. It didn’t sound like many of the authors they work with did anything like that so I was happy to have ‘made their day.’ The note I included said something along the lines of, ‘Just a simple thank you to everyone who helped with *Title of Book*. Your hard work and dedication is appreciated.’ Or words to that effect.”

“For my publisher, the last two years I’ve been late handing in books and I know that creates stress for everyone from editor to production to publicity. So after consulting with my publicist there, I’ve sent gourmet cookies from a NYC bakery the publicist suggested. Enough so everyone gets at least one (they’re huge) with some extras,” Mary Jo Putney added. “Last year I specifically sent them to the production department since I was causing them the most trouble, but I made sure there were cookies enough for everyone.”

Authors assume gifting is common practice

“When I wrote for Harlequin Mills & Boon (Harlequin Presents) I always sent my editor a Christmas gift,” [Sandra Marton](#) said. “I didn’t come up with the idea; a couple of other authors told me it was standard, so I followed suit. I always tried to come up with something I believed my editor would really relate to. I was always one of only a handful of Americans writing for Harlequin Mills and Boon, and, interestingly enough, over time I came to suspect that my British writer sisters didn’t give gifts, that it was we Americans who did, but I’m not at all certain of that.”

While Marton isn’t insinuating writers from other countries are tight wads or Scrooges, her uncertainty shows that there seems to be a widely accepted, unwritten cultural rule, especially in America, that is prevalent in the publishing industry: even if authors aren’t obligated to do so, they should send gifts anyway. Perhaps it’s like how Americans are expected to tip their servers and servers rely on this income, compared to tipping not being an automatic practice in other countries around the globe.

“I felt more obligated to buy my agents gifts than my editors, but there was still an internal sense of obligation for the latter,” [Jordan Summers](#) said. “One of my agents used to talk about what various clients got her giftwise, so I felt like I’d be the odd man out if I didn’t contribute somehow. My editors were less so on that front.”

“I didn’t feel obligated but I knew that it was a common practice from the other authors I associate with,” [Terri Osborne](#) said. “Plus, I credit my publisher and my agent with changing my life for the better so I wanted to show my appreciation. I sent mostly cookies, chocolates, and cheesecakes. I think I might have spent around \$40 each for my publisher and agent, plus shipping. I always ordered online and had the gift delivered.”

Relationships can matter in gifting

One thing I gleaned throughout all the answers I received was gifting often came down to the relationship between the author and the person to whom they gave a gift. Authors also tried to personalize things, and gifting brought the author joy.

"I've been gifting for about 35 years. I think you just pick out something you'd like and see what the reaction is," Thompson said. "I've given Christmas gifts to my editor and agent for many years, almost from the beginning back in the 1980s. I know I gave my first agent a holiday gift each year (she was Jewish), and I was with her from 1985-92."

"I've had my agent since 2006 and she's amazing. She got me my first New York contract which was a three-book deal with Kensington, and we've been together ever since," [Tina Gerow](#) said. "I didn't start out buying her gifts though. It took a few years for us to develop a personal relationship, something beyond just the business aspect. I don't go overboard. In 2008, when she landed me a two-book deal with the possibility of two more, I sent her and her office staff a chocolate-covered fruit and cookie tray as a thank-you. I had to do some research to find a place that did that in Manhattan since I live in Phoenix. I also didn't realize how big it would be since it was only \$75 (including delivery), but apparently it was a *lot* of food! She ended up sending some home with everyone in the office."

"I've given gifts to my editor and PR/marketing person and chose pretty scarf- type vests for each of them. They are based in London so I was looking for something that was easy to transport with me when I went to pay them a visit in person," [Tammy L. Grace](#) said. "I don't think it matters what is spent, as it is the thought that counts. I tried to find something that seemed to fit each of them based on what I know about them. Each gift was only about \$30, but I tend to think something I took the time to pick out for them is appreciated more than a gift card."

Grace also included people beside her editor in her gifting.

"I've also given gifts to my social media assistant and typically send gift cards for things I know she enjoys and also sent her a beautiful pashmina for Christmas because the colors reminded me of her. I have never felt it was expected that I send a gift to my editor, but because we've worked together only online and via video/phone, I wanted to give her something when we met in person and I felt the same way about the PR person, thinking it would be quite odd to give only the editor a gift when I was meeting both of them," Grace said.

The scope or type of the relationship also can matter in who authors choose to bestow gifts.

"What will count to the receiver is that the gift is a thoughtful response to something special that happened between them," [Claudia Dain](#) said. "I've given this a lot of thought and have been astounded at what authors feel they should do for their agents and/or editors. I believe the core of this free-handed gift-giving philosophy is the idea that the author seeks to ingratiate herself to the two most important business people in her life, to spend enough money or buy the perfect gift so that those people will be loyal to her, or on some level think of the author as a friend. I don't agree with this perspective. These relationships are not based on friendship. They are work relationships and the agent's or editor's loyalty to me should be, and must be, based on my work ethic and work product. My agent works for me so if anyone is giving a gift, it would be from me to him."

"I never sent gifts to editorial assistants or agents, and I really don't understand the concept of gifting one's agent at all. I didn't/don't gift people who work for me in the indie world, either," Marton said.

“I don’t arbitrarily send out gifts,” Gerow added. “I haven’t sent any of my editors gifts over the years. Honestly, I’ve never built that kind of close relationship with them where I felt it was appropriate. The longest ‘book relationship’ I’ve had with an editor was for three books, but even then it stayed more of a great working relationship and just never made it to that personal level. I would’ve felt comfortable sending them an email saying happy birthday or buying them a drink for a birthday if we were at a conference together or something, but not buying a gift for them, per se, if that makes sense. Especially not as a new writer. I have to have some sort of relationship built with them to do that or feel it’s appropriate.”



An agent and author assistant weigh in

We’ve looked at what’s been given and why, which is a key consideration in the giving of gifts. But is there really an expectation that the authors feel there is?

To get an agent’s perspective on gifting, I asked [Veronica Park](#) of Fuse Literary.

“Personally, I’m fine with receiving gifts if it’s a tradition that’s important to the sender, like a holiday, provided it’s the kind of thing one would usually send in the professional sense—from one business to another (example: holiday cards, holiday chocolates, etc.),” Park said. “But I personally don’t think it’s necessary for an author to send gifts to their agent or editor, and at times it can even feel a little uncomfortable for the agent if their clients send them unsolicited gifts. Particularly if those gifts are expensive, or if it feels like the author is trying to buy preferential treatment or encourage some kind of preferential treatment. For my part, I prefer my agent-author and author-editor relationships to be based on professionalism and mutual respect, first and foremost.”

Author Assistant [Kate Tilton](#) added, “This is something I’ve found is very different from person to person. I’ve heard of some assistants who give gifts and others don’t. I’ve had some clients send me things and others who don’t. They show me they appreciate my work in other ways, like paying their invoices quickly, continuing to use the same amount of hours each month consistently for years (meaning I know I have a stable paycheck), mentioning me to other potential clients and/or including me in their book acknowledgments. I’ve been working with authors going on 10 years now and I believe gifts are not expected from either side of the partnership. That being said, gifts can be a nice way to show thanks. The gifts are never expected, even from clients who have given me gifts in the past, but they are always a welcome treat.”

So what might your agent, editor, or assistant like?

“Once a client even dedicated her book to me, that honor means more than any physical gift,” Tilton said. “But if you have the budget for it, a physical gift is a nice way of showing appreciation. One client sent me flowers on the launch day of her first book. Totally unexpected and it brightened my day! Another client sent me a mug that says ‘Girl Boss.’ I think about her

every time I use it! A few clients have paid extra on their invoices or send a Christmas bonus. Some of my clients will send me a signed copy of their latest release. Not everyone does this but I enjoy having print books and make sure to share about those copies on social media (a bonus for the client!). Food is also nice! I'm a fan of cookies and chocolate myself."



Giving is about more than money

Many of the authors who responded didn't spend hundreds of dollars. While [IRS](#) regulations allow an individual taxpayer to give up to \$15,000 to any individual without paying a gift tax, that amount is not deductible. The IRS also says "If you give business gifts in the course of your trade or business, you can deduct all or part of the costs subject to the following limitations: You deduct no more than \$25 of the cost of business gifts you give directly or indirectly to each person during your tax year. Incidental costs such as engraving, packing or shipping aren't included in the \$25 limit if they don't add substantial value to the gift." Your tax professional can tell you more.

"I try to stay between \$25 and \$50 for individual holiday gifts," Herkness said. "I've given gifts every year that I've worked with my agents/editors. I also send food gifts to the whole team at both my literary agency and publishing house. However, I do *not* send those at Christmastime because they get showered with food around then. I send the edible treats on less busy holidays like Thanksgiving or New Year's. Since I write romance, I have also done Valentine's Day. I am truly grateful to my agents and my editors for all they do for my books and my career. It's nice to acknowledge that in a concrete way."

"I know women like chocolate, and my agent once told me she adores the spa baskets. I usually spend about \$50 on each basket," Thompson said. "I spent less when I wasn't making as much money. One year, when my agent got me a particularly good deal, I sent her a gold bracelet. I got it at Sam's Club, so it didn't cost as much as she thought it did, but she was thrilled."

"I didn't really look at 'how much should I spend,' but rather what is a nice, but not over-the-top thank you and might be a little more fun than a bouquet of flowers," Chianese said. "I wanted a gift the people could really enjoy (i.e., cupcakes). Gift vs. gift card: Personally, for me, gift cards feel very impersonal and sort of meaningless in this case. I wanted to send something that showed I was actually putting some thought into my thank-you. However, I'm not against gift cards at all. I do send them to readers when I do giveaways, but then I'm hoping they'll use it to buy *my* book. Not sure that always happens."

"Perhaps a simple e-greeting card is all that's needed to acknowledge big holidays and important events, such as job promotions," Milburn said. "I do think there is something more fun about giving and receiving physical items in the mail, however, whether it's a heartfelt card or a package of presents."

“When I used to write for Harlequin, Tor, and Kensington, I regularly sent gifts to my editors and occasionally to my agents around Christmas,” Summers said. “The gifts for the editors and agents tended to be things like chocolates. I chose gifts that wouldn’t break the bank and would also not make them feel guilty for not returning the sentiment. I kept them in the \$20-35 range and usually went with boxes of chocolate.”

“I sent handmade jewelry items to editors I knew better at a smaller press,” McCutcheon said. “I didn’t exceed \$25 per person since that was the amount I was allowed to deduct on my taxes.”

“When I was traditionally published, I kept to a self-imposed limit of \$100,” Marton said. “The gifts to my Presents editors were always well received. I do recall sort of wondering if I should have gone over my self-imposed \$100 limit as my earnings made substantial increases, but in the end I kept to that limit.”

Maybe gifting is really about good karma

While none of the authors who emailed me said they have given gifts to get ahead in their careers, they did find gifting to be a way to be remembered and the authors enjoyed making others happy.

“I don’t feel obligated to send holiday gifts, but I am truly grateful to my agents and my editors for all they do for my books and my career. It’s nice to acknowledge that in a concrete way around the holidays. I give the gifts because I truly appreciate all the time and effort my agents/editors put into working with me,” Herkness said. “I enjoy sending small tokens of my gratitude for their efforts throughout the years. It’s a pleasure to say thank you in this way.”

“Is this a good career move? It can’t hurt, but don’t expect that you’re going to get extra marketing or anything in return,” Chianese said. “It might help show those people who have never met you, or talked to you, that you’re a nice person who thinks of others. Maybe then when you’re asking for the back cover to be re-written (again) or that the cover idea be changed (again and again), those doing the work won’t want to hurl curses your way. One can hope. I would also say it’s the thought that counts, not the amount spent. Sometimes, it’s the little things that mean the most.”

“This past January, I sent a bunch more to everyone since January is a dull month,” Putney said. “The publicist picked the cookies up when delivered to the building, then set them up in the breakroom and made an announcement over the speaker system. She said there was a stampede, with people exclaiming over the quantity. I also included boxes of gluten free and vegan cookies. The publicists said the vegans had tears of happiness in their eyes. (She may have exaggerated.) I do think it was important to be inclusive since I really like my publisher, and there are a lot of hardworking people in the backroom working to make everyone’s books a success, and they deserve thanks for what they do.”

After her first agent dropped her, Claudia Dain asked for a list of submissions and contacted one of the editors who had given her a positive rejection.

Dain said, “I called her directly to ask if there was anything I could do to tweak the manuscript enough so that she’d buy it. She said that the book was wonderful but it wasn’t right for them, and that she was certain this book would see the light of day and to not forget

her when I became a published author. This was my first truly positive contact within publishing and I was so appreciative of her supportive words; I sent her a bouquet of flowers as a thank you for her kindness. Fast forward a few months and this editor is having lunch with an agent. The agent asked, 'Who have you read that you loved but didn't buy?' The editor threw out my name. The agent contacted me and asked to represent me, which she did, and that book (and my two other completed novels) were sold. The flowers cost about \$30 and were the best investment to my career that I can think of."

Final takeaway

My takeaway from all this is that no one is going to scream at you (like in my nightmare) if you don't give a gift. So to give or not to give—the answer to that question is really up to you. Giving should make you happy, not create stress.

"I sent them stuff because I appreciated them and wanted to be nice," Bennett said. "I'd personally rather receive something special than something expensive, so that was the route I took. Things I thought they'd appreciate. I don't know whether it's expected or not, but from the agent or editor's POV, it's probably a nice gesture and makes them think fondly of the author, so I figure it can't hurt. We all want to be thought of fondly, right?"

"I never regret giving chocolate," [Jennifer Stevenson](#) said. "My view is, I give these things to make myself happy. If it isn't appreciated, well, that's a lesson learned about that individual. I don't think that one person's response says anything sweeping about human nature or whatever. I keep doing it because I like to."

Michele Dunaway is out of witty ideas for her bios. Her current thank-you gift is to send people socks with cute animals on them—because who doesn't love cute socks? You can find her at micheledunaway.com where her characters always give the perfect gift.

The Joy of Receiving A Gift

By Michele Dunaway



While authors obsess over giving gifts, there's nothing quite like receiving one. Once, when I was named 2012 Journalism Education Association Distinguished Yearbook Adviser of the Year, flowers arrived at school from my yearbook company. Because of my cats, I can't have any live or cut plants inside my home, so receiving flowers brightened my day. Sometimes the yearbook companies send their advisers small care packages. Opening the box always brings me joy.

So while authors assume it's common business practice to send gifts, when a publisher does the same, it gives us a warm fuzzy feeling. When I asked authors about any gifts they'd received from their editors, agents, or publishers, most gifts seemed to arrive at the holidays.

[Mary Jo Putney's](#) agency makes donations to literacy charities on behalf of all their clients, so she feels there's reciprocity for gifts she sends them.

"I am lucky in that I consider my agent and my former editor friends, so we have exchanged gifts for Christmas over the years," [Trish Milburn](#) said.

Another time gifts might arrive was to celebrate a book release or hitting a list.

"My editor has sent me gifts for release days, which I'm certain the publisher does this for all the authors. I get cards for other occasions, but no extravagant gifts," [Tammy L Grace](#) said. "For release day, it is usually flowers, cookies, or treats of some sort to mark the special day. It's thoughtful and from talking with other authors seems to be the norm. The gift always makes me feel appreciated and always comes with a heartfelt card."

"I don't recall my agent ever sending me anything," [Jenna Bennett](#) said. "I got flowers from an editor once, for hitting the extended *New York Times* bestseller list for the first time."

Yet like that saying, "Your mileage may vary," others have not had that experience.

"As an author, I've only received one gift from my editor and that was when she left," [Gail Chianese](#) said. "The gift was unexpected and incredibly thoughtful. But I've never received flowers for release day or gifts for hitting milestones. As far as I know, my publisher doesn't do

that and it's fine. I've never received anything from my agent other than advice and my royalty check, and honestly, that's all I expect."

However, a gift can mean a great deal, especially after feeling frustrated because of something that might be happening in your career. It says, "You are valued."

"On my debut women's fiction novel, I was having a lot of trouble pleasing my long-time editor," [Claudia Dain](#) said.

Dain's novel was already sold and had been rewritten twice, yet her editor had yet to sign off.

"In complete frustration, I called my agent and told him I wanted out of my contract. The publisher called me and discussed the changes she wanted, and I got back to work. A nice floral arrangement from the publisher showed up on my doorstep two days later. It was the nicest thing at the perfect time. It's almost embarrassing how much those flowers meant to me."

Relationships also mattered, and gifts could be a way of showing that.

"In 2010, when I had a hemorrhagic stroke, seven brain surgeries and was in the hospital for 51 days, my agent and her staff sent me a huge teddy bear along with a packet of cards from my readers and editors. They also sent my husband and son some gift cards to different restaurants so they didn't have to worry about cooking while they were worrying about me," [Tina Gerow](#) said. "It was really sweet. Once I recovered, I called her and thanked her profusely for being so thoughtful. I would have also sent her a handwritten note, but it took me a few months to be able to write legibly again after that."

"I had tons of personal quality time with my small press editor and publisher, and I felt they were friends, so it was only natural to drop a gift to them now and then," [Jennifer Stevenson](#) said. "My editor sent me gifts as well, generally during the production process—lovely personalized things like a glass figurine of a fox that matched my book cover and fridge magnets made of my cover images."

Many agents, editors, publishing houses and assistants often send holiday cards.

"I love the giving spirit of the season, so for me Christmas cards are something I can afford and a way I can show my thanks to those that keep me employed," author assistant [Kate Tilton](#) said.

[Michele Dunaway](#) is your Nink editor for a few more months.

Gift Giving

Some final advice & some recipes to try

By Michele Dunaway



"Be creative! I wish I could handcraft gifts but that's not my forte. If it's yours, do that! However, if it's not, then use your creative brain to come up with fun ideas. As they always say, it's the thought that counts."

—Nancy Herkness

"I personally don't need people to send me flowers and stuff, not even my husband, because they just die. Kind of a waste. But something thoughtful makes people feel like you were thinking of them and you care. Authors do it between each other. Several authors have lost parents lately. Others of us go in and send them nice gifts. I know they appreciate that."

—Becca Jameson

"I wanted a gift the people could really enjoy (ie: cupcakes). Gift vs. gift card: Personally, for me, gift cards feel very impersonal and sort of meaningless in this case. I wanted to send something that showed I was actually putting some thought into my thank-you. However, I'm not against gift cards at all. I do send them to readers when I do giveaways, but then I'm hoping they'll use it to buy *my* book. LOL. Not sure that always happens."

—Gail Chianese

"I considered gift cards, but I hear stories about cards being put aside, lost, forgotten and so I went with a physical gift. The gift card would have been easier."

—Linda Rae Sande

"I think you just pick out something you'd like and see what the reaction is."

—Victoria Thompson



Sugar Cookies with Buttercream Frosting

Submitted by [Charlotte Hubbard](#)



This is the cookie that turns an ordinary cookie tray into a fabulous plate of Christmas cookies! I usually make five to six batches of this dough, adding paste coloring and flavored gelatin (see below). I bake the cookies one day, store them in a covered container, and then decorate them the next day because it takes that long to finish about 13 dozen of these!

Ingredients

- 1/2 C. butter, softened (no substitutes)
- 1 C. sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 T. lemon juice
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 2 C. flour
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. baking soda

Directions

Cream the butter and sugar, then beat in the egg, lemon juice, and vanilla. Combine the dry ingredients and gradually add them to the dough until it's well blended. Tint with paste food coloring, if desired. Wrap dough in wax paper or plastic wrap and refrigerate it for at least 3 hours (it will keep for several days, until you have time to bake).

Preheat oven to 350°. Work with half at a time: roll to about 1/4" thickness on a floured surface, then cut with cookie cutters. Place 1" apart on a cookie sheet covered with parchment paper, and bake 7-8 minutes for softer, chewier cookies and 9-10 minutes or until lightly browned for crisp cookies. Cool on the pan for a minute and then remove with a spatula to a cooling rack. Makes 2-3 dozen.

Kitchen hint: For flavored sugar cookies, add a 3 oz. package of sugar free gelatin to the dough! I make green dough with lime, yellow dough with peach or orange, and dark pink dough with cherry gelatin. If you use regular sugar gelatin, reduce the sugar in your recipe by a couple of tablespoons.

Buttercream Frosting

This is the recipe I learned long ago in a cake decorating class. I love it because it doesn't taste like shortening, and it dries firmly (without getting hard) when you decorate cookies or cake.

Ingredients

- 1/2 C. milk
- 1/2 C. softened butter (no substitutes)
- 1/2 C. shortening
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 1 tsp. lemon flavoring
- 6-8 C. (about a pound) confectioners sugar

Directions

In a mixing bowl, blend the milk, butter, shortening, and flavorings. Blend in the sugar a cup or two at a time, scraping the bowl, until the frosting is thick and forms peaks.

For colored frosting, use paste coloring to maintain a thickness that will hold its shape during decorating. Makes enough to decorate/frost 6 batches of sugar cookies, or a cake.

Kitchen Hint: I divide my frosting into 4 or 5 plastic containers and color one batch with deep pink, one batch with yellow, one with green, one with sky blue and I leave some white. Then I get out my pastry bag and decorating tips, the sanding sugars, jimmies, and miniature M&Ms, and I PLAY! Let the decorated cookies dry/set up before you store or freeze them.



Peppermint Bark

Submitted by [Lacy Williams](#)

Ingredients

- 1 package white chocolate chips
- 6-8 candy canes, crushed
- 1/4 t. Peppermint extract

Directions

Melt white chocolate in double boiler. Don't overheat! Stir in extract and crushed candy canes. Spread in thin layer on baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Refrigerate for an hour, then break into pieces.



Magic Dust Spice Rub

Submitted by [Karen Tintori](#)



Champion BBQ pitmaster and restaurateur [Mike Mills](#) came up with this spice mix that he calls Magic Dust, a recipe he published in 2005 in his and his daughter Amy Mills Tunnicliffe's book *Peace, Love and Barbeque*, and a recipe now found on dozens of websites with a simple Google search as he released it to the media as part of his book publication.

According to Mills, this recipe can be used on any type of food, barbecued or not. The heat level can be adjusted if you like it extra spicy.

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup paprika
- 1/4 cup kosher salt, finely ground
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons mustard powder
- 1/4 cup chili powder
- 1/4 cup ground cumin
- 2 tablespoons ground black pepper
- 1/4 cup granulated garlic
- 2 tablespoons cayenne

Directions

Mix paprika, kosher salt, sugar, mustard powder, chili powder, cumin, black pepper, garlic, and cayenne together and store in a tightly covered container.

Chef's Note: To make it a little more hot and spicy, increase the mustard powder and black pepper to 1/4 cup each.

Yield: about 2-1/2 cups

Social Media Promotion, Part 1

Best practices for 2020

By Mindy Klasky



Author Note: Social media remains a linchpin for many authors' promotional efforts. This article outlines five current best practices for five of the oldest, best-established social media networks: Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, and YouTube. Next month, we'll look at some newer players in the field, including LinkedIn, Snapchat, TikTok, Tumblr, WeChat, and What's App. Please note, paid advertising on social media platforms is beyond the scope of this article.

No author can possibly interact with readers on all social media channels; there simply aren't enough hours in the day. Successful promoters pick and choose among platforms, selecting the ones that play to their strengths (e.g., long and detailed essays, short and witty observations, photos, or video.)

While many services allow authors to create one post and disseminate it across multiple platforms, those distributed posts might not put the author in the best promotional light, because each platform's users expect interactions consistent with the platform's design. (For example, Twitter's 280-character limit means that a long, insightful observation about the publishing industry will be reduced to a hyperlink or Twitter thread many users will never follow.)

The following best practices should help authors identify the social media networks most in line with their skill sets. All facts and figures on social media usage cited below come from the [Pew Research Center's Social Media Fact Sheet](#), which was last updated June 12, 2019.

Facebook

Facebook, the second-most-popular social media platform in the United States (after YouTube), counts approximately 69% of US adults as users. Among all Facebook users, 74% visit the site daily, and an additional 17% visit the site weekly.

Facebook applies complicated often-changing algorithms to determine which posts to show to which accounts. While the precise nature of those algorithms is secret, the system favors posts that generate a great deal of interaction (likes, shares, and comments) from users. In recent months, the algorithms seem to favor the distribution of posts from the profiles of family and friends over those of commercial pages.

1. **Polish your cover photo.** (“Cover photo” is Facebook’s term for the banner at the top of a profile, page, or group; it is not the “profile picture,” which is often a user’s portrait.) Your cover photo, which is your first chance to snag a passing user and make them a fan, should reflect your brand, instantly conveying your genre and your specific books. View your cover photo on multiple devices; the entire photo is not visible on mobile devices. As there are still millions of users who access Facebook via computer make sure your cover is optimized for that platform. The new desktop interface places a user’s profile picture in the bottom center of their cover photo (a change from past placement on the lower left.)
2. **Engage your followers.** Facebook’s algorithms promote posts that receive a lot of engagement. Therefore, authors should post with the specific goal of creating interaction. Consider asking direct questions (especially ones with easy, straightforward answers). Acknowledge responses to your posts by clicking “like,” adding stickers, or making a comment. (Those acknowledgments build a personal bond with your followers. At the same time, they increase your points of contact with your followers for future Facebook algorithms.)
3. **Use videos and images.** According to *Social Media Today*, more than eight billion videos are viewed on Facebook every *day*. Still photos, memes, and other images also catch readers’ eyes as Facebook posts scroll by. Similarly, short text-based posts stand out when accompanied by one of Facebook’s prepared background designs.
4. **Create groups.** While Facebook notoriously limits the visibility of posts to profiles and pages, they give far greater visibility to posts made in groups. Rumors abound that Facebook will start to charge for groups; however, no charges are yet in effect. Your groups can be relatively small (e.g., a street team or an ARC team) or quite expansive (e.g., a book club for your genre.) Many authors foster the appearance of exclusivity by making their groups private.
5. **Avoid hashtags.** While Facebook supports hashtags, they are not commonly used on the site. If you do use hashtags, never use more than two in a single post. Multiple hashtags may send a message to Facebook’s algorithms that your post originated on another social media network.

Instagram

Approximately 37% of US adults use Instagram, with 63% visiting the site daily and another 21% visiting the site weekly.

1. **Deliver quality posts.** Of course, all social media requires quality posts—but quality photos *really* matter for Instagram. Learn your camera’s settings. Consider creating a uniform feel by using the same filter on all your posts or by adopting a color scheme for specific periods of time.
2. **Use hashtags.** Instagram followers respond well to two types of hashtags: A) Long, witty, and entertaining hashtags that may be unique within the Instagram world and B) Precise, common hashtags that link communities of users. Study the hashtags commonly used by authors in your genre and plug into their networks.
3. **Use stories.** Stories are built from images and video, with added text, GIFs, stickers, filters, and polls. They last for 24 hours before disappearing from your feed.
4. **Run a contest.** The best contests are simple ones—ask your followers to comment on one of your posts, then select a winner. You don’t have to give away expensive new technology like a Kindle or an iPad; instead, you can award your own ebooks. If you run a contest, make sure you follow Instagram’s [rules](#).
5. **Remain social.** Perhaps because of the relatively sparse textual interaction on Instagram, many users forget to engage with their followers. Respond to comments, answer questions, and thank people who compliment your posts.

Pinterest

Approximately 28% of US adults use Pinterest. Statistics about daily and weekly visits are not readily available.

1. **Pin fresh content.** Fresh content goes beyond merely adding new pins. Rather, Pinterest wants to encourage the addition of pins that aren’t available anywhere else on its site. If your pin isn’t unique, consider adding unique (but relevant) titles, using a different font in the text overlay, *and* using different graphics, patterns, or colors. (Generally, it’s not sufficient to use only one of those methods to create content considered “fresh” by the Pinterest algorithms.)
2. **Pin the most important items first.** The first five pins you post each day will get more engagement than the rest of your board, no matter what time of day you make those pins. Consider which items are most important and pin them first.
3. **Emphasize quality over volume.** Pinterest finds more value in quality pins (fresh content, quality images, etc.) than in the number of pins you make. Use your limited social media time to create consistently good pins, rather than a multitude of mediocre ones.
4. **Use keywords.** Keywords increase the value of your pins to Pinterest users. Use keywords in descriptions, focusing on the terms a user is most likely to type when trying

to find content like yours. When possible, include relevant keywords in your profile and board descriptions.

5. **Limit use of group boards.** Pinterest created group boards to allow communication about specific, limited content. Over time, those group boards became ways for authors and others to cross promote. Pinterest has now indicated that it will provide greater distribution of relevant individual boards, rather than group boards.

Twitter

Approximately 22% of US adults use Twitter, with 42% visiting the site daily and another 29% visiting the site weekly.

1. **Optimize your profile.** Make sure your handle is short and simple, without extra characters. (Consider creating a new account if your handle is hard to use and remember.) Review your bio, the first thing on your profile that most people will see when they consider following you. Don't forget to use relevant hashtags to integrate your profile into existing Twitter communities.
2. **Pin a tweet.** Create your very best content, and then pin it to the top of your feed. Along with your bio, a pinned tweet is your "first impression" to newcomers. Consistently put your best foot forward, including when you change your pinned tweet when launching a new book or series.
3. **Build relevant followers.** Early marketing efforts on Twitter emphasized increasing the number of followers and harvesting contacts without regard to how relevant those accounts were to yours. Contemporary best practices emphasize building *relevant* followers—authors, readers, agents, editors, etc. Consider trimming your list of followers so that you're only broadcasting to people who are interested in you, your books, and your genre.
4. **Engage your followers.** As with most forms of social media, followers want to communicate with the genuine "you" (or, at least, your genuine author persona); they aren't looking for sales pitches and endless promotion. The oft-cited 80/20 rule remains a useful guideline—spend 80% of your time engaging with your followers and only 20% selling to them. (Engagement includes responding to your followers' tweets, retweeting, and @mentioning others. You might also ask relevant questions, conduct polls, and tweet about trending news. Humorous accounts tend to thrive on Twitter—possibly as an antidote to the flamewars that tend to rage on the platform.)
5. **Use visuals.** As with other social media, visuals are increasingly important. Followers engage more with photos, videos, and other media than they do with long strings of hashtags.

YouTube

YouTube, unlike other social media, functions as a search engine, allowing users to initiate research queries. Arguably, this "search engine" function exists separately from the site's "social

media” function. Nevertheless, approximately 51% of US adults visit YouTube daily and another 32% visit weekly, making YouTube the most popular social media site in the country.

1. **Create quality content.** YouTube’s primary goal is keeping viewers watching. Therefore, the site’s algorithms heavily favor “sticky” videos, so create your videos with that goal. Eliminate fluff from your introductions, and get to the meat quickly. Script your videos so you don’t have dull moments where a viewer might exit. Provide interesting visuals, like graphics, animations, and changing backgrounds to break up your speaking.
2. **Optimize your title.** You want viewers to choose your video over all the others reported following a search. To maintain energy, keep your titles short, use relevant keywords, and keep in mind the words and phrases people are likely to use when searching for videos like yours.
3. **Use compelling thumbnails.** Most of your viewers are going to see your thumbnail at a tiny size. Therefore, use bright, contrasting colors (ideally *not* red, white, or black, because those are the colors YouTube uses for its own design.)
4. **Create playlists.** Remember—YouTube wants to keep people on its platform. Playlists make that easy, by presenting viewers with jumping off points for their next video. Create playlists for your videos and display them on your channel page.
5. **Recruit subscribers.** Once you’ve invested time and energy in getting people to watch a video, you want them to watch all your future videos. Encourage them to subscribe to your channel. Add a Subscribe button to every end screen, to capture people before they leave the “territory” that you control.

USA Today bestselling author [Mindy Klasky](#) learned to read when her parents shoved a book in her hands and told her she could travel anywhere through stories. As a writer, Mindy has traveled through various genres, including romantic comedy, hot contemporary romance, and traditional fantasy. In her spare time, Mindy knits, quilts, and tries to tame her to-be-read shelf.

Journaling & Creating a Benevolent Self

By Denise A. Agnew



Being a creative person, you may have found that the pandemic has enhanced negative self-talk or perhaps created issues with completing deadlines or writing at all. We can forgive ourselves for feeling rocky when our world is downright crazy.

That being said, creative people tend to be hard on themselves all the time. We dredge up perceived faults we have against our creative abilities one after the other and beat ourselves bloody.

What if you could call on a benevolent and confident self (call it future self if you like) to get you through any negative self-talk? What if you could journal your way from negative thinking that tanks your creativity toward an encouraging and confident self that uplifts your creativity?

If you've journaled before, take a quick peek at it. Did you fill it with a plethora of negative highlights, such as what didn't go right, your judgments and grievances with yourself and others? Journaling like this might relieve the pressure, and in many cases it can free up your creativity. In Julia Cameron's *Artist's Way*, she encourages writers to start their morning with stream-of-consciousness writing. The idea is to get down all of your gunk, good or otherwise and without censoring or holding back. Many writers have gained perspective and benefit from this technique. The process of letting it all out can open our eyes.

For some writers, journaling what isn't working for them is enough. Often the barriers we place on our writing abilities come from childhood experiences or other situations through life where something went wrong. Getting it out helps, as we assume that the same type of negative thing will occur again and sometimes it does, but we can be better prepared.

However, beyond that is our own internal thought process where, if we focus on the negatives, we often then only see the negatives in our writing, and we repeat negative patterns and belief systems in an endless cycle. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy. We say we can't. So we don't.

To reverse this, we should step into our power and create a benevolent self that can flip the negative thinking. One way to do this is journaling.

If you don't already have a journal, now is the time to grab one specific for this assignment. Don't reuse one. Go find one that appeals to you in color/fabric/material and paper. Use a favorite pen or buy a new one to use just for this journal. This can pump up your enthusiasm to stick with it.

Journal prompts

Below are journal prompts designed to open your mind to new creative possibilities. Take as much time and pages needed to thoroughly explore each of these possibilities and questions.

- What negative things do you tell yourself most frequently about your writing abilities? This can apply to other things that have nothing to do with writing, but for the purposes of clarity, let's stick with writing for the moment.
- Are there similarities between each negative thing?
- Where and when did you get these ideas about your writing abilities? Don't be shy. Lay it all out here. You may not have taken much time to think about these things before, so don't be surprised if it takes a while to pinpoint them.
- What are the patterns you see between each? Are they things someone else told you about your writing or things you assumed entirely on your own?

Clearing things up

Now that you have some idea of the negative beliefs about your writing that bother you, let's work on the one that bothers you the most. Of the negative things you've listed, is there one that sticks out to you as the most painful? Highlight that. Then you will ask, is it actually true? How do you know it isn't true? Would you say this to a close friend?

Now that you've highlighted the one negative, let's analyze the truth of it. Let's work through the process using this example: I can't write at all.

With the highlighted negative thing you've told yourself, answer the following question:

Is it actually true?

No, it isn't true that I can't write.

How do you know it isn't true?

Because I have written and published 10 books.

(Don't start ruminating on how many reviews you *don't* have or how much money you *aren't* making right now. Neither of these things is a reflection on the quality of your writing.)

Would you say these things to a close friend?

No, I wouldn't. In fact, I think it is horrible to say to my friend that she can't write, because it isn't true. I'd be angry at anyone for saying this to my friend.

When it is apparent that your negative belief is most likely not true and why, it can help you attack each negative belief you have with regard to your creativity.

Go back through each negative you wrote and ask/answer the questions for each one. Is it actually true? How do you know it isn't true? Would you say these things to a friend?

Discover your benevolent self

Now there is one more step to take, which is to take the negative things that bothered you and shift this thinking. What would a benevolent, loving self say to you? Basically, turn that negative into a positive.

Example: I can't write at all.

Benevolent self: I am a talented writer with many stories to tell. I'm particularly good at telling XYZ type of stories.

Example: I can't write historical fiction because it is hard to write and I was never any good at research.

Benevolent self: I love reading historical non-fiction. It fascinates me. Knowing that, I'd find reading research on the time period I want to write extremely interesting. I can research the time period(s) and facts I find intriguing with ease.

If you have difficulty getting to an uplifting statement, go for a middle ground that is neutral such as, "I enjoy writing stories. XYZ stories intrigue me the most." This neutral ground points out to you that you enjoy writing and what you want to write, which is more encouraging and not a negative.

If you've found this method useful, I'd love to hear from you. Drop me a note at danovelist@cox.net.

Denise A. Agnew is the award-winning author of over 69 novels and screenplays. Denise's novels Love from The Ashes and Blackout were optioned for film/TV by Where's Lucy? Productions, Bright Frontier Films and MDR Entertainment. Denise is a Writer/Producer (Where's Lucy? Productions, Happy Catastrophe Productions, Bright Frontier Films), a paranormal investigator, Reiki Master, and Certified Creativity Coach. As a creativity coach, Denise assists anyone in the creative arts to maintain lifelong creativity. You can find her at www.deniseagnew.com and www.creativepencoaching.com.

The Mad Scribbler

Some questions for NINC members

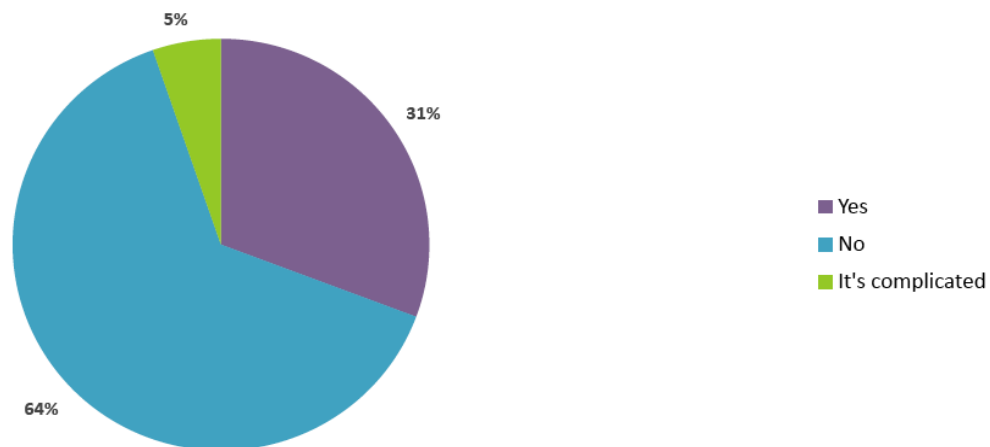
By Laura Resnick



In the November 2019 survey of NINC members, which [WTH Analytics](#) administered, one of the questions was: *Do you currently have a literary agent?*

This was the result:

Members Currently Working with a Literary Agent



Fully 64 percent of respondents reported they do not have an agent.

The survey also confirmed that this is a very accomplished population of commercial fiction novelists:

- Nearly half of NINC members have each published more than ten novels (and *all* members have published at least two)
- The vast majority of NINCers have been publishing for more than five years.
- Nearly half of our members have had books appear on national bestseller lists
- 47 percent of respondents earn 75-100 percent of their income from writing

Yet 64 percent of NINC members don't have a literary agent. And another five percent responded, "It's complicated."

I was surprised by these figures, which are the exact opposite of what I expected to see in the survey results. And I would like to explore this subject in a future column.

So, NINC members, I have some questions for you:

- If you currently do not have an agent *by choice*, why don't you want one? Do you think that might change? Why or why not? Have you had (or wanted) an agent in the past?
- If you *want* an agent but don't have one, why do you want one and why don't you currently have one?
- If you have one but "it's complicated," what is complicated about it? And how do you think or hope that situation will play out over time?
- If your agent situation has recently changed or seems likely to change soon, can you describe how and why?

Please **send your replies and comments to me** at: LLR1962@yahoo.com.

If you **do not want your name** mentioned in the column, **please specify** that in your email to me, and your name will not be shared with anyone at all.

Laura Resnick, who does not have an agent, writes fiction, nonfiction, and short fiction. She's taking a break from writing her column this month but will be back in September.

Membership Benefits

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

Are you taking advantage of all your member benefits?

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

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

Networking

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

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

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

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

Conference 2020:

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

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

Conference e-loop: <https://groups.io/g/BeachNINC2020/>

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

NINC members are eligible for certain professional discounts. A complete listing of these can be found at <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/member-freebies-discounts/> along with other member discounts.

Volunteer

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

Open positions include:

- Social Media Committee
- Tweet Team
- Recruiting New Members
- Anything!



Founded in 1989

NINC Statement of Principle

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

Founders

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

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
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- 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.

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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](#).

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