



The official newsletter  
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of writers of popular fiction



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# *Nink* October 2022

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# President's Voice

*By Lisa Hughey*



The conference is over, and fall is upon us. A huge thank you to Tawdra Kandle, our programming chair; Mel Jolly, our conference director; Sarah Woodbury, our sponsorship chair; and the rest of the conference team for a fantastic NINC 2022 Work Smarter conference. The event was a resounding success (with the exception of the hurricane that followed). Hopefully by now everyone is at home and safe from the storm.

A big thank you to everyone who volunteered to write conference reports for the newsletter. Thank you also to our registration helpers, moderators, and roundtable facilitators. Every one of you made the success of the conference possible.

If you missed the conference, please check the November and December issues of *Nink* for our comprehensive conference reports. If you missed the conference, or if you headed out early to escape the storm, or if you had a little too much fun at the D2D/BookFunnel karaoke party, you also missed our Annual General Meeting. Here are the highlights of what your NINC board has been working on over the past year.

- Hired a new central coordinator and a new bookkeeper
- New ACA ([Authors Coalition](#)) rep
- Our new [website](#) is up and mostly running (this is a multi-year project started in 2020)
- DEI Committee is continuing their work and, along with the newsletter team, we've instituted quarterly articles that specifically focus on DEI subjects
- Expanded our conference staff and had the largest conference to date (no plans to make NINC larger)
- Started a NINC Clubhouse room Tuesdays at 2 p.m. EST
- Disbursed money to several members from our legal fund
- Expanded the [Linda Kay West scholarship fund](#) to include money for hotel and travel
- Signed on to Authors Guild's *amicus brief* in the [copyright infringement lawsuit](#) against the Internet Archive.

After an inspiring conference, seeing old friends and making new ones, I'm ready to dive back into work. I hope you all find that same energy and joy for the best job around!

~ Lisa

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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/>

# Self-Publishing Your Audiobook: Royalty Share or Not?

The \$26,000 lesson

*By Michael L. Banner*



Of my 16 self-published books, only half are in audiobook format. This is mostly due to the significant underwriting cost of bringing each to market (from \$1,500 to \$3,000 each). I have tried various methods for getting these to market, including selling my audio rights to a traditional publisher and self-publishing—either by underwriting the cost myself or royalty sharing with no up-front cost. When self-publishing your next book, here is why I learned it is best to retain your audio rights (instead of royalty sharing or selling to a publisher), self-underwrite the production cost, and self-publish your audio everywhere.

Royalty Share was first introduced by ACX's platform for direct distribution to Amazon and Audible. It allows authors to self-publish without investing in most or all the narrator/production fees for creating an audiobook. In place of getting paid up front, the narrator and author (rights holder) split the royalties received on the audiobook's sales for seven years, at which time the production is deemed paid.

## **My \$26,000 royalty share lesson**

In one of my three-book series, after paying to produce book one and realizing it would not sell enough copies to pay for the production costs, I offered the narrator a Royalty Share arrangement (while remaining exclusively on ACX) for the other two books. The big draw for my narrator/producer to this offer was that he would also get Royalty Share on the boxed set (all three books, including book one that I had already paid him for). I was pretty sure the boxed set would sell decently because it was 23+ hours of listening pleasure for one Audible credit. Admittedly, I wasn't confident enough to underwrite the \$3,000+ production costs

myself. My narrator, having some time in his schedule, agreed to Royalty Share and we launched the other two books in the series, followed a few months later by the boxed set.

As I suspected, books two and three sold poorly. But the boxed set sold 8,500+ copies, including 4,000 during a one-day Audible sale. Overall, the boxed set generated over \$52,000 in net royalties, half of which went to my narrator/producer. Essentially, I spent \$26,000 to produce two audiobooks and the boxed set vs. about \$3,000 if I had instead paid for the production costs up front. Simply put, Royalty Share cost me almost nine times more than Pay for Production. And yes, had my narrator opposed a Royalty Share, I might never have taken the chance and invested the \$3,000 to begin with. Hindsight is always 20/20 when it comes to investments, but there was yet another lesson I had not fully considered.

After three years, sales of the boxed set slowed to a trickle and decreased each month. Additionally, ACX does *not* allow rights holders to reduce prices or run active promotions. Locked into a seven-year contract with ACX and the narrator, unless I bought out the Royalty Share agreement, I was stuck watching sales go to zero. Before I tell you what I did, let's explore which option is better for you.

### **Royalty share or pay for production?**

Your budget is a big consideration, along with the marketability of the book. Some authors do quite well royalty sharing their audiobooks. And some narrators will not produce audiobooks without sharing the royalties. However, there are some very strong reasons why paying for production and retaining your rights might make more sense than royalty sharing or even selling them to a publisher.

### **Wide distribution and control over pricing**

ACX is no longer your only choice to self-publish and market your audiobooks. With your completed audiobook files in hand, you now can self-publish through Findaway Voices. Think of it as Draft2Digital for audiobooks. Findaway provides not only distribution through Amazon and Audible (for slightly less royalties than if you publish through ACX), but they offer 42 other distributors, including library channels, Apple, B&N, Kobo, and Chirp (BookBub's growing audiobook marketplace). Perhaps the best benefit of Findaway is that, unlike Audible/Amazon, you control your pricing and can set up price promotions on Chirp, B&N, and/or Apple.

### **Sell more, make more**

Think of it this way: Unlike with ACX's pre-set higher prices, by setting your own pricing and promotions through Findaway, you control the odds of selling more copies of your audiobooks. Findaway's royalty rates are higher, thus making you more money, even though your pricing might be a lot less. Example: My 23-plus-hour boxed set is sold by Audible for \$29.95, yet I only averaged \$3.75 in royalties per audio sale (assuming a new ACX nonexclusive agreement). By additionally selling this audiobook through Findaway for \$9.99, I can make

\$4.50 per sale, even though it's being sold at 1/3 the price (depending on distribution channel). I make more and my readers/listeners get a better deal. That's a win-win!

### **Try exclusive and then change**

Perhaps you will want to test the waters first, as in self-publishing your audiobook exclusively through ACX to start. After all, the royalty rate is 40% of the net sales price (vs. 25% for nonexclusive). And if your audiobook is nine hours or longer, it has a good chance of performing well on Audible during the first one to six months of its release. Then after sales drop off, go wide. When you pay for production and own 100% of your audiobook's rights, you can now elect to change your ACX contract from exclusive to nonexclusive (by simply writing an email) and publish your audiobooks wide (in addition to Audible and Amazon) through Findaway. **Caution:** This is *not* an option with Royalty Share. After my aforementioned Royalty Share agreement, I would advise against "testing the waters" in this way. Getting "unstuck" was anything but easy.

### **Beware the ACX royalty share lock**

Even though my Royalty Share audiobooks' best earning years were probably over, I still wanted the rights back. After negotiating a deal to buy out my narrator, I assumed that ACX could simply change our royalty agreement. That is, ACX could easily switch to collecting royalties for one person, instead of two. *Wrong!*

### **Removing a royalty share**

To remove books from Royalty Share, ACX requires taking them out of production and off Audible/Amazon's digital shelves (in this case, by the narrator requesting release), and then republishing them as new.

To continue selling them through ACX necessitates resubmitting every audio file as if they were brand new audiobooks. That means all reviews are erased; thus, I lost over 800 reviews on just my boxed set alone. Submitting books through ACX is time-consuming, depending upon internet upload speeds. Resubmitting them is far worse. The process took many long hours to complete, and those books were still not available for sale on Audible or Amazon for many days after submission. Multiple technical issues (by ACX) caused problems in trying to submit the files, resulting in numerous back-and-forth emails and a phone call.

Concurrently, I submitted each one of these audiobooks to Findaway (for distribution outside of Amazon/Audible), who approved and began distributing them within three days of submission. I can now run promotions, submit them for inclusion in BookBub Featured Deals (not quite as hard to get an ebook Featured Deal), and make more on each sale than I would on one Audible retail credit/sale. Meanwhile, I continue to wait to receive approval from ACX for re-inclusion on Amazon/Audible.

## **Sell direct, too**

Lastly, consider adding direct-to-consumer sales for your audiobooks. Findaway offers (for a cost) a sell-direct service called Authors Direct. I am currently trying out BookFunnel's new audiobook beta, along with WooCommerce (both free). In either case, you can sell your audiobooks direct to readers/listeners on your website and receive nearly 100% of the sale price as your royalty (you'll have transaction fees of up to 5%). Using my example, if Audible's price is \$29.95 and Findaway's (through its partners) \$9.99, I could sell it direct to my subscribers for \$4.99 and still make even more money. Now, my subscribers get the best deal possible, and I am selling my audiobooks everywhere, *at the same time*.

With the options available to authors today, why give away your audiobook rights? You can offer your audiobooks through the largest platforms (Amazon and Audible), all the other retail platforms, libraries, and sell them directly through your own website... simultaneously. But you cannot do this if you Royalty Share or sell your rights to a publisher.

For me, I have 26,000 reasons why I will always pay for production and retain 100% control of my audiobook rights and royalties. My conviction is so strong that I have even secured the rights back to my only traditionally produced audiobook.

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*Michael L. Banner is a USA Today and international bestseller, penning 15 novels as ML Banner, and two nonfiction books under his Self-Publishing Empire® series. Before becoming a full-time writer, Banner was a serial entrepreneur, having formed dozens of businesses over 40-plus years, including SmallBiZ.com. Before selling, he helped more than 100,000 people to start their own corporations or LLCs, consulted thousands by assisting them on how to set up and manage their own enterprises, and served on boards of other start-ups.*



## Contemporary Romance Continues to Evolve

By Chéré Coen



Contemporary romance novels are a subgenre within the giant field of romance, with the basic tenets being the stories are set in modern times, generally involve two people who fall in love and, as is the case with almost all romance novels, live happily ever after. With each passing year, the subgenre has become more diverse in its characters and subject matter, as well as its audience, but the field is still being written primarily by women, for women, and about women.

The history of the contemporary romance novel dates to the 19th century, when authors such as Ann Radcliffe and Jane Austen penned stories with female protagonists, many of whom were strong and independent and who usually ended up with the male love interest. Women of that time had few choices in life besides marriage and low-paying and demeaning work, so novels involving heroines who succeeded provided them with an escape from real life.

In those early days, contemporary romantic novels were strictly for white readers who could afford literature.

“Early romance novels featured heterosexual, white female protagonists either defying social conventions or overcoming personal struggles in pursuit of their own happiness,” Amanda Pagan, children’s librarian at the New York Public Library, in *A Brief History of the Romance Novel*, wrote. “The heroines of these novels eventually found the loves of their lives and ended the novels secure and happy. Any development of a romantic relationship between two (or more) people—as well as an ending that was emotionally satisfying (usually happy but not always)—became the two core guidelines that romance novels follow to this day.”

For the first half of the twentieth century, contemporary romances veered more toward mainstream writers such as Daphne Du Maurier (*Rebecca*), Francis Parkinson Keyes (*Dinner at Antoine’s*), Taylor Caldwell (*Captains and the Kings*), and Colleen McCullough (*The Thorn Birds*), although not all featured the subgenre’s trademark happy endings.

British publisher Mills & Boon, which later merged with Harlequin, began publishing short contemporary romances for a small price. Popular characters of the 1950s and 1960s included men in professions with women usually as housewife, mother, stewardess, or nurse.

In 1972, the earth shifted for the genre. Kathleen Woodiwiss published *The Flame and the Flower* at Avon, in which Woodiwiss incorporated steamy sex scenes into her historical romance. The novel became a bestseller, readers demanded more sex scenes throughout the genre, and the modern romance was born. Contemporary authors such as Jackie Collins, Danielle Steel, and Nora Roberts followed.

The main elements, however, remained the same.

“Two basic elements comprise every romance novel: a central love story and an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending,” according to [Romance Writers of America](#) (RWA).

Since the 1970s, the romance genre has grown tremendously and shifted into numerous subgenres. Within contemporary romance there are several divisions such as suspense, thriller, paranormal, erotica, inspirational and sweet (no sex). Romance is so varied that it’s argued to be the leader in paperback sales. According to RWA’s 2016 statistics, romance made up 23 percent of the overall U.S. fiction market, only following general fiction.

### **Today’s contemporary romance**

In the late twentieth century, publishing began producing contemporary romance novels with diverse characters. Gordon Merrick published a bestselling gay romance titled *The Lord Won’t Mind* in 1970, according to Pagan, and authors such as Beverly Jenkins wrote romances with African American characters.

But it wasn’t until the last few decades that there’s been a dedicated push to diversify the subgenre. Award-winning author [Liz Talley](#), who writes “contemporary romance with Southern flavor,” still sees the field utilizing those tropes that make it popular, plots such as second chances and “I hate you but I love you” stories. But the selection for readers has greatly expanded, she said.

“For me, it’s definitely more diverse and the heroes and heroines look more like the readers who are reading them,” she said.

In other words, heroines are not always a size four with immaculate hair and makeup and designer clothes.

Covers can still veer toward cartoon characters that look as if the tale will be light and fluffy, but there’s “more weight to the story underneath,” Talley added.

It’s not all white heroes and heroines, either. Or even just African Americans. The love stories may be multicultural, multiracial, and include members of the LGBTQ+ community.

[The Ripped Bodice](#) bookstore in Culver City, California, caters to romance readers, and is owned and operated by sisters Leah and Bea Koch. The duo produce an annual report titled the “State of Racial Diversity in Romance Publishing” and the most recent collection of data has seen an uptick of books written by BIPOC authors.

## The evolving LGBTQ+ market

A 2019 bestseller proved that some stories outside the realm of traditional contemporary romance could become bestsellers. *Red, White and Royal Blue* by Casey McQuiston, in which the son of the first U.S. female president falls in love with the Prince of England, was a hit.

“It’s encouraging to see that big publishers have LGBTQ+ books that hit the market big because I think it’s good that LGBTQ+ books and their readership have visibility in the market, and that the stories they tell have a voice that can finally be heard,” author Jackie North said. North writes M/M romance, or stories of men falling in love with other men.

“As for books like *Red, White and Royal Blue*, which made a huge splash, this happened, I think, for two reasons. It had a well-funded marketing push behind it and it was a fun and lively read with an interesting premise. The release of this well-written book felt like a blockbuster—a big marketing push with a huge budget, and an almost made-for-the-big-screen premise and story. There is even a movie in the works, which is exciting!”

Overall, however, North still sees LGBTQ+ books as a niche within the subgenre.

“Merely because big publishing is sensing a piece of the market that they can corner, I don’t feel that this means they are coming around, not all of them, anyway, and certainly not as the focus of future marketing plans, simply because the LGBTQ+ market is quite small and not a big moneymaker,” she said. “Overall, publishing is a numbers game. Publishers and authors consider what genres and tropes are trending and then set their sights on that. The majority of LGBTQ+ books are self-published, and there *are* authors who make good money, and plenty of authors make a living; some even make a *very* good living. To big publishing, that isn’t enough, and I think LGBTQ+ books will stay at the edges of the publishing market.”

## How to reach an audience

According to RWA, typical romance readers are overwhelmingly female (82 percent). Most are white, with 12 percent African American, 7 percent LatinX and 4 percent Asian/Asian American. Sexual orientation of romance readers continues to be mostly heterosexual with 9 percent bisexual, pansexual, or other bi+ identity and 2 percent gay or lesbian.

However, according to NPR’s [“Gen Z is driving sales of romance books to the top of bestseller lists”](#) by Deanna Schwartz and Meghan Collins Sullivan, contemporary romance known as “New Adult” novels are vastly attracting new younger readers. They use New Adult authors [Colleen Hoover](#) and [Emily Henry](#) as examples of novelists appealing to a younger set.

“For months, Hoover and Henry have occupied multiple spots on the *New York Times* paperback trade fiction bestsellers list,” the article said. “The success of these contemporary romance writers has been driven in large part by Gen Z readers—and social media.”

Hoover’s novel *It Ends with Us* was on the NYT bestseller list for 29 weeks as of early September, and Hoover’s *Verity* sat at No. 1. Her October 18 book release and sequel, *It Starts With Us*, has enjoyed more pre-orders than any novel in Simon & Schuster history.

“A decade ago, the main demographic for romance was women ages 35 to 54,” the article revealed. “But in the past several years, that has widened to include women 18 to 54, according to Colleen Hoover’s publicist, Ariele Fredman.”



Much of that new interest among Gen Z readers is their love of TikTok and its variant BookTok, where videos range from book reviews and recommendations to author profiles.

“Sales for authors whose books have gone viral on TikTok had reached 12.5 million in 2022, as of July, according to NPD BookScan, a data service that tracks U.S. book sales,” the NPR story reported. “And as of April, nearly 41 percent of TikTok’s global users were between the ages of 18 and 24—with more than half of those being women, according to Statista.”

It’s an annoying statement that journalists new to the genre routinely use, those who cling to the age-old stereotype of purple prose and find modern romance refreshing, that what’s sold today in bookstores is “not your grandmother’s romance.” With the new advent of more diverse contemporary romance, it could be said that today’s novels are not your mother’s either.

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*Cheré Coen is a travel journalist who writes romances and mysteries under the pen name Cherie Claire. Her latest—in addition to working through a master’s in creative writing—is the Viola Valentine paranormal mystery series.*

# How to Avoid LGBTQ+ Stereotypes

*By Eris Young*



It would be impossible to sit down and list every LGBTQ+ stereotype that might pop up in a work of fiction. For one thing, stereotypes change as society changes, and they can be hard to pin down, it's more a feeling you get while reading than a specific image.

A stereotype might only be noticeable to someone from the group being depicted, which means that authors writing outside their own experience need to take steps to make sure they won't hurt or alienate their readers.

## **Is this my story to tell?**

Before fiction became so globalized and widely accessible, it was standard practice for non-marginalized authors to write stories about marginalized people—crucially, people who were excluded from literary circles and therefore could not tell their stories themselves. As authors, we need to make sure we're not accidentally reinforcing this harmful dynamic.

But just because you're writing outside your lived experience doesn't necessarily mean you shouldn't write the story; I wouldn't be writing this article if that was the case! Instead, writing responsibly is about doing your legwork, and being prepared to have your work read by the people you're writing about.

There are a handful of best practices to keep in mind that should help you protect both yourself and your readers. These pointers are drawn from my own experiences as an author, editor, and sensitivity reader, and from a lifetime as a queer, transgender reader of books.

## **We're people, not decoration**

Recently, reading a new installment in a favorite fantasy series, I was surprised and excited when the author included two transgender women in a scene; until then, trans people hadn't been mentioned in the series at all.

My excitement quickly took a nosedive when it turned out the trans women weren't characters at all but set dressing: they were never given names, and it became clear they were only included to give the scene—which took place in a nightclub—a sense of sleazy criminality.

If the author had asked any trans person before including this, frankly throwaway, line, they'd likely have politely explained why it was harmful. Instead, the author relied on their own preconceived notions associating trans people with degeneracy and artifice, and ended up writing a stereotype.

As a trans person, reading this scene made me feel as if people like me didn't belong in the author's world—or if we did, it could be as decoration only, not as characters with interior lives. So the first, most important thing to remember is that the people you're writing about are human beings: any person, no matter who they are, is a potential *character*, and no one deserves to be treated like part of the scenery.

### **The people you're writing about will be reading your books**

As a critic on a short fiction writing course, I regularly come across stories featuring nonbinary or trans characters, where the author had obviously written with the assumption that no real-life nonbinary or trans person would ever read the story—much less have cause to edit or critique it.

It's an excellent rule of thumb to always assume that, whatever group you're writing about, someone from that group *will* read your work at one point or another. Try to imagine how what you're writing will make that person feel.

### **Do your research**

This one is obvious. "Research" takes many forms, and research material can mean books, podcasts, TV shows, interviews, or almost anything else, but it's always important to check who created those materials. Is the author, artist, or showrunner themselves LGBTQ+, or, if not, did they hire LGBTQ+ consultants?

Research can also mean talking to people from that specific group, be they friends, family members, or even strangers off the internet. You are allowed to ask questions about someone's experience, or even ask them to take a look at what you've written. But whoever you speak to, remember that no one person will be able to speak for their entire community, and no one owes you their time.

Especially for less visible groups such as intersex or asexual-spectrum identities, it can be exhausting to have to explain your identity or lived experience over and over to different people. Always ask politely first, and don't take it personally if someone says they don't want to look over your work or give you advice.

If it's more than just a few lines, it's best to hire a professional sensitivity reader. It's their job to help you make your writing as good as it can be, and unlike a friend or family member, they'll be unbiased and won't just tell you what they think you want to hear.



## Listen to criticism

If you're writing a story about mountain climbing and you consult an experienced climber, you'll listen to them when they say something you've written is inaccurate, right? LGBTQ+ people have the expertise and lived experience to be able to say if what you've written rings true, or if it feels like a stereotype.

I recently did a sensitivity read for a novel featuring a nonbinary character. The character was well-written and multilayered, but there was an odd moment where that character's partner talks about their gender and says, "No one but me will ever love them."

As a nonbinary trans person, I intuitively understood that the line made me uncomfortable because there's a long history in fiction of gender-nonconforming characters being portrayed as unlovable or undesirable *because* of their gender. I was able to suggest a more positive, compassionate approach that framed the character's nonbinary gender not as an obstacle to a relationship, but as just another reason to love them.

## Stereotypes are more than just negative images

There are plenty of highly visible LGBTQ+ stereotypes—the theatrical, "limp-wristed" gay man and the wise, ethereal, cardboard-cutout nonbinary person, to name a couple—but the more insidious stereotypes are those that operate beyond the page, on a metanarrative level.

Ask yourself, for example, how your story treats gender-transgression or ambiguity? Are the aesthetics or trappings of queerness in your story always associated with misery, artifice, or evil? Are you [queer-coding](#) your villain? Are your lesbian characters "punished" or even [killed off](#) implicitly for not conforming to heteronormative expectations? Is the only gay man in your historical novel tragically closeted? An LGBTQ+ stereotype could even be the simple act of denying your only queer character a happy ending, implying that being LGBTQ+ can only lead to a miserable, tragic end.

## Queerness isn't a bad thing!

My final piece of advice for writing LGBTQ+ characters, then, is simply to remember that being gay, trans, intersex, asexual—or any other queer identity—is *not* a bad thing. So many of the stereotypes and harmful images we have of LGBTQ+ people come from the ways society has framed us as criminal or ill, or has only seen us when we're hurt or killed for being who we are. But remember, we've been finding love and family and creating our own joy, even within societies that criminalize or pathologize us, for centuries.

## Conclusion

It's impossible to plan for every eventuality. What you *can* do is your due diligence. Educate yourself, and consider hiring a professional whose job it is to be attuned to the ways that unconscious bias can manifest in fiction.

Practice empathy with both your readers and the people you're depicting, and question your instincts when writing experiences you've only passively heard about through media and pop culture: ask yourself what feels natural for this character or storyline, and why you want to include it?

If you hold onto the touchstones of empathy, research, and critical thought, your LGBTQ+ characters and storylines are much more likely to be positive, authentic, and enjoyable to read.

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*Eris Young is a queer, trans writer and editor. They are the author of nonfiction titles [They/Them/Their](#) (2019) and [Ace Voices](#) (forthcoming December 2022), published by Jessica Kingsley Publishing. As a sensitivity reader, they have worked with authors such as Sera Milano, Derek Künsken, and Mandy Haggith. They are also the fiction editor at [Shoreline of Infinity](#) sci-fi magazine. Find Eris on Twitter: [@young\\_e\\_h](#).*



## The Way We Were The Founding of NINC

*By Barbara Meyers*



### **Misty water-colored memories...**

When asked what year NINC began, founder Maggie Osbourne says, “I sure hope the others are better at dates than I am. We were all youngish and beautiful, so it was a long time ago!”

Some of those young and beautiful “others” did indeed recall that five long-time writer friends—Jasmine Cresswell, Maggie Osbourne, Marianne Shock, Rebecca Brandewyne, and Janice Young Brooks—came together to found Novelists, Inc., in 1989. All were multi-published, professional authors whose needs were not being met by the other writing groups existing at that time. All also had experience as board members or founders with another writers organization.

### **Can it be that it was all so simple then?**

“Looking back, my feeling is that the organization filled the unanswered needs of many genre writers and thus came into being relatively smoothly. My impression is that we were ignored by everyone until one day the industry looked around and saw NINC was up and running,” Cresswell recalled.

Brandewyne remembered it differently. “It was made known to us by various people from some major publishing houses that they really weren’t happy about the idea of NINC. They truly didn’t want authors to have any power or say in what went on in the publishing world from the writers’ standpoint.”

She added, “We had to think long-term, that NINC had to be set up and structured in such a way that it could continue to function even with an inexperienced, a crazy, or even a criminal

board in place, because the odds of something like that happening in the future were actually pretty good. Maggie insisted that the knowledge and experience of previous board members shouldn't just be thrown away either. So that's how the advisory council came about as a check and balance for the board of directors."

Brandewyne threw the name Novelists, Inc., into the ring at an early meeting, which gave Cresswell the brilliant idea of calling the newsletter *Novelists' Ink!*

## **Scattered pictures**

Cresswell said serving as board members for another organization made up of mostly unpublished writers "provided the impetus to establish one that would provide for the specific needs of those writers who were already multi-published." NINC founders were focused on the opportunities, problems, and frustrations encountered by writers who had already successfully published at least two full-length works of fiction.

NINC needed an initial membership large enough to provide a useful source of group knowledge and expertise, but beyond that growth was never an objective. The idea was to hold an annual conference and meet with editors and agents more informally to encourage useful dialogue and open up opportunities for the members.

Charter member Shirley Paranteau knows NINC filled a void left by other writers' organizations by offering a smaller, more intense conference where writers were all published.

According to charter member Curtiss Ann Matlock: "When Novelists, Inc., started it was by and for those who wanted to take seriously the entire scope of being a fiction writer. It was for the published fiction writer—no publishers or agents in the meetings. No people who took it as a hobby or a lark."

The original membership requirement was having one novel published with a legitimate (not vanity) press. By the time the bylaws were written, the requirement changed to having two traditionally published books because one book could be a fluke but two meant you're a serious writer.

"We wanted serious writers in NINC," charter member Victoria Thompson stated. Perhaps NINC charter member Susan Aylworth summed it up best: "People who were in the trenches—and the midlist—wanted something that would be for writers by writers about writing and the business of writing."

## **Or has time re-written every line?**

Osbourne saw NINC as not only an information source for published authors, but one with a fantastic conference where they could meet other published authors. Brandewyne envisioned a very powerful advocacy group for writers of popular fiction, not only a network of knowledge to help writers manage their careers, while Cresswell thought NINC would be “a comfortable place, virtual or otherwise, for the multi-published novelist.” She added, “NINC was never intended to be exclusively for writers of any specific genre. As such, we welcomed male authors from the beginning and definitely benefited from hearing the male perspective on many issues.”

Brandewyne thought publishers frequently took gross advantage of authors and wanted to see an organization that had the courage, strength in numbers, and wherewithal to combat that.

## **Why can't we?**

Charter member Linda Barlow fondly recalls 1992, the year she served as NINC's president, partly because of the conference featuring Carrie Fisher and Erica Jong as speakers. “That year NINC also worked with the Authors Guild to chip in, co-sponsor, and publish the first trade paperback edition of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, the novel for which he was an assassination target by Islamists because there was a fatwa laid upon him for writing it. NINC, in concert with the Authors Guild and other authors' organizations, decided to take a stand against censorship. This was a notable example of NINC's outreach and support of other organizations and authors. Rushdie was not a member of NINC, but that did not matter.”

## **What's too painful to remember?**

In the early days, Thompson said, “Our newsletter was private, and members were not allowed to share the contents with nonmembers. This allowed members to be frank and open in sharing news and concerns. Some members did not honor the confidentiality and shared info with editors or others, but it didn't happen often. We also had a day at the conference when editors and agents were not allowed to attend the sessions. This gave members a chance to vent and share sensitive information and talk about things they would never share in front of the pros. This made editors and agents upset and concerned about what we were saying about them. They didn't trust us for a while. We eventually made part and then all of the newsletter public and did away with the ‘members only’ day at the conference.”

Brandewyne's worst memory of the period during which NINC began was when those members of NINC refused to keep the newsletter private and confidential to NINC (which was the requirement then) and started sharing it with publishers. She thought that was the last nail in the coffin when it came to developing any real power and advocacy in the future.

Osbourne laughs. “There were small money bets about how long the confidentiality rule would last. And we actually had a conversation about whether men should be allowed in. Sounds so crazy now.”

## **I can smile at the old days**

“Probably the greatest impact NINC had on my career was the opportunity to meet and share war stories with other authors. Also, more importantly, to learn from everyone else’s experiences. I learned so much from my NINC colleagues!” Barlow said.

“When I was still writing romances, I got amazing guidance and suggestions from some of the superstars of the genre, and I gave guidance and suggestions to writers who went on to become superstars,” Keiler recalled. “When my career in traditional publishing flatlined, I caught the indie-publishing wave early, thanks to NINC, and I worked as an indie author for years. NINC also opened a new door in my career as I am now writing general fiction for a NINC member’s publishing house.”

## **And if we had the chance to do it all again**

Osbourne: “It’s fabulous that here we are decades later with a thriving organization that started with five women saying: ‘We can do more for published authors, and, yes, we’re the people to do it.’ The accomplishment I’m most proud of is being one of the founders of NINC.”

Brandewyne: “I had in mind a very powerful advocacy group for writers of popular fiction, not largely a network of knowledge to help writers manage their careers.”

Cresswell: “The fact that NINC survives, suggesting some writers are still finding it useful, is all that I could have hoped for as a founder.”

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*Barbara Meyers writes a mix of contemporary romance and women’s fiction as well as the comedic fantasy series, Grinding Reality.*

## Smart Marketing for Savvy Authors

By Tawdra Kandle



*This quarter of Smart Marketing  
is all about using the tools we own:  
Wowwing with our websites;  
Nabbing readers with our newsletters;  
Super-maximizing our sales pages!*

Whenever I'm asked about the changes in the publishing world over the past 10-plus years, I love pointing out how many businesses exist today that weren't even dreamed of a decade ago. Indie publishing has not only created a plethora of new authors, it also has helped to birth a flurry of author- and publishing-support tools and services.

I'm thrilled that we have BookFunnel to help us serve our books (and audiobooks!) directly to readers. I'm grateful that BookBub allows us to widen our visibility. Some authors have gone from hiring out formatting and graphics to using apps like Vellum, Atticus, Book Brush, and Canva to streamline the processes. These tools make our lives easier.

Still, sometimes it's easy to focus on the bright and flashy programs and forget that we have some basic elements of the business right at our fingertips. Not too long into my career, a wise author told me that it's important to focus on what we own, what can't be taken away from us, things we can affect: not our Facebook groups or our TikTok followers, not even our Amazon readers, but things like our websites, our newsletter lists, and all of the public-facing elements of our books.

Recently, I had the opportunity (and motivation) to put that sage advice to work. In early September, one of my boxsets was scheduled to be featured on BookBub as a 99-cent Featured Deal during the same week that another book in the series was scheduled to release. I was

excited, of course, but more than that, I was determined to do whatever I could to give my books the best chance possible to attract new readers.

I applied for spots in other paid promo newsletters such as Ereader News Today, Bargain Booksy, and Robin Reads. I called in some favors from author friends and set up some swaps for social media and newsletter features. I planned out ads for Facebook, Amazon, and BookBub. All of these tasks were good moves, solid strategies for making the most out of a golden moment.

But I almost forgot to take care of a few key elements that had the potential to make my book more appealing—and more likely to be bought and read. Those include my book pages on all of the vendors as well as specific pages on my website, and my newsletter audience.

Maybe I'm the exception and not the rule, but most of the time, I don't pay much attention to my vendor pages aside from the basics (Are my title, cover, and price correct?). But as I prepared for my Featured Deal, I looked at how my discounted book was represented with an eye to detail:

- *Blurb*: I did some research into what the experts are recommending for book descriptions right now, and then I implemented what I'd learned. After confirming that the tropes were clear in the first few lines of the blurb, I tightened up the prose and made sure that it was free of errors and typos.
- *Series*: As we all know, one of the most important elements of any BookBub Featured Deal is what happens in the month after our book is featured. We hope that readers will go on to read others in the series. Some readers will even pick up the next book or two while they're downloading your free or bargain book. So it's important to have that info clear and visible. I checked on all of my vendors to be sure that my series info was up to date and that the other books also had great blurbs and thumbnails. Note that B&N Press, Kobo, Apple, and Google Play all allow you to manage your series as you prefer (including prequels and/or boxsets as you like), but Amazon is another story.
- *Series, Amazon-specific*: The book of mine featured on BookBub as a deal was a boxset, which Amazon will not incorporate into the main series. The challenge, then, was to reconfigure the book's Amazon sales page to show readers that there were other books in this world. I used A+ content to accomplish this task, adding book covers, blurbs, and a brief description of how the books all fit together (should they be read in order, and if so, what IS that order?).
- *Cover*: A quick cover change for a book about to be featured by BookBub isn't always advisable or possible, but if you have a cover artist with a quick turnaround time and the ability to update a cover that has room for improvement, it's not a bad idea to give it a shot. Look around at the bestselling books in your genre and trope, and then use them as inspiration (For instance, if you write romance, what's the word on man chest? Should your cover feature couples or a single man? If you write fantasy or mystery, are

the bestselling books sporting complex visuals or a simpler, one-item-on-a-black-field cover?). At the very least, be sure that the covers of your series (if applicable) are all complementary, and if your book is a boxset, use a 2-D flat cover, not a 3-D boxset.

- *Author bio*: This might be the least important of the vendor sales page to-dos, but updating your bio and picture (if applicable) costs you nothing but time, and not much of it at that. Be sure that your bio is engaging and pithy, giving readers a small glimpse into why they should want to be part of your book world.
- *Keywords*: While this metadata is not necessarily visible, it's worth it to check the keywords you use in the backend of vendors like Amazon. Revisit your selected genres and categories as well. Have the options been updated since you last updated this book? See if there are new opportunities to better represent your book.

Once I'd polished the vendor pages, I shifted my focus to a place where I have total control: my website. I updated the featured book's page there and added all of the purchase links, a special graphic, and a teaser to a sidebar-linked page that spotlights sales and promos. I also created a new page for the soon-to-be-released title and then added a post with an excerpt. Even after doing all of that, I realized that I wanted to offer my readers as much incentive as possible to buy both of the books and read the entire series. To that end, I decided to write a short prequel scene to the discounted book and post it on my website to further pull potential readers into the books' world.

But what was the best, most efficient way to let them know about the new bonus? This is where my newsletter audience comes into play. I constructed a schedule of emails to help build excitement for the promo and the related release by sharing sneak peeks, excerpts, graphics—and, of course, the link to the new prequel scene. My goal was to pique the interest of new readers and then lead them on the journey that would include a stop to buy some books before they join the world I've created.

I used specialized links to track which options were appealing to more newsletter readers. I also did several re-sends through the week, sending slightly tweaked versions of the sale and release announcements to those in the audience who hadn't opened or clicked on any link. I saw a nice uptick in responses and interaction with my readers.

Ultimately, both the promotion and the release were relatively successful, but even more importantly, I was reminded in several tangible ways of the tools I control—and how easy and important it is to use them regularly. I'm determined to continue finding new ways to invite readers into my book world with *all* of the resources at hand.

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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*

### PES Editorial

Peter Senffleben of [PES Editorial](#) knows that different novelists need different types of editing along a book's journey. There's manuscript evaluation of an early draft that points out the strengths and weaknesses of a manuscript to help an author improve their story overall or on a scene-by-scene basis. There's developmental editing to address the bones and groundwork of a story. Or perhaps they need an extensive edit that combines developmental and line edits.

Peter provides this and more, including help with cover copy and query letters. He has experience as an agent and an editor at traditional publishing houses, and he's worked on more than 200 titles in a variety of genres with award-winning authors.

Peter has graciously offered NINC members a **15% discount** and **10 pages edited for free**. You'll find more under Member Benefits: [Freebies and Discounts](#) on our website.



*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 NINC members: <https://groups.io/g/ninlink>
- 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/>
- 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.*

- President: Lisa Hughey
- President-Elect: Celeste Barclay
- Secretary: Hallee Bridgeman
- Treasurer: Timothy Cerepaka
- Newsletter Editor: Harper St. George
- Advisory Council Representative: Steven Womack

### **Advisory Council**

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

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

## 2022 Committees

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

- Central Coordinator: Laura Resnick
  - Assistant Coordinator: Mica Stone
- 2022 Conference Committee
  - Conference Director: Mel Jolly
  - Assistant Conf. Director & Programming Chair: Tawdra Kandle
  - Assistant Prog. Chair: Hallee Bridgeman
  - NINC After Dark Coordinator: Tamsin Ley
  - Hotel Liaison: Karen Fox
  - Assistant Hotel Liaison: Tegan Maher
  - Conference Registrar: Pam McCutcheon
  - Assistant Registrar: Stephanie Julian
  - Sponsorship Chair: Sarah Woodbury
  - Assistant Sponsorship Chair: Dylann Crush
  - Traditional Publishing Liaison: Victoria Thompson
  - App Coordinator & Graphic Design: Laura Hayden
- Authors Coalition Representatives: Rebecca Zanetti & Hallee Bridgeman
- Bookkeeper: Christy Wilson
- Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Committee
  - Chair: Celeste Barclay
  - Misti Boehm
  - Pooks Burroughs
  - Malorie Cooper
  - Lynn Emery
  - Pamela Kelley
  - Ellis Leigh
  - Hildie McQueen

- Alison Perry
- Harper St. George
- Samantha Silver
- Social Media Committee
  - Chair: Violet Howe
  - Sylvia McDaniel
- Membership Committee
  - Boyd Craven
  - Sarah Woodbury
- *Nink* Newsletter
  - Editor: Harper St. George
  - Acquisitions Editor: Trish Milburn
  - Copy Editor: Cynthia Moyer
  - Production Manager: Laura Resnick
- Nominating Committee
  - Chair: Wayne Stinnett
  - Tanya Anne Crosby
  - Katherine Garbera
  - Pamela M. Kelley
  - Kathryn Le Veque
  - Kristine Smith
- Discounts Program: Emilie Richards

### Central Coordinator

Laura Resnick

Novelists, Inc.

P.O. Box 331, Covington KY 41012

[admin@ninc.com](mailto:admin@ninc.com)

*Address changes may be made on the website.*

### *Nink* Newsletter

*October 2022 edition – Vol. 33, No. 10*

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

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

Publication: 12 issues annually. Available in PDF and epub formats. Public issues redact NINC members-only information.

To change subscription preferences, please contact [admin@ninc.com](mailto:admin@ninc.com).

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