NINK

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Contents

President's Voice

By Tawdra Kandle

I can't believe that this is my final column as president of NINC. At times over the past two years, it felt as though this term was endless, but from my present vantage point, it has all passed so quickly.

When I unexpectedly took over the position in the beginning of January 2020, I was fighting both shock and panic. Shock because I'd expected to have a year as president-elect to really learn about this whole president gig; I'd only attended three board meetings at that point. Panic because I felt completely unprepared and lost about what I was meant to be doing.

My first board meeting as president was terrifying. I didn't know the language I was supposed to use, how to call a vote, what actually *needed* a vote … I was waiting for one of the other board members to call me a fraud and kick me out!

The only reason that I survived those early days was because we have such an amazing, incredible group of people who care passionately about this organization. First and foremost, the person who kept me on the right path and made sure I didn't make *too* many missteps was our central coordinator, Terese Daly Ramin.

I can't imagine being a NINC member and not being familiar with Terey, but if you aren't, trust me when I say that she knows more about our organization than anyone else I've met. She was gracious enough to give me advice when I asked for it and patient with all of my (many) questions. Terey is the one consistent member of the board even when the other positions change annually or at least every three years, and she made sure that I knew what needed to be addressed ahead of time, so I never went into any meeting unprepared.

If you don't know Terey, you should. And we should all thank her for the service she pours into NINC.

I'm also very grateful to the other board members with whom I was privileged to work: Lisa Hughey, our incoming president, is savvy, wise, and filled with the best ideas. Hallee Bridgeman, our secretary, is not only one of the most efficient people I know but tons of fun to hang with at conferences. Our treasurers during my term were Pam McCutcheon and Timothy Cerepaka, both of whom have been wonderful about keeping us informed on budgetary needs and limits. Michele Dunaway was newsletter editor during my first year, and through her, I

learned how *Nink* works (it's fabulous!). Having Harper St. George take over this year has been a marvelous transition too, as we've been seeing the realization of many goals for our newsletter.

And of course, Lou Aronica, our advisory council rep, was always available as a font of wisdom, channeling the collective advice of our past presidents when I had questions. Lou's term ends this month too, and I know the board is going to miss him.

In case you've forgotten, just as we were all collectively sighing in relief after January, March of 2020 rolled around, and with it, the first hints of the pandemic. We'd had so many beautiful plans and hopes for the conference last year—and we'd put together an exciting program—but as March turned to April and then to May, we had to face the reality that our event was going to look very different.

If you ever must be in the event-planning equivalent of a foxhole with someone, hope that it's with people like Mel Jolly, our conference coordinator, Lisa Hughey, assistant chair last year and chair this year, Rochelle Paige, our former sponsorship chair, Karen Fox, our hotel liaison, Mindy Neff, our registrar, Violet Howe, our social media volunteer, Laura Hayden, our graphics guru and all around app authority, Sue Philips, who helped with everything, and Karen King, our moderator coordinator. If not for them, I can't even imagine what 2020 and 2021 might have been like.

The point of this hike down memory lane is not to relive the ups (there were a few!) and downs—and downs—of the past two years. Rather, I want all of our members to realize how fortunate we are to belong to an organization—a community—like NINC. We are surrounded by history in our founding members and those who joined early on, and at the same time we see our future in the authors adding to our ranks now. We are growing, vibrant, and changing—and that's essential.

We see our weaknesses and our mistakes, and we're taking action to correct those situations. We're doing what we can to represent our members in conflicts within the larger publishing community. We do our best to present new information and up-to-the minute innovations both at the annual conference and within our member groups on Facebook and Ninclink.

For myself, I'm just as excited to be part of NINC today as I was the day I received my official confirmation of membership. I'm proud of where we've been, where we are, and where we're going.

Thank you to all of the members for the trust, patience and support you've so graciously shown me over these past two years. It's been an honor and a privilege to serve.

I can't wait to see what happens next.

Tawdra Kandle

Tawdra Kandle is a USA Today bestselling romance author with over 100 books released. Her titles include new adult and adult contemporary romance; under the pen name Tamara Kendall, she writes paranormal romance, and under the pen name Tessa Kent, she writes erotic romance.

About NINC

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

About *Nink*

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

NINC Member Benefits

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

Missing a newsletter? Past issues can be found here.

Accessing the NINC Website

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

Conference Reports

Constructing the Perfect Amazon Book Sales Page—Using Proven Data to Increase Conversions
Presented by Dave Chesson

Reported by Pam McCutcheon

Dave Chesson is the creator of Kindlepreneur, Publisher Rocket, and Atticus (book-formatting software). He is well known for conducting experiments to help authors do more effective marketing.

After Chesson interviewed Michael Alvear on his Book Marketing Podcast, Chesson was impressed with how Alvear used heat maps to show what customers—not authors—look at when buying a book. So, Chesson decided to run another experiment and hired a company to track test subjects' eye movements to see where they landed on the Amazon book sales page.

It's important to note the constraints of the study. Due to the high cost involved, the test was limited, using only 28 tests, 100 potential customers, and three genres: Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Nonfiction. The people who took the tests were paid but were not avid readers or genre-specific readers. Also, keep in mind that it occurred before the pandemic, and before Amazon made structural changes and added the A+ content. Plus, Amazon makes so many changes (and tests changes on different customers) often, so your mileage may vary.

Though Chesson thinks there should be more genre-specific research, what he learned from this experiment can probably be extrapolated to other genres.

Cover

First, the cover is the most important thing on the page. Since the cover image is larger than the others on the screen, customers have more time to look at it. However, to entice readers to click, it must have a genre-specific component that meets genre expectations (for example, a spaceship for a science-fiction space opera).

Title

As expected, the second most popular places they looked at were the title, subtitle, and reviews. He noted that if the book is in a series, it's especially important to show that in the title or subtitle.

Book description

Shoppers now only get to see the first sentence or two of the description and must click "Read more" to see the entire description. If the author included a hook at the top of the book description, there was a 78% higher chance of the subjects clicking to learn more. Only 18% read more without a hook.

He recommends you use HTML to add bold lettering or a larger heading tag in the description to make the hook stand out. You can also change the color of the font if you're HTML-savvy. However, there are some HTML tags Amazon no longer allows you to use (such as H1, H2, and H3) though they may still be allowed in older submissions. Go to his free book description generator to learn more and experiment to see how the description will look on several different platforms. However, be careful of adding too many bells and whistles or it can become obnoxious.

Ad carousels

These are those rows of covers at the bottom of the page for sponsored ads and also-boughts. The experiment showed that what matters most to the reader is if the book in the carousel is pertinent and seems to belong to the same subgenre. However, they rarely clicked on the right arrow of the carousel to see more. Because books in your series come above these carousels, it's important to make sure Amazon lists your series.

Editorial review section

This is the most underutilized section on the page. His test subjects didn't actually read the reviews in this section. Instead, they focused on the "qualifier" or social proof of the person writing the review such as a *New York Times* bestselling author, reviewer, review location, popular blog name, etc. It's important to bold those qualifiers and translate them for the reader (meaning you could explain what kind of blog it is, etc.). He found the best conversion results from the following format:

"Quote from reviewer"
Name of reviewer
Qualifier (in bold)

He recommends no more than six quotes—more is overkill. And if you have pertinent awards, put them at the top in this area. You can change these in your author profile on Amazon's Author Central.

Word cloud density boxes

These boxes above the reviews were rarely looked at by the test subjects, but you might be able to use them and the reviews themselves to find good keywords.

Reviews

Strangely, the three-star reviews were the most read, then the four- and two-star. Why? Because the three-star reviews appeared to be the most constructive (some reviewers know this and are now giving three stars to really good books). The five-star reviews were rarely read, and the one-star reviews were read only if they appeared to be constructive. The reviews with images received the most attention, such as a picture of a person holding the book. The test subjects rarely read beyond the first page of reviews.

Pricing

There wasn't a lot of attention on this area, so he has no general rule of thumb for it.

Author rank

Though this is important to us, shoppers didn't even look at it.

Images and videos

The test subjects rarely clicked on videos for books, but images received lots of interaction.

Next

For his next experiment, he plans a detailed analysis of book description construction. For more helpful free tools, articles, and podcasts, check out his Kindlepreneur website where he has recently put up a free QR code generator for URLs and an ISBN barcode generator for your print books.

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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.

New Ways to Style Your Books with Vellum
Presented by Brad Andalman

Reported by Cheré Coen

Brad Andalman is one of the co-founders of 180g, the creators of Vellum*—software that allows authors to create and publish beautiful books. Prior to 180g, he worked for Pixar Animation Studios, where he helped to create Pixar's feature films and develop its next-generation animation software.*

Brad Andalman had exciting news to share with NINC participants. Vellum 3.0 is currently in the beta stage and the expanded software should be available to writers by the end of the year or early 2022.

"This is a big change," Andalman said of the upcoming launch of Vellum 3.0. "It really changes what you'll be able to create."

Vellum 3.0 software will offer writers more choices in how they style print books, including the addition of images in chapter openings that may span two pages, the chapter's first page and the blank page on its left-hand side. The image will be able to bleed off the page, leaving no white space in print.

Andalman offered several examples of how Vellum will add these new styles to the software, ones that may be used in the design of print books. The eight designs that will be included in the software update run the gamut of book genres.

"With Vellum 3.0 we wanted to go a little bit further," he said of the update that will be free to all existing Vellum subscribers. "These are carefully, thoughtfully designed styles."

In addition, writers may upload their own images to be used in chapter openings, both black and white and color images. Writers may drag these images onto the design page and the software will automatically turn the image to gray scale. The images may be adjusted on the page as well.

Vellum will be on hand to assist writers through the process if they wish to use their own images, Andalman said.

"If you don't like any of our backgrounds, you can choose your own," he said, but he added, "There's enough range in these (designs) so you will love them all."

Andalman did, however, plead with participants to keep the information under wraps until the Vellum 3.0 launch.

In a nutshell, writers will be able to use Vellum 3.0's existing designs or upload their own images to enhance any number of chapters pages. These images may expand to one or two

pages (in the case of two, the left-facing page must be blank) and the text may be adjusted to be read over the image.

For instance, a dark image of a castle may be placed as the backdrop on a chapter's first page and its corresponding left-hand page. If the image is too dark, white text may be placed on top, its color easier to read. As the reader turns to the second page of the chapter, one without an image, the text returns to black on top of the blank white background.

Text styles will expand as well, including new drop caps and text fonts. For instance, writers will be able to use the chapter numbers in new and fun ways, Andalman explained, to match the style of the book. The icon box on the left-hand side will allow writers to switch between content and styles to view how the book will appear. If writers don't approve of the style, they may click exit and start over.

Another aspect of Vellum 3.0 will be that styles used in a book's design may be saved for later use. This is especially handy for those writing book series, Andalman said. Writers may also hire illustrators to design chapter openings and save those designs in Vellum for future use.

"With this amount of style and this amount of configuration, we wanted people to have an easy way to save so they can apply to another book in a series," he said.

The new design elements are only for print production. For those adding images to their print books, the resulting file size of the PDFs will be larger but it should not affect the book's publishing or the price, Andalman said.

Currently, Vellum is looking for beta testers of the new software version. For those who wish to test out Vellum 3.0, send Andalman a message on the conference app, Whova.

"We really want to keep improving the software," Andalman concluded. "We think this (Vellum 3.0) will open us up to new users and keep our users happy."

In other news, Vellum was designed specifically for Mac users and Andalman said there are no plans to expand Vellum for PCs. Their focus is on expanding Vellum in its current state to offer writers more opportunities, such as with the Vellum 3.0.

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Cheré 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.*

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

Presented by Julie Braunschweiger

Reported by Tawdra Kandle

Julie Braunschweiger, Manager for Barnes & Noble's self-publishing platform, is responsible for day-to-day business operations, author outreach, promotions, and social media, as well as being closely aligned with top-line NOOK strategy.

Julie Braunschweiger of B&N Press opened her presentation with good news: Barnes & Noble is far from dead. In fact, the bookseller emerged from the hardest months of the pandemic with renewed energy and dedication to their mission: serving readers by selling them the books they want.

Under new CEO James Daunt, best known for reviving Waterstones in the UK, B&N is returning to their core value of bookselling. When their brick-and-mortar stores were forced to close for months during lockdown, the company took advantage of the time to reset and redesign, making the shelves, spacing and overall look more appealing to customers. Local stores revitalized their layout and organization. The result has been overwhelmingly positive, reported Braunschweiger. The new focus in the physical stores is on local bookseller knowledge, and this trend extends to local indie authors.

Braunschweiger also announced that Barnes & Noble has partnered with Lenovo to create a new 10-inch HD tablet which sells for $129.99. The company is also updating their NOOK eReaders, as well as the NOOK app for smartphones and tablets. In addition, they're working on improving the audiobook retail experience.

Braunschweiger shared a few updates at B&N Press. First of all, the uploading platform, which was reconfigured in 2018, has become even more user-friendly. The sales reporting is highly customizable, giving authors the ability to see trends in yearly, monthly, and weekly reports.

Additionally, authors can now designate My Contributors, allowing assistants or others limited access to the portal in order to make changes or upload books and covers without permitting them to see sales reports or banking information.

Braunschweiger also touted the advantages of the Custom Book Sample, which gives authors the ability to create a sample of their book for potential customers to read prior to

purchase. She suggested offering an exclusive Barnes & Noble coupon in that sample to further encourage purchase or preorder.

Barnes & Noble has also recently moved to a flat 70% across-the-board royalty rate for ebooks and pays authors on a 30-day payment cycle.

The B&N Press print book division has also recently expanded beyond paperbacks into hardback copies. Authors receive a 55% royalty on list price minus print cost. There are 20 different trim size options, including new mass-market sizes, and the hardback books offer a choice of dust jacket or printed case. Braunschweiger noted that their printing costs are competitive. Barnes & Noble allows a six-month preorder window for paperbacks.

Braunschweiger also expanded on B&N Press's dynamic merchandising. There are two components to merchandising through Barnes & Noble. First, the company offers a list of store-wide promotions which include Top Indie Favorites, Free eBook Favorites, NOOK Books Under $2.99, Free Fridays, NOOK Daily Find, and NOOK Romance Daily Find.

Top Indie Favorites are new releases that are shared every other month. More than 100 titles are chosen by the curating team, and it is a cross-channel promotion, with the list shared via email and on several other Barnes & Noble pages. While the book must be on preorder when it is submitted for consideration of inclusion, the final file does not have to be uploaded in order to be approved.

Free ebooks can be submitted for several different merchandising opportunities, including Top Free NOOK Books, Start a Series for Free, Free eBook Favorites, and Free Friday. All of these, as well as the Top Indie Favorites, are available via the promotions tab on the B&N Press portal. If that is not available to you, email Braunschweiger at jbraunschweiger@bn.com to request it.

Braunschweiger further encouraged authors to apply for a price promotion whenever you're running a BookBub Featured Deal in order to further raise visibility of a discounted or free book.

On top of the regular promotions, there are also four seasonal merchandising themes: Armchair Travel Sale, Beach Read Sale, Fall 99-Cent Sale, and Holiday Mysteries Sale. These appear on the promotions tab as well.

In addition to store-wide promos, authors can create their own sales via the BOGO and Coupon Creator. You can select the books to which the coupons apply as well as the discount percentage. If you create a Buy One, Get One sale, it's all done in the cart at check-out for the ease of the buyer. The advantage to this type of promotional sale is that it avoids price matching on other vendors. Braunschweiger pointed out that this kind of deal would be perfect to offer at the end of a first in series, giving the reader a chance to buy the next book at a discount, or to use as special sales for your newsletter subscribers.

While there are no series pages available yet, B&N Press is working on adding bundles pages, which are dynamically merchandised for series, as well as carousels with series. You can see an example of that here. This page is still mostly dynamically merchandised (featuring

bestseller lists, coming soon lists, and so on). The "Staff Picks" might go away since that is hand-merchandised; it will likely be replaced by something dynamic, but there is no specific timeline on this.

Braunschweiger did reveal that what Barnes & Noble *is* doing is slowly adding carousels to the product pages to show a handful of books in that series, as can be seen here. If you scroll just under the "Overview," you can see the other titles in the series. The product page also displays a "First in Series" badge under the cover to identify it as such. She noted that since both of these features are handled manually, it's a slower process.

Braunschweiger further recommends making sure that your book pages are optimized—that all of the metadata is correct, that you offer a customized sample, note the series, and that your book has received a number of reviews.

Barnes & Noble is now offering more access to their virtual events, which Braunschweiger noted would be especially great for book launches. She suggested emailing her for more information on this opportunity.

The Author Resources tab on the portal page includes not only basic information (such as steps to self-publishing and book cover design basics) but also links for B&N Press's third-party partnerships with BookTrib, Reedsy, 99Designs, and Inkubate (which helps authors find more readers by matching writing styles to other authors). Author Resources also offers a What's New section to keep authors up to date on maximizing sales and profits at Barnes & Noble.

Braunschweiger said that she and her team are working to bring more indie author voices to B&N readers, and to that end, authors can reach out about the chance to write a post for the B&N Press Blog, which is cross-channel promoted through both social media and BN.com. The blog features the latest news, advice, and marketing tips as well as the week's five favorite indie ebooks.

She also encouraged authors to tag the company on social media when spreading the word about promotions and new releases.

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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.

Tips and Tricks for Creating a Serialized Story
Presented by Ines Johnson

Reported by Michele Dunaway

A 15-year veteran television and film screenwriter, Ines Johnson has a doctorate in education. She writes books where damsels cause the distress, princesses wield swords, and moms save the world.

Ines Johnson describes herself as a writer and producer turned romance author. She starts her session by saying her favorite quote is that well-behaved ladies rarely make history. She loves the strong female lead, especially the ones who get knocked down and then get back up again even stronger and smarter than before. In this presentation, she used *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s pilot episode. (Reporter note: As this part of her presentation included YouTube clips of the show, many of those references have been trimmed out here.)

First, the difference between a serial and a series is that a series is a string of books with the same main characters or related characters in the same world. Think JR Ward's paranormal Black Dagger Brotherhood, Bella Andre's contemporary Sullivan series, or Courtney Milan's Brothers Sinister series. Each story in the series tells the self-contained tale of one couple in the world.

A serial showcases the same character or characters in a story with an overarching plot that is told through a sequential series of books that must be read in order to maintain comprehension. Game of Thrones and Twilight are serials.

In TV terms, most half-hour comedies are series. You could watch an episode of *Seinfeld* or *Friends* one week, miss it the next week, and there won't be too much character progression to cause confusion. However, if you miss an episode of *Scandal*, you'd be lost. Serials must leave the reader both satisfied and wanting to tune in next week. Same for your books.

Here's how you do that. Aristotle talked about beginning, middle, and end. TV and books follow this three-act structure. But let's think in terms of setup, confrontation and resolution.

Setup

This quickly establishes everything the audience or reader needs to know to step into the ordinary world of the main character, but at the same time hook the audience. We will learn the character's goal.

Confrontation

Once the audience knows what the hero/heroine wants, then writers must toss obstacles in their way. In the middle, the hero/heroine must confront many obstacles that test skill and

resolve. The hero/heroine faces false victories and setbacks and will likely have to regroup once or twice before advancing the cause.

Resolution

Facing obstacles changes the hero/heroine. They could grow and learn valuable lessons, or they could fail and doubt themselves. But two-thirds of the way through, they must confront their most arduous challenge. The outcome of this final obstacle will resolve the goal set up in the beginning in the setup. But in a serial, this is not the end because when one door closes, another door opens.

Let's look at each structure even more in depth. For clarity, each of the following acts will start with an outline and then go into depth.

Act One—The Setup

1. Teaser
    a. Scene leads/launches
        i. Character
        ii. Action
        iii. Narrative
        iv. Setting
2. Want/need
    a. A hole in my heart
    b. Filling the void
3. Plan
4. Obstacle
    a. Antagonist
    b. Physical obstructions
    c. Inner/psychological problems
    d. Mystic forces

Teaser

The purpose of the setup is to quickly establish everything the audience or reader needs to know. It's Norm telling a joke in *Cheers* before the opening credits role. It might be the murder before we meet the detectives who will solve it. There are many ways to launch the scene.

Character: Your hero/heroine is typically the driving force behind the book. Johnson said the most important thing you can do is get the reader on their side from the first paragraph. With a character-driven scene launch, the reader understands the character's immediate desires so that they become the reader's desires as well. And we need to know what's in their way of getting that.

Action: Action and narrative summary may look the same at first glance, but there is a key way to spot the difference. Look for the verb. You can't *was* and *were* and *have*. You can jump. You can stare. You can run. You can groan. When you use an action-driven scene you will start

in the middle of things without an explanation or backstory. Johnson likes these because they engage the mind. The reader wants to know what is going on and will keep reading to find out.

Narrative: This summary allows the writer to explain and describe. It can be powerful when it's used to set up the scene or demonstrate the character's personality or state of mind. Writers should use narrative summary when information needs to be told instead of shown, perhaps because it has already happened. You can also use it when a character's thoughts or motivations can't be shown with action.

Setting: Setting should be part of plot. Here you allow the scenery to set the tone of the scene or character's emotions.

Wants and needs

Once you know who they are and a few rules of the world, the reader should glimpse the current situation and know what the goal is. A goal is either a need or a want.

All characters have holes *(a hole in my heart)*. The character believes they are lacking something crucial in their lives (dream job, right social circle, mother's approval, etc.). Rarely are characters whole. A part is missing. Readers now embark on a journey with the character who is out to fill the void.

Characters *fill the void* in one of two ways, with either a need or a want. There's a difference. A want is a false goal, a red herring that throws both the reader and the character off the true course that will lead to filling the character's hole. It takes some time and some bumps in the road before the character realizes their want is not what they need. The need perfectly fills the void the character has been experiencing.

In your story, does your main character have both a need and a want? Make sure you know both, but for this plot point use their want.

Plan

Before a character can see their need, they have to yearn after a want, and to get it they make a plan which has some ups and downs. This scene is usually brief. Sometimes the character doesn't even voice the plan; they simply start down the path. The writer must know the plan, however. What steps must they take to be successful in grasping their need?

Obstacles

Along the way, the writer throws a wrench in the way. We're about to enter Act II, which Johnson calls the obstacle course. Your character should have at least two obstacles put in the way.

Antagonist/bad guy: This person lends clarity and power to the dramatic structure because their primary function is to oppose the protagonist. They don't have to be evil, but they should personify the character's obstacles. Example: Cinderella's stepmother.

Physical obstructions: These are material barriers in the way of the protagonist. They can be rivers, deserts, mountains, or a car causing a crash, anything that presents a substantial obstacle. Example: Ariel's tail in *The Little Mermaid*.

Inner/psychological problems: These are intellectual, emotional or psychological problems the protagonist must overcome before achieving the goal, like dealing with fear, pride, jealousy, or need to be mature. Example: Fiona in *Shrek* hates how she's actually an ogre and believes she's unlovable.

Mystic forces: Most enter stories as accidents or chance, but they can be expressed as moral choices or ethical codes that present obstacles. They can be personified as gods or supernatural forces the characters must contend with. Example: the magic forces that alter Tiana's life in *The Princess and the Frog*.

Act Two: Confrontation
5. Growth
   a. Positive
   b. Negative
6. Setback
   a. Major setback
7. Regroup
   a. Buttons
8. Confrontation

Growth

At the end of Act I, your hero/heroine must confront many obstacles that test them. You're going to throw even more at them. First, how did they fare with the obstacles in Act I? Did they succeed and get closer to their goal? Or did they fail and experience a setback?

You'll need to have a growth scene after the main character faces that first obstacle. Growth is *positive* or *negative*. Both may slightly alter the character's plan.

False victory/setback

After the impact of the obstacle hits them, the hero/heroine typically has three options.
1. They might advance because the obstacles barely impacted them. (Johnson asks, but really will a reader be interested if the character faced no adversity?)
2. They might have thought they advanced but soon came face to face with unintended consequences. This is known as the false victory.
3. They barely catch their breath before facing another major setback when another obstacle presents itself.

At the end of Act I, you left your character in some kind of peril. At the start of the second they deal with the obstacle and are changed (grew and advanced or became wounded and retreated). Regardless, they go forward again and face another obstacle, often a major setback. Then they must regroup.

Regroup

In this scene your hero/heroine figures out if their goal is truly what they want and they proceed with gusto. Or they may realize this is not truly what they want and the goal changes to true need. Nowadays writers in film, television, and books use this structure of want versus need to curve a twist in the plot. If your character realized their need was a want, and they made a change to their goal, they must come up with a new plan before moving onto the next plot point, which is another obstacle.

Johnson pauses here to talk about *buttons.* (Reporter's note: Johnson wrote an article for the July 2021 *Nink*, which you can find on the NINC website.)

Buttons are ways to get out of the scene that leave the reader wanting more.

- Period: statement or sequence is over, no loose ends, resolved. Use it sparingly to give audience a breather.
- Exclamation mark: Impact! Heightens, strong emotions. Also use sparingly as it can overwhelm the reader.
- Question mark: suspense. More coming.
- Ellipses: to be continued. More is coming but answer is not guaranteed.
- Dash: ends abruptly. A handy device, informal and playful, telling the reader you're about to take off on a different tack but still in some way connected with the present course.

Confrontation

This is a different type of obstacle. It's still either antagonist, physical obstruction, inner/psychological problem, or mystic force. But more importantly it's the last obstacle your main character will face before the resolution.

There are two schools of thought: You can make this obstacle the biggest that the main character has ever faced. Or you can make it the same or lesser than the others. Johnson recommends making it huge because you want pages turning and hearts pounding. End Act II.

Act III—The Resolution

9. Silver Lining
10. Resolution
11. Closure
12. Open Door

Act II should end with you leaving your hero/heroine in some form of peril. All looks lost. But it's not, and there's a rainbow at the end shining its light on the silver lining in the distance. There's a way out. Your main character just has to get there.

Silver lining

There doesn't have to be any more obstacles at this point. The last one knocked your character on their butt, but they got up. Facing these obstacles in Acts I and II has changed them. They've grown and learned some lessons.

This scene is a revelation; it's an aha moment. They can have an epiphany or a revelation. Both are a discovery. In an epiphany the character comes to understand a point that they haven't had before, and this opens them to a new (silver) lining. A revelation is a communication of information that's often undisclosed prior. One happens in the mind, the other happens in the ears. Either way, the character is changed and moves differently from now to the end of the story.

Victory/resolution

Your character has a teachable moment, and they are behaving in a different manner that should propel them toward the achievement of their goal. Hopefully, this is that scene when your character would achieve their goal.

Closure

Before you embark on a new story you must close out the first one. Have you ever ended a relationship unresolved? It's no fun. Don't do this to your readers. Be sure to tidy up any subplots, including the main plot. By this point in the story make sure to converge and complete any subplots you have dangling. You could even end on a cliffhanger.

Open Door

An Open Door is a bridge to a new story by introducing a new complication without much of an explanation. In a standalone film the viewer leaves the theater or stays in their seat while trying to work out what it all means. How did the story truly end? It's as though you get to choose your own ending, and everyone comes up with something different. Johnson believes this method works because the reader or viewer gets that sense of the closed satisfaction they crave, but before the reader gets to the last page the author wrenches the door open and introduces a new obstacle.

With the Open Door, you get close because one storyline ends and another, which overlaps it, begins. A cliffhanger is an unresolved story question. An Open Door is a new Story Question after the old one was answered, which invites the reader or viewer back on this crazy roller coaster ride. It's why they are reading you in the first place.

This works with same characters across multiple books, and also with different characters each book. In that case, your couple gets the HEA, but the epilogue brings in a new hero/ heroine and questions so the reader wants the next book.
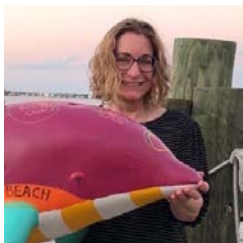
Michele Dunaway writes contemporary romance and teaches full time high school English and journalism. She's currently at work on two new series.

Author Marketing for You
Presented by Becca Syme

Reported by Cidney Swanson

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.

When working with authors as a success coach, Becca Syme is frequently asked a similar series of marketing questions. Should I be on TikTok? Should I be on more than one social media platform? Start a YouTube channel? A Patreon? A podcast? Should I enroll my books in Kindle Unlimited? Should I have a newsletter? Syme's answer is the same for each question: *It depends*.

Having coached thousands of clients, Syme readily acknowledges that universal success systems don't exist and that every author must approach marketing decisions differently.

Syme invites us to imagine the last time we bought a book online because of an author's marketing. None of us buys from every tweet, every recommendation, and every ad we see. We don't buy every book because we don't have to. There is no scarcity. The rules change when there is no scarcity. In a buyer's market, a seller must stand out and be memorable or excellent.

Syme says "stand-out author marketing" consists of doing less and being better at it. Authors cannot be good at everything. She encourages authors to utilize innate potential with intentional development. Someone who is innately bad at something can become 10 times better and only go from a 1 to a 10 on a scale of 100. Someone who starts doing something they are innately good at and then trains to become better can end up in the top 1%.

Syme fundamentally disagrees that every author must do everything in the same way to achieve the same success. To answer the marketing questions listed at the beginning, Syme likes to use something she calls a success alignment grid. This consists of a list of questions designed to uncover what may help or hinder an author in their marketing efforts.

Should I be on TikTok?
To decide if TikTok will be a good fit for an author's innate strengths, Syme tells authors to ask these questions:

1. Am I private or comfortable in public?
2. Am I introverted or extroverted?
3. Do I self-regulate my use of time before endless data or do I have trouble stopping myself from consuming data?

4. Am I highly creative or not as creative?
5. Do I like fiddling with new things or do I dislike glitches?

TikTok is a better fit for someone comfortable in public and extroverted, who has no problem ending their consumption of data, who is highly creative, and who likes trying new platforms which may have glitches.

Should I be on more than one social media channel?
Here, it is useful to ask a similar set of questions:
1. Am I private or comfortable in public?
2. Do I have lots of free time or no free time?
3. Do I self-regulate my use of time before endless data or do I have trouble stopping myself from consuming data?
4. Am I highly creative or not as creative?
5. Do I love social media or hate social media?

To spend time on more than one channel, an author should be comfortable in public, have lots of free time, be capable of regulating media consumption, be highly creative, and love social media.

Should I have a YouTube channel or a podcast?
Similar questions from above are now presented in abbreviated form:
1. Private vs. public-comfortable?
2. Lots of free time or no free time?
3. Do I have a new and different idea or am I doing what's already been done?
4. Do I have a highly invested audience or am I an unknown author?
5. Do I have tech expertise (or money for it), or do I have neither expertise nor cash?

An author who wants to start a YouTube channel or a podcast should be public-comfortable, have lots of free time, have a fresh idea to present, have a highly invested audience, and have either technical expertise or the ability to pay for it.

Should I do a Patreon?
Questions to ask include these:
1. Private vs. public-comfortable?
2. Introverted or extroverted?
3. Do I have a new and different idea or will I do what's already been done?
4. Am I comfortable asking for money or uncomfortable?
5. Do I lack a reliable community or do I have one already?

An author wanting success on Patreon can be private or comfortable in public, introverted or extroverted. It's best if an author has a new and different idea for their Patreon, and they should be comfortable asking for money. Also, Patreon makes more sense for an author who doesn't already have an established online community.

Should I be in Kindle Unlimited?

Syme's questions here are a bit different:
1. Am I unknown or do I already have a big platform?
2. Am I patient or impatient?
3. Am I willing to write to market or do I need to write uniquely?
4. Do I prefer fewer moving parts or am I okay with more administration?
5. Can I release regularly or can I not?

An author can be known or unknown and succeed in KU. If an author is less patient, willing to write to market, prefers less administration, and can release regularly, KU makes more sense. However, KU will never make sense for someone who dislikes the idea of being exclusive to one sales platform. Syme says that if the idea of KU makes an author feel sick, it's best to pay attention to that feeling.

Should I run a newsletter?

Here, Syme employed some tongue-in-cheek humor:
1. Are you human or a robot?
2. Do you hate money or want money?
3. Do you hate people or love people?
4. Do you have a Patreon or Substack or do you have no online community?
5. Does your audience matter or not matter to you?

Syme feels that most authors, i.e., those who are human, want money, and don't hate people, ought to have a newsletter. Those with existing online communities might be able to get by relying on those. But as Syme points out, a mailing list is something an online platform cannot take away.

Should I run my own ads and be the "decider?"
1. Private vs. public?
2. Lots of free time vs. none?
3. Am I okay giving up control or is it easy for me to delegate?
4. Do I have low tolerance for failure or high tolerance for failure?
5. Do I learn systems easily or not?
6. Do I have technical expertise or money or neither?

7. Am I able to make an objective product assessment or not?
8. Do I know my genre or not?
9. Can I see signaling or not? Signals are not subjective. Covers and blurbs are signals about what is inside the book; they are not art.
10. Do I need to be right all the time or am I okay being wrong?
11. Am I emotionally attached to my product or able to remain detached emotionally?
12. Do I write genre mash-ups, or do I write for a clear market?

Running their own ads is less of a good fit for those authors with little free time, those who are great at delegating, those with low tolerance for failure, those who do not learn systems easily, those who cannot assess images objectively, those who hate being wrong, those with emotional attachment to their products, and those who write genre mash-ups.

In conclusion
Syme reminds authors that in this market of plenty, they cannot make sales simply by showing up. It is essential to stand out and be memorable or excellent. She advises authors to do less, be better, and get support.

For more information about Becca Syme and this presentation, visit http:// betterfasteracademy.com/ninc2.

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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.

Domestic Violence in Fiction:
Write the Story Survivors Deserve
Presented by Adriana Herrera

Reported by Tawdra Kandle

Adriana Herrera, in addition to being a bestselling romance author, is a trauma therapist in New York City, working with survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

Herrera is well suited to address the topic of writing about trauma and how survivors cope. She writes because she loves romance—it is a place of comfort for her—and she wants to serve survivors through her stories.

With this dual motivation, Herrera is also passionate about helping other fiction authors to write accurately and sensitively about those who have come through trauma by understanding both the experience and the possible repercussions.

Herrera defined trauma as experiencing, hearing, seeing, or learning about an event that involves death, the threat of death, or serious injury to one's self or another. The feelings most often associated with the experience, no matter what it is, are intense fear, hopelessness, and horror. Trauma overwhelms a person's sense of control and meaning in life.

Domestic abuse, which is a prolonged exposure to trauma, is only comparable to surviving a cult or of being a prisoner of war. The trauma is held in the body as well as the mind through a strong and unique sort of mind-body connection, and unprocessed trauma will have an impact on everyday life.

Herrera described two types of trauma paradigms: the first is complex trauma, wherein children experience multiple traumatic events that occur within the care-giving system, the social environment that is supposed to be the source of safety and stability in a child's life. Hallmarks of this can be the development of reactive detachment disorder, impairment of self-capacities (feeling worthy of life and love), difficulty with managing feelings (marked by self-harming, alcohol, and drug abuse), and a struggle to form relationships and connections. An intervention can help in this kind of situation.

Post-traumatic stress disorder, however, is a serious, potentially debilitating condition that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a natural disaster or serious accident, a terrorist incident, the sudden death of loved ones, war, violent personal attacks such as rape, or other life-threatening events. There are currently about 8 million people in the United States living with PTSD.

Next, Herrara went on to talk about how trauma affects the human brain. She explained about two different sections of the brain: first, the amygdala, or so-called lizard brain, which keeps us safe by alerting us to danger. Eager to employ the fight or flight responses, the amygdala is not good at discriminating between real, imminent dangers and those we simply remember. It can sound the alarm even when the real danger is well past.

The hippocampus, on the other hand, helps us store and remember information. The hippocampus is the librarian of the brain, tagging our memories with information about where and when they occurred.

Herrera described the brain as a filing cabinet. Regular, non-traumatic memories are stored in the hippocampus. However, trauma is often stored in the amygdala, in the file of it's-still-happening. Physiologically, then, remembering that event can feel as though it's still happening in the moment.

For instance, fictional characters who have traumatic history might have no idea why they react to traumatic memories. It's essential to portray realistic reactions to triggers. For instance, veterans might be functioning, but their brains could be in a fog, meaning that adapting to civilian life is challenging because in their minds, they are still in the battle.

Some of the effects of trauma can include re-experiencing the event (through nightmares, intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, and traumatic re-enactment), hyperarousal (hyperactive behavior, struggles with sleeplessness, easily startled, irritable, fearful, marked by a difficulty in concentrating), and avoidance (refusal to talk about trauma, avoiding triggers and reminders, numbing of feelings, experiencing a sense of separateness or difference from others). Since cortisol is released by the brain when the amygdala is triggered, those coping with the after-effects of trauma might experience dilated pupils, dry mouth, a surge in epinephrine and ACTH (a hormone that stimulates the production of cortisol), a release of glucose, inhibition of urination, increased perspiration, and an increased blood flow to the lungs.

The consequences of trauma can show up in health conditions including asthma, fibromyalgia, chronic pain, migraines, and GI distress; in reproductive issues such as sexual dysfunction and pregnancy difficulties; and, of course, psychological struggles.

Herrera pointed out that in the genre of romance, women's fiction, or literary fiction, trauma is often experienced at the hands of an intimate partner. An intimate partner is identified as someone with whom a person had emotional connectedness, regular contact, ongoing physical contact and/or sexual behavior, familiarity with and knowledge about each other's lives, and a shared identity as a couple.

The term intimate partner violence or IPV describes physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, and psychological aggression, including coercive acts by a current or former intimate partner. One in three women and one in four men have experienced some form of IPV. One in four women and one in seven men will experience IPV that could have long-term effects such as injury, fearfulness, PTSD, or the contraction of an STD. Women between the ages of 18 and 24 are the most commonly abused by an intimate partner, and 19% of domestic violence involves a weapon. Domestic victimization is correlated with a higher rate of depression and suicidal behavior. On average, nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner

in the United States. All of these statistics cited by Herrera came from the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

The red flags which can indicate a greater potential for intimate partner violence include speaking disrespectfully about former partners and disrespect or dismissiveness about the feelings and worries of a current partner. The abusive intimate partner often does favors that the other partner doesn't want or puts on a show of generosity to make others feel uncomfortable. The relationship may become too serious too quickly, and the abusive partner becomes controlling and possessive. If he is a male in a male/female couple, he may harbor and express negative attitudes toward women.

Abuse, which is defined as someone taking advantage of a power imbalance, can take the form of coercion and threats, intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, minimizing, denying, and blaming, economic abuse, using children as a threat, and using male privilege.

In the context of romance, real or fictional, Herrera stated, men with these traits who perpetuate these acts are not part of a happily-ever-after scenario.

She shared a number of facts versus harmful myths, many of which are employed within fiction. For instance, men do not abuse out of passion; abuse is about values, beliefs and attitudes. Also, it is a myth that men who were abused as a child are more likely to abuse others in adulthood. But, in fact, while men who experienced abuse as children might have bought into the idea that abuse is okay, multiple research studies have shown the connection between child abuse and abuse to an intimate partner to be weak.

Also, men who had a previous partner who genuinely abused or mistreated them (ostensibly resulting in a suspicion of all women) are not going to use that experience as an excuse to hurt someone else. Further, it is a myth that men hold their feelings in too much until they build up and boil over. Most abusive men don't hold back on expressing their feelings; in fact, they have an exaggerated sense of how important their feelings are.

Additionally, IPV is as prevalent in LGBTQ+ relationships but is grossly underreported, often due to legal definitions of domestic partnerships that exclude same-sex couples, the dangers of outing oneself when seeking help, the lack of LGBTQ+ specific resources, potential homophobia from the staff of service providers, and low levels of confidence in the sensitivity and effectiveness of law enforcement officials and courts for LGTBQ+ people.

Herrera stated that writers need to be aware that abusive men or women might be out of control, but that this kind of behavior should not be excused in real life or in fiction. She pointed out that there are choices we make as authors, but the trauma experienced should be addressed appropriately, including possible flashbacks or traumatic incidents in the story.

Trauma does not heal on its own, Herrera reminded us. The mind and body will always present a bill for what they have endured, and this should be reflected in our stories. But recovery is possible, usually marked by emotional safety, telling the trauma, and connection with loved ones and the community.

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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.

Using Audiobooks to Enhance Your Author Business
Presented by Will Dages

Reported by Jennifer Stevenson

Will Dages is head of Findaway Voices, a platform that helps authors create and distribute audiobooks all over the world. Findaway Voices *has been in business for 15 years.*

Growth and trends

The audiobook industry has seen eight straight years of growth. Authors can distribute wide via Findaway to 40-plus retailers and libraries. The three fastest-growing genres are Romance (up 146%), Mystery & Detective (158%), and Fantasy (68%), and most recently, Discrimination & Race Relations (2708%), Personal Finances (646%), Action & Adventure (493%), Nature (406%), Parenting (396%), and Science Fiction (318%).

Dages provided a chart to help authors choose how much to discount their audiobooks on Findaway Voices during limited-time price promotions.

Production process

Casting: The best narrators can bring their audience with them. Listeners fall in love with a narrator's voice and trust them as a curator.

Preproduction: Dages encouraged authors to spend as much time as possible in this step, to prevent disasters.

Production: Your narrator is doing the work. They edit, proof, master, and deliver files.

Post production

Final delivery and approval. You need not distribute with Findaway. If you pay for production, you own the property. Findaway does not do royalty share.

Creation process

If you're considering selling your rights, consider negotiating for veto power over narrator choice. Consider the rights you want and negotiate them. Participate in the casting. If you split rights, or an audio publisher buys it, you have far fewer choices and lower royalties.

If your voice is part of your brand, for example, if you're a podcaster, you might narrate your own book. But audiobooks are different from podcasting. You must maintain consistency of character voices, pace, tone, and cadence.

Doing it yourself: Audition yourself for a one-hour recording: does it sound at the end the same as at the beginning? Now read the same five minutes as you send the narrators who are auditioning. Then ask friends to listen to all the samples, including yours, and let them pick.

Pre- and post-production: What makes a book better?

Prepare your script https://blog.findawayvoices.com/turning-your-book-into-an-audiobook-script/. Read your manuscript aloud to yourself. Keep notes and comments in the manuscript on what doesn't work.

Create a pronunciation guide. Then choose an extended sample of 15-20 minutes, selecting text that includes all the characters, accents, and genders, and variations in tone and pacing. It's very cheap to correct these factors early on, but expensive when fixing them later.

After you have booked the narrator, this is the most important part: be nitpicky *now*. After production is finished, they can charge you extra for fixes that are inconsistent with the extended sample. Objective errors like mispronunciations are free fixes. Things like accents or pacing, you pay to fix.

Post-production, give timestamps when giving feedback to your narrator. Trust their vision. Assume that they know what will play with readers better than you do. Learn to give the feedback that is most useful to your narrator. Treat your narrator like a collaborator, not a chore boy.

Retail market overview

Chirp is an arm of BookBub, a retailer accessible only through Findaway. They offer deals via newsletter, free to the author. Discounted audiobooks are exciting for readers, who are used to paying $15 per book on Audible. You can apply once a month per title. Competition is stiff to get the deals. Expect great series buy-through, as Chirp pushes the next release in the series and pushes for reviews.

Findaway sells direct with **Apple**. Your royalties are 45% nonexclusive with Findaway, but only 40% at Apple via ACX. You get price control, and you can run promotions. Apple increasingly gives more merchandising space and carousel space (promotional real estate) to audio.

Scribd shows strong audio growth. Dages urged the audience to "Reconsider your hate for them." They work exclusively with Findaway as a provider, and "We've had no trouble getting an audiobook taken down off Scribd."

Google is the only cross-platform provider that offers global preorders.

Libraries

The library market uses two models: À la carte, where they pay a lot for each copy, then circulate it as much as they want. Here, most of the money goes to big publishers' bestsellers. The other model is the subscriber model, where the library buys one copy of each book, and the entire catalog is available to patrons. When someone checks the book out, you get a small royalty per borrow, but they can lend it as often as they want at the same time.

Dages provided a library market overview of 45 retailers. (See his slide show in Resources below.) Findaway has been able to help all small audio retailers to compete with Audible.

Marketing your audiobook release

Simultaneous release (ebook, print, audio) is painful because audiobooks take six to eight weeks to produce. You must turn in a finished book to your narrator. However, we see a 30% increase in sales with simultaneous release.

Set your list pricing for retail and libraries

At Findaway, you can set it the same as at Audible. Audible charges the same for all books; it's not as good on the open market. Findaway is good at helping you set your ideal price. You can deep-discount prices on book one and set smaller discounts for books two and three.

Merchandising opportunities

Marketing@findawayvoices.com is your direct line to Findaway's merchandising team. If you're doing something to market your book, tell them six weeks in advance. They pitch new books, discuss upcoming sales, and can maybe get you into the retailer's carousel. Retailers plan six weeks ahead, so don't wait until two weeks. Ask if Apple or Storytel might have something you can jump in on.

Giveaway codes

You can send audiobooks to reviewers. Findaway provides 30 codes per book.

Authors Direct

You can have your own page on Findaway to sell your audiobooks. We offer a 70% royalty (30% higher) on books offered there. It's an optional paid upgrade, more useful if you have a big mailing list and know how to drive a big launch. More at Authors Direct at https://authors-direct.com/authors/.

Sales and reporting dashboard

Findaway offers their dashboard for trend insights. "The best data we have is not very good…but this is everything we know. Many retail partners don't report well or promptly. It can take months to hear from some of the distributors, retailers, or branches. But bad data is better than no data, and it's getting better. Use it as 'trend level' information, not detail-accurate."

Include audio in your author brand

The biggest problem is that your readers don't know you have audio. Include audio in your planning.

Covers: All your covers should look like they're from the same author. Have a square cover version designed; don't letterbox your ebook cover. You'll never get a feature from any retailers with a letterbox cover.

Narrator: Your narrator is part of your brand. Consider your narrator as another businessperson; how can you elevate their brand and give yourself visibility? Record a Q&A with them; ask for bloopers; fun stuff to peel back the process; show some humanity under the behind-the-scenes of audiobook production. Listeners love seeing how sausage is made.

Pen names: There is some discussion on the value of pen names. Dages believes listeners like multidimensional authors and feels that creating a new brand and persona is too much investment.

Your community

In your community, post only one advertisement per 50 messages.

Some authors use Clubhouse, a social media app with voice-only chat rooms. It's largely for audio producers and a few fans right now, but they're coming on. He also mentioned Discord, Facebook groups, and especially TikTok, where authors are "selling a lot of books by not talking about their books. Some of the most interesting #BookTok is people pretending to be their protagonist, 60 seconds of your character telling their story." New tools emerge on "BookTok" all the time.

Overdeliver for your community. Give more than you get. Focus on what you're giving listeners, not on what you're getting from them.

Other ways to engage with your fans

Serialized releases: "There are no great platforms in audio yet, but there are ways to hack it in, especially on Scribd, coming soon."

Reader magnets: first chapters, alternate endings, self-narrated or fan-read chapters. Get creative! Steal ideas from the special features on movies. Email your subscribers to ask if they got their free gift yet.

Findaway Marketplace

Dages announced a brand-new feature at Findaway, a platform that connects authors and narrators directly: https://findawayvoices.com/marketplace. A series of tools guides authors step by step. All Findaway Marketplace tools are free to use; you do not have to distribute through Findaway. If you hire through Marketplace, you know the narrators are not scammers but are verified good quality, on time, and reliable by Findaway. You are guaranteed no AI (artificial intelligence, i.e. machine) narration. You may use alternate payment methods, and for a small fee you can have optional payment management by Marketplace.

On Marketplace, each narrator has their own page with its own URL, an audio intro and bio, avatar and background image, and badges verifying their work history with Marketplace.

Advantages for the author: It's easy to find a narrator. You can filter and tag your narrator search and use Marketplace's workflow tools.

Q&A

Q: I'm exclusive with Audible. Is it easier for me to continue as I am?

A: When you are in the audio market wide, and things change drastically and go down in one or other of those wide markets, you are covered elsewhere. It's more painful to go wide later than sooner.

Q: I'm exclusive at KU and Audible. Can I go wide with audio?

A: YES.

Q: Do you have length requirements on an audiobook?

A: I have some audiobooks for children under two minutes.

Q: When does Marketplace open for narrators and authors?

A: We will go live when we have a critical mass number of narrators ready.

Q: What's the future of AI narration?

A: We're surprised how fast it's evolving. Right now it's still very obviously a computer reading. We do QA (quality assurance) on books coming in; so far, it's easy to pick out the machine voices. We don't accept it at all. Consumers believe they're getting a human narrator. The technology may be ready, but the market is not ready.

Q: Are you open to accepting AI as it grows?

A: No. We're against it right now and I don't see that changing soon. That decision is not based on quality but do markets want it?

Q: Over what period of time did you find later release is not as lucrative as simultaneous release?

A: from audience member: If you put out an email or an ad and someone doesn't click because it is or isn't audio, then the algorithm thinks you suck if someone comes to the page and doesn't buy. The algorithm doesn't know that they didn't buy because audio wasn't available.

Q: On Scribd, can we opt out of Scribd when we distribute with you?

A: Yes, you can uncheck any distributor or retailer.

Q: I switched from Audible to Findaway. It took a couple of months to see improvement. How does Authors Direct work?

A: There's a $99 one-time fee. You get a storefront and can load as many books onto it as you want. It's your own audio landing page/domain with a domain name. You can use your own website's header to customize. Authors Direct is built in Shopify.

Q: Is there a link we can give to our own favorite narrators that allows them to sign up for Marketplace?

A: Not until Tuesday.

Q: Will it be searchable?

A: After Tuesday.

Q: On our Author Direct page, can you add a button to redirect people back to our home page?

A: I'm not sure yet, but we'll try.

Resources

- Blog post: https://blog.findawayvoices.com/turning-your-book-into-an-audiobook-script/
- https://findawayvoices.com/marketplace
- Email Will Dages: wdages@findaway.com

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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.

Copyright and Trademarks:
What Every Author Needs 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 started the session with a caveat: "This is not legal advice. I'm not your attorney." She urged anyone with legal questions to seek advice from an attorney.

Copyright

What is copyright? Marr gave a dictionary definition first that copyright is a legal device that the work conveys ideas and information. The creator decides where the work goes.

The main goal of a copyright is to encourage creation of new intellectual and artistic works. It allows people to have a revenue stream. Pirates may take your work, but that's illegal.

Marr likened books to seeds. "A book is like a seed. It's an individual entity that when planted grows into a tree. Each branch of the tree is a derivative work." Derivative works include games, apps, foreign editions, audio, films, etc.

"You have subsidiary rights for these (the tree branches). You can license some or none of these," Marr said.

These include reproduction rights, distribution rights, right to create adaptions (aka derivative works), performance and display rights.

All these things come from one intellectual property, your book. Copyright lasts a long time. For works created after 1977, it's the life of the author plus 70 years. For works for hire created after 1977, it's 95 years from the date of publication or 120 years from the date of creation, whichever comes first.

One exception is fair use. It's muddy, but it's a defense.

Copyrights, Marr said, "are like a house. It's a piece of property you can sell or transfer." An author's copyright may only be exploited or exercised by the author, or a person or entity to whom the author has licensed, transferred, or sold all or part of their rights.

Copyright is automatic. A copyright comes into existence the moment an author/creator fixes his or her words into a tangible form.

Marr debunked several copyright myths:

1. A work must be registered with the U.S. Copyright office to be protected by copyright. No, registering gives you additional protections (more later).
2. Anyone can use your words. No, no one can use a protected work without the copyright owner's permission, unless it's fair use. However, you can use protected works as long as they fall within the bounds of fair use.
3. You can copyright ideas. No, copyright only protects the *expression* of an idea, not the idea itself.

Best practices:

1. Put a copyright notice on all works.
2. Register after publication.

Why register?

Copyright shifts the burden of proof to the infringer. It makes the author eligible for statutory damages, and it makes the author eligible for attorney fees.

Marr had a friend who ran into this after she didn't file copyright. Since she hadn't filed, her friend found it a hard time to find an attorney. Marr said it can take $50,000 to $70,000 to get in the courthouse door.

Copyright infringement occurs when a person other than the copyright owner exploits one or more of the copyright owner's exclusive rights without the copyright owner's permission. It's like a thief has come into your house and stolen something.

Your first step is a cease-and-desist letter. It puts the infringer on notice. It establishes a date for your discovery of the infringement, which could become important in a court case. It tells the infringer you intend to stop them.

Filing the copyright is done online through the U.S. Copyright Office. Marr said that while the website is "wonky," it's not hard and not expensive. She equated it to having "smart girl problems." "We are so used to being good and smart (because we are) that we get frustrated. But I promise you can do it."

Marr said to do it within five months of publication. When asked why, she said it's a statutory window. "I say five months is a best practice."

Q&A

Q: What if you've missed the window? Can you still file?

A: Marr told the audience yes. Copyright is a "brand asset." Your copyright is a brand asset and part of wills, estates, etc. Marr admitted that it's one more thing to add to an already tough publishing schedule but to "Do it as soon as you can."

Q: "I'm working on something for film/TV. Should I copyright it first before selling?"

A: Marr said, "It's already copyrighted. You could register it with the WGA. You don't need to be a member." Studios often have so many similar ideas. The key with proving someone infringed on your work is that they had to have access to it.

Q: Register in pen or real name?

A: Marr said first see if the publisher filed. Start with a search of your pen name and real name. Most publishers file copyright. The choice is the author's.

Q: Can I use short phrases of another author's work and credit them?

A: Marr said you need the author's permission. If you made disparaging comments, get permission or you can be sued. She also said, "The letter of the law and the practice of the law can be two different things."

Disney, she said, will always sue you. If that quote is public domain, it's fine. It it's a song lyric, they can and often will come after you. Epigraphs can be infringement and become very pragmatic. Getting permission is key. Publishers often expect the author to do this.

Trademarks

Under both federal and state laws, a manufacturer, merchant, or group associated with a product or service can obtain protection for a word, phrase, logo, or other symbol used to distinguish the product or service to others. These are "trademarks."

Trademarks offer authors protection for their logos (think Nike's swoosh or McDonald's arches), for their pen name, and for their book series names (you cannot trademark individual titles).

Marr suggested that indie authors who make seven figures should be trademarking pen names, series titles, and any logos. These are assets. Think of Dr. Seuss and Nancy Drew and how they continue to provide revenue to those who hold the trademarks now.

If a book series name might be yours in the marketplace, consider trademarking it as it's a brand asset. The goal of registering is to prevent marketplace confusion.

A worldwide, comprehensive search takes place to see if anyone else is using the mark or name that you want to register. Search for words first and then logo. Do a worldwide search for words and logos in a similar class. Most people won't confuse books and angus steaks, for instance.

The key here is that are we going to confuse a buyer? If not, continue to the application, TEAS (Trademark Electronic Application System).

If an attorney is doing your trademark, the attorney will do an opinion letter. Marr said the attorney does the search and then, based on their past experience and expertise, will issue an opinion as to whether it will get past the examining attorney at the trademark office.

Marr said she thinks of the opinion letter as a traffic light: Red, Yellow, Green. Green, it should go through. Yellow, may have issues. Red, doesn't think it will get through, perhaps because of an identical name or something. "I have had clients go ahead when there's red light," she said. "Note that if it doesn't go through, you may have provided a record of infringement."

In that case, you might need a consent for use.

The information needed for the application is as follows:

- Owner of the mark
- Name and address for correspondence
- Depiction of the mark
- Goods/services
- Application filing fee
- Specimen for application
- Signature

For a pen name, things that indicate it's them will be part of the specimens for the application, such as screen shots with date and time and web addy.

The categories for the application are usually #9 and #16 for authors, with #9 for ebooks and #16 for book series.

All are sent to the USPTO. You file, pay, and wait while their attorney does their own search. Marr said current time is around three months to get an examining attorney. They look for actual branding. They will either issue an office action or proceed to publication.

An office action is a request for more information. The office action can sometimes be simple. It might be additional documentation needed to show that the trademark request is within the parameters of what is acceptable. Once Marr responded to one with a *Variety* announcement and with screenshots of the Facebook group with 20,000 members to prove branding. You have six months to respond to an office action and answer why you should get the trademark. If you do not respond or say no to an office action, your case is considered without your information.

After this step, your trademark is published in the official gazette. Then you wait. For 30 days, anyone in the world can object as to why you should not receive this trademark. Cockygate was an objection.

The time published to registration certificate is about 11 weeks. If successful, you will get a letter and it's a tangible certificate. Start to finish is about nine months with no problems in the U.S. It can be frustrating, and it's a lot of waiting.

Q&A

Q: If an author stole a fanfic, changed it, and passed off as their own, can the original author sue?

A: Maybe. It's hard to give definitive answers in a conference room setting. Was the original book transformative enough that it falls under fair use? Satire falls under fair use. Say it's transformative and a new take. That might be fair use. Plagiarism and copyright are two different things. Example: *Twelfth Night* is in the public domain. I put my name on it and publish it. That's plagiarism, passing off someone's work as yours. But it's not a copyright violation. If it's copyrighted, fair use may not apply.

Q: *What about* The Boys*?*

A: Disney doesn't own superheroes. No one calling himself Superman. No one wearing a cape. Two entities also have armies of lawyers.

Q: *What about if you change the characters to gay or other characteristics?*

A: Fanfic is a little questionable.

Q: *If I file for copyright, does it cover all derivatives?*

A: You do not need to copyright your audiobooks separately. However, every time you create a new derivative, it will be copyrighted. Example: You sell the movie rights. Netflix will copyright the film they make. But when it's just a book, the one copyright covers it all. But if you make different things, copyright the different things.

Q: *I used the name of a winery in a book. Now there's a winery with that name.*

A: Did you file for copyright? If so, the book was put out before the winery and the copyright registered before them naming the winery, so you should be okay. Then again, off the cuff I can't give a definitive answer.

Q: *Copyright with pen name or real name?*

A: Advises that you put books into an LLC. It's really hard to keep secrets these days, so if you want to be anonymous, use an LLC. It adds layers and steps for people to get through. Create as many layers as possible. However, it should be up to the author to decide which name to use. If you have an LLC, you might have benefits. Depends on how you want to set up your business. If you want it super simple, your name. What is your goal? What do you need? Work backward from that? Think about estate planning. All books are assets.

Q: *I filed years ago then rebranded. Same inside but new title and new name. Do I need to refile?*

A: Unsure. Muddy area.

Q: *Should I get other trademarks?*

A: U.S. Trademarks are usually enough.

Q: *Can I use Legal Zoom for forms?*

A: What I'll say is Legal Zoom didn't use Legal Zoom to get its trademark.

Q: *What if Amazon says prove your copyright?*

A: Say you get dinged. You respond. You have to prove it. This is when your agent or attorney can send a letter. Or if you've filed for a copyright, you can send that as proof. But it's usually sending a letter.

Q: Series is published. Didn't register a trademark. Someone else uses series name and applies for a trademark. Can they stop you from using it?

A: File during that 30-day opposition time. If not, it could get litigious.

Q: Can I proactively file?

A: Yes. You can file an intent to use, which is planting a flag. You get six months to use or you must apply for an extension.

Q: What about foreign translations?

A: Where is the translation from? German translators in Germany have some rights to copyright. If you are paying for translations, you may want to copyright them.

Q: Can I be in one state and my lawyer file from another?

A: Federal law can be from anywhere.

Q: How do I defend a trademark?

A: Set up a Google Alert. Send a letter. You will have to do an update with the USPTO at the five-, eight- and 10-year marks to show it's still in use.

Final thoughts

You can't copyright a title or trademark it, only series names. Copyright protects the holder of the work. Trademarks protect the consumer from market confusion. Trademark is valuable as it's a protected asset. If you have a series making pennies, it may not be worth the trademark. But if it is making big dollars, it might be worth the cost. It's a balancing act.

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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.

Treat Your Writing Like a Business
Presented by Joe Solari

Reported by Janis Susan May Patterson

Strategy and operations consultant for authors, Joe Solari is managing director of Claymore LLC, where he helps authors, including six- and seven-figure earners, to reduce stress, optimize their publishing businesses and create personal wealth. He possesses a BFA from the Art Institute of Chicago and an MBA from the University of Chicago Booth School of Business.

If you thought all it took was writing some very good books to become a financially successful author, you're wrong. The first step to becoming a more profitable author is to take a very good look at the business side of your writing. Some survey questions Solari asks are:

1. What are your gross royalties? $10,000 to $50,000 was the most popular answer.
2. Do you have a corporate structure? Most answered they had either a DBA [doing business as] or a sole proprietorship.

A well-structured business gets better results faster, and good business practices can be a cash flow driver. In publishing you need a cumulative advantage, as writers are in a marketplace where there is not a traditional supply/demand factor.

Some important things to remember are that growing expenses eat up profits, more projects take on more money, and growth can outpace cashflow. This can all affect the writer's ability to access credit, and the ability to get credit is important for any business. If you don't set up your business right it can harm your credit, harm your ability to get credit, possibly make you not get it at all or make it cost more. It can even affect your ability to get what you want credit for.

The Cares Act created access to capital. An enormous amount of credit was pumped into the market. Solari helped his clients get approval and forgiveness for fair amounts of money mainly because the proper business protocols were in place. If your business is set up correctly, you can get access to credit.

One thing you must realize is that you put your time, work and money into your writing business, and that makes you an investor, probably the major investor, and you must regard yourself as such. You must also realize that the sole purpose of your business is to deliver a positive free cash flow to the investor-you. The investor should care only about how much money the business makes, not about characters or covers or whatever else makes a book. That is the job of the writer-you. The question is can the investor make more money elsewhere? Writers must start thinking like this.

Regarding cash: We want to make more, we want to keep more, we want it to cycle faster; in other words, money should go out and bring back more moneybuddies. Writers need to set up their businesses to maximize their income and profit, and minimize their expenses and tax liabilities. They need to use legal structures to protect their pretax profit.

Practicalities: How much of every dollar the writer earns in royalties is returned to the investor? If the gross royalty is $1.00 and the expenses are $.41, that means pretax profit is $.59. To create a benchmark, say pretax profit is $.35; taxes average 30%, which means $.24 is net profit.

Lots of writers say they want to be a six-figure author, but that is a vanity statement. What is important is how much does the writer get to keep? How much is pure profit? Solari's client base averages is $.41 per dollar as pretax profit, while some go down to $.35 and others go up to $.55.

If you earn below $10,000 you need to get an EIN (Employer ID Number), which is free from the IRS. This will prevent fraud and theft. Set up a separate bank account for your company. If using a credit card, either separate the charges or get a totally separate card for your business. Operate as a sole proprietor.

If you earn between $10,000 and $50,000, after doing the above you need to set up a company (more about what kind in a minute). What you save in taxes will offset your costs to do this. Start a payroll.

If you earn between $50,000 and $100,000, after doing all the above you need to establish a retirement account.

If you earn $101,000 and up, after doing all the above you need to diversify.

Types of companies

The most common for lower-earning writers are a sole proprietorship and a DBA (Doing Business As). Solari recommends you not do a DBA, saying they are old and archaic and that an LLC (Limited Liability Company) is better and creates a separate legal entity. Setting up an LLC does cost money, and prices vary by state.

An LLC is a legal entity set up at the state level. Even though it is a pass-through entity there will be taxes; you must pay 15.8% on profits. An LLC uses an operating agreement to set the rules.

A corporation is a legal entity created at the state level, but it is double taxed by both the state and federal governments. Rules are set by bylaws. This can be a very complicated and confusing type of organization, and most writers will not need something like this.

An S-Corp is an option you can take and applies to either an LLC or a corporation and affects your federal tax status.

An LLC/S-Corp provides the most flexible governance in an operating agreement as well as hybrid taxation as sort of a pass-through entity. This is the best tax treatment in most instances.

With everything except sole proprietorship or DBA, you must pay yourself a reasonable salary as an owner; 50% of the profit is a good guideline. After all, what is a "reasonable salary" for an author? Whatever it is, you don't want the tax auditor to make the decision!

Whatever company structure you choose, there will be paperwork and filings. You must file separate tax returns for the company apart from your personal ones. You must run a payroll and register for unemployment in your state.

Issues solved

By creating a company you will have created a separation of personal and company assets. Having a company can reduce your tax exposure by 7.8%. Remember, at least 50% of the profits should go to salaries, i.e., if you earn $100,000 gross, $50,000 should go out in salaries, though the amounts can vary. It must be set up where money is coming out of the business even if only $100 a month. This makes a precedent and a tax advantage. You can set up an IRA or a 401(k) and, once sufficient funds are met, you can borrow 10% of the value of your 401(k) up to $50,000, though you must pay it back within 10 years.

Budgeting

A budget is essential. On his website, Solari offers an Author Capital Planner which computes your writing schedule, money, investing, budgeting, etc., and gives an estimate of your finances.

Solari says how you are building your business depends on what you spend, but there are no absolute rules. Some big authors pay less than 10% of gross for ads. Some pay more. In general, though, if you're spending 30-40% on advertising Solari says you're throwing money away. However, each author must decide what is right for them. On the plus side, authors can get away with expensing a lot of stuff, such as travel and research, etc.

Business accounts: Once you have them, you should look at your business accounts and reconcile them a bare minimum of once a month. In case you don't know how, there are tutorials available on YouTube.

It is important you have a budget because no plan survives reality. A budget will help you find profit leaks, sets guardrails, gives you a method for testing ideas, and reduces the chance of running out of cash. There is a sample sheet available on Solari's website; this can give you a way to test ideas and start plugging possible holes in your business plans.

Checklist

Anything you do more than three times a year should have a checklist. Solari says there are several free downloadable apps available, calling them a significant productivity tool. Checklists help find holes and they are good to hand off to other people to do.

In conclusion

Solari offers writers who register through his website a half-hour, one-on-one conversation for free; he is happy to offer advice, and it is the best way for you to understand how he can help you build a better business.

Setting up your business as a writer correctly can mean keeping a great deal of the money you have worked to earn. *Not* setting up your writer business correctly can cost you a lot. As Joe Solari says, quoting Dr. Russell Ackoff, "The righter you do the wrong things, the wronger you become."

Slides from this presentation, as well as links to a number of helpful charts and sheets which you can download, are on the website at joesolari.com/ninc.

[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.

Creating the Right Launch Plan for Your Book
Presented by Malorie Cooper

Reported by Harper St. George

Mal and Jill Cooper are USA Today *bestselling authors who have released about 250 titles. The pandemic made them sit down and evaluate their past launches that were more successful to find out why. This presentation details the results.*

All spreadsheets discussed in this session and the PowerPoint presentation can be accessed by NINC members by going to thewritingwives.com/ninc.

Framing the launch

Mal Cooper began her presentation by discussing the importance of framing your launch. Before you launch your book, you must make sure that your packaging is telling the reader what you want it to say. Your book is a product, and its presentation is your marketing. We want our readers to buy our books, but we also want readers browsing Amazon who haven't read us before to buy our books. These potential buyers are a cold audience.

The cover and blurb are our first attempts to warm up that audience. Covers are the first thing to grab their attention. Your cover should convey the tropes and universal fantasies in your book. (See workshop by Theodora Taylor for more information about universal fantasies.) The book blurb is your most important marketing tool. Give it the attention it deserves. Always look at other books in your genre for style and substance.

The first thing you should do when planning your launch is fill out the worksheet Mal and Jill created: The Writing Wives Speed and Lifestyle Survey. This will tell you how many books you can write in a year and still like writing. Fill in your numbers on the spreadsheet, and it will calculate this answer for you.

Once you know how many books you are comfortable launching in one year, create a budget and stick to it. It won't help you if you blow through your budget and haven't made it through the year yet. Make sure that the budget you choose is sustainable for you.

Types of launches

There are three types of launches you can use, but there is no universally ideal launch plan. Rapid release has not performed any better for her than any other launch plan. She's had rapid releases that flopped. Instead, she's found that the ideal launch speed for her is 90 days apart in a series. Choose the plan that works best for your writing speed and whether you write standalones, series, or serials.

1. **Impulse Speed:** This means two to five launches a year. This launch type has the most marketing touchpoints with a goal of maintaining reader engagement between releases and then making the most of each release. The intention is that each release will carry you for several months.
    -   You will launch a new release every 90-plus days.
    -   You can do low-cost marketing spends because low cost usually means more labor intensive for you. With only two to five books per year, you have the time to do the extra marketing work.
    -   Do shorter preorders because they convince Amazon that your book sells. For example, if you do a one-year preorder and get one preorder sale a day, then you train Amazon to think you don't get many sales. If you do a shorter preorder length with the same amount of preorder sales, then Amazon will think you sell better.
    -   Your posts on social media should introduce readers to the protagonist in your story to create that emotional connection.
    -   Aim for six to 10 newsletter swaps.

2. **Warp Factor One:** This means four to seven releases in one year. This launch type requires more thought and planning. It also requires more capital for marketing and booking paid promotions. Warp Factor One takes the foundation from Impulse Speed and ramps them up.
    -   You will launch a new release every 45 to 90 days.
    -   Increase marketing spend because more of your time will be spent on writing books and less time doing low-cost marketing.
    -   Create your preorder at the time of your prior release.
    -   Build a bigger newsletter — bigger newsletter means less paid marketing.
    -   Do at least one post a week about the book on social media between launches, but increase this to once a day within one week of launch.
    -   Aim for eight to 12 newsletter swaps. Try to swap with authors you don't normally swap with to increase your reach. Try to pick authors not in your also-boughts so you can reach new readers. Readers in also-boughts have probably already read you.

3. **Star Gate:** This means eight-plus releases per year. This type of launch requires the most planning and marketing spend of all launches.
    -   You will launch a new release every 30 to 45 days.
    -   This is ideal for the first, third, sixth and final book in a series. Don't discount book one until you are launching book three. This will give new readers drawn by the low price more books to purchase in the series.

- This method requires the most amount of paid promotion. You need to spend your time writing books and not on low-cost promotion.
- Create your preorder at the time of your prior release.
- Post daily on social media.
- Aim for 12 to 20 newsletter swaps. Engage much more with your newsletter. Your subscribers are your primary sales channel with this launch plan.

Remember, you also need to match the launch to your book no matter the plan you choose. Cooper does a lot of serial books. These books have overarching story lines with character development and the world evolving as readers move through each book, so it's important that readers go back to the first book in the series even if they jump into the series later on. For this reason, she will often market the first book in the serial, and most marketing will focus on pointing readers back to that first book. Standalones and books in a series that can be read as standalones do not need that same focus on the first book in the series. You can have the bulk of your marketing efforts focus on your current release. It all depends on your marketing budget and how much read-through you have in your series.

To preorder or not to preorder

When Cooper plans a book release, she also has to decide whether she will put the book up for preorder or not. The following is a list of pros and cons she has developed to help her decide. In general, she says that it is best to do preorders when books are released wide. She does not recommend preorders for books going into KU, or she suggests a shorter preorder period for those books.

- **Pros of preorder**
    - You can grab readers when they are hot. If they read the previous book in the series and your next book is up for preorder, then they can one-click it as soon as they finish and it's fresh on their mind.
    - It is ideal for building read-through because your link in the back of your book is guiding them through.
    - It can make releases smoother.

- **Cons of preorder**
    - It can tank sales history. As mentioned above, having a long preorder can make Amazon think you aren't selling well, when a short preorder, or no preorder at all, will result in the same amount of books sold.
    - Preorders do not do much for books that see the bulk of their sales in KU.
    - It can create a time crunch when you have to get your book finished to meet the preorder date you have set.

How to price your book

Your superfans are going to buy your book on preorder for a higher price, so charge the higher price before release. A week after launch you can lower the price. The key here is to know your readers and to be honest with them. Let them know you appreciate them buying but if they are on a fixed budget you will lower the price later. She's had readers complain and will occasionally PayPal them the couple of dollars difference. Alternately, she's asked for more readers to buy at the higher price to help her reach a certain goal and they have done so. Again, the key to this method is to build a relationship with your readers and be open with them.

If you are doing a launch sale, do it within 30 days of release. If you want to get readers into your series and get the funnel read-through to the other books in the series, then price lower. If you want this particular book to get a high sales number now, then price high. It all depends on your plan and which readers you want. You must know your audience.

One thing to note is that the categories at the bottom of your book page on Amazon do not always show up on the left side navigation menu. Readers cannot always browse those categories by drilling down the category menu on the left side. Therefore, you may not need to get the orange #1 tag in those bottom categories. Consider trying to get a #1 New Release tag, because that category shows up in the side navigation section, which means readers can find it easier.

Research your audience

A good way to research your audience is to list the tropes in your book. As mentioned earlier, these should be covered by your cover and blurb. A great resource for this is TVTropes.org. Their website describes them as "the all-devouring pop-culture wiki that catalogs and cross-references recurrent plot devices, archetypes, and tropes in all forms of media." Once you have an idea of your tropes, look at the covers and blurbs in the genre or subgenre you think you match. Make sure your cover and blurb are similar. Target those authors in your ads and do newsletter swaps with authors who use your key tropes. Readers tend to read based on tropes.

Capture and build your audience

Reader magnets are a great way to build your audience. If you are starting a new series or pen name, then a reader magnet is the most important thing you can do. A reader magnet is a story that you give readers for free in exchange for signing up to your newsletter. This should look as professional as your full-length books with a nice cover and editing. It needs to be a full story with a beginning, middle, and end. Ideally, it will be 8,000 to 15,000 words and should be book 0 in your series, so that it works as an introduction to your world. It works best if it uses the same tropes as the first book in your series. Try to release this four to six weeks ahead of your series, but it is fine to add this to an already established series to reach new readers. If you have an ongoing series, make it fit at an ideal entry point later on in the series.

Remember, with this reader magnet you are trying to convince readers that they can spend 10 hours with you and not hate you. You aren't trying to convince them to spend money on your book, but to spend time with you. It's about relationship building rather than selling.

Make the magnet so that the only way someone can get it is to be on your newsletter list. She will sometimes do a Facebook ad for the reader magnet to reach new readers. It's a great idea if you're newly building your list. She does not recommend having a full-length book as a reader magnet, because writers work too hard to give away books for free and there can be low read-through. The magnet should be low cost/low word count to give a taste of your writing to the reader.

Final notes

Cooper created a spreadsheet that tells her how long her production process takes for a single book. The left side is input, and the right side gives dates when you need to have everything done. This is called the Launch Planner.

She also created a spreadsheet for the year that encompasses all the launches she has planned. This is essential if you have a lot of launches because it keeps you organized. This is called the Year-Long Release Sheet. Both sheets are available for NINC members at thewritingwives.com/ninc.

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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.

Ace your Blurbs and Ad Copy
Presented by Malorie Cooper

Reported by Jennifer Stevenson

With more than 100 published books, New York Times *bestselling author Malorie Cooper now focuses on helping other authors achieve success and reach their publishing goals. Look for her fiction under M.D. Cooper and her nonfiction under Mal Cooper.*

Is it possible to have fun writing blurbs? Yes, it is.

Cooper and her wife Jill have written blurbs for about 1,000 authors. They interview the author and then write the blurb.

Their system

Blurb pitfalls include too much backstory. Often a blurb really begins in the third paragraph. You might include a plethora of names; instead, use "the king" and "the goose girl." You might omit to state an adversary or conflict. Some people have been told, "The blurb should contain what's in the first chapter." This is not so. Tell people what they're getting into without spoilers.

Be sure to say, "It's going to get really bad. The hero has to do X, or bad things will happen. Say what the worst outcome could be." There must be a risk of failure.

Especially in romance, you want to let the reader know, "Oh, it's *that* story, *that* trope, I like *that* one."

Beware of "filter words" and passive voice. Use immediate language.

Cooper especially warns us against backstory. It takes away from urgency. You can lose the reader in a sea of detail. Backstory uses up space where you could be relating tropes or character or setting. It simply isn't necessary and it isn't relatable.

Blurbs should be about 250 words long. Convince the readers you can spin a tale. Readers will judge the prose of your book based on your ad copy. If it's lame and full of typos, they will expect the worst. These days, all Cooper's blurbs are prose heavy. This is a super-powerful opportunity to highlight your unique quirkiness and grab readers.

Backstory

A blurb need only say where you are, who the main character is, and what's the inciting incident. Include no more than two named people, if you can get away with it. Avoid confusing and uncommon names.

Antagonist

Specifically and plainly state what the protagonist is up against. Make it clear and specific where the conflict is. Use the antagonist to hint what the stakes are. Layer in your protagonist's motivation.

Make those words pull their weight!

Every word matters. Watch for these culprits: noticed, seemed, spotted, saw, realized, felt, thought, wondered, believed, knew, or decided. These are "tell" words, not "show" words. They're filter words, passive voice, and hints at backstory.

What happens if it all goes to pot?

If you don't include the stakes, you've merely written an introduction to the story. What is at risk? What happens if the protagonist doesn't solve the problem before...? Don't give away the whole plot. Hint at possible outcomes. This is where you lay in the hook.

Write blurbs to market

Know your genre. Look at how top books in your genre are blurbed, especially the books that aren't discounted. Structure your blurbs like that—which tropes, how antagonists and risks are presented, etc.

Character focus

Make people care about this imaginary stranger. This is your most important job in your blurb.

Setting and plot

Ping your tropes in your setting and plot mentions.

Your blurb and cover must convey your top trope, what Theodora Taylor calls the "universal fantasy."

Identifying your book's elements

Character 1 Sarah Harding	Character 2 Peter Ames	Setting	Plot elements	Tropes
Software architect	Interior Designer	Salem, Mass.	Sara is hard on a deadline.	Work-weary
Logical	Easy smile	Boston	Peter loves being on the water.	Alone a long time
Detail-oriented	Obsessed with color synergy	Oceanside bar	Sarah has sworn off men, focusing instead on her career.	Business failure
Walled-off	Amiable	Whale cruise	Accusations of gold digging	Needing a new start
Closet romantic	Loyal	New England		Wholesome romance
Loves dancing	Honorable			Reverse millionaire

Now that you have your chart, highlight the items on each list that really matter. Highlight the ones that are strongest in tropes or commonly loved. Select the ones that are aligned with the genre, then the ones that synergize with each other, then the ones that overlap.

Map to genre

Select the elements that work with and are strong in your genre.

Character 1 Sarah Harding	Character 2 Peter Ames	Setting	Plot elements	Tropes
Software architect	Interior Designer	Salem, Mass.	**Peter designing new office for Sarah's company**	**Work-weary**
Logical	**Easy smile**	Boston	**Sara is hard on a deadline.**	**Alone a long time**
Detail-oriented	**Obsessed with color synergy**	**Oceanside bar**	**Peter loves being on the water.**	**Business failure**
Walled-off	**Amiable**	Whale cruise	**Sarah has sworn off men, focusing instead on her career.**	**Needing a new start**
Closet romantic	**Loyal**	**New England**	Accusations of gold digging	**Wholesome romance**
Loves dancing	Honorable			Reverse millionaire

Select the elements that synergize with each other.

Character 1 Sarah Harding	Character 2 Peter Ames	Setting	Plot elements	Tropes
Software architect	Interior Designer	Salem, Mass.	Peter designing new office for Sarah's company	Work-weary
Logical	Easy smile	Boston	Sara is hard on a deadline.	Alone a long time
Detail-oriented	Obsessed with color synergy	Oceanside bar	Peter loves being on the water.	Business failure
Walled-off	Amiable	Whale cruise	Sarah has sworn off men, *focusing instead on her career.*	Needing a new start
Closet romantic	Loyal	New England	Accusations of gold digging	Wholesome romance
Loves dancing	Honorable			Reverse millionaire

Then isolate the elements that overlap and put them together, and you will have something you can tie together into a 250-word narrative.

Character 1 Sarah Harding	Character 2 Peter Ames	Setting	Plot elements	Tropes
Software architect	Interior Designer	Boston	Peter designing new office for Sarah's company	Work-weary
Detail-oriented	Easy smile	Oceanside bar	Sara is hard on a deadline.	Alone a long time
Closet romantic	Obsessed with color synergy	New England	Peter loves being on the water.	Business failure
Loves dancing	Amiable		Sarah has sworn off men, focusing instead on her career.	Needing a new start
	Honorable		Accusations of gold digging	Wholesome romance
				Reverse millionaire

You'll use it on the cover, in ads, in blurbs, in keywords. Your keywords have the strongest linkage with search terms. Those keywords can go into your titles (in ebook, not print).

Blurb dos

Write a blurb you can imagine being read aloud during a trailer for a movie version of your book. Practice reading your blurb aloud like a film trailer voice-over. Shorter is not better. Prove to the reader that you can spin a tale. Aim for 200 words but don't pad it. And yes, add in a call to action such as "Pick it up now!" This is cheesy, but it works.

"If you want reverse harem, fated mate, enemies to lovers, you'll love this story." Pinging the tropes works. Add the heat level. You want to attract the right reader and repel the wrong reader.

Anatomy of a blurb

The parts of a blurb are the **character/motivation/setting**, the **problem**, the **solution**, the **obstacles and risk**, and the **penalty for failure**. Write a checklist and check off each point. Or pretend you're writing an email to a friend about the book.

Readers one-click based on personal stakes. That's what makes them buy *now*.

Cooper is a big believer in a tagline. What kind of feeling will the story have? Set that tone here. Taglines are like a second book title. Use them and hit those tropes.

Now write paragraphs for each of these elements: character/motivation/setting, problem, solution, obstacles and risk, penalty for failure. This "clinical" section of your blurb has to allow your voice to shine through.

Now the ad copy

Ad copy and blurbs are very similar. They're trying to do the same thing: you want to engage a cold audience, or slightly warm, who stumbles across you. There are two ways to run the ad: On price, highlighting the price, and adding urgency and the deal, and on the entertainment value, the human factors.

Write a version of a blurb for the ad copy. Create an image, i.e. a good background, that adds to and illustrates your ad copy.

Use Facebook's Dynamic Content when creating the Ad Set, then create the different ads, using different blurbs or chunks of your blurb. Try out different taglines as the headline for the ad. The ones that convert (get a click) will be the ones you use in the final version.

The Writing Wives offer a service where they write blurbs for other people for $200-$300. There is a one-hour call with the author. Then they write the blurb. The process takes four to seven days. Usually, they provide two or three different blurbs. "We also teach a version of [today's workshop] that takes eight days. In this class, you show us your cover, people guess the genre, and we create a five-column sheet. Then we look at whether the tropes are in the cover. This costs about the same, $300."

Q&A

Q: How long a blurb would a novella or a short story have?
A: Shorter for stories, not for novellas. 120 words for a short story.

Q: My books are 100K+ words long. The inciting event happens in Chapter 3. It turns everything on its head. Would you put that event in the blurb, or keep it a secret?
A: Yes, it should be in the blurb…because if you sell them on the first few chapters, before the story turns on its head, then you're mismarketing it. Even if your book's biggest moment is at the very end, a big twist, you have to write *something*.

Q: About the timeline: Do you write a few chapters and then stop and plot the whole work and then figure out what the blurb is?
A: Jill writes a blurb before she writes the book. I write very differently. I don't know quite what's going to happen. What has worked for me and works for Jill changes, and it flips sometimes. I suggest you do it book by book and try different things in your bag of tricks. Some people have formed the blurb in their heads, but not me.
Audience member: In my book they find a body in the time capsule, and I kept it secret in the blurb. But every review gave it away. I should have put the body in the time capsule right away and made a better blurb.

Q: Any advice for fantasy/science fiction writers with a lot of worldbuilding?
A: This is where tropes help a lot. You can use them like insider terminology that tightens your blurb up. Don't try to get too specific if it's too backstory-heavy.

Final advice

If you choose not to put one of the five things in your blurb, know why you left it out!
Don't put your series into a box set until the sales tail has died down. If you have a hugely successful series, don't put the box set out until you're ready.

Resources

- Classes and ebooks:
    - *Help! My Facebook Ads Suck* (ebook is free)
    - *Help! My Launch Plan Sucks*
    - *Help! My Blurbs and Ad Copy Suck*
- Find the PowerPoint for this presentation here.
- More resources at https://www.thewritingwives.com/ninc/

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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.

Writing the Diaspora:
Creating Characters with History and Depth
Presented by Adriana Herrera

Reported by Cidney Swanson

USA Today *bestselling author* Adriana Herrera *is an outspoken advocate for diversity in romance and has written for* Remezcla *and* Bustle *about Own Voices in the genre. She's one of the co-creators of the Queer Romance PoC Collective.*

Adriana Herrera came to the United States from the Dominican Republic to attend graduate school. Later, she and her partner traveled to Ethiopia and Honduras, where they worked for many years. Each of these experiences has informed her work and her advice to writers interested in writing the diaspora. Herrera provided important questions that authors can ask when creating characters outside their own identity.

What is a diaspora?
No single experience is universal, Herrera notes, but members of diasporas tend to share several traits.
- Migration, forced or voluntary
- An idealized, collective memory or myth about the ancestral home
- A continuing connection to a country or origin
- A strong group consciousness sustained over time
- A sense of kinship with diaspora members in other countries, for example, Dominicans, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans tend to feel kinship because of skin color or language commonalities

Often, Herrera sees authors who conflate the differences between nationality, race, and ethnicity. For example, someone from DR can be black or white; they aren't racially the same even though they may share nationality and ethnicity. Another example would be India, a nation with multiple cultures despite a closer-to-uniform race. It is therefore important to be granular in exploring cultural variety within places that may be geographically identified as a single nation.

Herrera agrees with consultant and facilitator Robin DiAngelo, author of books such as *White Fragility* and *Nice Racism*, who points out that even with good intentions, authors can have harmful impact. Impact is what authors need to focus on. Herrera finds it helpful to pose a series of questions. While she feels it isn't useful to police what is okay for someone to write, there are still considerations when an author (often white) wishes to write characters outside

their lived experience. She recommends that authors develop the ability to put down their own understanding of what the world is and try to look at it through a different lens.

What is your motivation?

Herrera notes several reasons an author might want to write outside their lived experience. They may feel they have insight into a certain type of oppression. They may feel compelled to push themselves to write characters from other backgrounds to make stories more inclusive or to reflect the diversity of their own experience. Or they may have people in their life from another culture, inspiring them to write a story with characters sharing the stories of those people.

Who has the power in your story?

Before beginning, Herrera recommends that a writer consider several things. Primary among these is to determine who will have power. What roles will the people of color play in the story? All characters will have a relationship to power, and there are several traps to be aware of. Authors should avoid writing a "magical Negro" character, whose purpose is solely to provide Jiminy Cricket-like advice to a white character. She says that writing an "exception" to lived culture is another trap, which can result in racist writing, again in spite of authorial intent.

How will you depict ritual or ceremony?

With ritual or ceremony, it is vital to pay attention to how culture is depicted. Authors must consider how to avoid language that is exaggerated or othering. Often things that are ceremonial within a culture are written as spectacle by those outside that culture. That is, an author may focus on the sensory elements (colors, scents, or sounds depicted for their vividness to the writer) while excluding what is more important. In *The Kingmaker* Kennedy Ryan did an excellent job of showing the significance of a coming-of-age ceremony and what the ritual meant to the people engaged in it.

The delineation of character

Herrera suggests the following exercise: Think of an example of a character in fiction that you liked but later heard was problematically portrayed. This can provide insight as to where personal blind spots might be lurking.

She adds that these considerations are important outside of race and ethnicity. There is a long history of depicting persons with mental illness as aggressive or dangerous. To do so as an author is to perpetuate a stereotype. Again, authors must consider impact.

In developing both character and plot, Herrera lists questions to ask:
- Are you putting a person of color (PoC) in the story just to make them suffer? Don't.
- Don't let your characters "hatch" on the page. Show characters in the places in which they would actually be found.
- Remember intersectionality. We are not only one thing.

- If you are white and feel compelled to examine systems of oppression, why not examine them from your gaze, or through the growth of the character with privilege?
- Is your PoC character a device for the development of your white character?

Conducting research

When seeking information about those whose experiences you do not share, it is good to look to people from that identity. Herrera suggests library-type research should be approached cautiously. Many so-called experts have a poor record, often creating miserable, trite stereotypes. It is critical to pay attention to who documented what you are reading. The gaze will be different depending on who created the material.

Employing sensitivity readers

While Herrera agrees sensitivity readers can be helpful, she has caveats here as well. A sensitivity reader will give you their personal sense of your work, not that of an entire community. Their job is to give you a better idea of your blind spots and not to rubber-stamp characterizations or offensive storylines.

At all times, it is important to consider context. Herrera suggests examining geopolitical and socioeconomic status, acculturation and religious belief, names, and the inner life of characters.

Geopolitical conditions and socioeconomic status

It is critical to consider the political context from which an immigrant arrived. The resources someone arrives with will have a huge impact on how safe they feel and on their ability to feel a part of the American tapestry. Herrera suggests asking the following questions at a minimum:

- Did they arrive without status?
- Did they arrive as political or religious asylees?
- Did they arrive with a protected status?
- Did they have a sponsor family?
- What did they survive to get to the U.S. or their new country?
- In the new country, do they have a community of people like them?

Acculturation and religious beliefs

Herrera has a set of questions to consider here as well:

- Do they speak the language of their new country?
- Do they have a community to land in?
- Were they isolated?
- Can they connect with their homeland?
- What did it cost them to assimilate?
- Does their faith help or hinder them in their new home? (For example, arriving as a Muslim since 2001 is different than before 2001.)

Names

   Names inform who your character is. Here are questions to ask when naming:

- Does the name have a meaning, or a connection to an ancestor?
- Was keeping the name intentional or an act of defiance?
- When it comes to identity, details matter, so choose names with care.

The inner life of your characters

   The inner life of a character should be impacted by the history of their nation of birth.

- How do they cope with adversity?
- How do they react to authority?
- Would their elder's opinion influence them or be important to them?
- Does their culture influence how they view gender roles, sexuality, relationships?
- How do they communicate with their loved ones?

   By asking questions such as these, an author can hopefully avoid the pitfalls of stereotyping or causing harmful impact.

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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.

How to Craft Better Stories with Plottr
Presented by Ryan Zee and Cameron Sutter

Reported by Michele Dunaway

Software developer Cameron Sutter invented Plottr—visual planning software for stories and books of all kinds. Ryan Zee is the the co-founder of Plottr, as well as the founder of BookSweeps, a premier book giveaway and lead generation platform for authors.

Ryan Zee and Cameron Sutter started their presentation promising session attendees an exclusive sneak peek. Rather than you waiting until the middle of the session, like attendees did, here's the spoiler: it's web-based Plottr, which will be fully featured in your browser, allowing all users of the program to work simultaneously and collaborate in real time. (Reporter's commentary: This is similar to how Google allows users to work on Docs, Slides, and Excel at the same time.) The web Plottr will sync with desktop and mobile natively, will have built-in cloud backups, will integrate with browser extensions (such as Grammarly), and it will be available for Chromebook.

Zee and Sutter shared that the goal of Plottr for web is so that authors can collaborate with co-authors, editors, and coaches. Files can be shared in "view only" or "edit mode." Plottr will now keep your files in sync across more devices without iCloud, OneDrive, Dropbox, etc. It will also allow you to save files securely in the cloud to prevent data loss in case your computer goes kaboom.

By the time you're reading this article, Plottr should be live as the alpha version is out now, but the beta version is planned for October and the public release for November.

So what exactly is Plottr? Plottr is a visual outlining and planning software (web and downloadable) for writers originally released in 2017. After Zee joined the company, it relaunched in May 2020 and has been downloaded by more than 20,000 writers. The software is compatible with Windows, Mac, Android, and iOS.

Plottr's goal is to help writers plot and outline faster, write cleaner first drafts, improve productivity, and save time. It also wants to increase confidence and allow a writer to have more fun.

The session began with a demonstration of how Plottr works. The main screen of Plottr is called the timeline. Here you can add chapters or rename scenes. Plottr also allows you to color code things, add scene cards, and drag and drop things as you move them around. The timeline can go across the page horizontally, or it can be changed to a more traditional, vertical format.

Zee and Sutter showed an example using the *Three Little Pigs*. Horizontally the timeline contained beats (another name for chapters, but you can change beats to chapters, scenes, days of the week, whatever). Vertically there were four characters: the wolf and each of the three pigs.

Each of the pigs has a character card and hovering over the box allows you to add tags and colors. Then additional information can be added to the timeline, and you can fill the timeline with boxes. You can have stacked scenes and as many or as few boxes as you want.
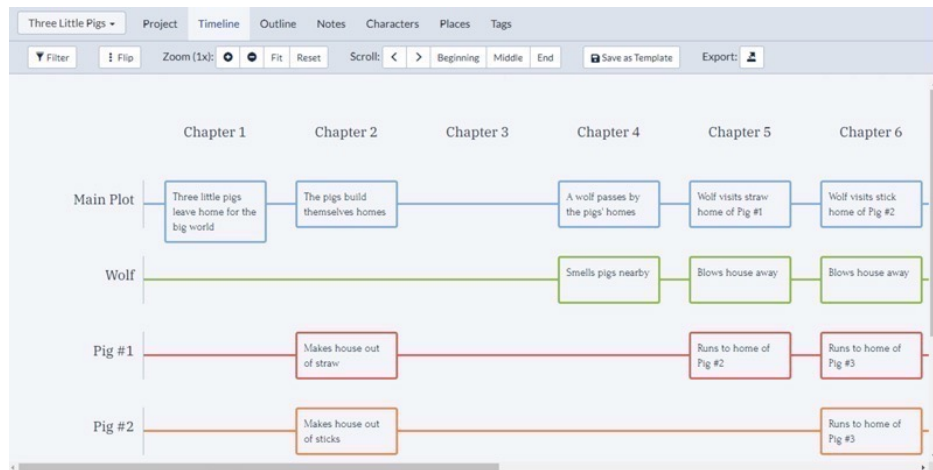

This is just the beginning. You can make it as visual as you want. Plottr has both light and dark modes. You can also zoom in or out, and you hover over items so things pop out. You can also flip Plottr vertically.

Plottr also has a series feature that allows you to do a book series overview. Samples of what this looks like can be found under the features section of the website at https://plottr.com/screenshots/.

With the book series overview, you will notice how all the titles are visible. Each of your books will have its own separate timeline and is presented on the page in a visual way.

According to Zee and Sutter, the series view helps plan and organize a series. Filters can be applied. Sorting by these can show how many screen cards and elements are in the timeline.
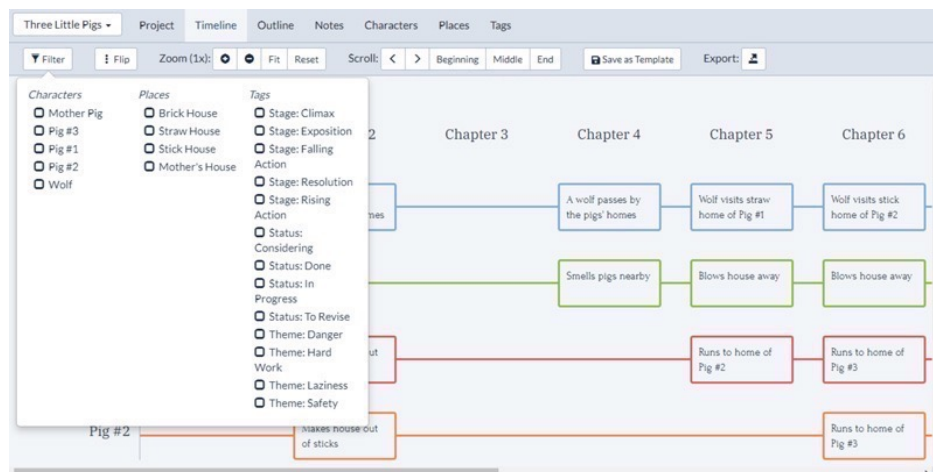
All this is just the timeline. See the tabs at the top? Plottr also has functions to create story and series bibles and is an easy way to keep all the notes in one place. Notice you have a place for notes, characters, and places. Plottr becomes an easy way to keep all your notes in one place. You can look at the notes. You can import pictures of those who inspire your characters. You can categorize however you want.

Each character card has a way to customize the attributes. You can track things, such as Zee and Sutter did with Pig 3 being the protagonist, his traits, and the type of house (brick) he lives in.

Plottr also has built-in character bio templates and a Goal/Motivation/Conflict (GMC) template, and these can be added to the character card. By using filters, you can ensure you've filled out what you need. Your custom attributes can also be saved as your own custom template.

Next up is the setting. Again, this allows you to keep all your notes in one place. Again, you add the attributes you need and want, and it allows for photos to be uploaded. Like the characters, places has editable features.

There's an overview, a card editor, and you can also use filters. Last up is the tags feature. With this, you customize and color code.

You can also tag anywhere in the project: scenes, characters, and themes. Zee and Sutter suggest you use filters on your timeline as this is helpful for pacing, discovering plot holes, and for feedback. This can lead to fewer edits.

They also built into the timeline templates for story structure. For example, a few are Romance the Beat, Dan Harmon, the Hero's Journey, Snowflake Method, and 12-Step Mystery.

It's very easy to get going with what you love, or you can create your own. You can also layer two or more plot structures into the timeline. For example, they showed Romance the Beat with 12-Step Mystery. These can also be saved as your own custom template. Sutter said, "Ryan did a lot of work to make them better."

Last but not least, Plottr creates an overall outline of your book. The outline section is where you'll find this automatically generated linear outline of your manuscript, and Plottr will export to both Microsoft Word and Scrivener. In Scrivener, the corkboard will show your Plottr notes. In Word, the whole outline, notes, and tags will be accessible, and Zee and Sutter say that often authors print this out so they have a hard copy.

Zee and Sutter say this makes your writing smoother, and you can customize what you export with the advanced export options.

"We want Plottr to make writing quicker, faster, and let you have more fun doing it," they said. "It's a way to visually organize your story, combine templates, create story bibles, and start writing."

For more screenshots and information, go to Plottr.com. Under the What's New tab in the top bar will be links to YouTube videos showing more Plottr features and how to use them.

Q&A

Q: Are there track changes in the web version?

A: Right now, no but we're working toward that.

Q: Templates for character and structure?

A: Yes, we do have templates for scenes. We have some built in like proactive, reactive, and scene essentials. Plus, you can add your own.

Q: What is the oldest Mac system the software will work on?

A: User had Snow Leopard, and it will work on this. Will work on High Sierra. Will work on 10.10.

Q: How do I create a scene? I don't see these.

A: Open it up. It was added a while ago. You may need to update your software. You click on the editor, give it a title, and the tabs should be there.

Q: How do I use this if I write chronological?

Answer: You can do it by changing beats/chapters to days of the week or months.

Q: I bought multiple copies but when I was on my phone it overwrote all the work done and saved elsewhere and I lost work.

A: Plottr must be closed on one computer before opening on another computer or device. Because of this, the move to web was how we wanted to avoid cloud and Dropbox storage issues.

Q: If I'm plotting a three-book series, is there a way to sort or tag the series?

A: They have an idea and are working on this. They know authors want to make it clear what characters are what in each book of the series.

Q: I'm seduced by all these templates. How do I know what to use?

A (from audience member): Pick one and stick with it.

Follow-up: But they are all so cool.

Audience: Find one that fits your personality.

Zee: You can also create your own template.

Sutter: If you add, say, the hero's journey and then the villain's journey, you can save this as a new template. Then on the Plottr dashboard when you open a new project, there's your custom template. Ryan recently added series, and you can start any book from a template.

Q: Current pricing is only different for the number of devices?
A: Yes. (No pricing for web was announced at conference.)

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

Author Branding and Merchandising:
Broaden Your Reach
Presented by Traci Olsen

Reported by Janis Susan May Patterson

A 10-year veteran of the publishing industry, Traci Olsen has worn many hats in the business. After a long stint at an independent, women-run romance publisher, Olsen has become a consultant helping authors with branding their work.

The basic thought behind branding, says Traci Olsen, is to make your work instantly recognizable to your fans. To achieve this, you must first decide "What do you want your audience to know and feel?"

Of course recognition is your goal, but how do you achieve it? One of the benefits of branding is it sets expectations. The reader should be able to look at your cover and even without seeing your name still know it's your book. Properly done, this kind of recognition factor will work and be recognizable across all platforms. It also has the benefit of setting expectations for the book.

Proper branding presents a united front, presaging the type of story as well as indicating the writer. Whether you write a bunch of standalones or a long-running series, you still should pay attention to branding. The covers—even the standalones, if they are the same "feel" as your others—should share a unified design theme. Design themes are achieved by colors, type styles, layout, and emotional feel. Common design elements should run through your website, social media profiles and all marketing communications as well as on every cover. They should not all look samey-same, but should have the same feel and emotional resonance. Two more great tools are alliteration and evocative words.

Remember, a brand is a promise from you to your readers. Proper branding helps readers know what they are going to get. For a bad example, think of *The Scarlet Letter* with a cover showing a cute little beach couple.

Before you can have a brand, you need to define what your brand is. The best way is to brand for your reader self. What would you like to see? Visualize what you want for your brand to represent to readers. Sexy? Sweet? Paranormal? Modern? Historical? Then visualize the experiences your books will deliver to readers. Love? Fear? Wonder? Next visualize how you want readers to see you as the author. Sophisticated? Wholesome? Otherworldly? Your brand should incorporate some of each.

Olsen used two of her clients, Holly Black and Cassandra Clare, as examples of how to define a brand. Both are very successful and both write in different forms of fantasy.

Holly Black began writing kid-type books about magic, but eventually progressed into YA

books about magic. To ease the through-line transition for her fans, she did more age-appropriate covers but with a similar feel in the artwork, type fonts and colors. Cassandra Clare has only written for adults, but all her covers in each series have the same feel with similar fonts and colors.

Think about the emotional and/or intellectual experience you want your readers to expect from and associate with you. Does that experience align with your brand identity? Consistency and fan service are both very important. To keep your fans and make new ones you must make your fans happy. You must delight your audience.

Taglines are important; they are often what catches your reader's eye after the cover. What feeling do you want the tagline to evoke? A sense of what if? Scary, uncanny, creepy, or hopeful, romantic, or angsty? This is almost a microcosm of your book which must lure the reader in.

For example, taglines for *The Wizard of Oz* might be "We're off to see the wizard," or "Follow the yellow brick road," or "There's no place like home." Each are different and have a different sort of feel, but still all point to *The Wizard of Oz*.

Are you ready for merchandising? If you have fan mail, you should have merchandise, which is different from swag. Swag is cute little stuff you give away for free with pre-orders or at conferences; it's promotional. Postcards, stickers, and pens are good examples of swag; things that will mail easily. Merchandise is more substantial and important, and you sell it to your fans for money. T-shirts, book bags, and mugs are currently the most popular. Olsen showed examples of mugs that Black and Clare had available. Both were in colors evocative of their book covers and had designs that were instantly identifiable with the books as well as utilizing quotes from each book. One said: "One must always be careful of books and what is inside them, for words have the power to change us." The other was: "Let's have a toast to the incompetence of our enemies."

Listen and learn what your fans want, and be sure what you have matches your brand. You can get with some people and bounce ideas around for swag and merchandise; just be sure they are not yes-people or total nay-sayers.

Choose wisely regarding manufacturers, stores, and ambassadors/partnerships when it comes to merchandising. Make sure their product is of a quality you wish to be associated with your name, delivery times are acceptable, and the price is right. There are a number of stores useful for merchandising such as DFTBA, Worldbuilders, Redbubble, Etsy, Café Press, etc., and some suppliers are starting their own merchandise stores. Investigate and make sure that they, whatever influencers and other authors you reach out to, are good matches for the world you are creating. Also, one very important thing is that your contract with your artist states that you own all rights to the images.

Book boxes are becoming popular, primarily in the fantasy world. Some book box creators are Litjoy, Owlcrate, and Fairyloot, though there are more. Typically they will contact you, as they work with artists and suppliers in creating and publicizing these one-time special editions. Some have their own merchandise store.

One thing Olsen continually pushes is to be nice online—really. Publishing is a people business. An author's brand perceptions are shaped by every interaction, both online and offline, that they have with readers and fellow publishing industry pros. Reputations are fragile,

and one mistake or misspeak can impact your brand adversely for a long time. You should be the author who contributes sunshine, helpfulness, and gratitude to the party. You should be the author others want to promote and hang out with.

Olsen was most definitive in her recap. "What do you gotta get right as an author?" Answer: everything. Get your colors and fonts and looks right, as they are the essence of what you're doing. That should be a priority.

On social media, do what you want to do and don't do what you don't. If you don't like Twitter or Instagram or TikTok, don't do them. Put your energy where it does you the most good.

Branding isn't easy. In fact, if you are combining self and traditional publishing it is difficult to correlate styles. You have to think about your branding, because you will have to live with what you do for a long time. Logos are nice, but not a necessity. It is important when choosing typography, cover design, color family, etc., to have a consistency of feel, not necessarily identical images. For example, all of the covers in the Cassandra Clare series Olsen used for examples have large amounts of gold color and a very similar type font.

Your brand is you. What is the story you are telling, the world you are building? Think about the essence of your story and what you are trying to tell people. Make that your brand.

Those who wish to reach Olsen can do so through her website at Traci@traciolsen.com or through Twitter and Instagram @tricksybelden.

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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.

The Mad Scribbler
The Ghosts of Conferences Past, Part Two

By Laura Resnick

"*A conference is a gathering of important people who singly can do nothing, but together can decide that nothing can be done."*
—Fred Allen (1894-1956), American comedian

Out of the many NINC conferences I've attended over the years, there are two that particularly stand out in my mind.

One was in New York City, a couple of years before the indie revolution got underway. What I mostly remember about it is how depressed and appalled I was by the time I went home.

Starting in the late 1990s, NINC began holding its conference in Manhattan every so often, so that we could get publishing professionals to participate. By then, unless our conference was an easy cab ride away from their offices during their weekday working hours, it was increasingly hard to get editors and agents to attend NINC. This was partly due to publishers and agencies reducing travel budgets for their employees. But, frustratingly, according to industry professionals whom we queried about their disinterest in NINC, the composition of our membership was also a deterrent.

Editors and agents attended conferences primarily to recruit aspiring/unpublished writers, not to meet with experienced career professionals who might be interested in finding a new publisher or agent for their work. Over time, we learned that even holding the conference *near* New York, which substantially reduced travel time and expenses for Manhattan-based companies, wasn't a solution; we still had trouble getting industry professionals to attend.

So, despite the very high cost of convening in Manhattan, NINC started holding the conference there every few years, where we could arrange programming that focused heavily on New York publishing, which was still the epicenter of our profession.

The organizers of NINC's Manhattan conferences always did a fantastic job of recruiting a wide range of industry guests and pairing them with relevant program topics. In addition to editors and agents, speakers at our Manhattan conferences included publishers, associate publishers, CEOs and presidents of publishing companies, vice presidents, sales and marketing executives, art directors, editors-in-chief, executives from distribution companies, and presidents of literary agencies.

And it was always at the Manhattan conferences that I would realize, "We have a terrible problem on our hands and I have no idea what we can do about it."

With every conference—and, indeed, with every year that passed—I thought New York publishing seemed more and more unfriendly to career novelists. There was not only a heavy focus on bestsellers and dismissal of everyone else, there was also an obsession with finding the next ready-made bestseller by an unpublished newcomer whose first novel would be an international mega-hit that would land a major Hollywood deal even before the first edition of the book shipped to the warehouses.

The focus on this sort of scenario also seemed to be invariably paired with barely veiled contempt for experienced writers who had readers and a solid body of work, but who did not happen to be Next New Best Thing. In that mindset, we could also never *become* the next major Hollywood-sought bestseller, because obviously if we were capable of producing such a book, we'd already have done so, and the fact that we had not simply proved that we never would.

Even self-evidently dynamic and enthusiastic publishing professionals who still embraced the *idea* of a talented career writer building audience over time, working toward bestsellerdom (or at least toward lucrative sales), talked about how difficult and ever more unlikely this was becoming, because of the way the entire sales and ordering system worked.

It was increasingly common that if a writer's very first book with a company was not a sales hit, the writer would be dropped. And the more you wrote books without producing a bestseller, the less likely it was that any publishers would want to give you another chance. This was true even if your books didn't reach their sales potential due to publisher mistakes (ex. poor packaging, lack of marketing, etc.).

Publishing was in a steep spiral that was largely inimical to career novelists, based on finding instant hits and treating most other writers and books like a waste product in this process.

Additionally, I was also depressed by how many of the publishing professionals did *not* come across to me as dynamic and enthusiastic. I had a poor impression of too many of the people who were *in charge* of our industry and our books. So I thought things would just keep spiraling, with fewer opportunities and lower earnings being the typical outcome for the vast majority of novelists.

Meanwhile, rather than depressing, I found most of the literary agents who spoke at that conference... well, just *annoying*. I actually had to get up and leave one session where four or five high-profile agents were on the panel, because I was about to start guffawing rudely at them. By then, they had each advised us to "write the best book you can" three or five or six times... and the session was only half over!

Indeed, "write the best book you can" was the advice handed out over and over, at session after session, by publishers, editors, and agents. Because... I don't know, they thought their audience of multi-published career novelists had all been deliberately churning out mediocre crap, thinking that was the way to succeed?

What the hell, people?!? EARTH TO NEW YORK! Are you sober?

I left that conference worried and demoralized, convinced we novelists were standing hip deep in a swamp of excrement that was only going to keep getting deeper.

As it happens, that conference took place after the other NINC conference that now stands out strongly in my mind, one that was far more pivotal than I realized at the time.

Our keynote speaker in San Diego in 2007 was Chris Anderson, author of *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business Is Selling Less of More*. Anderson's theory, which he explained to us in detail with graphs and charts, suggested that big changes were developing in consumer distribution systems that would affect all of us.

The limitations of available shelf space in traditional brick and mortar stores leads those companies to focus heavily on the most popular products (ex. instant bestsellers that land Hollywood deals before the first edition of the print book even ships to the warehouses). Anderson hypothesized that changes in marketing and distribution were paving the way for niche audiences to find niche products, vastly expanding the range of choices available to consumers and the range of markets available to creators.

Examples discussed in Anderson's book, which I read after that conference, included Netflix, which had achieved huge success as a mail-order company that stocked a much, much wider range of DVDs than Blockbuster stores, which instead focused on providing many copies of the most popular movies. Netflix, unconstrained by the shelf space that determined Blockbuster's stocking decisions, developed a huge consumer base of people just like me; I mostly wanted to watch Bollywood films, British TV, and wildlife documentaries, none of which I could find at Blockbuster—whereas Netflix had an enormous range of these genres. iTunes was also examined in the book, another company able to offer an immense range of music because it was unconstrained by physical space for its stock. Niche buyers and niche producers could find each other in these new and emerging systems of distribution.

I felt that Anderson's talk was relevant to novelists, but I couldn't yet see how. Even later, at that New York conference, depressed by the state of the traditional industry, I still didn't see it. At the time, selling books to consumers still relied on the complex logistics of print production and physical distribution, and a "niche" market just meant fewer sales. With the *totally not collusive* "industry standard" print royalty rate of 8%, how could a writer make a living with the long tail market Anderson described of much smaller audiences for a much greater array of products?

Those two conferences took place a year apart. The second one, in New York, starkly conveyed why we so urgently needed the changes in distribution systems that were predicted at the previous conference in San Diego. As a pair, they stand out in my memory because of that —and because of everything that followed.

Only two or three years later, the enormous ebook and indie disruption of our industry was underway, including a 65% or 70% royalty for authors who self-publish, as well as opportunities

for small niche publishers, and everything changed. This revolution in production and distribution systems has brushed aside many of the problems that were evident at the New York conference and brought into sharp focus how Anderson's long tail theory, described in San Diego, applies to us and our industry.

The indie revolution has also substantially changed the focus and tone of NINC conferences in recent years, as the conference reports in this issue of *Nink* demonstrate.

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Laura Resnick, who writes fiction and nonfiction, will be busy this festive season in her part-time job as a walking-tour guide. Happy holidays to all!

NINC Member Discounts

This month's discount information is brought to you by NINC member Troy Lambert, who graciously agreed to tell us about his own experiences with Plottr. You can access our discount under Member Benefits on our website.

Plottr changed my writing life and my outlining process. I want it to change yours, too.

I joined Plottr as a user back in 2017, when the features the software has now were only dreams in a glorious future, but I could see the potential it had. I officially joined as the Education Lead in 2020, and the rest is, as they say, history. So what can Plottr do for you, and why should you give it a try?

Organization

The very first way I used Plottr was to add a new layer of organization to my story NOT in Scrivener. Don't get me wrong, I still write in Scrivener, but I didn't even want to click down to the character space to see if Suzy's eyes were indeed blue as my mind suspected, or if I had given her brown ones instead. It took me out of my writing flow.

Instead, I keep characters, places, and even the descriptions of what I'll be writing in Plottr on a separate screen. At a glance, I can see the information I need to just keep writing without leaving my writing space. Of course, that is just one part of the organization for me. I write in some long series and keeping characters, places, and plot points straight is more than my meager mind can manage.

I use the tags, filters, and series bible features of the software on a daily basis.

Efficiency

The organization I mentioned above also increases efficiency. First, I plan a lot more of my story in advance, and my "scene cards" become daily writing prompts nearly impossible to ignore. I'm less likely to mess up, leave an open loop in my story, or create plot holes.

And most importantly…

With a detailed plot and a more organized story, I write faster. When I write faster, I have more fun. Who doesn't want that?

Collaboration

Recent Plottr updates and the addition of Plottr Pro mean I can use it not just for writing, but for rewriting, editing, and even to edit other people's manuscripts and working with co-authors. Because besides making the writing process more efficient, I think we have the technology to do a much better job at improving editing efficiency as well.

Plottr is a big part of that vision, and it has changed all these processes for me, from self-edits to rewrites to editing with other authors.

And more…

So what is next for Plottr? New features, improved user experience, and much more are all on the way. You can try the software for free, and if you love it, there's always that NINC discount to get you started. So what are you waiting for?

Give Plottr a try by visiting www.plottr.com. Check out our YouTube channel for instructional videos, our excellent documentation, and if you have any questions at all, feel free to reach out to our support team.

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.
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- President-Elect: Lisa Hughey
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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
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  - Tanya Anne Crosby
  - Kristine Smith
  - Jenny Gardiner
  - Judi Fennell
- Discounts Program: Emilie Richards

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Novelists, Inc. c/o Terese Ramin
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Address changes may be made on the website.

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

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