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# President's Voice

By Lisa Hughey



It's conference time again and we couldn't be more excited!

September is the month that I typically plan out the next year and focus on identifying new career goals. I started when my kids were little and went back to school. The first few weeks of having the house to myself were always great for planning. I'm done with back-to-school, but I still use September as a time to reassess my current career outlook and plan my future.

That's why the NINC conference comes at such a great time. NINC 2022 Work Smarter is going to be fantastic. The conference committee has outdone themselves with so much goodness for attendees. If you are unable to attend, remember that all the sessions will be reported on by NINC members and the articles will be in the November and December *Nink* newsletters. Plenty of vendor discounts will also be available to non-attendees.

A few new things this year. There will be a quick all-attendee meeting prior to the Welcome Reception where we will go over the change in the conference structure and the committee will announce our new events. We've added many new sponsors, plus different options for connecting with other attendees, industry guests, and sponsors. We are very excited about the MOSHH (Meet Our Sponsors Happy Hour) event. There will be drinks, fun ways to interact, and raffle prizes. We've also added additional meals for attendees. Check out Tawdra Kandle's article for a full accounting of our exciting conference events.

Whether or not you are headed to St. Pete Beach, I hope you take a moment to reflect on the beginning of the year, and then look forward to an exciting and inspiring future.

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*USA Today bestselling author [Lisa Hughey](#) writes about strong heroines who are perfectly capable of rescuing themselves and the heroes who love both their strength and their vulnerability. She pens romances of all types—suspense, paranormal, and contemporary—but at their heart, her books celebrate the power of love. She lives in Cape Ann, Massachusetts, with her fabulously supportive husband, two out of three awesome mostly grown kids, and one somewhat grumpy cat.*

## **About NINC**

NINC is committed to welcoming a diverse and inclusive membership to our organization and serving all members. No author will ever be discriminated against on the basis 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](#), [traditionally published 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/>



By the time you read this update, you should be packing your bags for St. Pete Beach! Are you ready to invade the beach and learn how to work smarter?

The conference team will soon invite you to join us on Whova, our conference app. On the app, you'll find the schedule (always subject to change, but fairly static now) and details on sponsored events and meals. You'll also be able to connect with sponsors, industry guests, and other attendees to set up meetings or hangouts.

Ground transportation is available to and from the Tampa airport. To set up your ride, call Shirley at Resort Transportation at 727-343-3303 or you can email [resorttransportation@yahoo.com](mailto:resorttransportation@yahoo.com). Lyft and Uber both operate in the area as well.

If you're a first-time attendee, or if you haven't been to the conference in a while, we have some updates. TradeWinds has several restaurants on-site ranging from casual beach- or pool-side fare (The Flying Bridge and Salty's Tiki Bar) to more upscale fine dining (Palm Court). There are also several restaurants within walking distance; Boulevard Burgers has promised to add extra staff during conference week to accommodate our attendees, and Skidders will be open for lunch and dinner starting Sept. 23.

There's also a Publix grocery store down the street (try to arrange a carpool with other attendees!) as well as The Deli in the hotel lobby.

Of course, your registration fee includes coffee on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday mornings; breakfast on Friday and Saturday; lunches on Thursday and Friday; snacks on Wednesday and Saturday; and the Beachside Buffet Blowout on Saturday night.

Have you been warming up those pipes? Karaoke returns to NINC this year on Saturday night. Plan to join us right after the Blowout for a night of unforgettable fun.

Remember that the conference schedule and a list of workshop blurbs are available on the NINC website [here](#). Make sure that you're on our conference email loop and/or our Facebook group to get up-to-the-minute news and connect with other authors and industry friends who will be attending the conference.

See you on the beach in just a few weeks!

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*Tawdra Kandle is the USA Today bestselling author of over 100 romances that span genres from contemporary through paranormal. Her engaging and realistic characters bring readers back again and again to devour the steamy love stories she spins. She lives in central Florida with a husband, a mischievous pup, and too many cats.*

## From the Editor

*By Harper St. George*



The conference is almost here! I keep looking at all of the great workshops the conference team has put together and get so excited. Last year I left the conference feeling invigorated and ready to tackle a year of growing my career by using all of the tips and tricks I learned. Did I use them all? No, which is why now is the perfect time for a refresher.

I hope to see a lot of you in St. Pete this year. Please don't worry that you will miss out on a ton of great information if you can't make it. While nothing can replace the networking and roundtable discussions, our reporters do their best to bring you all of the information from the workshops. If you're new to NINC, we have a reporter scheduled for every session. Their job is to take notes and transcribe them into informative articles that appear in the November and December newsletters. This is also a great feature for attendees, because it can be excruciating deciding which session to attend when so many are at the same time.

Whether you can't make it to the conference this year, or you can't make a particular session because you attended a different presentation, we've got you covered. Check out the November and December issues to find the information you might have missed. I can't wait to see you all at the conference!

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*Harper St. George writes historical fiction 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.*

# The Quest for Author Voice

By M. L. Buchman



What's your author voice?

No idea? The Avoiders say: Congratulations, you've now joined the club of every other author out there.

*Some inkling of an idea?* The Hesitant whisper: Oh, don't think about it too hard, you'll destroy it and never find it again.

*You know what your author voice is?* The Naysayers shout: Liar, liar, pants on fire!

*It's all a mystery. It's hard. No one can ever know...*

We've all heard these and a hundred similar comments. A quick search on Amazon reveals no relevant titles in restricted searches like "author voice" or "author's voice." "Writer's voice" is only marginally more fruitful. And casting a wider net was little better:

- *Finding Your Writer's Voice*, Thaisia and Wall (1996)  
(the only one of these titles I've read, shortly after its release)
- *Finding Your Voice*, Edgerton (2015)
- *Writing Voice*, *Writer's Digest* (2017)
- *Finding Your Writer's Voice*, Quinlan and Lin (2017)
- *Discover Your Writer's Voice Workbook*, Crider (2019)
- *The Complete Air Fryer Cookbook*, Miller (2021)  
(sometimes you just have to love search engine algorithms)

This was all that I found in 15 minutes of trying. And that is in the self-help subgenre of writing, where its denizens pour out hundreds of how-to books on every topic imaginable.

Everyone avoids talking about voice. Almost everyone.



[Robin Patchen](#) says: “I find that the best way for an author to develop his or her voice is to write, a lot. At first, most writers are trying too hard to be interesting or savvy or intellectual or whatever they’re going for. Over time, as we pour words onto pages, we build confidence. A lot of our amateur striving slips away, and what remains is our true voice.” She uses journaling to locate her “natural voice” and then carries that into her writing.

## Starting out

I was first introduced to the concept of voice as a newbie writer at a book signing by a very jaundiced John J. Nance. As we were chatting beforehand—one of the advantages of arriving early to such events—I had told him of my first fantasy novel, my second science fiction (SF) novel, and that I was going to try my hand at a romance next.

With the first energy he’d shown among the early crowd, he said, “Good. Good! Write what you want while you can. Once you sell, you’ll be stuck writing that one genre forever no matter how sick you are of it.” His airplane and airport thrillers have sold millions of copies, yet his first true love is Westerns. He couldn’t convince his agent to shop it around, not even under another name.

I often wonder what John’s Westerns might have become.

[Jennifer Stevenson](#) notes that: “Jayne Ann Krentz has often stated that readers will tolerate cardboard characters, crappy research, and plot holes you can drive a truck through, because what they come back for every time is your voice.”

## Measuring voice

My eventual breakout series was in military romantic suspense, of which I’ve since written 42 novels and 70 short stories. Well aware of Mr. Nance’s warnings, I began monitoring my sales by genre.

With my military romantic suspense as a baseline, I wrote a pair of contemporary romance series. I *love* contemporary romance and love writing it. The challenge of telling a gripping love story in which nothing else happens just fascinates me. (By that I mean that there’s no war, no international crisis, no medical catastrophe...it’s pure. Just the love story. I think it may be the single hardest genre to write well.)

My contemporary romances have one small problem. They sell one-third as much as my military romantic suspense. I could see that quality wasn’t the issue as I consistently received the same 4.5 to 4.8 stars with both genres. But I could write an off-the-wall short story in romantic suspense, and it would vastly out-earn the most heartwarming contemporary full novel that I could craft.

Eventually, I noticed that a few of my romantic suspense reviews were using words like “adventure” and “adrenaline.” So, I decided to work from actual data instead of guessing.

My assistant (my wife is amazing) stripped all of my reviews into a Word document (because I sure didn’t want to actually risk reading them, she only sends me the good ones). She

gathered them from traditional review sites, e-reviewers, bloggers, Amazon, Kobo, anywhere she could find them, and I threw them all into a word cloud generator. (Several free ones are listed at <https://skillscout.com/free-word-cloud-generators/>.)

I was getting all of the standard romance words: women, love, romance, romantic, passion, emotion, etc.

I was also getting military romantic suspense words: military, action, adrenaline, adventure, packed (paired with “action”), edge (paired with “of seat”).

But the big surprise was that the words in the latter group were often more common in my reviews (and therefore larger in my word cloud) than many of the romance words.



This image is one of many word clouds I generated at the time. This shows my top 50 words. The small “suzanne” was for how often my fans compared me to Suzanne Brockmann, which still humbles me to this day.

At the time I did this, I had a roughly equal number of contemporary romance and military romantic suspense releases. Still, I skewed strongly to the suspense and action.

*This was my readers telling me what **they** thought my writing voice was!*

Maybe I was a thriller author? Maybe that’s where my “natural voice” lay?

Another possible clue, I’ve read a *lot* of thrillers. Of course, I’ve read a lot of most things. But thrillers and hard SF were the two genres that survived my classics phase, my nonfiction phase, my personal growth phase, etc.

### Testing the theory

So, my wife and I decided to place the bet. Writing had become our household’s sole source of income, so why not take a big risk with that, right? Oy vey!

We chose to gamble one year of my publishing cycle. Four novels. I would research and write four thriller novels and we'd see what happened. So, while still writing my romantic suspense, I began researching my thrillers.

Two years later, my Miranda Chase geopolitical techno-thrillers landed and took off immediately. At this writing, I'm working on No. 10 in the series. They're outranking my romantic suspense in rating stars, numbers of reviews, and income.

### **Why this worked**

Partly, the leap from military romantic suspense to techno-thriller involving military aircraft is not a vast chasm. More than 90% of my audience made the crossing with me.

I need to be challenged. Switching to thrillers after more than 50 romance novels brought a level of excitement to my writing that the readers probably felt.

But the key was writing to my natural interests. I love airplanes. I love complex characters battling and triumphing over their own shortcomings. And I'm fascinated by the geopolitical pressures and gamesmanship that course back and forth across our world.

With those pre-existing interests, naturally, that's where a section of my writer's voice lands.

"The issues and emotions and themes that matter to the writer are at the heart of an author's voice, and become part of the hallmark of an author's writing, whether they are aware of it or not," Laura Baker says. "These themes and emotions that matter to us can be at the heart of every story we tell, exploring those themes and emotions until we understand them." (She offers a month-long course in voice at <http://fearlesswriter.com>.)

### **What is my voice?**

"I can find four or five key elements of your voice in an hour-long workshop, and even if you're a beginner, those elements will be present *now*," Stevenson says. "The longer you write, the more your voice concentrates and intensifies."

It's not a matter of *creating* your voice. It already exists.

I have a teacher friend who gave an exercise to every 101 writing class. She provides a very specific image from a wonderful short story, "A Kind of Flying" by Ron Carlson.

"There's a tiered wedding cake in the middle of a quiet country road. Write one paragraph about why it's there." Then the students would read them aloud: dark, betrayal, accidental, quirky, gritty, suspenseful, murderous... No two matched, and none came close to Carlson's sweetly romantic tale that my friend read at my wedding.

There is no "quest" — your voice, *your* take on the world, already exists.

It's a different publishing industry now than the one John J. Nance faced in the '90s. Dive into the story that *you* want to tell, rather than the story that you think the industry wants told, and you'll be aiming straight at your voice.

Let the inner you out and you'll have nailed your author voice.

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USA Today and Amazon No. 1 Bestseller [M. L. "Matt" Buchman](#) has 70-plus action-adventure thriller and military romance novels, 100 short stories, and a lot of audiobooks. PW says: "Tom Clancy fans open to a strong female lead will clamor for more." Booklist declared: "3X Top 10 of the Year." A project manager with a geophysics degree, he's designed and built houses, flown and jumped out of planes, solo-sailed a 50-foot sailboat, and bicycled solo around the world...and he quilts.

# Crafting the Cozy Mystery

*By Nancy J. Cohen*



Cozy mysteries have been popular since the days of Agatha Christie. Readers enjoy these stories that are a subgenre of the traditional mystery. Detective stories, police procedurals, and courtroom dramas also fall under the mystery umbrella. In a traditional mystery, there's a murder that must be solved. Missing persons or theft are other possibilities, as long as they present a puzzle for readers to solve. In addition to a whodunit, cozies have distinctive qualities that give them a special appeal.

## Elements of a cozy mystery

- Amateur sleuth
- Interesting occupation
- Small town setting
- A sidekick and/or a cherished pet
- Limited number of suspects
- Whodunit with a fair play puzzle (clues are planted that lead to the killer)
- Focus on interpersonal relationships

These are “clean” books that can be read by all ages. They have no bad language, graphic sex, or violence. Love scenes should take place behind closed doors, and murders shouldn't involve any messy details. Cozies provide a lighthearted read with a happy ending. Nobody gets terribly hurt except for the murder victim, who may be someone we love to hate. Justice is always served, unlike in the real world. This gives us a feeling of control in the midst of chaos. Humor is welcome as are romantic subplots. Readers love series so they're a must-have for this genre.

Subcategories are popular but not essential. Basically, these make marketing easier and provide a hook for your submission to a publisher. They also feature into your metadata if you are self-publishing your work.

### **Cozy subcategories**

- Culinary cozies
- Animal mysteries
- Crafts and hobbies
- Paranormal mysteries
- Historical mysteries

### **Reader expectations**

The average reader for my books is female in the 45 to 65+ range. Satisfying reader expectations is critically important. According to IngramSpark, “The tone of a cozy should be upbeat, optimistic and lighthearted. The setting should be the kind of place the reader might long to live in or to choose for their vacation.” Fans of the cozy genre prefer fast-paced stories with distinctive cover art, punny titles, and interesting locales. Social issues may be included if the tone is maintained.

Taboos forbid any harm to children or pets.

*Publisher's Weekly* says, “The heart of why readers love cozies is they know what they are getting. They know they will have a sleuth who is pulled into the crime because that sleuth cares about other people, they know the sleuth’s friends and family will help and hinder the investigation, they know that humor will abound, and they know that in the end, through all the twists and turns, the killer will be caught. In a cozy, there is a happily ever after and justice is served.”

### **Story structure**

- The setting
- The amateur sleuth
- Recurrent characters
- The victim
- The suspects
- Solving the crime

### **The setting**

Choose a setting that has a unique flavor, whether it’s a seaside resort, a small town in suburbia, an ethnic neighborhood, or a mountain retreat. Enrich this locale with regional foods and cultural practices. Make your scenes come alive through the five senses, slang terms, and other details that only a local would know.

Then pick a site for the murder to take place. This is what I call “the setting within a setting.” As a reference, study [The Brokenwood Mysteries](#) on TV or the [Hallmark Movies & Mysteries](#) channel. Note how each episode in a series focuses on a different venue, such as a winery, a craft show, or a wedding. When you determine the backdrop for your book, you’ll have a built-in group of suspects.

### **The amateur sleuth**

Your sleuth should work in an interesting occupation that offers a chance for readers to learn something new. Here’s where your series can stand out. Let’s say you want to write a culinary mystery. What angle hasn’t been done? Where can you set the stories that nobody else has tried? What will make your caterer different from the rest? Will your protagonist’s voice be funny, cynical, or memorable in some other way? Strive for originality within the subgenre category.

In terms of personality, you’ll want a strong, independent protagonist who takes a proactive approach to sleuthing. They will be a good conversationalist to coax suspects into talking when the police are stymied. Give them a personal motive for getting involved and a reason why they’re unable to let the cops solve the crime.

### **Recurrent characters**

Readers adore series and they want secondary characters to feel like friends. This includes pets, which fans love. Just make sure never to hurt the animals in a cozy. The sleuth should have a sidekick because you’ll want to do a periodic review of suspects in the story. Other continuing characters can include work colleagues, family members, friends, and love interests. These people will be the source of your subplots.

### **The victim**

Who do you want to kill off? Is it someone we’ll love to hate? Or is it a likeable person who appears to have no enemies but harbors deep secrets? Choose your victim and consider if it’s someone known to the sleuth. This would raise the stakes for her to solve the crime, although it’s not necessary as long as she has another reason to get involved. Also, be careful about killing off a favorite recurrent character in a sequel. If you have to get rid of someone, knock off a minor player to avoid offending your readers. Then try to think up a unique method of murder for each book.

### **The suspects**

Once you identify the victim, determine who might have had a reason to want this person dead. Each suspect should have a secret to hide, whether or not it relates to the murder. Connect these characters to each other so they all know one another. Suspects can lie, contradict

their own or someone else's statements, and rat on each other. But even though each person might seem to have a motive, only one of them is the killer.

## **Solving the crime**

In the first third of the book, the crime occurs and the suspects are introduced. The sleuth realizes these people have secrets to hide. During the middle portion, complications arise to deepen the plot. Clues are planted and false leads followed. Here you can add suspense through techniques such as time bombs, false alarms, and isolation. Raise the stakes with more murders or higher risk to the heroine. Finally, each person's secret is revealed until the killer is exposed. The sleuth has a confrontation with the murderer and escapes through their own resources.

## **Marketing tips**

The cozy market is thriving. Fans will always crave these lighthearted books that provide hours of entertainment. First decide if you're going the traditional route. Check the publisher guidelines to see if you need an agent, although this is advisable for contract negotiations. [Go here](#) to see the approved list from Mystery Writers of America.

Prepare a series proposal along with your submission packet. You'll be presenting your book as number one in an ongoing series. This might include a profile of your sleuth and story blurbs for the next few sequels. If you have a niche marketing plan, include that as well.

If you intend to self-publish, plan your branding from the start. Cover design, fonts, colors, and book titles should be taken into consideration. Link these across all platforms. Also decide how often and at what price point you want to release your books. It's possible to do very well with a series this way, but you must constantly promote your work. You'll have full responsibility for book production as well as marketing, so be sure this is the way you want to go. On the other hand, you'll have full control over your career, and that has its own benefits. There are extensive posts online about indie publishing, so look for blogs and workshops on this topic.

## **Issues for the cozy writer**

Since this subgenre is primarily, but not exclusively, written by women for women, authors may run into similar battles as romance writers. Cozy authors, while respected much more widely today than when I started writing in this genre, are still less likely to win certain writing awards when lumped into a general mystery category.

Writing a lengthy mystery series comes with its own drawbacks. You have to avoid repetitions in terms of motives and manner of death. It's important to catch up new readers while not boring your loyal fans. You have to decide how much to age your protagonist from book to book and find personal reasons each time for the sleuth to get involved.



Keeping a long-running series fresh isn't difficult if you focus on the sleuth's interpersonal relationships. The reader is almost always more interested in your character's life than in the crime. Yes, there's a mystery to solve in each story, but more importantly, which love interest will the heroine choose or how will she deal with her annoying mother-in-law? Also have something new for readers to learn. It'll make the book exciting for you to research as well.

## **In conclusion**

Cozies will always be popular. Readers seek an escape from reality and an entertaining story where all is well in the end. They know they're getting a "clean" read, a fast-paced murder mystery, and a glimpse into an interesting occupation and/or locale. This genre will always have its dedicated fans.

## **Cozy resources**

- [A Guide to Cozy Mysteries](#)
- [Cozy Mystery List](#)
- [Millennial Cozies: A New Generation Discovers the Joys of the Cozy Mystery](#)
- [The Cozy Mystery Library](#)
- [Trend Report: The State of the Cozy](#)
- [What Exactly is a Cozy Mystery?](#)
- [What is a Cozy Mystery and Why is it So Popular?](#)

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*Nancy J. Cohen writes the Bad Hair Day Mysteries featuring South Florida hairstylist Marla Vail. These books have won numerous awards along with her nonfiction titles, Writing the Cozy Mystery and A Bad Hair Day Cookbook. Active in the writing community, she is a past president of Florida Romance Writers and the Florida Chapter of MWA. When not busy writing, she enjoys reading, fine dining, cruising, and visiting Disney World.*

# COVID and Creativity

By Denise A. Agnew



As a creativity coach I'm always curious how the outside world impacts the internal world of the creative person. Any number of stressors can affect how an author feels about writing as a whole and their ability to write at all. Most people in the writing world are driven to create stories initially because of their love of telling a tale. Many things can interfere with that process, sometimes leading to long-term writer's block or other creativity issues. Complications can arise with the onset of an illness.

In the case of COVID-19, some writers have found the impact on their lives enormous. For writers [Judi Fennell](#) and [Jan Scarbrough](#), catching this disease made an impact on their creativity. Through it all, they've discovered ways to ignite their creative enthusiasm despite illness.

## Jan's long road with multiple illnesses

Scarbrough wrote two novellas in 2020, and in 2021 she wrote a sequel. When she contracted COVID-19 in March 2022, this disease was the latest illness to impact her writing. Over the last two years she battled cancer and endured chemo treatments, which definitely put a dent in her writing mojo.

Recently, she has written more of what she's interested in and done things her way, which seems to have helped her creativity improve. She has purchased books by co-authors Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi such as *The Emotion Thesaurus* and found the guides helpful when she's struggling and reaching for inspiration to spark ideas.

Scarbrough suggested a tip for writers currently facing issues with their creativity. "I keep a writing diary with number of words tallied daily. This is my tip. To keep track of writing progress." She elaborated on why she feels tallying her word count daily helped her. "It's productivity. I had problems with that during COVID. But being productive helps with creativity because I usually figure out what happens in the novel as I write."

Scarborough also said that writers might find the [One Stop for Writers](#) site useful regardless of the reason they've developed writer's block. One Stop for Writers, which is basically an online library full of reference materials, is a subscription-based site featuring a two-week free trial.

This website might be especially useful for people who are already plotters. Writers with a more pantsier attitude may or may not find it as useful. It is definitely worth looking at if a writer is curious, especially with the free two-week trial which gives a writer time to play with the features and see if it is a good fit.

Another software authors may wish to try is [Plottr](#). Plottr is also a subscription-based site, so it is always good to research the benefits ahead of time and see if you find it helpful before you commit to purchasing a subscription. Plottr has a lifetime subscription available that is a good value for the money. Another similar site is [World Anvil](#).

Writers can be stubborn about looking at alternatives to finding their creative center again. Whenever a writer is willing to try new methods to bolster creativity, it keeps the channels to creativity flowing and the chance for a breakthrough is possible. Scarborough continues to take classes and keeps an open attitude toward learning. With that in mind, I'd encourage her to continue her habit of tracking her word count and using the [One Stop for Writers](#). In addition, she could push herself and stretch out the amount of time she's writing each week to make sure there's always a challenge to reach. Another suggestion is to keep writing in the genres and about topics she's truly interested in because this method has worked for her previously.

### **Judi's struggle to do it all**

Contemporary romantic comedy author Judi Fennell discovered firsthand how COVID-19 can mess with creativity. Fennell's work as an ebook formatter and sometime cover artist requires a sharp eye, and she has a heavy schedule of obligations. Not only did the virus put a dent in her writing but intruded on other responsibilities in her life.

In January 2022, she caught COVID-19. Fennell and five writer friends had been meeting once a month in person (masked up, vaccinated, and boosted), but eventually Fennell and three others caught the virus.

She suffered extreme fatigue which included symptoms like needing three-hour naps. She suffered brain fog. She sometimes mixed up words both verbally and when writing. Another unusual and unexpected side effect appeared. She would think she was adding something correctly, then when she looked at the final numbers, she had gotten it all wrong. A calculator became her friend.

Fennell's group became determined to resurrect their creativity. They agreed to do writing sprints via text. Everyone would write, then have a five-minute break at the 20- and 40-minute marks. They didn't have a formal arrangement of when they planned to do these sprints, but when someone felt they needed a sprint, they would text the group and most of them took part. For Fennell this was a great way to use the accountability of the group, and everyone was

benefiting from this plan. She found the sprints significantly improved her word count. Her group also critiques each other's writing, and this adds to the motivation because she knows she needs to produce for her critique partners.

Because Fennell has a heavy work schedule, she is finding it challenging getting a new book out into the world. I suggested she find additional writing time for herself. This could be a dedicated allotment once a day or a few times a week using a timer for 30 minutes or longer. I also suggested she makes certain there isn't anything (short of a true emergency) that will interfere with that time. The more often a writer can sustain this self-accountability, the more likely they'll stick with the habit. Getting words down on paper can create a lot of satisfaction, and as a result the writer is more likely to be motivated to reexperience that reward.

Fennell can also benefit by reminding herself that giving herself a bit of slack can result in less fatigue and a sharper mental focus. She could carve out additional time to relax. Anyone who is driven to carry out a lot of responsibilities can find themselves drained from taking on too much, even if the tasks are enjoyable. It is too easy to stop noticing when the stress of working is taking a toll on creativity.

### **Additional tips**

Both Scarbrough and Fennell can check in with themselves from time to time by asking the following questions:

Am I honoring every idea I get no matter how strange or uninspiring it might sound at the time?

Is the writing falling by the wayside because I'm not valuing it by purposefully carving out time five to seven days a week?

Even if I am writing five to seven days a week, how long am I writing during a day and can I add in even a little more to the clock/word count?

How am I making myself accountable? Word count, time spent, writing buddy making me accountable?

What sort of reward can I give myself at the end of the day if I've made progress in my writing?

How do I feel emotionally? Are the ideas that are coming satisfying and exciting?

Writers experiencing illness can make inroads and renew creativity by keeping their options and eyes open. A willingness to put one foot in front of the other and try even the smallest thing to get words on paper can make all the difference, even when illness sidetracks them.

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*Denise A. Agnew is a novelist, optioned and produced screenwriter, producer, Certified Creativity Coach, Reiki Master, paranormal investigator and medium. You can find her at [agnewcreativemedium.com](http://agnewcreativemedium.com).*

# Finding Success in Niche Markets

By Trish Milburn



We've all heard the widely accepted advice given to authors who want to succeed in today's crowded fiction space: write a series, stick to popular genres and sub-genres, and target a wide audience. This all makes perfect sense and has yielded enviable levels of success for many authors. But sometimes going for the widely popular just isn't the path for us, and deciding to go a niche route is a valid choice as well.

## The choice

The decision to go niche, or to travel what may be a harder road to success, can be a conscious one as it was for me, may grow organically out of a single book as it did for [Neil Plakcy](#), or just sort of happen when a writer follows their muse, as is the case for [CJ Archer](#).

"I write where my muse takes me, with one eye on the market," said Archer, who writes the Glass and Steele historical fantasy mysteries with a romantic element set in Victorian London. "If I looked at what was selling and decided that was the only genre to write in, I'd have given up years ago. Trying to craft something in those genres would have driven me to boredom. By writing the story I want to write, and including elements I know my readers like, I've managed to make a decent living."

The genesis for Plakcy's Have Body, Will Guard male/male adventure romance series came while driving home from work in a bad mood and a desire to run away to some exotic locale where he would meet a handsome man who would sweep him along on an adventure.

"Well, that didn't happen, but I did decide to write a book about a mild-mannered English professor...who gets kicked to the curb by a long-term partner and answers an ad for a job in Tunisia," Plakcy said. "The job falls through, but he meets a sexy bodyguard who needs his help...and away we go."

What resulted was *Three Wrong Turns in the Desert*, a romance novel with an adventure plot. Plakcy admits that isn't that unusual in today's marketplace.

"But I wanted to write about the same two guys and give them new adventures in close protection. That's what led me to this underpopulated and largely unrecognized niche of LGBTQ action and adventure fiction," Plakcy said.

Burnout and a recent discovery of K-pop music led to my own decision to try niche fiction with my *Idol in Love* series of romances not only set in that musical world but which also take place in South Korea with mostly Korean characters. Even though my hope has been to tap into the rising popularity of Korean music and culture, the decision to write in this niche was prompted by the need to find the joy in writing again. I had been writing in the widely popular area of cowboy romance, but I was really burned out.

## Expectations

[Nicholas Harvey](#) readily admits that he was naïve about potential quick success when he wrote his first book in 2017 and expected a "fun little stream of extra cash."

After taking time to study the industry and take some courses, he discovered he needed to be writing a series. He'd missed the indie publishing wave and began in earnest just before COVID hit and "everyone who'd ever thought of writing a novel had time to do so."

"I found the sub-genre of sea adventures and convinced myself I'd fit in that box," he said. "Which my books do, except they squeeze into a small corner of that aforementioned box," since his main character is a woman, a dive boat operator in the Cayman Islands, doesn't know martial arts or have a military or police background, and he writes in UK English. "My expectations in December 2017 were hopeful my book would be some kind of runaway success. By January 2020, my expectations were of a long and difficult road ahead to build the brand."

Plakcy says that gradually writing narrower than even the M/M romance sub-genre has led to "an established, if small, fan base, and I keep writing the books because I love the characters and so do some readers."

## Pros of niche writing

A big positive is the freedom to write what you love because, as Harvey said, "nothing deadens the soul faster than not expressing what's itching to become words on paper."

Being a big fish in a little pond also has advantages if your name becomes synonymous with the niche.

Since [Patricia Rice](#) left traditional publishing, she's been able to write the historical romances with a psychic twist that she wanted to and that she knew her readers would enjoy.

"I've been able to expand these books from the Georgian era through Regency, Victorian, and into contemporary times," she said. "I have taken them from romance into romantic suspense and currently into mystery with romantic elements. I've been producing more books instead of wasting months and months on plotting and writing synopses and chapters to send

to my agent in hopes of hitting the sweet spot of easily marketable fiction. And I am making twice the amount of money I made when I was an extremely well paid author of traditional historical romance—because I can keep the books on the shelves where readers can find them.

“Make no mistake—I’m not saying the niche market is paying my way. I write that because I enjoy it. I’m saying that being able to sell my books in ways traditional publishing can’t is expanding my audience. I could not do this in traditional publishing.”

Archer points out that if you’re writing what you enjoy, it makes sitting down at the desk day in and day out easier.

I have also found this to be true. Deciding to write in a niche that I enjoy and can get excited about has taken away the dread I was feeling toward writing, even knowing that I might not sell anywhere near as many copies. I left a job that I dreaded going to 17 years ago so that I could write full time, so the last thing I wanted was for the writing to become the job I dreaded.

### **Cons and cautions**

Plakcy cites niche books being harder to market and to make real money on, while Archer says that writing in a popular genre won’t necessarily lead to higher sales.

“I see authors worrying all the time about their low sales numbers and they write in genres with the highest readership,” Archer said.

Harvey said it’s important to put on your business hat and to be honest with yourself if you’re considering writing niche fiction, particularly if it’s really niche.

“There are lots of poorly written, well-marketed books selling like hotcakes, and plenty of brilliantly written, poorly marketed books logging one sale a week,” Harvey said. “Are there any other novels close to what you’re about to or have written? There already exists something similar to what you’re creating and therefore a market to work with. What really becomes tricky is when you take your elements and spin them into another genre entirely. But one thing I’ve come to realize...it’s a great big world out there and you’ll have to try pretty hard to find a niche that doesn’t have a following of some kind.”

### **Marketing the niche book**

Harvey said it’s easy to feel that niche writing is much harder to market than main genres, but he doesn’t believe that’s true these days.

“Marketing for niche takes the same methods as any other genre,” he said. “It all begins with understanding your readers. We all tend to think our audiences are clones of ourselves, but they rarely are. I was convinced scuba divers would love my series, and to an extent they do. But the majority of my audience are 55+ who like the *idea* of scuba diving, or simply love the island and adventure vibe.”

Amazon and Facebook advertising can be more difficult to target with niche books because of fewer comparable authors, so Harvey suggests finding detail targeting in other ways.

“For the 99.9% of us who don’t luck into a homerun with their first novel, no marketing will pay out until you have more books. Both Facebook and AMS ads are too competitive and expensive,” he said. “I’m a relatively small fish, but with 11 books in my AJ Bailey series, I net \$15 from every book one that I sell based on my read-through numbers, as sell-through gets cloudy after a while with discount promos skewing the numbers.”

Even with a potentially more difficult climb in niche fiction, hard work can pay off.

“Since January 2020, I’ve been blessed with steady growth,” Harvey said. “Each year my gross has doubled. I will hit six figures for the year (2022) if growth continues as it has.”

### **The niche path**

Rice said that if an author has the ability and support to write what you want, it’s remarkably satisfying to do so.

“Besides, someone has to start each new trend – why not you?”

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*Trish Milburn writes the Idol in Love K-pop romance series and has also released the first in the Could Have Been a K-Drama novella series, all of which are niche fiction. She markets these mainly through lots of conversations with fellow K-pop and K-drama fans on Twitter and on her [Word of the K](#) website, where she writes weekly posts about the Korean entertainment industry.*



## Smart Marketing for Savvy Authors

By Tawdra Kandle



*This quarter of Smart Marketing is all about social media.*

*Post. Tweet. Pin.*

*Is it essential?*

*How do we grow our following?*

*How do we think outside the SM box?*

Social media is a nearly unavoidable part of life, especially for us authors. We connect with our readers (and each other) via posts, tweets, and reels. We share pictures, updates, memes, and funny stories. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are arguably the three strong pillars of the social media world.

But these three platforms are hardly the only game in town. It seems that we're offered new outlets almost every month. Some fizzle and fade away quickly, while others dig in and slowly become part of our social media landscape. They might not be the main ways we interact with fans and friends, but can they serve an important purpose when we're looking at reinforcing our branding—and supplementing our marketing plans?

Many authors would respond with a strong *yes!* Pinterest, YouTube, and TikTok might not be the first options you think of when planning a release or promotion, but it turns out that by ignoring other social media outlets, we might be missing out.

[Malorie Cooper](#), a *New York Times* bestselling author of science fiction and thrillers who also (with her brilliant wife, Jill) pens a series of author improvement books and offers classes and coaching on Facebook ads, launches, and branding, was an early adopter of stepping outside the social media box. I'd never heard of authors using Pinterest strategically until Malorie mentioned it during a workshop.

“I moved beyond Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter because all platforms eventually either die, or niche down, which decreases reach,” explains Cooper. “While Facebook still has the largest user base (2.9 billion as of January 2022), YouTube is right behind it at 2.56 billion. While Pinterest is smaller, it’s a great way to find audiences. TikTok, as everyone knows, is on the rise, so it makes sense to build a presence there, too. I’ve also dabbled in Reddit ads, but I decided that with the platform’s smaller reach and prickly user base, it wasn’t worth the time investment at the moment.”

While much of the world sees Pinterest as a great place to find recipes, create a virtual vision board, or plan holiday parties, the platform can also be fabulous for an author who wants to define and solidify branding.

“Pinterest is a really handy platform, because if the images or ads one uses are clearly aligned with an author’s genre and tropes, then people saving them are essentially self-identifying as being that author’s target reader,” Cooper notes. “If the author can get the user to their site, and the Meta (Facebook) Pixel is installed, then those people become targetable with Facebook ads. Some brands also do well with direct ads on Pinterest that send people to the retailer, though that seems to not work as well with books.”

Incidentally, Pinterest is also a great way to involve readers in promoting elements of your brand by asking them to create boards based on your books, series, and/or characters, increasing visibility. Ask your private reader group and your newsletter subscribers to make boards and share them.

YouTube is another outlet that many of us don’t immediately see as a possible social media venue, but it’s actually a rich resource for growing your audience—and your reach.

Cooper points out that the easiest way to expand reach on YouTube is to put your audiobooks on the platform. “Those will get an author more subscribers and ideally push the channel over the requirements to monetize,” she shares. “Once monetized, the author gets paid for ads that run with their videos. There’s more nuance to this, of course, but that’s the gist of it. YouTube will often deny monetization, or remove it, but one can appeal, explaining that the audiobooks are original content, and that the author is the creator. Another way to grow a channel is to do weekly podcasts. If one has a large enough reader-base, that alone may be enough to push the channel into the numbers that will allow a person to monetize.”

Quite possibly the most talked about and controversial social media platform to emerge in recent years is TikTok. The origins of the app in China made it initially suspect among the Western world, and earlier this summer, a commissioner from the Federal Communications Commission called upon Google and Apple to remove TikTok from their application stores. ByteDance, its parent company, has committed to making changes that will ensure the safety of collected user information. By early in 2022, there were over one billion daily users of the site.

“TikTok is definitely a platform that one has to use a bit before trying to make content for it,” Cooper admits. “Some people hate it, and I’m really not sure why, to be honest. There is pointless content on TikTok, but that exists everywhere. I imagine a lot of people dislike it

because of the time involved in making new videos. Luckily, now that Instagram and Facebook have reels, and YouTube has shorts, that content can be used over and over again.”

Being able to recycle content is a definite plus when you consider how much time and effort can potentially go into the creation of videos. Knowing that you can use TikTok posts to engage your followers on other social media venues might ease the stress of that commitment.

And there are some surprising upsides to engaging on TikTok. “One of the things I’ve found on TikTok is that aside from Facebook, it’s the platform where I seem to get the most meaningful user interaction,” reveals Cooper. “People ask questions and have comments that show they’re really paying attention to what they’re watching and not just swiping, watching for a few seconds, and then moving on.”

But as more and more authors migrate to TikTok, making it harder to become more than just one voice among many, do any of us have a chance to go viral and sell a lot of books? “The thing is, an author has to stand out in a way. Develop a look and an angle that’s more than just the usual so that people will remember you and come back. Paying attention to TikTok trends can give you ideas for how an author can incorporate that into their content and pull in extra viewers that may convert to readers.”

There are several groups (on Facebook, ironically!) devoted to tricks and tips on growing your TikTok followers and increasing views, likes, and shares. TikTok offers options to stitch videos together or duet with the original post. It’s also important to learn how to find the best sounds or music as those trends can positively affect visibility.

“My strategy with TikTok has been to build a brand that is entirely separate from my writing and eventually move them toward my books by having the character I created reading my books,” explains Cooper. “My TikTok account currently has fifty-three thousand followers. Several videos have over a million views, and one is closing in on six million. In addition to exposing these followers to my books, I’m also going to use this platform to launch a new pen name with (hopefully) a massive follower-base already built in.”

One of the key takeaways from Cooper’s experience using social media beyond the big three is that it’s important to tailor your sharing and strategy to each platform. What works on Facebook or Instagram isn’t necessarily suited to the audience on TikTok or YouTube. It may take some time and research to figure out how to find your place on different sites, but the effort might be worth it to expand your reach to an entirely new set of potential readers.

Cooper points out that it’s often a good idea to observe a new-to-you social media platform for a while before diving in. Having a considered plan that includes your goal, what and how often you plan to post, and how you can best translate your brand to a new audience is very important. Decide how personal your posts or videos will be, or if you’ll stick to only talking about your books and characters. There’s no right or wrong way to do this.

“I think something to remember is that people often have an idea of what they want, but it’s usually not what will actually capture them,” Cooper notes. “Be different. Build a memorable brand.”

So what's next once we've conquered the brave new or under-considered worlds of TikTok, YouTube, and Pinterest?

"Right now, the only other major platforms to consider are Reddit, LinkedIn, and Quora," reveals Cooper. "The latter two are less useful to fiction authors, but may be excellent for non-fiction authors."

This quarter, we focused on social media and how it relates to marketing for authors. While we heard from several authors who consider Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to be less than essential to their overall marketing plan, the majority of us feel that social media is how to interact with our readers and network with other industry professionals. Love it or not, these outlets are here to stay.

Next quarter, we'll discuss how to use the tools we own—things like our newsletter lists, websites, and sales pages (including blurbs, titles, covers)—to boost our marketing plans. I'm looking forward to picking up new ideas and inspirations at the conference this month and sharing them with all of you.

Thanks to the awesome Malorie Cooper for her generosity in sharing experience and insight this month. Be sure to check out [The Writing Wives' Help! I'm An Author](#) series.

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*Tawdra Kandle is the USA Today bestselling author of over 100 romances that span genres from contemporary through paranormal. Her engaging and realistic characters bring readers back again and again to devour the steamy love stories she spins. She lives in central Florida with a husband, a mischievous pup, and too many cats.*

# NINC Member Discounts

By Emilie Richards

## *Publishers Weekly and PW Select*

Since 1872, *Publishers Weekly* has been the common ground where book people at all levels, in all roles, learn and share news about what's new and what's next in every aspect of publishing the written word—in book, audio, video, and electronic forms. For the past several years *Publishers Weekly* has offered NINC members a discount on their "insider benefits," which include:

- *Weekly print issues*: 175+ prepublication book reviews in every issue, industry news
- *Companion digital editions*: Read the interactive digital version of each issue on Saturday and get the latest news first—available for your desktop, tablet, phone
- *Announcements issues*: Spring and autumn children's & adult roundups of what's coming
- "Subscriber-Only" *online access*: Expanded bestsellers lists, 200,000 book reviews, more...

*PW* offers us a discount on subscriptions to either the print+digital+online, or for a lower rate digital+online.

In addition, we also receive a discount at *PW Select*, a marketing program to reach *PW*'s audience of booksellers, librarians, publishers, agents, film scouts, and industry insiders. *PW Select* includes:

- A listing (cover art, synopsis, on-sale info) in the print and digital editions of *Publishers Weekly*
- Feature placement on front page of [PublishersWeekly.com](http://PublishersWeekly.com) and [BookLife.com](http://BookLife.com)
- Feature placement in BookLife's weekly e-newsletter which reaches over 23,000 people
- An announcement of the book to BookLife's Facebook and Twitter channels
- A six-month subscription to *Publishers Weekly's* digital edition

Information on how to access either of both discounts is available at our website under [Member Benefits: Freebies and Discounts](#).



*Emilie Richards* is the author of over 80 novels, which have been published in more than 21 countries and 16 languages. She is both traditionally and indie published.

# 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 (these groups are for NINC members only):

- Email list for all Novelists, Inc. Members: <https://groups.io/g/NINCLINK>
- NINC Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/NovelistsInc/>
- Follow NINC on Twitter: [https://twitter.com/Novelists\\_Inc](https://twitter.com/Novelists_Inc)
- NINC on Clubhouse: Novelists Inc Virtual Tiki Bar
- Critique/brainstorming group: <https://groups.io/g/NINKcritique>
- Traditionally published authors: <https://groups.io/g/NINCTradPubbedAuthors>
- SF/F & speculative fiction writers: <https://groups.io/g/NINCswordsandrayguns>
- Authors of thriller/crime/suspense: <https://groups.io/g/NINC suspense-thriller-crime>
- Discuss creating book covers: <https://groups.io/g/NINCcovercreators/>

## 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/>

### **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.

NINC is committed to welcoming a diverse and inclusive membership to our organization and serving all members. No author will ever be discriminated against on the basis 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.

### **Founders**

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

### **2022 Board of Directors**

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

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## 2022 Committees

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

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- Discounts Program: Emilie Richards

### **Central Coordinator**

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*Address changes may be made on the website.*

### ***Nink* Newsletter**

*September 2022 edition – Vol. 33, No. 9*

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

To request reprint rights or to **submit an article proposal**, please contact [the editor](#).

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