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President's Voice

By Tawdra Kandle



The year I joined NINC and attended my first conference, I answered the call for volunteers to moderate sessions and report on workshops. I wanted to get involved in the organization, and I thought this might be one way to do it.

As it turns out, I was correct.

Not too many years later, when the Programming committee needed an assistant chair, one of the people involved in the decision-making process remembered that I'd volunteered to facilitate round tables at the previous conference. She recommended me for the role ... which is how, in a roundabout way, I came to spend twenty-three months as president.

And that's why you should volunteer to work with NINC!

In all seriousness, volunteering that first year accomplished exactly what I'd hoped for: I definitely became involved with the organization—and it's been a wonderfully enriching experience. We are all part of something that's unique and incredibly important: a group of professional authors of different backgrounds, experience, business practices, income levels, and aspirations who all share a common goal. We learn together, we network, and we exchange details of our successes and our failures.

One of my favorite parts of getting to know new-to-NINC speakers is watching what happens over their first few days at the conference. Without fail, no matter how much we've prepared them, they're surprised by the level of experience and knowledge possessed by our members. They're awed by meeting authors who are bestsellers, list-hitters, and innovators.

We, as a group, are fairly awesome.

Last month in this column, I wrote a little about the importance of volunteering. I mentioned that we have some openings for members to step up and fill some of these roles. These include spots on the Membership committee and the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committee, as well as, on the Conference committee. We need to fill the roles that will be vacant on January 1st.

We need you.

If you have ever considered volunteering with NINC—if you've ever thought that perhaps you want to be more involved—maybe now is the time.

There are benefits to being a NINC volunteer—some include a conference registration comp—but the best part of the experience is more than that. It's the people you'll work with, who you'll get to know so much better. It's the satisfaction of realizing that you're giving something of yourself to an organization that's essential to the larger author community.

If you want to find out more about the openings and what's involved with each one, please email me at president@ninc.com OR tawdra@tawdrakandle.com. I'll be happy to point you in the right direction!

~Tawdra Kandle

Tawdra Kandle is the USA Today bestselling author of over 100 romances that span genres from contemporary through paranormal. Her engaging and realistic characters bring readers back again and again to devour the steamy love stories she spins.

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/>

From the Editor

By Harper St. George



Welcome to the conference issue of *Nink*. I have a confession to make ... I'm not a conference person. They tend to overwhelm me with information and social interactions that send my introverted heart into hiding. On top of that is the stress of choosing which sessions to attend when they all look so interesting. This means that I usually come home stressed out and with too much information to process. All of this to emphasize exactly how much I mean it when I say that I *loved* the NINC conference.

From the advanced content of the sessions to the willingness of our speakers and industry guests to be accessible for discussion at any time, it was an amazing experience. However, it's the openness and graciousness of our members that puts it over the top as the best conference I've ever attended. Everyone I spoke with was very willing to share what was working for them, what wasn't working, and what they were excited to try next. The environment of camaraderie and support makes this conference special, and that's completely because of our members. Thank you for being you.

This issue is the first of our two conference issues. The NINC conference is unique in that we try to have a reporter in every session, so that members who were unable to attend can still benefit from the great content. The November issue of *Nink* includes the Thursday and Friday morning sessions. The December issue will include the Friday afternoon and Saturday sessions. We do not cover any of the NINC After Dark activities, including the roundtable sessions. Please remember that our reporters—while fabulous!—are not infallible, so please excuse any mistakes or incomplete information. Join me in thanking our dedicated reporters for doing such a great job. This issue wouldn't be possible without their conscientiousness and dedication.

We will return to our regular content in January 2022. I hope you all are able to gain some useful insights from their reports.

~Harper

*Harper St. George writes historical romance set in various time periods from the Viking Era to the Gilded Age. Her latest series is *The Gilded Age Heiresses*. She lives in the Atlanta area with her family.*



Conference Reports

Stress-free Productivity

Presented by Sarra Cannon

Reported by Pam McCutcheon

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

An indie author of YA adult fantasy novels, Sarra Cannon is the host of the successful YouTube channel [Heart Breathings](#), where she focuses on productivity and building positive momentum for writers. But, according to Cannon, real stress-free productivity is unattainable because there's always something more to worry about. However, you can arm yourself for sustainable productivity that is joyful, fun, and healthy.

If you are overwhelmed, always behind, struggling to keep up and feel inspired, or say things like "I'll slow down when..." or "If I slow down, everything will fall apart," you probably experience disappointment, exhaustion, and/or anxiety. To reverse this negative momentum, carve out some time to do the following:

Daydream

Ask yourself: If you could craft a career you want, what would it look like? What would it feel like? What is your ideal career? What types of stories would you write? What does it take to make you feel like a success? If you knew success was inevitable, how would you choose to spend your day (not someone else's plan)? Where will you be in 10 years? This is your vision for your career—your GPS system. Let it guide you and take your own path, not one someone else has chosen for you. *Don't skip this step.*

Evaluate

When you are in survival mode, you don't have the luxury of seeing the big picture. Ask yourself, what is the most stressful? Is it writing, marketing, social media? What are you currently behind on? Can you catch up or do you need to reevaluate? How much time do you really have? Think about what parts of your life don't align with your plan, what isn't moving forward, and what you can hire someone else to do.

Prioritize

Remember that 20% of your activities will account for 80% of your results, so you must focus on what's important and prioritize. To start, do a brain dump and write down everything you already do and want to do, then ask yourself if these things are moving toward your ideal

life. To help you prioritize what you should do, identify whether the goal moves you toward or away from your vision, and whether it has low or high short-term impact. Where they intersect on the grid below determines how important they are.

PRIORITY BOX	Low short-term impact	High short-term impact
Moves me toward my vision	2. Important Tasks—long-term priorities essential to success	1. Sweet Spot—your priorities for the moment
Doesn't move me toward my vision	4. Unimportant—cut from your schedule forever	3. Danger Zone—do only if you have a short-term need that trumps your long-term vision

Look for synergy (cross-promotion) and amplification (using the same post on all social media). Decide what to let go, push back, or outsource. Remember, this will only be successful if you go all in, stay consistent, and put your full energy into it. If you're not seeing results or you're constantly stressed, you may have too much on your plate. Then you won't be able to keep up, and it will lead you right back into that negative momentum. You need to adjust your expectations of how you need to be successful.

Plan

Cannon uses her [HB90](#) method (Heart Breathings 90-day plan) to plan after she has prioritized everything. She recommends working with 90 days, which allows her to aim for a specific result, execute a focused plan, and evaluate success. Of course, you can choose a shorter or longer period—whatever works for you.

Goals: When setting goals, be specific and measurable about what you want to accomplish (she chooses no more than three per quarter). For example, don't say you want to increase your income or write a book. Instead, a good goal would be to average X amount of dollars per month by a certain date or write X number of words per day.

Projects: These are *how* you accomplish those goals. Choose projects that will have the most impact, such as completing a rough draft of book three, doing promotion for book two, making a launch plan for book one, etc. Choose projects that will have the most impact on your goals.

Tasks: What actions will you take to complete each project? Detail specific tasks, such as outlining your novel, creating characters, writing X number of words per day, etc. To track her tasks, she uses a Kanban board with all the tasks written on individual sticky notes. For example, she might have three columns to represent the goals, then three rows under each one to track progress: To Do, Doing, and Done. It allows her to visually track her progress as she moves sticky notes from one section to another. She also uses Pomodoro to accomplish tasks, which gives her 30-minute sessions to work on the tasks: 25 to work, and five to take a break. See her YouTube channel, [Heart Breathings](#), for more info on her system.

The key is to know what you want to achieve, and how much time you have. Do not overplan. Make sure you take into account vacations, conferences, appointments, kids' games,

etc. Also plan to take time to rest and to play. As the old saying goes, “You can’t pour from an empty cup.” Don’t push beyond joy.

Do the things *you* choose to do and regain your balance. At the end of your life, don’t be that person who says, “I wish I’d had time to be my true self.” Find *your* point of sustainability and work toward it now.

Cannon also recommended *Chillpreneur: The New Rules for Creating Success, Freedom, and Abundance on Your Terms* by Denise Duffield Thomas for further reading on how to be successful. To see the slides Cannon used from the presentation she did at NINC, [click here](#).



Pam McCutcheon is a hybrid author of all kinds of romance (sweet, sexy, paranormal, contemporary, historical, time travel, etc.), fantasy short stories, and nonfiction books for writers under her own name, and writes young adult fantasy under the name Parker Blue. She is a partner in the assisted self-publishing business [Parker Hayden Media](#) with Laura Hayden.

Estate Planning for Authors

Presented by Sara Wells

Reported by Chéré Coen

Sara Wells is a partner at Morgan, Lewis & Bockius, LLP, a large international law firm. Wells assists clients worldwide in the creation of their estate plans, including handling sophisticated assets such as literary works, and trusts to help clients make tax-efficient transfers to beneficiaries.

Like most attorneys when asked for legal advice, Sara Wells immediately warned NINC participants at the NINC 2021 conference to speak to their own lawyers for personal estate planning. She stressed that since states and countries have different inheritance laws, the conference workshop was an overview to how to get started in the process.

The bottom line, however, was that upon a person's death, taxes may ensue. To both avoid unnecessary taxes for the heirs, and to provide a seamless way to transfer assets and property—whether something tangible like a home or a collection of literary works—writers should plan accordingly with an attorney.

“The thing you want to know at the back of your mind is, the government wants their money,” she said.

For writers hoping to keep their literary business intact and in operation upon their deaths, Wells offered a few different options.

Taxes

The U.S. government imposes taxes on certain transfers of property: a gift tax imposed on property transfers in life; estate tax on transfers of property at death; and the Generation Skipping Transfer (GST) tax that's imposed on certain transfers of property that skip a generation.

There are exceptions and ways to avoid these taxes, Wells said. In 2021, the gift and estate tax exemption and the GST exemption is \$11.7 million in the United States. The exemption amounts are scheduled to revert to \$5 million, indexed for inflation, on Jan. 1, 2026, or potentially on Jan. 1, 2022, under current pending legislation, she said.

Other exemptions may apply, including paying someone's tuition to an institution or paying someone's medical care, again to the specific institution. A person may also make a gift of up to \$15,000 to someone in 2021 and the money is excluded from tax. If married, that amount may be doubled.

“After that it eats into your exemption,” she added.

U.S. state inheritance and estate taxes vary, Wells said, with about 20 percent of states having such laws. Massachusetts, for example, has a \$1 million exemption in 2021 with a top

marginal rate of 16 percent and “It does not take very long to hit that top rate,” Wells said. Florida and California have no inheritance and estate taxes.

Again, Wells urged participants to discuss their financial planning with an attorney in their state or country.

Transfer of property at death

Property passes to others according to the individual’s wishes, Wells said. The mode of transfer of personal assets depends on how the property is titled. They distribute the following ways:

- Property transfers to others pursuant to the individual’s will, which are especially useful when someone needs to be designated as a guardian for minor children. You can also name a personal representative to collect and preserve property, pay creditors and taxes, and distribute property as directed in the will. A “Works” personal representative may be named to manage literary property. For those without a will in the United States, the individual state will step in, usually distributing assets to other family members, “which may not be what you want,” Wells said.
- Property owned jointly, such as real estate or joint bank accounts, passes on to the other joint owner.
- When someone is designated a beneficiary (such as with a life insurance policy or a retirement account), the property passes to that beneficiary.
- Property owned in trust is transferred according to the terms of the trust, subject to any powers of appointment.

Things to consider are that some property transfers will go through probate, and others that are done outside of probate are still subject to taxes.

Estate planning for authors

Wells encourages writers to establish an estate transfer plan to:

- Ensure that the writer’s literary legacy is protected after death;
- To establish the administration of copyrights after death, as well as unpublished papers and contractual obligations;
- Naming a possible Works fiduciary in a power of attorney, a will, or a revocable trust.

These considerations may be handled with a will and a personal representative established to manage the literary property as well as other assets. But, a trust allows for designated trustees to have administrative powers in accordance with the trust. These may be to distribute funds, file necessary tax returns, invest money, and administer the trust without obtaining approval of the probate court.

Writers can name someone as a Works fiduciary trustee to manage their literary property. This may be a family member, child, spouse, or friend with experience in literary matters. Trustees are entitled to reasonable compensation, Wells said, so the person who administers the

literary business after a writer's death may receive a fee. The Works fiduciary is also responsible for entering into contracts with publishers, collecting royalties, maintaining copyrights, etc.

A trust may also list co-trustees, such as pairing together a spouse and someone more experienced in literary works.

Once again, Wells insisted that writers hire an attorney for their own estate planning. Laws and taxes will vary on the writer's residence and the date documents are signed, since legislation may change current tax and inheritance laws.



Chéré Coen is the author of three book series under the pen name of Cherie Claire. Her latest is Ghost Fever, book seven in the Viola Valentine paranormal mystery series.

Adaptation: How to Transform Your Novel for the Screen

Presented by Ines Johnson

Reported by Jennifer Stevenson

A 15-year veteran television and film screenwriter, Ines Johnson has a doctorate in education. Johnson compressed a six-week class into 45 minutes. What follows are the high points of those 45 minutes.

The rules

1. **You owe nothing to the original work.** A script will pass through the hands of a writer or multiple writers, the director, the actors, and finally the editor. Each puts a different take on the story. Like a game of telephone, the process changes the product over and over.
2. **Don't mimic the original work.** However much you change the story, the character arcs must remain intact. The story is always about the characters.
3. **Tell the best bits.** Pick the best supporting characters, condensing several into one if necessary. Feel free to reinterpret the original work. Change things. It's okay.

The word

Find a single word that encompasses the main theme of your work. Measure each scene against this word. If that one word applies to the scene, keep it; if not, cut the scene.

The logline

Turn that one word into a phrase that includes the genre and compares the story to a similar, successful film. The logline should contain an adjective about the main character, their goal, and a conflict or adjective about the villain.

Inner movie method

Act I

- Page 1: exposition, place, time, mood / tone
 - Don't bother with warm-up time. Trap the audience with your opening.
- Page 3: central question or theme
 - The stakes are set up here. The viewer starts to care.
- Page 10: "want" dialogue
 - Someone has to *say* what the main character wants. This can even be said in the negative, by someone other than the main character.

- Page 30: obstacle #1 AKA curve ball
 - At the beginning we see their life-as-usual responses. Now we see that those responses don't work. There must be two obstacles—right before you launch into second act (page 45), and one right before you launch the third act (page 90). Do not let the middle sag.

Act II

- Page 45: growth
 - The main character reacts positively or negatively to the outcome of their page 30 plan/response.
- Page 60: commitment
 - Your main character is committed to their plan, and the stakes rise. Still, the main character is failing.
- Page 75: obstacle #2 AKA silver lining
 - At this point the plan is overturned, a new opportunity presents itself, but with further obstacles.

Act III

- Page 90: resolution
 - This is the climax, the finish line, and there is no more uncertainty. The main character and antagonist have it out and resolve the dramatic question of the story.
- Page 120: the end
 - This is the outcome, where we see your hero's new life. Get out fast.

Stories are told in three acts. These three acts contain nine plots or more. Within each plot point is a series of sequences comprised of scenes. Scenes are further broken down into beats or steps, each one occurring in a single time and place.

The Step Sheet

Also called the Beat Sheet, this breaks your story into a new step whenever the camera moves to a different time or place. Each step must further the development of the story from beginning to end. In a feature film, this could break down to 15 steps in Act I, 25 in Act II, and 10 in Act III.

Johnson illustrated how a telephone call which cuts from one speaker to the other can contain quite a few beats. Each beat, when the camera shows us a different character, is its own scene. Be careful not to intrude on the director's prerogative of deciding when to look at (cut to) one character or another.

Mistakes novelists make

1. Don't identify the location too closely. This is someone else's job. You can't show backstory, either.
2. Don't write camera movement into your script. That's the director's and director of photography's job. Likewise, unless you have an excuse of an aerial view to see other characters in motion before we see the main character, skip camera direction.
3. Don't use up white space in your script with stuff you have no control of, and don't be redundant. Johnson advises against parentheticals, as well. They are done sometimes, but she thinks they're messy.

Screenplay format

A script has four parts: scene slug, action, character, dialogue. First give a **scene slug**, identifying the scene's location. After each scene slug, you must give **action**, that is, whatever is done without words, including only the *essential* character descriptions. Keep the action to four lines or fewer. Action takes the most screen time and is the most expensive. **Dialogue** and **character** go together. Dialogue is the least expensive part, using just camera, microphone, actors.

Software tools for screenwriting include FinalDraft, the industry standard. You can also use Scrivener, Celtx, and MSWord, all of which have screenwriting templates. All these software tools employ the four styles: Scene heading (slug), action, character, and dialogue.

Johnson left us with this advice:

- **Read scripts** to learn how to write scripts.
 - <http://scriptcity.com/>
 - <http://www.dailyscript.com/>
 - <http://www.simplyscripts.com/>
- **Submit your work** to competitions: <http://www.inktip.com/> or local pitch festivals in LA, New York City, Atlanta, and Washington, D.C. Visit Amazon Studios, Netflix, and Hulu, all looking for new and innovative scripts.
- Writer's Guild of America <http://www.wga.org> is where you can **register your script** so that it is protected during submissions.

Q&A

Q: What's your favorite project that ever got produced?

A: My favorite was a kids' show about the Egyptian dynasty. It got a lot of interest, but there was no money to produce it.

Q: I've written my screenplay. Now how do I get this produced?

A: Fifty thousand scripts are registered at Writer's Guild each year. I never liked those odds, so I went to cable TV, which has a lot more channels. Even today, and if I weren't so burned out, personally I wouldn't go to Hollywood or cable; I'd go to a streaming service. Or

I'd go to my local state. I'd find a local production house, especially if I had the money to finance it. Then I'd stream it on YouTube, or on my own site, or on public access TV. We don't have to wait for those in ivory towers to produce our work, same way as we don't have to wait for them to put our books up. We can do it ourselves. The most expensive part is people. If you can do it locally with a reputable production company, go to it.

Q: Would you write the same screenplay if your story is animated?

A: [Animators] are the hardest to find. The best idea is to get with an animator from the start.

Q: Is it better to squish five books into one film?

A: TV is very expensive. Episodic storytelling takes longer to produce and builds slower. On the other hand, then you can syndicate the rights into other things.

Q: We write romance series that have different heroes and heroines for each book. Does TV do this [kind of episodic series]?

A: There are shows that do that. Higher-premium cable channels may follow a couple for a season, then a different couple for the next season. Matt McConaughey did one. Or think of *Doctor Who*.

Q: Is it more beneficial to adapt a series with just one couple? Taking different couples but retrofitting it to one couple? Or using all the different plots and all the different characters?

A: That is not what's being done. What I would do is pitch the first couple as something with a long arc like the *Bridgertons*. Use the same family but put a different focus on different characters [for the episodes].



Jennifer Stevenson is the author of five funny series: *Liars in Love*, *Backstage Boys*, *Hinky Chicago*, *Slacker Demons*, and *Coed Demon Sluts*. She is currently co-president of *Book View Café*, the world's oldest, largest, and most prestigious author-owned publishing collective.

What Draft2Digital Built for You This Year

Presented by Kevin Tumlinson

Reported by Janis Susan May Patterson

An award-winning and bestselling novelist, notable podcast host, and content creator as well as director of marketing and PR for Draft2Digital, Kevin Tumlinson spoke on what has been going on at Draft2Digital.

After beginning as a humble aggregator some years ago as an organization where self-publishing writers could upload their books and for a 15% commission have them distributed to a number of retailer sites, now it looks like [Draft2Digital](#) is well on its way to becoming a self-publisher's best friend.

The basics

There has been a lot of behind-the-scenes work at Draft2Digital in a little over a year. There have been updates to the D2D website with fresh copy and images; the D2D blog has been refreshed and rebuilt; and there is loads of new content, including livestreams and podcasts.

In addition, there have been refreshings and updates to some of their best-loved services. For example, D2D offers free conversion and layout—yes, free, even if you don't release through them. They can convert your manuscript from .doc, .docx or RTF into an epub, mobi and print-ready PDF. They even have layout tools that are very user-friendly.

D2D can distribute your pre-formatted epub worldwide to ebook retailers and libraries, and D2D reaches every country on earth. What is good is that while D2D distributes to both familiar and unknown vendors worldwide, you control your distribution. Every vendor is opt-in; your work is never just arbitrarily "put out there." You choose which vendors you want to use. If you decide to use a large number of vendors this makes it much easier on you, as you only have to deal with D2D instead of each individual vendor. Plus, D2D keeps an eye on their vendors; if one becomes less than optimum in their behavior, D2D will unsubscribe all their books from there. D2D is also always on the hunt for legitimate, worthwhile vendors and will ask you if you want to include them in your distribution.

Any online retailer with which D2D works must have your best interests at heart. D2D is picky; a small sample of their list includes Amazon, Apple, Barnes and Noble, Kobo/Kobo+, Tolina, Overdrive, Bibliotheca, Scribd, 24 Symbols, Baker and Taylor, Hoopla, and Vivlio. Your readers can choose where they wish to shop for your books.

Universal Book Links

Through [Books2Read](#), a division of D2D, there are a ton of tools built on their Universal Book Links—a single link that connects your readers to everywhere your book is sold online. This is an evergreen link that you can customize. If you decide later to add a new vendor to your distribution, a quick refresh will put the link for that book with your others.

Draft2Digital Author Pages

If you don't have your own individual website or page, D2D offers a dedicated author page that includes links to your books, your newsletter sign-up, your social media and more. All for free.

Reading lists

D2D offers reading lists where you can create a curated, customizable list of books (yours, anyone else's, or a combination) to use in promotions. You can create a customizable carousel, build lists, and categorize on your author page or on Books2Read.com. You can use affiliate links and even list your book with bestsellers such as Grisham and King, etc. This will give you social credibility and visibility as well as associating you and your books as a part of the big author's world.

Payment splitting

Box sets and collaborations just got a lot easier. D2D will manage splitting the royalties and making sure everyone has their tax requirement in place. There is a system of checks and balances to weed out scammers, so there is a form to go through to set this up. You can even split royalties with a charity if you wish, or have your royalties divided internationally. The only caveat is that the writers must use D2D as the only distributor, as D2D can divide only what goes through their system. If you want your royalties from Amazon divided, you must go to Amazon through D2D; if you go direct to Amazon, D2D cannot include those royalties.

Print

D2D is now offering print, and the features are great. They can do conversion from your ebook file, or you can upload your own file. D2D has beautiful layout templates and a cover converter that can take your ebook cover and create a full paper cover from it. Production quality is high, offering your choice of matte or glossy covers and cream or white paper, meaning your book will have the quality look of traditionally published books. Automated front and back matter is available.

D2D distributes paperbacks to retailers worldwide. If you upload a new book to the process, D2D will upgrade your listings. D2D uses LightningSource for printing, and proof copies are now a flat fee. There is international author copy support and no more surcharges for author copies. One free change **per title** is allowed every 90 days with the cost borne by D2D. If you must change something else during this time period, a system where you can buy discounted "change" tokens is being explored.

Other benefits are improved back cover and spine layouts, your ability to set first page content, and added colophon (publisher's mark) support. If you want to upload a Vellum print file you can bring your own PDF. If you want to leave the ebook solely on Amazon, you can still do the print version through D2D. You can also bring your own cover if you like. D2D is hoping to offer an automatic large print edition in six months or so.

It is recommended that you do not upload a placeholder. You can, however, do preorders. If you create your print PDF on D2D, you can export it to take elsewhere but, unfortunately, currently there is no way to export your cover.

Merchandising and promotions

Merchandising is always a big thing for independent authors. D2D's Merchandising Manager is always actively looking for store promotions that their authors can participate in. You can also schedule promos on your own through their new promotion form. <http://d2d.tips/conference>

If you have an idea for a promotion, you can call the merchandise manager with your ideas (back to school was used as an example) and she will go through the UBLs and reading lists to find people she can contact to participate. This will be a great timesaver and service for self-publishers who are not as connected as they should be in promotion.

Other services

Like many other vendors/aggregators, D2D offers you the choice of a free ISBN or the opportunity to use your own. However, you should use a new ISBN for books done through D2D. While it is not illegal to use your old ISBN, changing the vendor of record can be complicated and takes time.

In short, Draft2Digital is dedicated to making your self-publishing experience as easy and correct as it can possibly be.



Janis Susan May/Janis Patterson is a seventh-generation Texan and a third-generation wordsmith who writes in mystery, romance, and horror. Janis and her husband live in Texas with an assortment of rescued fur babies.

Using Universal Fantasies to Sell Your Books to Anyone, Part One

Presented by Theodora Taylor

Reported by Cidney Swanson

(This was a double session. Part one of this report covers the path that led Theodora Taylor to discover Universal Fantasies and their impact on book sales. Part Two unpacks Taylor's film-clip examples of powerful UFs found in well-known, popular tales.)

After logging time as a music journalist, playwright, and radio writer, Theodora Taylor fell in love with penning hot books with heart. She is an Amazon Top 10 bestselling author, and her 50 Loving States series, featuring alternative heroes and unlikely heroines, has become a one-click stop for thousands of readers.

Bestselling author Theodora Taylor became a six-figure author by accident. In the early part of her career, she felt confused as to why some of her titles were hits while others seemed to miss. Now, nearly a decade into her independent publishing career, she writes in whatever genre and length she likes, confident her readers will gobble up anything she writes. She credits all of this to her discovery of her readers' engagement with stories that employ something she calls "universal fantasies." Using both her own books and film clips to exemplify what this looks like in stories, Taylor reveals practical steps authors can take to ensure their readers, too, will rush to purchase the next book released.

The journey to discovering the power of universal fantasy

In 2011, Taylor landed a traditional contract with a splashy deal, but her title didn't move according to her publisher's expectations. Even worse, a movie offer fell through when the studio in question went under. In a sort of death knell to Taylor's traditional career, her editor was scathing in her estimation of Taylor's second novel. At this point, eager to be in charge of her own career, Taylor pivoted and turned to independent publishing.

She set out to write solely for readers of Multicultural and Interracial Romance, a niche audience with a small but devoted readership. At that time, there was no Romance subcategory on Amazon for Multicultural and Interracial Romance. However, Taylor's audience grew steadily as she pursued this demographic one sale at a time. Within her first year, she was able to surpass her self-imposed goal of \$50,000 in sales. Sometimes, though, her books would flop on release, and she couldn't figure out why—or how to fix it. Frustrated, Taylor brushed up on craft, hoping this would take her sales to the next level. Unfortunately, her sales didn't seem to correlate in any meaningful way to her efforts.

In 2016, Taylor had what she considers her first big hit, a title that landed in the overall Top 100 for the Kindle Store, *His Pretend Baby*. While she was grateful, she still had no idea what had made this book a bestseller and no clue how to replicate its success. For the next two years, she

continued to write but felt increasing anxiety over her inability to predict whether a book would do well or poorly.

The power of UF in ad copy conversion

In 2018, with the goal of becoming a six-figure author, Taylor turned to Facebook ads, enrolling in a course on how to create highly successful ads. The course emphasized targeting an audience hungry for an author's genre. However, Taylor quickly learned that there were no good ways to target her niche readership of Interracial Romance using Facebook. With no better choice available, she had to target more broadly. Of all Taylor's titles, *Her Viking Wolf* had sold the best, without reliance on ads, pre-orders, or newsletter swaps. It felt like the obvious choice for running ads.

One of Taylor's course assignments was to craft multiple versions of ad copy for a single title and then A/B test them. In these tests, two ads that were identical except for ad copy battled it out for supremacy. The winning ad copy would then compete against another version and so on until a clear winner was identified. Taylor quickly found her obvious winner. While most of her (losing) ad copy relied on selling the *tropes* in her book, one version described what was good about the book and why readers would enjoy it. That was her winner.

This Facebook ad went on to generate unprecedented sales despite its inclusion of what she refers to now as a "really terrible cover." What Taylor learned was that successful ad campaigns were not about the characters on the cover or how true-to-trope a book might hew. What mattered was how well her ad tapped into a universal fantasy. Taylor's Facebook ad copy promised readers a tale of a woman pulled out of her ill-fitting life by a beast of a Viking who time-traveled to her era in order to claim her as his fated mate. Although she didn't realize it at the time, Taylor had begun using the Universal Fantasies (UFs) in her story to sell it to readers.

Trope versus universal fantasy

While UFs are related to trope, the two are distinct. Taylor explains that tropes such as the buddy adventure tale, second-chance romance, fish-out-of-water, enemies to lovers and so on describe what a book is; UFs are why a book is good. *Her Viking Wolf* includes Vikings, time travel, and wolf-shifters. However, readers love it not for these things but because of the universal fantasy appeal of a hero who storms into his romantic lead's life and turns it upside down, taking her where she would never have gone on her own. UFs are those things in a story that give readers "the feels," causing readers to connect with the story and characters. Taylor likens a good UF to butter: it is the ingredient that makes everything taste better, thus enabling her to offer books that deliver delicious thrills and feels to readers.

Here is the winning description Taylor employed:

When Chloe Adams was four, her shiftless shifter parents abandoned her on the side of the road.

But now she's reinvented herself as a DIY domestic goddess, and she's engaged to the hottest alpha in Colorado—that is until a large, red-haired, time-traveling Viking werewolf shows up to claim her as his fated mate.

Wait, what?!?!

WARNING: This smoking-hot romance contains jaw-dropping twists and turns, sizzling sex scenes, and nothing less than the adventure of a lifetime. It should only be read by those who like their Vikings red-haired and red hot!

She explains that while she didn't know it at the time, this copy (still in use three years later) contains four UFs in a single description. Bolded for identification, the UFs are:

1. **A woman who was wounded by her parents** is shocked when
2. **a beast of a Viking** shows up in her time and
3. **pulls her out of her ill-fitting life** by
4. **claiming her as his fated mate.**

Caveats for writers creating ad copy

While this breakdown appears simple, Taylor cautions that there are three things that frequently trip writers up as they attempt to market bestsellers. Including UFs in ad copy is not the same thing as telling readers why they *should* read the book. It is not the same thing as telling readers why the book is "good." And it is not saying to readers that because the author's other titles have made lists, this book will be good too.

Rather, ad copy, book descriptions, and all other marketing must show readers why they will enjoy the book. Taylor's simplest definition of universal fantasy is this: *The reason or reasons people enjoy your story.* And her advice when it comes to highly converting ads, blurbs, back cover descriptions, and stellar reviews is this: *Show readers the reason or reasons they will enjoy your book.*

Taylor recognizes that not every romance author includes high-heat sex scenes, and that many authors write outside of romance altogether. To establish a clearer picture of how UFs show up in tales with no heat level at all, Taylor turns to Disney movies and Jane Austen film adaptations, providing extensive examples from several of these. In part two of this report, we will unpack these stories, mining them for their peerless universal fantasies.

Authors can sign up for Theodora Taylor's Substack at <http://7figurefiction.substack.com/>.



Cidney Swanson is an award-winning author of YA Sci-Fi including Kirkus-starred Saving Mars, the Ripple series, and the Thief in Time series. She's also written contemporary YA (the Payback series) and an adult Sci-Fi, So Dark the Sky.

Using Universal Fantasies to Sell Your Books to Anyone, Part Two

Presented by Theodora Taylor

Reported by Cidney Swanson

(Part One of this report covered the path that led Theodora Taylor to discover universal fantasies and their impact on book sales. Part Two unpacks Taylor's film-clip examples of powerful UFs found in well-known, popular tales.)

After logging time as a music journalist, playwright, and radio writer, Theodora Taylor fell in love with penning hot books with heart. She is an Amazon Top 10 bestselling author, and her 50 Loving States series, featuring alternative heroes and unlikely heroines, has become a one-click stop for thousands of readers.

Theodora Taylor defines universal fantasy, or UF, as the reason or reasons people will enjoy an author's story. Using film clips from *Beauty and the Beast*, *Cinderella*, and *Pride and Prejudice*, Taylor provides extensive examples of UFs that readers find it almost impossible to turn away from. She says it is important to note that while many of these UFs would be horrible in real life, in fiction they move books to bestseller lists.

Ten UFs in Disney's live-action *Beauty and the Beast*

1. **Being forcibly removed from a life or place you don't belong:** Belle, clever and well-read, doesn't quite fit within her provincial village. Taylor emphasizes that the appeal of the tale isn't really about being kidnapped. Rather it is about being forcibly removed from a boring life—something many readers fantasize about.
2. **The bully really likes you:** This is terrible in real life, but part of the appeal of *Beauty and the Beast* is found in the bully-beast's infatuation with Belle.
3. **Abuse of power:** The beast uses aggression and power to remove all of Belle's choices. Again, this would be awful in real life, but it is a powerful UF.
4. **The most popular guy/richest guy chooses you:** Technically, the beast is the wealthiest person in Belle's world. There is a primal-preen satisfaction in attracting the attention of the most desirable mate available.

5. **Servants who are delighted to serve:** The song “Be Our Guest” explores this fantasy. Like Batman’s Alfred, these servants are completely trustworthy and provide Belle with needed aid.
6. **A fixer-upper:** Fixer-uppers are irresistible—as HGTV’s longstanding popularity attests. The beast transforms from an illiterate spoiled monster to a humble and self-sacrificing gentleman.
7. **Wounded main character in need of love, healing, and understanding:** The beast, like Jack Ryan, Wolverine, and practically all Sarah J. Maas characters, is damaged goods. Humans like stories where the wounded receive healing.
8. **Not just any gift. The Right Gift:** When the beast gives Belle a library full of books, he proves that he sees her and not just a pretty face.
9. **The love triangle:** Like Bella Swan in *Twilight* or Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger Games*, Belle is being pursued by two potential mates.
10. **A really good makeover:** Belle, like Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady* or the boy in *The Karate Kid*, is transformed. During the ballroom scene, she attains princess-like status.

Taylor points out that transforming into someone you didn’t know you could be is one of the most enduring human fantasies. She quotes screenwriting teacher Robert McKee, who says that a good romance isn’t about two people falling in love, but rather it is about two people becoming who they need to be to *deserve* love.

Bonus UF: **Banging a beast:** Taylor admits this won’t work in every tale for obvious reasons, but that it is a good UF to remember for anyone writing science fiction alien romance.

Five UFs in Disney’s animated *Cinderella*

Universal fantasies abound in this tale. Taylor notes five of them.

1. **Instalove.**
2. **True love match:** Taylor points out that a powerful use of this UF is to have a couple who clearly belong together but can’t be together because one is already in a relationship. Readers will stick around to see the two who ought to be together ending up with one another.
3. **Suffering main character:** In real life, there is often little we can do to relieve suffering. However, within a story, we will keep reading in the hope of seeing that suffering ended once and for all.
4. **Obsessed Prince:** Cinderella’s prince is obsessed with finding a girl he’s only met once. While it could be creepy in real life, a man who will stop at nothing to find his mate is a universal fantasy.
5. **Badass Cinderella:** Taylor sees Cinderella as a badass who saves herself. She’s a heroine who raises a mouse and bird army loyal to her alone. She is a girlboss. Most women dream of getting the chance to save themselves, and in this way, Taylor says the Disney ending works better than the Perrault one. In Disney’s version, the shoe falls and breaks,

but Cinderella has kept the other slipper in a pocket. Cinderella earns her prince and wedding through persistence, another huge UF.

Bonus UF: **Pluck rewarded:** Like Mark Watney in *The Martian*, Cinderella is plucky, and her resourcefulness is rewarded.

UFs in *Pride and Prejudice* film adaptations

Using a clip from the 2005 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, Taylor shows a potent UF in the ball scene where Darcy and his party first appear. A series of visuals establishes Darcy as a powerful man. First the musicians stop playing, then the dancers stop dancing, then the host of the assembly approaches and greets Darcy with a bow, and then everyone bows. Jane and Lizzy titter over the new arrivals as they walk the length of the room. We see Darcy visibly react when he makes eye contact with Lizzy Bennett. Taylor calls this moment “Power Butter”—a sort of ultimate UF where a woman of lower standing compels the attention of a powerful but haughty man.

Taylor points out that in the film adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, very different UFs are at play. Darcy’s ill-judged initial proposal to Elizabeth Bennett is turned on its head in this version of the familiar tale. Lizzy asks Darcy if he was responsible for separating Jane from Mr. Bingley. When Darcy admits he was, and that he takes pride in it, Lizzy has had enough. Instead of standing still to hear him out, she attacks him. The remainder of Darcy’s insulting proposal is carried out while she engages him in combat with deadly weapons. A woman in a corset capable of felling her opponent makes for a compelling UF.

How to make UFs work for you in your career

Taylor is a proponent of outlining before writing. Beyond that, she advocates for creating compelling FB ad copy *before outlining*. By doing this added step before committing to writing a novel, authors can set themselves up for unprecedented success. When Taylor brainstorms her own novels, this is the method she employs. If she can’t come up with FB ad copy that employs a specific UF or two, she moves on to a different story. For authors who want to produce bestsellers, writing a story which can’t be described using its UFs is not worthwhile. UFs are the reason readers enjoy a book. Taylor’s entire marketing strategy centers on showing readers what they will love in her book. Not why they should read it, but why they will enjoy it. Incorporating UFs into a marketing plan from the get-go, Taylor argues, is the most important way to set a book up for impressive sales.

Once she’s got an outline including the overarching UFs, Taylor shifts to making certain she incorporates UFs in every scene. If there are none in a scene, she either adds them or deletes the scene. She acknowledges that some scenes are important for setting up UFs that will pay off later. However, if a scene doesn’t set up or pay off a universal fantasy, she cuts it to a few sentences or a paragraph at most.

Taylor reminds authors that UF is a tool best used alongside time-honored tools such as planned marketing, professional covers, paid editing, newsletters, and constant improvement of craft.

In conclusion, Taylor encourages authors to look to streaming services which show non-American fare; other nations' preferences might provide new ideas for UFs that spark interest on a global level.

Authors can sign up for Theodora Taylor's Substack at <http://7figurefiction.substack.com/>.



Cidney Swanson is an award-winning author of YA Sci-Fi including Kirkus-starred *Saving Mars*, the *Ripple* series, and the *Thief in Time* series. She's also written contemporary YA (the *Payback* series) and an adult Sci-Fi, *So Dark the Sky*.

Finding Your Perfect Match: How to Hire (or be Your Own!) Assistant

Presented by Traci Olsen

Reported by Tawdra Kandle

Traci Olsen has over ten years in publishing, including a long stint at an independent, women-run romance publisher where she learned a lot about marketing, blurb writing, and the various ways supernatural creatures can also head up cool secret societies. Clients include bestselling and debut authors from the Big Three as well as indie publishers.

Hiring an assistant can be a daunting task for any author. Traci Olsen, owner of Flying Buttress Media and personal assistant to two well-known, successful authors, shared tips and strategies for working with an assistant—as well as for making your business better by being your own best assistant.

Olsen kicked off her presentation by unpacking the basic responsibilities that a good assistant should be expected to undertake. These include prewriting (newsletters, social media captions and posts), maintaining a calendar, providing reminders, scheduling and website maintenance, acting as a go-between with author support professionals, agents, and other authors, planning and executing social media, and handling fan mail and interaction.

Of course, the tasks required can vary according to the needs of the author and the talents offered by the assistant. Some assistants also help authors with writing blurbs, brainstorming book- or brand-related merchandise, and plotting out a year of releases, marketing and promotion. Others serve as a buffer between the author and the rest of the professional world.

A personal assistant, as opposed to a virtual assistant, may perform additional in-person functions such as party planning for release events, literary estate planning, filing contracts, filling out forms, attending book signings, and accompanying the author on book tours, acting as an advocate and go-between to keep things moving. Olsen noted that part of her own responsibility includes reading and being familiar with all of the books and characters created by her authors. This allows her to better interact with the super fans and craft more authentic social media posts.

She noted, too, that when working with creatives, assistants can often be the people who free up the authors' time to do things considered more fun. Assistants also, however, sometimes have to wrangle authors to keep them focused and working on what needs to be done.

Olsen urged both authors and assistants to make life easier by using technology whenever possible to help with communication, reminders, and with blocking out time. She uses a wide variety of digital tools to aid in her work as an assistant. She recommended finding or creating and using templates for any task that might be repeated often, including greetings or sign-offs

for all correspondence. These can be adjusted according to the season or anything else going on professionally (such as a book release or sale).

Boomerang is another valuable tool: it can be set up to send an email back to your inbox at a scheduled time as a reminder of something that needs to be done in the future. Olsen also recommended using Trello, Asana or Monday, all of which help with organizing tasks for a group so that all team members can see what is in the process of being worked on and what is finished; it's almost like a giant to-do list or a group Kanban board. Slack and Basecamp are also helpful for team projects as they facilitate interpersonal and group communication.

Google calendars, which are shareable, can make scheduling and communication much simpler. Each entry has plenty of space for details such as links, contacts and locations, and email and/or push notifications can be enabled as reminders.

Olsen shared that her favorite tool for creating graphics, ads, headers and social media page covers is Canva, which offers some of the same advantages as Photoshop but can be more user-friendly. Canva has templates for just about any need, in addition to accent elements, a Pixabay photo library, and a large portfolio of both backgrounds and text fonts.

Regardless of whether you hire an assistant or simply wish to make your own days more productive, Olsen suggested that blocking out times for specific tasks helps to keep a schedule moving. Doing so can increase efficiency by helping you to see where you're dragging things out as well as when a task is complete. While scheduling, it's also helpful to set aside regular time for administrative work like handling quarterly taxes and seeing to invoices—writing those scheduled hours into your calendar just as you might any other appointment.

Olsen referenced the Pomodoro Technique, a time-management tool to help keep you on schedule. When working in Pomodoro, you should set a timer for 25 minutes, during which all social media, emails and phones are turned off, and focus exclusively on the task at hand, whatever that might be. After each 25-minute interval, take a five-minute break before starting again. Use this or any other sprint-like technique to meet not only writing goals but also other publishing-related activities like scheduling social media, developing branding, and answering fan mail.

Olsen also touted the importance of spreadsheets, which she uses for social media scheduling and planning. She looks ahead about a month at a time to note releases, promotions, and sales, as well as holidays both major and minor; sometimes an obscure celebration that has a connection with something in a book can be a great promotion opportunity.

Even if you're not ready to hire an assistant yet, Olsen pointed out, you eventually may come to the point of realizing that it is necessary to delegate work in order to take your author business to the next level, freeing you to write more books and focus on craft. When that happens, there are several factors to take into consideration.

First of all, while it's a good idea to ask other author friends for recommendations, it's important to realize that not every assistant will work well with every author. Discussing time management expectations and a delineation of duties is crucial, especially in the beginning. Once you've found the right person to work with you, it may take time to adjust, even if you've hired a super assistant.

One of the keys to making the author-assistant relationship easy is recognizing what you should delegate and what you should continue to do yourself. Determining this isn't always easy; some authors prefer to hold onto more than others, particularly before they develop full trust in their new assistant. But once you identify what you can let go, it will make the process smoother, hopefully freeing time to allow you to concentrate on the most important task: writing the next book.



Tawdra Kandle is the USA Today bestselling author of more than 100 romances that span genres from contemporary through paranormal. Her engaging and realistic characters bring readers back again and again to devour the steamy love stories she spins.

How to Create a Stunning Book Trailer in Just Minutes

Presented by Kathleen Sweeney and Anthony Ricker

Reported by Harper St. George

Kathleen Sweeney is the customer service manager and marketing lead at Book Brush.

Anthony Ricker is Book Brush's media and video specialist and has 15 years of film and video experience.

The [Book Brush](#) workshop focused on demonstrating a new feature authors can add to their marketing toolbox: the Trailer Creator tool. This feature will help authors create professional-looking book trailers from templates or from scratch, depending on their design skill level and needs. Trailer Creator is available at the Platinum membership level. This article will go step-by-step through the process of creating a book trailer. Please note that all the elements of the trailer are able to be edited in advanced mode. First, we'll take a look at a template accessed in easy mode, before going more in-depth with the advanced section.

Create a book trailer in Easy Mode

Go to the website [Bookbrush.com/welcome](https://bookbrush.com/welcome) and log into your account.

Select Trailer Creator from the button choices.

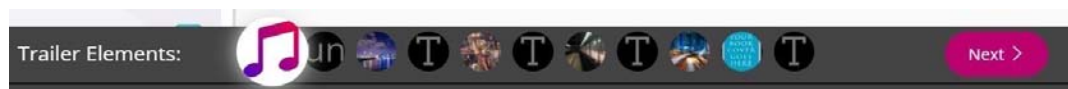


Make sure Easy is selected at the top of the page. The easy creator mode will allow you to select from a range of templates to get you started.

Select an image from the template choices. This will take you to a new page labeled Templates & Projects. The image you selected will be your starting background. The images are sourced from Pixabay.

Click Get Started at the bottom center of the page.

A menu of Trailer Elements appears at the bottom. This is a step-by-step bar that guides you through the process of creating your book trailer.



The first step is choosing your audio. Book Brush has a database of copyright-free music you can choose from, or you can upload your own audio file in the My Music tab. Music is broken down into the following categories: bright, emotional, epic, romantic, dark, and a tab for music you have uploaded. Sample the music and select one by hitting the + button.

Click next.

This is where you will add in another background for the next scene of your book trailer. There is a stock library of video files to use, or you can use your own video. The workshop example searched for the image “football.” Select the video you want, and it replaces the template video.

Click next.

This is where you will add in the text that will appear over your video. Write your text in the workspace. You can drag the text anywhere you want it to appear on the screen. You can also click the corner of the text box and stretch it out to be as wide as you want it to be on the screen. You also have the ability to change the font, size, color, and add effects like shadow.

Click next.

This is where you add in the next video scene of your book trailer. Do another search. The workshop example searched for “office.” Select the video you want, and it replaces the template video.

Click next.

This is where you will add in another text box that will appear over your video, using the instructions above.

Click next.

This is another background for your book trailer. You can search for an image. The workshop example was an image of an office.

Click next.

This is where you will add in another text box that will appear over your video, using the instructions above.

Click next.

This is the last background slot using the template. The workshop example searched for an image of a horizon.

Click next.

This is the end of the book trailer when your book cover appears. Select which book cover you want to display.

Click next.

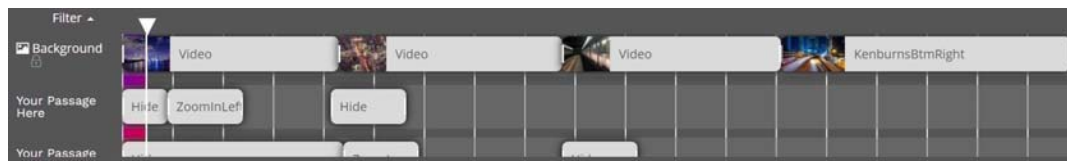
The text here is formatted for your release date to float in.

Save your trailer and then download it.

Using Advanced Mode

The option to switch from easy to advanced mode is always available to you at the top of the screen, so that you can switch modes at any point during the trailer creation process. Switching to advanced mode will bring up the complete timeline of the video showing the

layers of audio, video, and text. This is where you can add in a logo (your own logo or Amazon logo) or a photo. You can also delete or add text boxes in advanced mode.



To add in a photo or logo, select Images at the top and select. In My Images double-click the one you want. Then underneath you can add in an animation. This is where you select where you want the image to float in during the trailer.

In advanced mode, you can add in a lot of video. For example, you can add in up to two minutes of video, or cut down your trailer to only one or two video images. You can also manipulate the length of time a particular image or video is displayed by dragging the selection to the point you want it to appear in the timeline.

Advanced mode also allows you to put in a community stamp (Ex: Amazon.com). It will stay there throughout the entire video unless you manually move it in the timeline to where you want it to appear in the trailer.

Easy mode is a great place to start for templates. However, once you get the hang of book trailer creation, you can start building your trailer from scratch in advanced mode.

To watch a video tutorial on how to create a book trailer using Book Brush, [click here](#) to head over to the Book Brush YouTube channel.

Best practices advice

- Do not use too many words in your video. It makes it difficult for your audience to read.
- Trailer Creator will allow you to blur the backgrounds and add filters to images to make text easier to read.
- Do not use too many animations at once. The purpose of an animation is to draw the eye of your audience. If there are too many moving parts at once, then it is difficult to know what to look at, which leads to a frustrating experience.
- Book trailer templates are generally set to 60 seconds or less. This helps ensure readers don't lose interest before the end of your trailer. However, you can make your trailers longer by using advanced mode.
- If you are only using one video in your trailer, then you can use Custom Creator for adding animation and text instead of Trailer Creator.

Using Custom Creator video instead of Trailer Creator

Select Custom Creator.

Select Facebook square ad size, which is also Instagram square size.

Select a video. The workshop example was "fast space."

Tools on the right-hand side (eyeball tool) allow you to grab the corner to make it bigger and adjust the image to fill up the space and center it where you want.

Click Book Template on the left and upload your book cover.

Add text. The workshop example was “Coming in 3 Days.”

Preview by hitting the play button at the top.

Add animation from the bottom left. For example: Shake and Duration to animate the text.

Click Book and then Add Animation. Select Hide Animation and then Duration. Hit the + sign to add in another animation. The example was a jack-in-the-box.

New and coming soon to Book Brush

Animated email signatures were released recently. Follow these steps to use them:

Select Custom Creator > Community Templates > Collections (static and animated signatures) > Select one > Modify the template with your information.

For example, click on Book and select Switch Cover to select your own cover > Add Animation. For example, you can choose to fade in a photo to add in a different element to your signature.

There are tutorials over on the [Book Brush YouTube channel](#) that will take you through the steps of importing the animated signature into your email program.

Book Brush will soon have quick video ad mockups available for social media. All you need to do is select a quick video and simply add in your text and book cover. The workshop example was a long plane ride with an airplane photo and engine noise. A book cover was added along with text that read “Long plane ride? Grab a good book.”



*Harper St. George writes historical romance set in various time periods from the Viking Era to the Gilded Age. Her latest series is *The Gilded Age Heiresses*. She lives in the Atlanta area with her family.*

Amazon is Changing ... Again

Presented by Dave Chesson

Reported by Sidney Swanson

Dave Chesson is the creator of Kindlepreneur.com, a website devoted to teaching advanced book marketing, which even Amazon KDP acknowledges as one of the best by telling users to “gain insight from Kindlepreneur on how you can optimize marketing for your books.” His tactics help both fiction and nonfiction authors of all levels get their books discovered by the right readers.

In order to predict where Amazon is heading next year and into the future, author and entrepreneur Dave Chesson uses a server-based system that collects data on Amazon every second of the day. He has a finger on the pulse of the retail giant and works actively to figure out where the company is going in the future. The question he asks when it comes to interpreting Amazon’s actions is simple: What makes Amazon more money?

How Amazon changes their site

Amazon likes to test everything, all the time, utilizing A/B testing. In this kind of testing, one group of customers sees option A while another group of customers sees option B. The company does A/B testing across multiple variables, including using different IP addresses, testing in different regions of the country (and world), testing sorted by browsers customers use, by computer OS, and by consumer shopping habits.

Because the tests are done in so many different ways, authors in chat groups will often report seeing different screens. Chesson cautions that changes seen by one person will not always mean Amazon is rolling out a permanent alteration. Rather, they are testing to see if the “A” iteration or the “B” iteration will result in an increase of revenue. Subtle changes, at Amazon’s rate of sales, can result in huge profits. Chesson cites a rumor that Amazon once spent \$7 million to determine the exact shade of yellow-orange on their buy button which would induce the highest click rate—and Chesson does not doubt the truth of the rumor.

Since NINC 2020, Chesson has observed the following changes to Amazon’s sale pages, categories, and formatting, as well as the release of its new program, Kindle Vella.

Amazon sales page

Amazon has recently been making what appear to be permanent changes to the filters displayed down the left sidebar for keyword search results. This newer format is probably being used to determine what a reader will be most likely to purchase. The sidebar’s new options include check boxes for popular book series within the search result. Chesson’s company continues to watch whether these keyword searches and follow-up sales are well-correlated.

Amazon has also been A/B testing the row of books on an individual title's sales page which displays below the book's description. In the past few years, it has been variously titled as "Sponsored products related to the item," "Products related to this item," "People who bought this also bought," "Products related to this item," "Customers who bought this item also bought," and "More items to explore." Increasingly, Amazon seems to be favoring the placement of sponsored products in this position rather than "also bought" items. Whereas in the past, sponsored products were indicated with "Sponsored" in bold text at the top, this has changed, and the change appears to be sticking, for now. In the present display, customers are more likely to see "Products related to this item" in bold with the word "Sponsored" just below this label in a significantly smaller, non-bold font.

Amazon is also experimenting with changes to the section labeled "Product Details," which includes such things as ASIN, publication date, number of pages, sales rank, and so on. Heatmapping (privately sponsored testing for eye movement on the page) indicates that this area commands very little customer attention. Instead, Amazon has increasingly displayed a top file system, which appears as a condensed, horizontal, icon-filled image showing some of the same information.

In a welcome change, Amazon has now opened A+ Content for use by independently published authors. A+ Content represents a new opportunity for these authors to display content under the bolded heading "From the Publisher" found below the rows of books and above the product details section. Chesson speculates that Amazon is aware this kind of content helps convert sales. He warns however, that most authors should only use it if they can make something very snazzy using a great designer. He expects that companies such as Book Brush will shortly offer a template for A+ Content, at which point it would make sense for most authors to begin displaying this content.

Category changes

Since the last NINC conference, Amazon has added 348 new categories while retiring 247. Chesson notes that once a category is retired, it does not completely disappear. Now, instead of showing the (former) category label, a number displays.

Consistently, Amazon is redirecting searches as typed in by readers. For instance, there used to be both a Sci-Fi Arthurian and a Fantasy Arthurian, but now there is only Fantasy Arthurian. A customer who types in "Sci-Fi Arthurian" in the search box will be redirected to "Fantasy Arthurian." This change is made without getting rid of the category path, though, and it may result in an author finding that their Sci-Fi book is now listed as Fantasy.

Amazon has also removed a previous keyword requirement. Authors are no longer forced to use certain keywords in order to be listed in a category. Because authors can now request categories, there is no need for the former system. Additionally, when an author chooses their BISACs, these do not translate into inclusion in certain categories.

It does appear that categories will continue to be used. To do this now, Amazon indexes for all possible iterations of the keywords typed into the seven keyword boxes. The use of highly specialized phrases may result in a book's listing higher in the category. However, it may list in

fewer locations. Chesson suggests using a combination of highly specific keywords and broader, more commonly searched phrases in order to rank as high in as many searches as possible.

Formatting changes

In 2020, Amazon began recommending ePub files rather than the mobi files they previously required authors to submit. In 2021 they stopped accepting mobi files, stating, “We listened to your feedback and are making it simpler to publish books on Kindle.” Chesson explains that while authors do not currently need to change older files uploaded in mobi format, the change is required in order to update a file. He suggests keeping “update files to epub format” on a to-do list as Amazon may require it in the future. This could happen with an abbreviated deadline, as per CreateSpace.

Another formatting change happened in 2021 when Amazon stopped allowing authors to request the number of pages to be listed on the sales page. Most likely, Amazon wants book and ebook to be identical. Now authors must program specific locations in a book which must correspond to pages in the print edition. Chesson’s formatting program Atticus will program these page numbers into books.

New programs: Kindle Vella

Chesson feels Vella, the new serialization platform, is too new to evaluate properly. It may work well on Amazon U.S. since it is a model that has been wildly successful in Asian markets. Chesson surmises that Amazon wants to compete with Wattpad for readers of short-segment fictionalizations of long-format works. In three years, Wattpad’s valuation increased 50%; it was recently sold to Naver in South Korea. While Vella is currently only rolled out to U.S. readers, Chesson points out that both short-length manga clips and short stories are doing well in the Asian market. If Amazon were to open Vella in these markets, it might be worth it for U.S. authors to invest in Asian language translations. Should NINC authors participate for now? If you are a new author, it might be worthwhile, but if you have a good system in place, Chesson suggests simply keeping an eye on it for now.



Cidney Swanson is an award-winning author of YA Sci-Fi including Kirkus-starred *Saving Mars*, *the Ripple* series, and *the Thief in Time* series. She’s also written contemporary YA (*the Payback* series) and an adult Sci-Fi, *So Dark the Sky*.

Level up Your Author Business with Data Tracking

Presented by Pete Fu

Reported by Tawdra Kandle

Pete Fu, an Ivy League college graduate and author of a wide variety of genre fiction, is also a co-founder of [Publishwide](#), a recent newcomer to the book sales reporting world. His workshop at the NINC conference detailed the importance of using, tracking and interpreting data as an author entrepreneur.

Peter Fu posited that data, on its own, is absolutely useless to authors. When those authors can apply the right information to the raw data, however, it's easier to draw reasonable conclusions, thus bringing meaningful and insightful impact to their business decisions.

The first step in this process is to label data as information before applying knowledge to discern how the various pieces of data relate to each other. With this understanding, it's easy to see which levers authors should push to confidently go forward with meaningful impact to the bottom line.

For example, which ads on which advertising platforms are having a positive effect on which books and/or series of books? Where is ad spend outpacing resulting sales? Where are clicks converting to sales?

Data, however, is often a source of problems for creatives, including authors. The amount of information can be overwhelming, with sales numbers pouring in from multiple book vendors in addition to daily ad spend, cost per click or per view, demographics, newsletter opens and clicks ... the list is endless. Some of the reporting can be very complex, and analyzing it often requires preformatting as not all platforms present data the same way, while some do not even offer the same classification of data. The task of organizing and interpreting the numbers can be an enormous time suck for authors.

When authors are drowning in data coming from so many sources, it's easy to forget that facts and figures are meant to be a source of value to businesses, not a cause of stress.

Fu noted that in a perfect world, data collection should be automated as much as possible so that finding and viewing your book and ad stats is easy, with a minimum time investment. That data should also be normalized as it is being ingested for the purpose of easy comparison. Authors need to be able to build on top of raw data, and in order to do that, they must be able to visualize data in order to quickly gain deeper insight.

Raw data, Fu explained, only tells part of the larger story. It's important to normalize those raw numbers because switching between datasets can be confusing, and there are times when authors need to build custom variables in order to gain deeper insight. Visualization of compatible data can help the user identify trends quickly.

In the past, authors have relied on a variety of different companies to serve their data, though those reports tended to be centered on only one vendor (or a very few) and did not include ad spend as an option. Publishwide, a newer player in the publishing world, helps authors collect and normalize numbers in order to better and more easily perform data analysis.

The service connects and delivers sales and expense data from KDP, Barnes & Noble, Apple Books, Draft2Digital, Facebook Ad Manager and AMS. Custom dashboards and available variables allow authors to filter, group, and sort data. Publishwide syncs with the various platforms every two hours, providing updated and accurate information. Available as a downloadable laptop or desktop program, Publishwide can also be added as a Chrome extension.

While the service doesn't currently offer an automatic interface with Kobo or Google Play, it is possible to download reports from those retailers and then upload to Publishwide, customizing the columns as needed. After this is done once, the program remembers and populates the same columns.

The reports from Publishwide allow all authors to see how much money they've earned—and spent—per book with greater accuracy than simply viewing charts that book vendors and advertising platforms offer. Fu pointed out that in particular, data delivered on the AMS dashboard can often be unreliable and inaccurate, which can lead to less-than-optimal marketing decisions.

Fu presented a case study that illustrated the value of normalized data. His charts for a recent book release included impressions, total royalty, clicks, net profit, and spend on a single book. Examining the daily numbers gave the author in this study the ability to determine which advertising strategies were performing well and which were spending money without an accompanying positive result.

Additionally, Publishwide can normalize and combine different sets of raw data to offer a clear view and comparison of strategies. For instance, Fu showed a slide that included several charts displaying impressions of Facebook ads versus Amazon ads, paid versus organic royalty, Amazon ad clicks versus Facebook ad clicks, net profit by country, and Amazon ad spend versus Facebook ad spend. Being able to see these bar graphs side by side makes it much easier to determine a strong and informed course of action for promotion and marketing, Fu remarked.

In the course of responding to audience questions, Fu confirmed that authors can use custom variables to create series reports as well as additional information necessary to small presses and multi-author projects such as anthologies, shared worlds, and shared trope series. The custom variables also allow authors to see sales and royalties by format, including paperback, hardback, and ebooks.

Some attendees expressed concern over security, and Fu explained that Publishwide does not hold login information for book vendors or ad platforms. Instead, the program uses authentication cookies which are stored on the authors' local machines, not on any other server. Only post-process data is retained by Publishwide.

The cost for using Publishwide is the same regardless of the number of books for which the author requires data.

Fu shared that as Publishwide is still growing and evolving, the small team in charge of development and customer service welcomes client interaction, including suggestions and requests for additional functionality.

Finally, Fu offered a special **two-month free trial** of Publishwide exclusively for NINC members. This includes access to all features of the program. To access this trial, go to publishwide.com and use code NINC2021. This sign-up code is valid until November 23, 2021.



Tawdra Kandle is the USA Today bestselling author of more than 100 romances that span genres from contemporary through paranormal. Her engaging and realistic characters bring readers back again and again to devour the steamy love stories she spins.

The Myth of Intention

Presented by Becca Syme

Reported by Michele Dunaway

Becca Syme is a Gallup-Certified Strengths Coach and holds a master's degree in Transformational Leadership. She's coached thousands of authors at all levels and hosts the popular Quitcast for Writers YouTube channel.

For the presentation and a link/code to take the Clifton Strengths test, and to download a **free copy** of *Dear Writer, You're Doing It Wrong*, please go to <http://betterfasteracademy.com/nin1>.

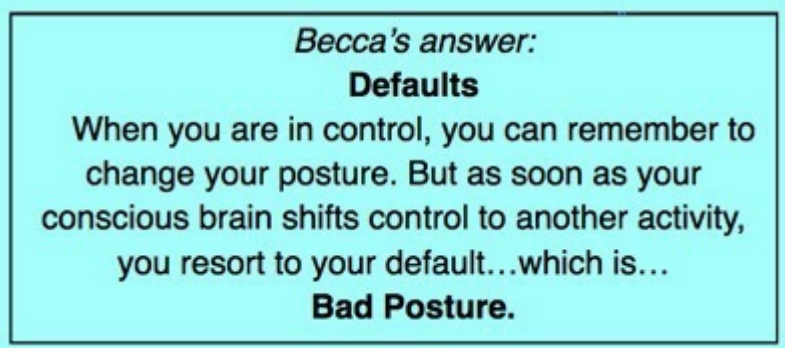
Becca Syme started by saying her goal was that we'd enjoy ourselves so much we wouldn't remember we were here. She also said to approach her, and that goes for those of you reading this.

The presentation began with a question: Who wants better posture?

The next slide: How many of you straightened up?

Syme then asked this writing or thinking prompt: Why don't you have better posture? The audience shouted out such things as computer, cell phones, laziness, age, habit, awareness, and boobs.

Syme clicked to the next slide which read:



Becca's answer:
Defaults
When you are in control, you can remember to change your posture. But as soon as your conscious brain shifts control to another activity, you resort to your default...which is...
Bad Posture.

Syme added, "As a success coach, my goal is to get you to your goal."

We become conscious when prompted, but we will resort back to our default settings. Think of it like this: Every decision ever made is a penny in the bank of your decisions. The more pennies, the more hardwired your patterns become.

She shared the quote from Don Yaeger, best known for *Great Teams*: “Decisions are the frequent fabric of our daily design.”

“Notice how fabric is hard to rip since it’s been woven together,” Syme said. “We all intuitively understand our habits. We are fairly conscious.”

Syme then pointed out how we spend more than half of our waking hours staring at screens. We’ve narrowed ourselves to a linear rather than 360-degree world.

You make choices all day long, and have since birth. Those choices make patterns, and those patterns set defaults.

Two years ago, Syme asked herself how many choices we have control over. “We make tons of unconscious decisions,” she said.

Conscious decisions include what clothes you choose to wear. Semi-conscious decisions are like reaching for our phone when bored.

Syme said that when she’s in the airport, “I watch people to see who can go more than 10 seconds when in line without reaching for their phone. I just watch how defaulted people are.”

Syme uses the word “semiconscious” because, “We have some ability over those choices.”

But some choices are cemented.

Breathing, for example, is automatic decision-making. Same for your heart beating. Your body simply does them and you cannot decide not to do them.

Trying to change patterns—cemented behaviors—is hard. This is why her Better/Faster Academy works with how we are already wired.

A common thread she sees is “Why can’t I do this thing?” And the reasons we tell ourselves are because we are lazy, stupid, or we didn’t want it enough.

None of these are true. But people believe it.

When you plan, what does it look like? Everyone plans differently. To plan you might:

- Imagine things you want
- Make a to-do list
- Print/buy calendars
- Find/learn rubrics
- Set big-picture goals

On find/learn rubrics you’re looking for a silver bullet. A big picture goal might be making six to seven figures.

Think of New Year’s resolutions. While Syme said she was not talking about smart goals, she did want to look at how we know if we can accomplish the goal we set. She gave examples of resolutions as “I want to work out more,” “I want to write six books,” and “I want to make seven figures.”

Syme asked, “In that moment, when you set the plan or the New Year’s resolution, how badly do you want that thing on a scale of 1-10?”

In that moment, she said, “It’s a 10. I set the intention that I want it. There’s literally an industry based around this. But the next day, how bad?”

How about February 1? Very few are still at a 10. July 1? There are many reasons why we don't want it. Often it's because we have not succeeded. We've given up and set a new intention. That's not necessarily a bad thing. We get too far from the 10 and we blame ourselves, give up, stop and start over.

What we really have is a failure to understand change management.

Syme then had the audience see how many can maintain perfect posture to the end of the session.

The Myth of Intention is: Setting the Intention (or having the desire/will) is enough to make the plan get executed. Completing an intention is not a discrete action. It is a system with separate functions.

A discrete action is one that you can take that will not impact anything else.

Planning is a system with separate functions.

A system is:

1. Separate, connected parts
2. Compelled process (internal or external)
3. Bounded function
4. Serves one purpose

Example, a circulatory system. Its boundary is the body around it. It's an internal system. It's motivated by keeping you alive. Another example, a traffic system. It's motivated by drivers. It's external. It's bounded by the city.

Actualizing a plan:

1. Will, Plan, Execute
2. Internally motivated; Externally motivated
3. Interruptible
4. To complete tasks

Put both together it looks like this.

A system is:

1. Separate, connected parts
2. Compelled process (internal or external)
3. Bounded function
4. Serve one purpose

Actualizing a plan:

1. Will, Plan, Execute
2. Internally motivated, Externally motivated
3. Interruptible
4. To complete tasks.

A system of planning exists but it is interruptible. Boundaries are theoretical. External world can impact. Purpose of plan—get things done.

There are three reasons plans fail:

1. Separate functions
2. Cemented patterns
3. Misunderstand the nature of planning

Separate functions

Only about 15-18% of the population is naturally able to have these internally motivated self-functioning systems where “to will” naturally leads “to execute.” This means only 15-18% can actualize a plan by themselves.

The reason why you might not be able to execute is why Syme asks her clients about their Clifton Strengths, or their kids, or their day job. So many things can impact the system. Just because a plan is on paper doesn't mean it works—although it does for some. People compare themselves to others who can (those 15-18%). Syme points out that not all execution systems are internally self-sustaining or functioning.

In fact, only roughly another 25% are good at two of the three (intention/plan/execute). But the vast majority have an over-functioning part of the system that requires some kind of external intervention.

The one (intention/plan/execute) we are really good at becomes hyperfunctioning, like our plans to make plans.

Syme says when you have an “over-functioning” part you may say things like:

- “I plan plans but never complete them.”
- “My plans always change.”
- “I am so driven to finish I don't adapt.”
- “I have big dreams that never come to fruition.”

These separate sections (will/plan/execute) are a system together. It means you can't expect “setting an intention” to naturally produce “making plans” or “executing plans.”

The remainder of the people need external help. You're not flawed. You're not broken. Your system needs tweaking.

A failure to execute a system does not mean you will not succeed. The bad news though is that it does mean you will not succeed alone.

Cemented patterns

We often ask ourselves, “Why haven't I been good at this?” Syme used the example of a pretend intention of writing on vacation.

Set the intention: I want to write on vacation.

Plan the plan: I plan to get up early every morning.

Then she goes on to show a slide saying, “First morning, everything is great. Everyone is tired from traveling. I get up and write at 5 a.m. All is well.”

However, the second morning the family has decided to go to Disneyland early to avoid the

crowds. You start at 6 a.m. with your family to get ready and go. This cuts into your ability to get up early enough to write. Now someone else's needs, Syme said, "are in my plan."

You have a cemented neural net about how to care for children, so you make decisions against the writing plan instead of against your neural net. When you do, you say things like, "We are here for a reason" or "We spent all this money" or "It's the best strategic decision."

Would you even think of going to the park at 10 a.m.? No.

No choice exists in a vacuum. (Syme had the audience repeat this three times.)

But because of this, you've now missed a day in the plan for writing by getting up at 6 a.m. for the park, so you've missed an execution. The plan is ruined. Now all is ruined.

You are more likely to take the "this one is ruined" philosophy of black-and-white thinking if you didn't make concrete/big picture plans. The danger in this is after a failure to execute we often throw out everything for a new silver bullet.

Either way, you now feel like your plans failed because you didn't take into account your cemented neural nets.

In the moment, your intention to write was not enough to overcome the system of your thinking, or the system of your family. You think: if your kids are super active, you can't ask them to sit around so you can write.

You were too far from 10 to expect the intention to be enough to self-generate. You think, "Want to write and go to park, got to get up." You are not at a 10 to write. You are at a 10 to get your family to the park. Cemented patterns override intentions.

Let's say you want to write 12 books in a year? What are the cemented patterns that may interrupt this?

1. Internal processes
2. External environment
 - Should write anywhere and at any time (This is the Reason, capital T, capital R).
3. Multitasking capacity
 - If I've never done this, won't work.
4. Rhythm of my family system
 - I go when my sister asks me out to dinner.
 - I value my relationships.
5. Responsiveness
6. Change in plans
 - Example: March 2020

The less accessible any particular pattern is, the less likely I'm going to be able to change it. Especially if it's part of a self-generating system (friend system, day job, family system). These want you to be the same. Systems excel at inertia.

Cemented patterns are environmental/systemic and some of them are neurological. It's also worth thinking about every part of your life as a system of self-sustaining choices rather than "I can just choose not to eat this candy bar, Becca."

Misunderstanding of planning

Are all plans meant to be executed? No. Why you plan is different for everyone.

Reasons people plan:

1. To prioritize action by intuition
2. To set aspirations high
3. To realistically set up a process of actions that they will accomplish

Almost all commercial planning systems that exist are for reason number three above.

Planning is not righteous. "To fail to plan is to plan to fail" is a myth for at least 40% of the population, especially when 50% of us are not wired to plan. Again, planning does not have to lead to execution. We plan to clear and to prioritize. Most likely you are already intuitively doing the right thing for you.

Also, if you aren't one of the 15-18% of the population who has a self-generating system, then you have to find support for the part of your system that's not self-generating.

Ask these questions:

1. Are "will, plan, execute" connected for you? How closely connected to you are they?
2. Are you internally or externally motivated?
3. Is there something interrupting your system?

Where do I need support? Planning is always interruptible. You have to compensate for interruptions.

Moral to story: don't write on a Disney vacation.

Seriously, first, you may need support. Maybe an assistant, accountability partner, coach, partnership, or family systems.

Second, which is the painful part and the bad news, you may need to adjust your expectations. Do you fall prey to the "anyone can do anything" fallacy? Do you expect something of yourself you can't give? Are you ignoring your cemented patterns? The system, not desire and motivation, is the issue. Are you trying to change too much? Percentage is less than 5% a year that any adult behavioral change has staying power. We think every choice exists in a vacuum. It doesn't.

Third, you may need cues. With reasonable expectations, with a fair understanding of your system, you may just need cues.

Syme takes the audience back to the posture check: systems, cemented patterns, and myth of intention.

Why is your posture bad? System—half your life is on screens. Cemented patterns—your muscles and core support. Myth of intention—telling myself I don't want it bad enough.

She then takes us through an exercise her physical therapist taught her: YLTW. Hold your arms up in the shape of a Y for 20 seconds, then lower to an L for 20, then straight out to your sides so your body forms a T for 20, and then make a W by bringing elbows to your sides with your hands up for 20. You have to strengthen your system.

It's the same process for when we want to change us or our systems:

1. Intention/awareness
2. Plan
3. Execution/will

Get outside support.



Michele Dunaway writes contemporary romance and teaches full time high school English and journalism. She's currently at work on two new series.

YouTube for Authors

Presented by Sarra Cannon

Reported by Jennifer Stevenson

Sarra Cannon is the indie author of more than 25 novels. She helps fellow authors put joy and creativity at the forefront. To help with this, she hosts the Heart Breathings YouTube channel, focusing on productivity and building positive momentum.

Sarra Cannon declares that YouTube completely changed her life. “I wish I’d started earlier than I did. It has impacted my joy, my career, opportunities, and my communities. I wanted to be an ambassador for bringing joy and creativity to your career. I’m also a planner girl.” She has two YouTube channels, the most successful being Heart Breathings, with 46,400 subscribers.

She started [Heart Breathings](#) as a way to share her advice about self-publishing with the public. At first, she tried to make it perfect, but that was overwhelming. Her goal now is to take some of the fear away from that, to give authors strategies, talk about equipment, and make it easier. Her handout for everything you might need to do your own YouTube channel, and a workbook questionnaire to help you choose content directions, are available via links in Resources at the end of this article.

Her second channel, [Sarrra Cannon](#), is a live chat for an hour where she talks to fans, including live video, with 6,870 subscribers from her core fan base. She grows her fan base and sells merch and paperbacks [here](#).

The branding is very different between her indie author advice channel and her fan channel.

Cannon credits many benefits to her YouTube effort. It builds community, promotes awareness of her brand and helps sell books, because people see not just her covers but who she is as a person. Doors open to speaking opportunities, and vendors and advertising channels such as BookBub and Book Brush reach out to her and ask her to try a new product, hoping that she will share information about it with her community.

Cannon believes that YouTube allows her to give back to her community, an essential ingredient for audience building. During the pandemic, all her fans were scared and stuck at home. She wrote stories and read them aloud the next day, live. She wrote a 90,000-word novel that way, writing that night, then reading the piece the next day. It was among her most rewarding YouTube experiences. The recordings of these YouTube readings are still popular online. The project “didn’t hurt my sales of that book. Everyone there bought the ebook and the paperback, because they wanted to support it.”

Authors on YouTube call themselves AuthorTube, an informal term, not a brand name.

What type of AuthorTube content do you want to do?

Cannon does three kinds: Vlogs, educational content, and promotional content.

Vlogs offer a slice of the writer's life. For example, Cannon made *The NaNoWriMo Diaries*, where she made 30 days of daily vlog. "I failed NaNoWriMo but won the vlog." Cannon shares her kids and home. Other authors may want to share only "authory things."

For this vlog, she made an expertly edited branding intro video. This video offers a clip of what the episode is like, and has music running over it. "It was more expensive to create than the darned vlog."

For an educational blog, you might offer episodes on how to do specific things, episodes on craft, or publishing. Some authors script their videos. "I just use an outline and let my mouth run." For example, she did an eight-part video series on how to plan a novel series. Her intro used a graphic with music only about five seconds long.

Music on YouTube indicates your brand. Cannon plays only her branding music, which she commissioned from an expert. For the class on series planning she had a unique intro video made.

For her **educational video series**, *What's In My Planner Bag*, she used a mirrorless camera. ("Mirrorless" refers to optical properties in the camera mechanism.) Unlike her usual ring-lit videos, the *Planner Bag* video series uses natural light, which blurs the background and makes it look "more professional."

A third use for AuthorTube is **promotional**. Try chapter readings, book trailers, unboxings, and cover reveals. Cannon put her bestselling *Shadow Demons Saga* into video, where she read it aloud on YouTube. Many fans have read the books because they discovered it through the free online readings. Last October, she held a 12-day "Spooktacular" of spooky stuff because she writes witches. Every single day, the subject tied into one of her books. She ran sales and sold t-shirts.

When Cannon reads aloud, she doesn't look into the camera. She reads live, and 100 to 200 people come and chat. She reads and monitors the chat at the same time, "which takes some practice." She talks for a few minutes, reads for 20 minutes, then she talks at the end about what inspired her to write this, or about the process. Between 1,000 and 2,000 fans have watched each recording; the work "has legs."

YouTube takes three to four hours a week. It's a big investment with big benefits. Have a plan! Below (**Resources**) is a workbook that can help you journal about how to decide what to do.

Brainstorm these questions: What's my goal? What do I hope to gain? How do I hope to serve or entertain others? Do I want to build a community? Sell merch? Make income from it? Inspire other authors? How can I entertain or serve others? What can I give back? What type of content do I want to create? What do I enjoy consuming? Also, what am I most careful about sharing? How private am I? Are you worried about showing up well on video? You can show your hands, or show slides. Or you can just not worry about it. You want viewers to tune in every week. What will they find interesting and helpful? When you focus on them, you find your success.

Equipment

You could spend \$10,000 or do it totally for free. All that's required is a camera, microphone, and internet access. Upgrade your equipment incrementally. "Perfect is the enemy of done."

Camera: If you use your phone camera, turn it landscape, not portrait. Most phones have pretty good cameras and mics in them. You could add a lavalier mic. You can also use an iMac webcam, or a webcam attached to your computer like a Logitech 920, for \$120. A laptop camera is usually too grainy. HD or 4K aren't necessary.

Lighting: Cannon recommends lighting "soft boxes," about \$100 on Amazon, with CFL bulbs for full-face video. For top-down lighting showing a tabletop and your hands, use a ring light, \$90 for a big one that stands on a tripod, \$25 for a tabletop box. "Nature's lighting is always the best."

Microphones: Cannon recommends a lavalier mic, which clips onto your clothes, for \$9 on Amazon. She uses an audio jack plug-in that could be adapted to plug into your phone (\$3 or \$4). For sitting down, she recommends a Blue Yeti, \$150 to \$170, and a \$50 model for podcasting. This is a condenser mic which will reduce editing. If you are using a mirrorless camera for fancier work, you will need a mic that goes on your camera, such as for educational videos. You will also want a popscreen, which filters out extreme plosives (spikes in low frequencies made by saying certain letters such as T, K and P) and sibilants (hissing sounds).

Hardware: You will need a 50-terabyte external hard drive to hold large video files, which can run 20G+ per video. Store them off your desktop, because the more video you save on your computer, the slower the computer runs. If you are using a mirrorless camera, you will need a 128G Sandisk card.

Video software: iMovie if you have a Mac. It's free, simple, and user friendly. There are many videos on YouTube that teach how to use it.

YouTube has their own [free creator studio](#), although editing there can be frustrating if you have a slow internet connection.

[Adobe Premiere Pro](#) is handy if you already have an Adobe subscription, although there can be a steep learning curve. [Premiere Rush](#) is easier.

[Wondershare Filmora](#) is free, and so easy her five-year-old uses it. Sometimes the audio and video get out of sync and need editing.

[Lightworks LWKS](#).

FinalCut Pro, about \$300.

Image creation

Branded introduction and the end screen identify your company and supply "backmatter." When you upload your video, YouTube gives you a chance to insert some endscreen matter. You can add a preview of what you want them to watch next, or YouTube will select what subscribers will probably pick next. For creating this material, Canva is easy, either paid or free. Adobe Photoshop is the most expensive alternative. The thumbnail image you use for your YouTube avatar can be created there. Plan, set up, and prepare the shot for the thumbnail; don't phone it in.

Music

Use stock music; it's like using stock photos on your covers. Some places to get music:

- YouTube's [audio library](#)
- [Loom](#) is music generating software
- RFMNCM or Royalty Free Music No Copyright Music (do a search with this phrase)
- [Premium Beat](#), a Shutterstock company, which sells royalty-free (\$20 per cut) music clips to fit your brand
- [Epidemic Sound](#) is Cannon's favorite. You may play two or three different songs in a single vlog. For a \$15 a month subscription, you have access to tens of thousands of different tracks. Sign up, make wish lists, and download what you need. She has two YouTube channels, so she needs two subscriptions to the software. But you can also use it on Instagram, Facebook, and other social media. Attach the proprietary links whenever you download and use the clip; in this way, it is checked automatically for legal use. What you have used in the past is still yours, but you can't continue to use a clip to create new things after your subscription ends.

Screen recording software

Quicktime Player is available for Mac, Quicktime for PC. You can also use Zoom by sharing your screen on Zoom, and then recording that.

[Streamyard](#) – Cannon uses this software for live videos. It pulls commenters' comments up onto the screen so the audience can see them, and you can use it on Facebook. With Streamyard (\$20/month) you can go live in three different media at once.

Analytics and tools

Do your research! Cannon recommends [TubeBuddy](#), an extension for your browser with many functions:

- Compare your stats.
- Search for other channels and click on a channel to use comparison bar charts to see where they might connect with your content and traffic.
- Search for keywords or topics on YouTube and study what's worked for other channels similar to yours.
- Make a list of 10 or more YouTube channels with similar interests that might appeal to your ideal subscriber. See what's successful for them.

Launch strategy

Choose seven strong topics that will appeal to your ideal audience, chosen from your research.

Outline, record, and edit all seven videos.

Take notes on your process, because you'll want that data.

Rapid release those seven videos in seven days. This "seed launches" your channel.

Share each video on social media.

Always offer an opt-in. Encourage your newsletter subscribers to watch and subscribe on YouTube.

Monetizing

Participate in the YouTube partner program, which requires 1,000 subscribers and 4,000 "watch hours" in the past year. You must have no "strikes" against you for content, i.e., don't break YouTube content guidelines.

Monetize your content in other ways, such as through book sales, merch, membership, Patreon, courses, services, and affiliate sales.

Best practices

Be consistent! Decide on a sustainable upload schedule and let people know right away when you'll be uploading.

Use TubeBuddy to do your research; find good keywords; craft a video title that is eye-catching.

Nail your thumbnails. If a video isn't getting views, consider changing up the thumbnail or title of the video.

Use the maximum number of keywords in your video.

Like and comment on your own video. Pin your comment to the top and "heart" it.

Interact in the comments as often as possible.

Comment on other authors' videos.

Have a good description with links to your social media, mailing list, freebies, and any other important information.

Create a step-by-step checklist of your process. This helps you remember what worked and what didn't.

Know your analytics!

Experiment with different lengths, topics, and styles. Note what works and double down on that.

Use the Cards feature of YouTube to create and place interactive visual links within your video, especially at the end.

Always add a subscribe button and a link to the video you want them to watch next to your endscreen.

Be sure to ask people to like and subscribe in your videos!

Upgrade your equipment as you grow.

Edit out the “ums” and awkward moments.

Have at least an outline to work from, so you’ve thought through what you want to say.

Batch your content so you always have a backup video or two.

Learn from others, but don’t copy! Be yourself!

Amplify your content. Share the word that you have a YouTube channel in your newsletter, on social media. Feature other authors from time to time, to cross-pollinate your audiences.

Resources

- [Slides from the presentation](#)
 - [Workbook](#)
-



Jennifer Stevenson is the author of five funny series: [Liars in Love](#), [Backstage Boys](#), [Hinky Chicago](#), [Slacker Demons](#), and [Coed Demon Sluts](#). She is currently co-president of [Book View Café](#), the world’s oldest, largest, and most prestigious author-owned publishing collective.

Books to Film and TV: What Every Author Wants to Know

Presented by Maggie Marr

Reported by Michele Dunaway

Maggie Marr is the USA Today bestselling author of over 20 books. She founded Maggie Marr Legal PC, an intellectual property law practice dedicated to providing legal solutions for creative people. A former ICM motion picture literary agent, she is co-founder and legal advisor to the Women's Fiction Writers Association and a member of Women In Film.

Maggie Marr puts credentials on her presentation slides so people know she's a credible source for her topic. The reason? The number one question this *USA Today* bestselling author of more than 20 books, lawyer, and former ICM agent gets is "How do I get my books made into a film or a TV show?"

Marr's answer: There are many paths up that mountain.

Marr said she understands that author friends and clients get frustrated with that answer. But Marr related the question of "How do I get my books made into a film or a TV show" to the one all authors already know: "It's like when asked, 'How do I write a book?'" Or like when someone says, "I have this idea for a book."

Authors, Marr said, know the three steps to writing a book:

1. Sit in the chair.
2. Fingers do the tippet-tapping (typing) thing.
3. X number of words per number of days and there's a book.

Marr then showed a chart that related the third step to this:

- 10 words x 5000 days = 50,000 words
- 100 words x 500 days = 50,000 words
- 1000 words x 50 days = 50,000 words
- 10,000 words x 5 days = 50,000 words

"Will it be a good book?" Marr asked. "I don't know. But you have something to edit and that's where magic happens."

Marr went on, saying that because authors know these three things make a book, "My friends want me to give them one to four things. After 21 years, I have not found one path. But I can give some general things. The dance steps don't really change."

Marr then said the best TV shows and movies came from books and showed a slide filled with covers for examples: Liane Moriarty's *Big Little Lies*, George R. R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and Annie Proulx's *Brokeback Mountain*.

Then Marr dug into the meat of the presentation: "There are three ways books become movies and TV shows. The outlier is by far the sexiest."

The three ways are organic discovery, submission, and outlier event.

Organic discovery

Organic is when development executives look for material and go on a process of discovery. They read newspapers and magazines such as *The New York Times* or *The Atlantic*. They scroll Amazon. These development executives basically act like readers do. Producers are not paid unless in production.

Marr suggested that all authors put "For Film and TV inquiries email (address)" on author websites, social media, and on Amazon profiles. If agented, also include that information. Do not make it hard for these people who've found you and your books to contact you, and this statement also makes it clear you are open to these types of inquiries for your books. If they email you, respond.

One of the first questions one of these executives are going to ask is "Are these rights available?" They will not read your book if they've already been scooped up.

(Marr mentioned [Rightscenter](#), a subscription service many development executives use to see if things are available. A look at the website shows it has more than 125,000 titles.)

Submission

Agents and literary managers call up and ask producers, "What are you looking for?" They will chat about the book they are pitching.

"It's a sales position," Marr said.

Marr also said agents or publishing house agents used to have relationships with companies such as ICM (sub-rights) and would call to agent the book. Then ICM would decide.

"Indie makes it different," she said. "Hollywood doesn't care who the publisher is. It's about the material."

As for top 10 authors, Marr said Hollywood often will pay to get chapters in an attempt to get a jump on their competitors.

For others, most do want submissions from an agent, but they do this to avoid getting sued. Often companies may have something in the pipeline already there with a similar plot and tone. Having a submission from an agent shows a paper trail—and that the studio did not steal your idea.

The whole process takes a lot of time.

Outlier event

Marr described this as when your cousin's uncle sits at dinner with Reese Witherspoon and tells her you wrote a book, and Reese says, "Oh, what'd she write?" and then reads it and must do it.

"It's sexy AF," Marr said. "We love it because that happens."

She mentioned the Sookie Stackhouse series (the Southern Vampire Mysteries by Charlaine Harris adapted as HBO's *True Blood*) as an example of an outlier event.

Outlier events, Marr said, "are hopeful events. A great story."

A producer is interested, now what?

When someone is interested, you and/or your rep get into it and hopefully come to one of three types of agreements: option, shopping, or attachment.

Option agreement

When a producer makes an offer, it's always most favorable to them and not to you. Marr suggests you hire someone to represent your interests. Some options will be six figures. Some will be high five. Some will be low five. It's whatever the market will bear.

Marr said, "I've not seen an increase in what people get paid for their intellectual property."

Options are when the producer gets X months exclusive rights to your book (such as 18-36) for a certain amount of applicable dollars. Options also have an extension of X months (such as 18-36) for non-applicable dollars.

Marr prefers 12-month options for both with written agreements. Her reasons are that a big producer can move things along; a younger, junior producer can get lost without support people; and it curtails "Hollywood hoarding" where producers collect and keep books under option so they have a list they can talk about.

Shopping agreement

This agreement brings no money. The producer trades the sweat equity to package the book to sell to distributors.

If you get this, do a limited time, not 12-18 months. Do not lock in, which keeps you from optioning with anyone else.

Attachment option

This option has pros and cons. This is when a producer says, "I'll attach to material X with option to buy for \$X when a third party boards the project," and when the third party attaches to the project, you and your rep negotiate the sale of rights directly with the distributor.

It's favored for the speed at which TV/movies get made. It allows the producer to shop the project and find a buyer, then the author negotiates with the distributor after people are attached to the project.

For example, for a payment to the author for \$5,000, the producer shops to Netflix, then once Netflix wants it, your agent negotiates with Netflix. In this scenario, all things are aligned but Netflix doesn't have the rights. It gives the author some negotiating room.

However, all things are aligned, including the author who wants it too. This is another reason to have an agent as the agent brings an aura of reasonability. The agent manages expectations and the deal closes more quickly. This is when the agent's market knowledge comes into play as they know comps, etc.

I've closed with a producer, now what?

Marr gave scenarios. Let's say you do an option of 12 months for \$5,000 with a 12-month renewal for \$7,000.

If a producer has a deal with a distributor it will be faster. It also depends on who's attached, such as the writer, director, actor, and/or showrunner.

The producer must pitch to the executives—"let's say Warner Brothers"—then they will need to sell it to a network for streaming, etc.

The producer works with the screenplay writer to make the package as valuable as possible to sell to a distributor. It could be the producer has a first look or overall deal with a distributor. In this case, the distributor looks for the production companies to bring them things.

Marr said, "If J.J. Abrams and Bad Robot knock on the door, great."

The producer must pitch and package. The producer is meant to take the intellectual property (book) and add attachments to make it valuable so one of these buy it. (Marr showed a slide with logos for Amazon Prime, Disney, WB, Universal, Hulu, BET, Netflix, HBOMax, Hallmark Channel and Paramount+.)

Producers have relationships when they want someone to take the pitch. This part can be frustrating because you have to lean into relationships: agent, manager, attorney. Some producers are also actors and directors, etc.

It can't be undersold how relationships are an integral part. All get in a room, or now Zoom, for the pitch. The screenplay writer or producer will give the pitch. All will listen without smiling or nodding, unless a famous actor is in the room and then they'll smile or nod.

Then they'll decide yes or no, and if yes, money begins to roll out.

If it was done as an attachment option, now dollars are there for the purchase price. The price is paid on the first day of principal photography, or within seven days before or after.

Contracts will contain reversion language for if they pay the price and the movie is not made. Depending on negotiated reversion language, you can request the rights back but a lien will be put on it. For instance, if Netflix paid and it's not made, and two years later HBOMax buys, HBOMax cuts a deal with Netflix.

There's heat, which means leverage. Once purchased, it goes into production.

Audience Q &A

Q: Do you want to be the writer in the room?

A: Marr believes it makes it harder for the producer to sell or harder to make unless you have credits for writing for TV or movies. If you do, that might help.

“No” is a powerful word. She did a deal where a big name author wanted this, and refused to do the deal without it. She took less money but was the writer in the room.

Q: What about adapting my book into a screenplay so it's ready?

A: Marr said, if you want to be a screenplay writer, be a screenplay writer. There is no better time. Everyone needs content. However, no one tells the talent (author) anything. They will talk to the agent. Ultimately it's an author's decision.

Screenplays are derivative works. For example, if a book is optioned eight times, there may be eight scripts out there. The studio will scoop up all scripts so it is not sued. It can be challenging the more scripts there are.

If you do it, it can be a disadvantage to the producer. What if J.J. Abrams wants his screenwriter to do your book?

Q: What should you do if given an opportunity for an elevator pitch?

A: Marr said she can't give a definitive answer. She did give this scenario: Say you're in an elevator with Reese. She says, “What do you do?” You say, “I write books.” Listen to what Reese says.

Often they will tell you what they want. Answer with enthusiasm and transparency.

This is an outlier event. It's having the right piece of material at the right moment.

Q: When should I follow up if a producer has my project?

A: Both the reader and the producer spend dollars on the project. Marr always follows up in four weeks. She emails on Thursday because they read on the weekends since there's no time during the week. The following week she calls. At seven to eight weeks it's most likely a default pass. At eight to 10 weeks a de facto pass.

Authors want to not be annoying or the author with no boundaries.

Q: What if I get an offer?

Always advocate for yourself. Have someone who knows more about rights read it. Get an entertainment lawyer. As Marr said, “I translate legalese and Hollywood-speak to authors.”

Remember no one can make anything without writers.

The deal is always presented in language favorable to the studio.

Redlining is “track changes” to a contract.

Q: How do I keep track of my optioned works?

A: Start a spreadsheet as to date in, date out, etc.

Q: What about the market today?

A: There are millions of ways to sell a project. It depends on attachment.

Certain things like Christmas movies of the week are evergreen.

Netflix had a group of developmental executives with the unofficial title of Hallmark Killers: “Do Hallmark but better.”

Bridgerton: historical studio probably only has one in development, not two to three.

Q: Who makes money?

A: Depends on the contract, but often you get purchase price and some episodic fees. Often the producer and showrunners may earn big, but you may not.

Q: Agency agenda?

A: Ask who is benefiting. Where does the agency want to stay? Working more long-term with the authors or with the producers? An agency that is packaging may have a more valuable relationship working with the producer than with you, so have a person who is just in your corner.

Maggie Marr can be reached at maggiemarrlegal.com and via the following social media:

Instagram: [Maggie_Marr_Legal_PC](https://www.instagram.com/Maggie_Marr_Legal_PC)

Facebook: [Maggie Marr Legal, PC](https://www.facebook.com/MaggieMarrLegalPC)

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Michele Dunaway writes contemporary romance and teaches full time high school English and journalism. She's currently at work on two new series.

Build Better Facebook Audiences and Reach More Readers with Your Ads

Presented by Malorie Cooper

Reported by Tawdra Kandle

With more than 100 books published, New York Times bestselling author Malorie Cooper helps other authors achieve success and reach their publishing goals. A strong believer in a unified brand, she works hard for both herself and others to put together an experience that gives a holistic presentation of both the author and their stories. Look for her fiction under M. D. Cooper and her nonfiction under Mal Cooper.

Humans buy books, not algorithms. This was the opening point made by Malorie Cooper, author of more than a hundred books and designer of more than 1,500 websites. In addition to her fiction catalog, Cooper has also written a series of author support and education books called the *Help! I'm an Author* series.

Cooper pointed out it's essential to understand that marketing platforms and tools are made to meet the needs of the hosting company and users before considering those of the marketers—and realizing what that means to authors is important. She further noted that while authors tend to refer to “the algorithm” when talking about websites and companies, in reality there are dozens of algorithms powering those platforms—and creatives have the choice of working with them or against them.

When drilling down on Facebook ads and how to find the best audience, it's important to begin by understanding how Facebook spends an author's money. First of all, Facebook knows its users. Facebook has already determined which users will click on each ad instead of simply viewing it. Facebook knows what its users are considering buying and how much money the users have to make that purchase. The platform is aware of the income, education levels, home ownership status, jobs, and hobbies of every user. Facebook knows how likely the user is to click on a landing page—and whether or not that user will ultimately buy the product being sold.

This knowledge affects how ads are shown and how much Facebook is willing to charge per click. The ads of authors who are selling books are less likely to be served to an audience who will spend more money. Cooper notes that authors' competition for Facebook ad views and clicks are Apple, Samsung, Lexus, Tide, and McDonald's—all companies with huge marketing budgets who don't blink at spending \$5 per click.

The question, then, is how do authors compete? What is the secret for finding the right audience who will click and buy?

Cooper presented two strategies: the Fast Grab and the Long Game. In the Fast Grab, the idea is to blanket an interest group with ads for a limited period (one to four weeks) so that the same people are seeing the same ads multiple times and are more likely to click sooner than later. The pros of this Fast Grab are the possibility of bulking up on sales over a short period, which boosts rank and increases visibility. The cons are higher cost per click, the potential for audience exhaustion, and financial risk.

In the Long Game, the idea is to spread the ad spend over a longer time period, which can lift the sales tail and maintain backlist sales. Using this method can keep books in a category's top 100 for years with a lower spend. The pros here are that some people take a longer time to make a decision, and with this strategy the ad has a better chance of ultimately capturing their sale. The Long Game creates a feeling of longevity with the viewer, is less likely to exhaust a chosen audience, and presents less of a financial burden to the author. The con is that the rank boost tends to be more of a slow burn than a big rise, meaning that visibility might be steady but has less impact.

Cooper next tackled the Facebook pixel and how to use it—and particularly how it interacts with iOS 14.5. She defined the pixel as a tool that allows companies to stalk internet users. Authors can use the Facebook pixel to show ads to people who have visited their site and/or who have downloaded one of their books from BookFunnel. The pixel helps authors to find readers who have interacted with them on other sites and advertise to them on Facebook.

The updates on Apple products via iOS 14.5, Cooper said, are mostly security theater, a show to make people feel safer while using Apple products by not allowing apps to share or send back info on users' activities on other apps or sites during Apple product use. She remarked that this change should not affect authors or their advertising strategies, as it is primarily for show—not stopping bad people as much as making more work for those who don't have nefarious intentions.

Cooper advises making sure that authors have the pixel installed on their websites and their BookFunnel pages. It's important to verify the website's domain in order to keep the pixel firing. This allows us to reach readers, capture them with the pixel on our sites, serve them ads on Facebook or Instagram, and then send them to our retailers.

Using the pixel allows authors to create their own tailor-made audience and thus avoid being a slave to Facebook's somewhat limited interest options (which often don't include a comprehensive list of comparable authors). Making a look-alike audience via a Facebook pixel widens our options considerably.

Cooper went on to present other ideas to move beyond what Facebook offers in building ad audiences. She suggested creating an audience based on interest in the locations mentioned in your books as well as finding people whose interests match those of your characters. We can also find groups who like the tropes in our books or have the attributes of our existing readers (including those who are retired, divorced, in school, or parents of young children or teenagers). We can even target people by how much money they have to spend.

In addition to thinking outside the box, Cooper advocated for creating an entirely new box. This could mean creating a brand-new Instagram account that posts art, thoughts, and memes

in order to build a specific audience that can be targeted. Another possibility is posting art and book covers to Pinterest, linking those images back to the author's website—and here she advises using a landing page that can potentially convert to an immediate sale as well as capturing a potential customer via the pixel.

Refining our search engine optimization to drive organic traffic is a fairly simple and inexpensive way to find a new audience to which we can advertise, and using non-Facebook ad platforms to drive traffic to our sites can also widen the pool of potential customers.

Cooper explained how to take readers through a journey which begins with capturing anyone who liked one of our Instagram posts. Our next step is to show them a video ad for a series on Facebook. After that, we can filter those customers by how long they watch the video to determine what we show them next: an ad for a free prequel, an ad for book one, or an ad for an omnibus/box set. One month later, it's time to show that same audience a video ad for another of our series.

Cooper also stated that she is in favor of several of the new options for Facebook ad settings, including campaign budget optimization, dynamic content in ads (which allows Facebook to mix up several different versions of an ad in order to determine which one has the best chance of success), automatic video creation, per-person optimization (serving ads to people who have a proven history of clicking on a specific type of ad) and improved ways to narrow audiences (by using options like "fiction books," for example). She further suggested promoting brand awareness—what makes us unique as authors—in order to keep our books uppermost in readers' memories.

This presentation is available to members here: <https://www.thewritingwives.com/ninc>.

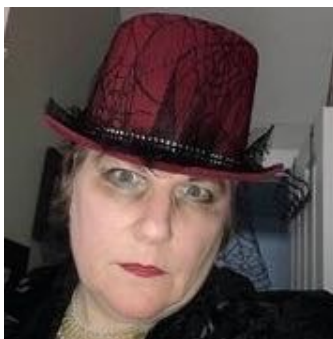


Tawdra Kandle is the USA Today bestselling author of more than 100 romances that span genres from contemporary through paranormal. Her engaging and realistic characters bring readers back again and again to devour the steamy love stories she spins.

The Mad Scribbler

The Ghosts of Conferences Past, Part One

By Laura Resnick



“The longer I live the more keenly I feel that whatever was good enough for our fathers is not good enough for us.”

—Oscar Wilde

Every NINC member who has attended our organization’s annual conference at least once is aware that it’s different from other writers’ conferences—in much the way that NINC itself is different from other writing organizations. But I doubt that anyone who wasn’t around in the early years of NINC is aware of just *how* different our conference was at its inception—not only different but, in many people’s view over the next couple of decades, controversial, ill-conceived, and not worth attending.

When the founding mothers (Rebecca Brandewyne, Janice Young Brooks, Jasmine Cresswell, Maggie Osborne, and Marianne Shock) launched this experiment in 1989, I joined their newly forming organization and attended the first conference that autumn for the same reason that many of the other 100-or-so founding members did: I keenly felt the lack of a writing organization focused entirely on professional novelists.

Some writing organizations were genre-focused, while others were more general, but all of them struggled, it seemed to me, with balancing their resources between career novelists and other writers. This appeared to be the case in organizations that required some form of publication as a qualification for joining (ex. the Science Fiction/Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA) required an applicant to have published one novel or three short stories), as well as those that didn’t (such as the Romance Writers of America (RWA), though it did have an internal group or “chapter” that required publication of one novel to join).

The tension I experienced and observed in writing organizations, which sometimes devolved into resentment and frustration, was because of differing needs and interests. An

aspiring writer working seriously on her first manuscript, or someone dabbling with idea after idea but never completing a book, or a published short story writer who'd never written a novel, or someone who wrote and sold a novel but never completed another book, or someone who stopped writing after her second book didn't get published... These were (and still are) all common descriptions of people who had needs or interests they hoped would be addressed by the writing organizations where they paid dues and perhaps volunteered their time. And very few of those needs and interests overlapped with those of a career novelist working on her fifth, twentieth, or fiftieth book under contract.

When balancing the choices they had to make about where to put their focus and resources, I felt that the organizations I was familiar with (either as a member or via the descriptions of members I knew) were less focused on someone like me than on people who wanted to learn how to write a novel and become published.

Similarly, conferences across all genres of fiction seemed to be aimed at teaching aspiring writers how to write, how to query agents, and how to submit to publishers. (Back then, "Does a manuscript need to be typed?" was a question one often heard at conferences and, no, I'm not making that up.) I had sold several romance novels by the time I attended my first RWA conference, where I had a meeting scheduled with my editor. Memorably, though, when I saw her, she was so exhausted from dozens of appointments with aspiring writers pitching their work to her that she said, "Let's just go to the bar and chat about something else. We can talk business by phone when I'm back in New York next week."

So the first NINC conference was unprecedented in the sense that every writer present was an experienced professional. I think we were all aware within hours of how different this gathering was. We were all peers. While some attendees were new to the business, like me, and others had been around for decades and dozens of books, there were things we all had in common: we had all completed, sold, and published multiple novel-length manuscripts; we had all dealt with contracts, editors, and publishers (most of us had also dealt with agents); we had all dealt with the peculiar monetary systems of the publishing world, and writing was a source of income for all of us (whether essential or supplementary, full-time or part-time). And this was the *first time* any of us had ever been at a conference where every person present had these things in common.

As I remember it, we all recognized within a day how much more candid, productive, and informative our conversations and sessions were, because of the shared level of professional experience.

Much of the first conference consisted of business meetings to debate the details of how this new organization would function (and, indeed, what it would be named—calling it Novelists, Inc. was a decision that arose from those discussions). Our discovery of how stimulating and mutually educational it was to be among experienced professional novelists led to the membership qualification we agreed on during those meetings: two published novels. The consensus was that we wanted NINC to be an organization for career novelists, and while many people published one novel, it was only after *two* books that it was clear someone was pursuing this as a career.

Other organizations existed that offered substantial advice and resources for helping a writer break into the business. NINC would be the organization and the conference that existed for writers pursuing the craft and the business beyond that first hurdle.

The high level of experience among our members meant we could learn a lot from each other—especially if our conference had closed, members-only sessions where we could talk candidly. These closed sessions were one of the early controversies of NINC. Every conference in existence had plenty of sessions that editors and agents didn't attend, but no conference had programming they *weren't allowed* to attend. Not until NINC.

Reactions among industry professionals covered a wide range, from mild (“hm, that’s different”) to anxious (“What are they talking about in there, behind our backs? What are they saying that they *don't want us to hear?*”) to annoyed or offended (“You invited me here, and now I’m supposed to hang out alone in this hotel while all of you attend a meeting where I’m *not allowed?*”).

This created some ill-will early on from industry professionals who found this new custom—writers locking them out of a conference room to hold a session in private—rude, or alarming, or a waste of their own time (or all three). It also created negativity among various non-member authors who thought it looked suspicious for writers to hold such sessions, or who were aware that their own editors or agents were disenchanted with NINC over this practice.

Within a couple of years, NINC rearranged the conference schedule so that we had specific days for members-only sessions followed by days when industry professionals were invited and all sessions were open to them. This “out of sight, out of mind” strategy eventually eliminated the uneasiness about our closed sessions.

There were other objections to our conference after that, though. One I heard regularly for years from writers was, “I go to conferences to promote my name and my work to readers. There are no promo opportunities at NINC.” That’s accurate reasoning, though myopic; learning, developing, and networking are valid reasons to attend a conference. Another accurate objection that eventually arose was, “There are no editors or agents there.”

Over time, editors and agents became increasingly hard to recruit as NINC conference participants, for a variety of reasons. One reason was that travel budgets decreased as times got tougher in publishing, so fewer employees were sent to conferences at the expense of the publisher or the agency.

But another reason, one that I heard often, was, “Everyone at NINC already has a publisher [or an agent]. I go to conferences to acquire new writers [or clients]. There’s nothing for me at NINC.”

I believe the more accurate version of that objection would be, “I look for *unpublished* writers or clients at conference.” That was what we didn't have at NINC: absolute beginners. And that “nothing for me at NINC” attitude of various agents and editors was very frustrating to us in the ‘00s, as times got tougher in the industry and, as a result, we had *plenty* of members looking for a new publisher or agent.

In those years before the self-publishing boom changed so many things for writers and for NINC, we wracked our brains trying to figure out how to get industry professionals to come to NINC. (I say “we” because I chaired one conference and later worked on three others while I

was a board member). One solution was to hold conferences in New York as often as we could (which was not that often, because it was very expensive). However, the result was usually that although industry professionals willingly appeared as speakers there, since the conference was near their offices, they would often leave immediately afterward, rather than hanging around to network with members. It was frustrating.

We didn't know the indie boom was just a few years away, which would more than triple our members' attendance at our conferences and fill our guest spots with engaged and enthusiastic professionals from new and innovative businesses disrupting the traditional ones we'd always had so much trouble attracting to our conference.

But more about that transition in Part Two of this topic, next month.

Laura Resnick, who works part-time as a walking-tour guide, spent much of October guiding [Haunted tours](#).

NINC Member Discounts



This month we're featuring [ScribeCount](#), our newest discount. You can find details about how to receive the discount at [Member Benefits/Freebies and Discounts](#) on our website. You must sign in to view it.

ScribeCount is an indie author's best friend. Our primary service is automated sales aggregation and reporting from over 40 publishing platforms, all combined into user-friendly charts and features that can be accessed in seconds. Whether you are publishing on all platforms or through Amazon's Select program, ScribeCount allows each author to customize their reports to fit their individual needs.

Additional features include ad tracking, KU status and price monitoring, daily email summaries, indie news consolidation, related income and expense tracking, keyword generation, pre-orders, chart comparison, and many more.

ScribeCount does this all without needing the author's passwords, cookies, or personal information, nor does the service run in the background when the author is not using it. Since launching in early 2021, ScribeCount has added additional platforms and features on a monthly basis with no plans of slowing down. The two-week free trial lets every author try the service worry-free. Tiered pricing and yearly subscriptions makes ScribeCount affordable for every author.

Give us a try at www.scribecount.com.

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:

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

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: *A link to the new member packet will be included as soon as it's been updated.*

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

2021 Board of Directors

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

- President: Tawdra Kandle
- President-Elect: Lisa Hughey
- Secretary: Hallee Bridgeman
- Treasurer: Timothy Cerepaka
- Newsletter Editor: Harper St. George
- 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
- Kasey Michaels
- Julie Ortolon
- Diana Peterfreund
- Pat Rice
- Erica Ridley
- Marianne Shock
- Wayne Stinnett
- Vicki Lewis Thompson
- Victoria Thompson
- Steven Womack

2021 Committees

Complete committee member listings are available on the website. Many committee positions are open and looking for new volunteers.

- 2021 Conference Committee
 - Conference Director: Mel Jolly
 - Programming Chair: Lisa Hughey
 - Assistant Prog. Chair: Tawdra Kandle
 - Traditional Publishing Liaison: Victoria Thompson
 - Hotel Liaison: Karen Fox
- Authors Coalition Representative: Laura Phillips
- Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Committee
 - Hildie McQueen
 - Gwen Hernandez
 - Lynn Emery
 - Pamela Kelley
 - Pooks Burroughs
 - Samantha Silver
 - Alison Perry
 - Misti Boehm
 - Harper St. George
 - Ellis Leigh
 - Malorie Cooper
- Social Media Committee: Violet Howe
- Membership Committee
 - Sarah Woodbury
 - Boyd Craven
- *Nink* Newsletter
 - Editor: Harper St. George
 - Acquisitions Editor: Trish Milburn
 - Copy Editor: Cynthia Moyer
 - Production Manager: Laura Resnick

- Nominating Committee:
 - Malorie Cooper
 - Tanya Anne Crosby
 - Kristine Smith
 - Jenny Gardiner
 - Judi Fennell
- Discounts Program: Emilie Richards

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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