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President's Voice

By Lisa Hughey



Hard to believe 2022 is almost over. I hope it has been a productive and rewarding year for you, and I hope that NINC was an integral component of your journey. We are an unusual organization because our focus is on the business of writing and our membership is composed of only *working* writers. We may be at different points in our publishing careers, but we are all working to elevate our business to the next level.

We are fortunate to have many great resources beyond our fabulous conference, most especially the knowledge base of our members. NINC is a space to share our experiences, commiserate together when we have a problem, celebrate our personal publishing wins, and brainstorm new and exciting opportunities. If you haven't joined [Ninlink](#) (an email list) or the [private NINC Facebook group](#), put that on your to-do list.

As I leave the board, our organization is continuing to grow. The conference committee has already begun plans for next year. The board has been developing ideas for new opportunities for our members. The newsletter is going to be offering additional monthly content. We've got a lot of things in the works to energize our business in 2023.

It has been my honor to serve as president this year. But I am delighted to pass the gavel into Celeste Barclay's very capable hands. I hope you have a fantastic holiday season and are ready to shine in 2023.

Thank you for allowing me to serve our organization!

Lisa Hughey

P.S. I will be heading up the nominating committee for 2023. If you are interested in volunteering with NINC, please drop me an email at lisahughey@pacbell.net.

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/>

~ In Memoriam ~

It is with a heavy heart that the board announces the death of former NINC President Julie Ortolon. Julie was an inspiration to writers everywhere and worked tirelessly to invent new strategies for success both prior to her service on the board and then as president. NINC has made a contribution to the Schreiner University Learning Support Center in Julie's name. If you would like more information, please see her obituary [here](#).



Julie Ortolon, 1959-2022



Conference Reports

Igniting Your Story from the First Line, the First Paragraph, & the First Scene

Presented by Susan May Warren

Reported by Ana Ashley

Susan May Warren is an award-winning, bestselling author of over 90 novels and with over 2 million copies sold across multiple genres. Warren runs an academy for writers and is also the executive publisher of Sunrise Media Group.

As a marketing major at the University of Minnesota, it's no surprise that Warren has a love of all things marketing—even things such as a book's first lines.

Ask yourself: do you think about the first line of your book, or that first scene as part of your craft? Something you work on because it needs to hit the right spot? Or do you think of it as a marketing tool?

The importance of that first line (as a marketing tool)

Imagine your brand is a tree. All your book series are branches off that main tree. From each of those branches comes the other stories that you are creating, and every book out there is a piece of fruit on the end of every single branch that you have.

Imagine then that your readers are birds of all kinds, coming to the tree to taste the fruit. If your fruit is not tasty, they will fly away. But if they like it, they will stay and they will keep eating.

What you want to do is create tasty morsels that will keep the readers coming back for more. This is why, if the first line or first paragraph in the first scene doesn't capture the reader's attention, they're probably not going to download the book.

Readers connecting with your character determines the success of a story

When we think about creating our first line, and our first paragraph, it's all about connecting with the reader. It's about the words, but also it's about the delivery. You want to capture that reader right away, especially if what you're offering isn't what they'd normally read. They have to care about the character and care about the character's journey and success for them to keep going.

Warren uses the example of the TV show *Alias*. Does anyone understand what the plot of the show is about? It's not about a double agent for the CIA stopping the bad guys. All viewers cared about was Sydney's character development and her journey to get together with Vaughn.

The hook

Hooks raise questions. Every good hook has two elements to it. It either possesses some sort of danger or possesses some sort of intrigue.

Examples of good hooks from classic literature

Call me Ishmael. — Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (1851)

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife. — Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)

It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. — George Orwell, *1984* (1949)

Someone must have slandered Josef K., for one morning, without having done anything truly wrong, he was arrested. — Franz Kafka, *The Trial* (1925; trans. Breon Mitchell)

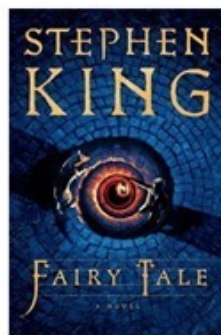
Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. — Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (1850)

There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it. — C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952)

Examples of good hooks from modern literature

FAIRY TALE

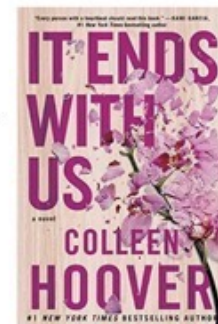
I'm sure I can tell this story. I'm also sure no one will believe it.



IT ENDS WITH US

As I sit here with one foot on either side of the ledge, looking down from twelve stories above the streets of Boston, I can't but think about suicide.

Not my own. I like my life enough to want to see it through...



Stephen King's example is a great hook because now you're thinking, "What is the story?"

Colleen Hoover's example makes the reader wonder if the character is going to commit suicide or not. It raises a sense of danger from the start.

Similarly, Warren will often start a story with some sort of hook. Once she's written the first scene and she understands what she's trying to accomplish with that scene, she will go back and finesse that hook so it's strong.

Making the reader care

Once you have your reader's attention, you need to make them care. Start your characters in a sympathetic situation, something that the reader can understand.

Ask yourself: What is that situation? What are the goals for the first scene?

You want to get their attention, so you create stakes for the character and for the story. We need stakes because we need to worry about the protagonist, and if we don't have something at stake, then we cannot worry about them.

In the first scene, you introduce the character, their hurt or flaws. Sometimes you're going to start a story with the inciting incident. Like, someone running through the woods because someone's after them, or something of equal high energy, but we still have to come back around to their home world.

You might show the competence of a Navy SEAL in action at the start, but then you go back into his world where you see the people he usually interacts with, and the life he normally leads.

Every character on the page has a problem that you're going to solve throughout the course of the story. Make sure that every scene after the first continues to deliver on the same promise.

To summarize, the first scene creates a sympathetic character in a situation of jeopardy whom we want to go on a journey with.

Self-diagnose your scene

- Does my first line pique a reader's interest?
- Would I want to spend time with this person or at least learn more about them?
- Can I relate to their current problem?
- Am I worried about my character when the scene ends?
- Do I know where I am? (and when?)
- Do I have a mental picture of the character and what he/she does?

Start with a destination in mind, things your reader must know by the end of the first chapter. How do you do this?

You push them off a CLIFF

- Competence (intro of character)
- Lie (internal journey): What lies does the character believe in that shape their actions?
I'm nothing without my job. I'm worthless because I was beaten up as a child and no one wants me.
- Ignition/Inciting Incident (setting up the problem): The small thing that will change the life of the character and push them on their journey.
- Fear (emotional journey): Something inside of them they deeply fear as the result of something from their past. Knowing what that fear is from the start gives us a sense of who the character is.
- Focus/Want (scene goal): What do you want in the first scene (external)? What do you want, deep inside (internal)?

Now you've got all the great components of your first scene. But now you're going to go back to the beginning, and form your first sentence.

How do you build a great first line or hook? Make it SHARP!

- Stakes: Give the reader a reason to keep reading. What is at risk? What will happen if the character doesn't meet their goal?
- Hero/heroine identity: Make the reader understand the character. Bring them into that sympathetic situation. What is your character feeling as they walk into the scene?
- Anchoring: What are the facts? The who, what, why, when, and where. Make a list of pertinent scene facts and use the five senses.
- Run: What is happening as the curtain is thrown back? Drop into the scene "already in progress." Interrupt the action.
- Problem: What is the inner question that will drive your reader/character through the story? What is the character's current problem (as they walk onto the scene)? How can you end the scene with something worse?

Do you *really* want readers to keep reading? Create a hook for each chapter!

Remember your goals: Attention | Sympathy | Stakes.

Use the CLIFF acronym to find your elements: Competence, Lie, Ignition, Fear, Focus, then build the SHARP elements for the first line.

And make us worry about your character by the end.

Finally

Warren recommends adding [Novel.Academy](#) to your creative and business portfolio of training. This is regularly \$37/month. Get it for \$30/month with the NINC discount code: 2022NINCMONTHLY. Or an annual membership for \$300/year with the discount code: 2022NINCANNUAL.

To see the slides from Warren's NINC presentation, [click here](#).



[Ana Ashley](#) is an indie author of MM romance. She writes small town contemporary romance with everyday heroes, found families, quirky pets, plenty of feels, and a guaranteed happy ever after.

KU vs. Wide: Can't it be Both?

Presented by Elana Johnson

Reported by Pam McCutcheon

Elana Johnson is a USA Today bestselling and Top 10 Kindle All-star author. She runs Indie Inspiration with Elana Johnson on Facebook.

USA Today bestseller and Top 10 Kindle All-Star author Elana Johnson shared her distribution strategies for success, but first described some common myths about Kindle Unlimited (KU) versus wide:

- All of your books must go in one or the other.
- You must stick with your choice for a year or more.
- Readers will be angry if they're not all distributed the same way.
- You can't have some books in KU and some distributed wide,
- ...and other fear-inducing statements.

Some notes on fear:

- Don't operate your business from a position of fear.
- Be willing to fail forward.
- Determine your risk level as a person/author/business.
- Experiment for yourself—don't assume others' experiences will work the same for you, not even Johnson's.

Moving back and forth between KU and wide takes a lot of time and energy, but take the first step and see what works for you. Focus on consistent, persistent effort over a reasonable length of time (months).

Definitions:

- Kindle Unlimited (KU): only publishing on Amazon with their KDP Select program
- Wide: publishing on Amazon as well as Barnes & Noble, Kobo, Google Play, and Apple (it also includes Draft2Digital, Eden Books, PublishDrive, Radish and selling direct, among others)

Johnson started out in KU, but is 65% wide at the current time, and plans to be 100% wide within two to three years. That's *her* goal—it doesn't have to be yours. Set a goal for what you

want from your brand and your business, then ask, “What distribution method will *best* help me meet my goals?”

Pros and cons

Pros of using KU:

- It’s easy, a one-stop spot to upload, and you’re done
- Only one link to manage
- Easy back matter creation
- KDP Select Benefits (five free days or up to seven Kindle Countdown Deal days every quarter)—easy to schedule, but be sure you use these benefits
- Provides an advertising opportunity to grow your KU readership since the books are included in a subscription plan your readers are already paying for

Pros of going wide:

- You have a wider reach for ebooks—anywhere someone reads, as well as many more countries/territories
- Can easily set it to free
- Price-matching to free on Amazon
- Can schedule sales/price changes
- Broad appeal when applying to promo sites
- Site-specific promo opportunities (on Kobo, Apple, etc.)

For those who complain you are not in KU, recommend they try Kobo Plus (a similar subscription program) or remind them they can borrow your titles from libraries (and you still get paid).

Cons of using KU:

- There is no permafree option.
- Can’t sell ebooks anywhere else (limits audience)
- Might be passed over for promos if you’re exclusive to Amazon
- It takes time to grow your brand.

Cons of going wide:

- Must update files across all six+ retailers, every time you make a change
- Must have retailer-specific links in your back matter
- Many links/files to manage
- Readers must buy the books to read them, which could prohibit growth.
- It takes time to grow your brand.

Which one do you choose?

You might choose KU if:

- Your books are long (greater than 65,000 words)
- A large percentage of the genre readership is in KU
- You are just beginning your indie career and you want something simple (you can expand later)
- You don't mind being exclusive to one retailer

You might choose wide if:

- You write shorter books (less than 60,000 words)
- A large selection of comp books are also wide
- You already have a large number of wide fans
- You started in traditional publishing and are branching out to indie
- Monopoly/exclusivity bothers you

Remember, you don't have to distribute the same for every book or series (though all books *within* a series should be distributed the same), and you can move back and forth.

Launching and relaunching

In KU:

- Use KU-specific language (download versus buy, etc.).
- Set higher prices to encourage KU downloads (length comes into play here).
- Have your paperback version in multiple places.
- Don't mention KU until release, to encourage them to buy during pre-order.
- Run a sale on wide books/series during launch to reach all of your fans.

Wide:

- Emphasize the fact that your book is available everywhere.
- Set market-competitive pricing (depending on length).
- Use individual links (not a universal one) to each retailer where possible.
- Appeal to non-US English-speaking countries.

Changing tactics

It's a good time to move from one to the other when:

- You recover and/or retitle, and are looking to relaunch a backlist series.
- Any time a book or series has run its course (either wide or KU).
- Any time you feel you can't handle the one you're in.
- Any time you want.

The best of both worlds

In KU:

- Keep longer books in longer series.
- Higher-priced books (depending on length)
- Move books not doing anything on wide platforms.
- Start simple, move one series at a time.

Wide:

- Move shorter series.
- Analyze sales and move underperforming books to KU.
- Grow one series at a time, and leave the others in KU.
- Launch wide, then move into KU after three to four weeks (or vice-versa—move wide after one term in KU).

Leveraging your catalog

In KU:

- Advertise full-price books.
- Use KDP Select benefits for limited-time sales at 99 cents and free.
- Have a binge-worthy backlist series (and use those words to promote it).
- Write long specifically to increase your KU income and earn bonuses.

Wide:

- Use permafree advertising—set it and forget it to continually expand your brand over time.
- Use retailer-specific promotions.
- Distribute paperbacks and audiobooks widely.
- Get your wide catalog into libraries.

In the Q&A, Johnson added

- Convince readers to buy direct from you.
- You can email Amazon to ask them to move you out of KU if necessary.
- When wide, use language to readers that says you are available on all platforms, and list and link to those platforms individually.
- If you are moving to KU from wide, tell them it won't be forever, but they should buy the book now, and warn them what date it's going to happen, then use KU language to new readers.
- If moving to wide from KU, warn readers it will happen and encourage them to download the book before it goes wide.

Johnson also provided a handout at <https://lnk.to/NINC> for more in-depth information. For additional tips and insights into how authors are succeeding in their businesses, both big and small, join her Facebook group at [Indie Inspiration with Elana Johnson Group Discussion](#).



[Pam McCutcheon](#) writes all different kinds of romance (sweet, sexy, contemporary, historical, futuristic, paranormal, mundane) and nonfiction for writers under her own name ([PamMc.com](#)), and the Demon Underground YA urban fantasy series under the name Parker Blue ([ParkerBlue.net](#)).

TikTok Your Way to Book Sales!

Presented by James Blatch

Reported by Laura Resnick

James Blatch is co-host of The Self Publishing Show, one of the leading podcasts for indie authors. He is a Cold War thriller author as well as a co-producer of online courses and help for authors at selfpublishingformula.com.

TikTok, a social media platform where users post short videos, has been driving books up the sales charts for a couple of years now. This year alone has seen half a dozen top sellers on Amazon where the author attributes some or all of their success to TikTok engagement.

James Blatch believes TikTok is possibly the best social media platform for selling books and finding new readers. The platform has experienced fast growth since its founding just a few years ago, and it's now ranked in the top 10 for social media users worldwide (by contrast, Twitter has dropped out of the top 10), with an estimated 80 million users in the United States.

Training the algorithms

Algorithms are the key to using TikTok. You can train the platform's algorithm to recognize who you are and what you want to see. You train the algorithm through your use of the **For You** page and the **Following** page. (Icons and links for these pages are in the upper-left corner of the TikTok screen.)

For You represents what TikTok thinks you want to see—or what TikTok wants you to see. Following shows you posts (videos) from people you've chosen to follow.

The For You page is where you get your new leads. These are posts that reach people who are *not* following you, and this is what really separates TikTok from other social media platforms. The reach on TikTok for an average post is an enormous audience, far bigger than the starting sample size you find on Facebook or Twitter.

The For You page is your window into the TikTok algorithm. Every so often, you should go through your For You page to see if it's relevant to your purpose. Train the algorithm so every post you see relates to your books, your genre, your topics.

The people and topics you follow tell TikTok what you're interested in. For example, Blatch's fiction focuses on military aviation. So he encourages TikTok's algorithm to recognize that's what he's interested in by following accounts about that topic. He wants to see a lot of posts relevant to his topic, which will in turn help readers interested in military aviation fiction find him.

So your first task on TikTok is to search for accounts relevant to you. When you use a search term, TikTok presents additional search terms related to it, drilling down further into specific areas of interest. These are the actual terms people are using to find your topic. You'll see terms there that you might not think of, and you can use this language in your comments to keep your own account relevant in your topic on TikTok.

Next, look up users. Pick out the bigger accounts in your niche. Anything with more than 1,000 followers is a good account to start following. Follow accounts that are relevant to your topic, and unfollow those that are not.

Also look at hashtags as they pertain to your searches, and use them to attract people to your posts.

When you see a post that's relevant to you, watch the *entire* video, because watching the post all the way through is what alerts the algorithm.

Features and tools

A number of the interactions on TikTok are things familiar to any user of other social media platforms: view, like, follow, comment, forward, save, etc.

But there are a few types of interactions that are unique to TikTok.

Duet: You take someone's video and run it alongside your new video, in which you react to their video at the same time it's playing.

It's better seen than explained, so here's [one example](#) of a duet, and here's [another](#).

Yes, you can use someone else's video without their permission. This is the norm on TikTok. Indeed, one video might be used by dozens or hundreds of other accounts, creating a whole series of duets riffing off that one video. TikTok thrives on this interactive and repetitive nature.

Stitch: The stitch feature on TikTok allows you to splice together multiple videos from other TikTok creators to create a new video, one that usually includes your own content. Here is an [example](#).

Trends: Trends are typically fun, lighthearted, and they're often based on sound. TikTok is full of clips of sound and music the system allows you to use with your videos. You can also use the sound from someone else's video to make a video of your own. Using a trending sound or using a trend in a way that people like can get you a lot of views (through the algorithm).

Blatch advised always sticking to using music available within TikTok. If you bring in copyrighted music from outside the platform, TikTok will probably take it down—and you could be in for some legal repercussions, too.

Video editing: Even if you have outside skills and tools, Blatch recommends using TikTok's tools to edit your videos. They've got good tools, replete with filters, stickers, titles, captions, sound effects, etc. More to the point, TikTok's algorithms like videos created with *their* tools.

Overall, TikTok likes it when you use their special features and tools, and so TikTok will promote posts more (again, through the algorithm) that use them.

Writers and readers

Within TikTok, there's a book community, and this is where authors promote their work to readers.

#BookTok is a hashtag that represents a massive community, where readers and authors find each other. Blatch cited a figure of 782 billion views of #booktok posts to date. This book community, huge and powerful, has propelled many authors to success. Within the #booktok community, there are numerous other hashtags that denote subcultures, subtopics, and genres.

The advantage of the #booktok hashtag is that a high percentage of people who view those posts are readers. Another possibility for an author, though, is to use the **#niche** hashtag, which indicates interest or expertise in a special subject area. Blatch uses #niche because his writing focuses on such a specific topic, military aviation. The upside is that #niche attracts people interested in your topic, but the downside is that a lower percentage of them are potentially interested in buying fiction.

Blatch used a couple of examples to show how TikTok helps writers sell books.

Author [A.P. Beswick](#) is a British indie author of modest means who recently had a TikTok post that went viral, getting 1.9 million views. He doesn't know why that post in particular took off, but it led to a huge increase in his sales, and he made \$10,000 that month. However, you don't need to go viral to improve your sales via TikTok.

[Jayne Rylon](#) hasn't had a viral hit on TikTok, yet she makes a good living from her books. She posts once a day on TikTok, keeping her posts focused on her books (with an occasional digression into kittens). Rylon estimates she makes one book sale per every 250 TikTok views. Which means that, for a daily video of less than one minute, some days she sells 5, 10, 25, 30 books via TikTok promo, and some days she sells over 100.

Tips for getting started

Your videos should be short and should fit into TikTok culture: don't try for a slick, professionally produced look. Amateur videos are the thing on TikTok! This audience likes sincerity. Be natural and spontaneous, but avoid hesitation or ambiguity.

Treat your posts (videos) like a book cover: Immediately convey the subject, keep it brief and sharp, make your book (title) and yourself (the author) prominent. Maybe choose a specific look for yourself that's consistent throughout your videos, or perhaps role play or dress up like one of your characters.

Use the power of the algorithms to find readers by following successful tropes. One example Blatch pointed out is that many writers use full bookcases as backgrounds for their videos. Flipping book pages is another trope. Some tropes work well for a particular genre (a tiara is popular among #romancetok writers).

Choose a style and stick to it. (Jane Rylon's account is a good example of this.) Create a visual identity for your account.

Post regularly, perhaps multiple times a day at first. Don't focus on virality; you don't need to go viral to have success. Aim for 1,000 followers as your first milestone.

Follow other #booktokers. Engage, "like," and reply.

Get conversations going on your posts. The TikTok algorithm favors engagement. Ask questions of the viewers, solicit opinions, or encourage comments. Post shareable things. Encourage stitches and duets.

Have some fun!



Laura Resnick is a longtime NINC member who writes fiction, nonfiction, and short fiction.

Grow with Google Play Books

Presented by Sabrina Benun

Reported by Cidney Swanson

Sabrina Benun is the Publisher Marketing Manager for Google Play Books. She oversees outreach and education in the global publisher community.

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful. Recent changes to Google Play Books support this mission while additionally aiding authors' sales efforts via the platform. Sabrina Benun, whose background includes working public relations for James Patterson, revealed updates of several marketing tools including promotion code campaigns, series bundle discounts, and autonarrated audiobooks.

Rather than using editorially curated merchandising, Google Play Books has algorithm-driven merchandising. This means that each reader viewing the store has a customized viewing experience created from their browsing and purchasing habits. Benun likens it to a personalized bookstore. With this bookstore available in 75+ countries to over 2 billion Android users, it's a platform that publishers and authors should consider investing in.

Google's term for those who sell on the Play Books platform is "partners." For those publishing partners who don't have accounts already, there is no longer an invitation code or waiting period required. To sign up, simply visit g.co/play/publish.

Benun advises partners to visit their Partner Center and update email preferences to hear about updates and opportunities. She also recommends participating in Google Play's affiliate program to earn an additional 7% on sales of ebooks and audiobooks. Affiliate URLs are easy to construct, and help is available 24/7 on the site.

Benun suggests that partners without an Android phone might wish to purchase an inexpensive model in order to understand the reader-facing experience. An important part of this is the user's notifications center, which supports merchandising through customized notifications, all listed in one place. Readers can receive updates about new books that come out from authors in their library, new books from series they've read, books that match their interests, and titles from their wish list with price drops.

Partner tip: To ensure your readers receive notification of sale pricing, don't change the list price from the Book Catalog page. Rather, create a temporary price drop via Partner Center > Promotions > Create a promotional price.

Overall updates to Google Play Books

On the consumer side, Play Books has updated to a cleaner look with improved filtering options allowing users to search books by language, age level, series, and more. Series subscriptions are newly available on some series, with more availability anticipated. Subscribing allows customers to automatically purchase new books in a series.

On the Partner Center side, the books catalog page has been updated, making it cleaner and easier for partners to find and manage books. Of special note is the new “Needs Action” column, where partners can see what needs fixing and get detailed instructions in order to fix the noted problem.

Promotional updates for partners

Promo code campaigns: This currently available feature allows partners to give their customers codes for free or discounted books. These codes do not impact the book’s list price in the Play Store, thus avoiding price matching. Discounts of up to 100% off can be offered, with up to 5,000 codes per campaign and up to three campaigns per month.

Benefits of promo codes: Users don’t have to log in to utilize promo codes. They will have the same ability to redeem promo codes whether using iOS, Android, or web-based platforms. Codes are redeemable in 75+ countries, and 24/7 customer support is available to all who need help.

How to create promo codes: Partners must initially visit their Partner Center home page and click on the announcement window about Promo Codes. After accepting the terms and conditions, partners select the “Promotions” tab on the left side of the home page dashboard. Finally, partners can choose “Create a Promo Code.” The Promotions > Promo Code pathway *will not work* if you do not follow the Home > Announcement Window pathway first. After distributing codes, partners can track redemptions.

Coming soon: series bundle discounts

These will begin showing under the Promotions tab later this year. Once bundle discounts are available in the tab, Benun recommends using the discounts in addition to or even instead of box sets. These discounts are prominently displayed to readers and will incentivize readers to order additional books in a series. For example, when a reader already owns books one and two in a series bundle, they will be able to easily see and purchase the books they are missing. Readers can quickly track how far into a single title they have read, improving their reading experience over reading in box sets.

The Play Books store will prominently feature series bundle discounts in three places: on each book’s detail page, at the end of each book in the series, and in recommendations to readers.

Partner tips for series bundle discounts:

- Do not set an end date to your bundle discounts.
- Do not require readers to purchase **all** titles for the discount.
- Offer multiple discount tiers to allow readers at different stages to take advantage of your offer.
- Offer unique tiers for different series, depending on size of series.

Once series bundle discounts are available, eligibility will be in English, Japanese, Korean, and French. Only ebook format will be allowed. A series bundle must contain two or more books ordered sequentially with whole numbers only. All metadata must match exactly within a series. Pre-order titles cannot be included. If a book is ineligible, the reason for this will be listed beside the title.

Autonarrated audiobooks on Google Play

Anyone who has a smartphone has an audiobook player in their pocket. Benun revealed that 95% of ebooks don't have an audiobook version, often due to the cost involved in producing an audiobook.

By partnering with other branches at Google, Play Books has been investing in technologies that utilize machine learning and natural language processing to improve the automated text-to-speech experience. Autonarrated audiobooks then use this text-to-speech technology to convert ebooks to audiobooks. When surveyed, 81% of listeners found autonarrated audiobooks a palatable alternative to human-narrated versions, making this a solid alternative for books that might otherwise not have audio versions available.

Currently, authors can create autonarrated audiobooks without charge on the Partners Center here: g.co/play/autonarrated.

At some point in the future, this service will be fee-based.

To get an idea of how far the technology has come, Benun suggests partners listen to an auto-narrated selection of Thoreau's *Walden* here: g.co/play/Walden.

To begin creating their own autonarrated audiobook, partners can visit the Partner Center and select an existing ebook in either English or Spanish that is currently listed on Google Play. Next, partners can select a narrator from over 35 choices, including a variety of gender and accent combinations. Selections can be altered later as well. Benun suggests editing the book on the Play Books partner site to exclude things such as the title page, table of contents, and so on. Edits made here will not affect the content of the associated ebook.

It will be necessary to find and correct mispronounced words after the file is complete, much as an author would do for a human-narrated audio title. Once the audiobook is available on Google Play, partners are free to download the file and make it available for sale on other sites. The price must be the same as the price on Google Play.

Benun lists the following features as “coming soon” for autonarrated audiobooks:

- Language expansion: German, French, and Portuguese (for already translated books; should be available by year end)
- Multi-narrator audiobooks
- More control over speed and pauses at the word-level (by year end)
- Improvements to dictionary (continually updates)

For more assistance, Benun recommends the following options, either of which will route to the appropriate live person at Google Play Books:

- For questions, fill out the contact form here: <https://support.google.com/books/partner/contact/default>
- To send feedback, tap the feedback icon top right of Partner Center homepage, which looks like an exclamation point inside a speech bubble.



*[Sidney Swanson](#) is an award-winning author of young adult sci-fi and fantasy with 30 titles to her name. Her novel *Saving Mars* was named to Kirkus Reviews Best of 2012 and was an honor book for the SCBWI Spark Award 2014.*

Amazon Ads: Targeting Simplified

Presented by Janet Margot

Reported by Tia Louise

Janet Margot is a former Amazon Ads executive, an instructor with Mark Dawson's Self-Publishing Formula, and the founder of Book Geeks Marketing. She brings all this experience to bear when advising authors on how to improve their success with the Amazon advertising platform.

Janet Margot wants authors to stop looking for magic bullets and start focusing on strategy when using Amazon ads to market their books.

"Tips and tricks alone don't build a sustainable advertising plan," Margot said in her presentation. Understanding how the ads pipeline works is essential to running successful campaigns, she added.

To begin, she stressed the importance of learning the correct terminology. Margot said she often observes authors getting incorrect or inaccurate answers to their questions because they aren't using the right words when asking for help.

For example, an *Ad* is defined as your book + bid + target; the *Target* is the group of readers you're trying to reach; *Relevance* is the strength of your book's connection to the target audience; and a *Campaign* is a collection of ads that share a budget.

Most authors know the importance of having a good book with good packaging (cover, blurb, etc.) when it comes to sales, but Margot says metadata is at the heart of successful ad campaigns.

"Metadata is the only controllable input," Margot said, and when it comes to relevance, "Metadata matters for all discoverability."

Metadata consists of the book title, the categories, and the seven keywords allowed in the KDP dashboard. These items control how readers discover your book on Amazon, which is basically a large search engine.

"There is no crisp formula for relevance," she said. "It's determined by how strong your book targeting is to the customer's search terms."

So how do you improve that strength? Margot identified several ways to find proper targets for your books, starting with identifying your audience.

"Brand competitive sets," or comp titles, are the first step in identifying your audience. Margot recommends identifying three to five comparative titles to yours and then studying how they are categorized on Amazon. Comps can also be used to refine your metadata.

From there, authors can find targets by entering keywords in the Amazon search bar and seeing what drops down as suggested searches or auto-fill. She also advised perusing bestseller lists, even consulting external sites like Goodreads, Libby, and BookRiot, and curating data from tools like Publisher Rocket.

Margot added several pro tips throughout her presentation, such as curating targets separately for ebooks and for print books, as the categories are often different for each format on Amazon.

Sponsored ads are Margot's primary focus, and when deciding which type to use, she said the primary difference is control.

With auto-targeted ads, Amazon does all the work finding the targets, and bids are general and applied at the "broad" level. The only control authors have in these types of ads are in bidding and negative targeting.

"Negative targeting is your best friend in optimization," she said.

Negative targeting can help ensure your book is on the right page, and it can also be used as "damage control" for keywords that are "impression hogs" with low click-through rates.

Keywords that have high numbers of impressions and low click-through rates are important to monitor. "See which have low or no clicks, and move them to negative targeting," Margot said.

Authors must have strong metadata in order to have strong auto-targeted ads, she said. In addition, auto-targeted ads can be a good way to find targets for manual ads when working with established books as opposed to new releases.

The alternative to auto-targeted ads is manual targeting.

Manual targeting is the most controllable form of sponsored ads and is broken down into two types, keyword targeting or product targeting—which do not compete for sourcing, she noted.

When using product targeting, the options are broken down again between categories and individual products or ASINs.

Category is the "broad blast," focusing on genres and subgenres, Margot said. She encourages using this method for a short time to raise awareness of your title. She also notes it can generate good ASINs to use.

ASIN is the most precise product targeting method of the two, she said. However, it can be the most difficult to take off, which can require more aggressive bidding strategies.

A new feature for ASIN targeting is the expanded box, which can broaden the reach to include similar targets to the ones being searched, possibly based on the browse tree or "also-boughts," but this is only a theoretical guess.

Separate from product targeting is targeting by keywords, which range from author names to book titles to terms related to genre.

Margot stressed quality over quantity in using keywords.

“Don’t dump a long list of keywords in your ads,” she said. “Targets should be closely aligned in segments.”

For example, she noted search terms for a romantic comedy might include words like *divorce*, *humor*, *romantic comedy*, and an author’s name.

Don’t put *divorce* and *humor* in the same targeting segment, as they’re not closely aligned, Margot said. Instead, group keyword themes together, and refresh regularly.

Pro Tip: Margot advised adding book titles to author names, as author names are only words in the Amazon search engine. “Amazon doesn’t know names,” she said.

When using keyword targeting, the *phrase* setting is Margot’s most used match type for bids. *Exact* is the most expensive and reaches highly determined readers, she said, and *broad* is good to use with genre terms, although she rarely uses this type.

She also does not use Amazon’s suggested bids for keywords. “Create your own bidding tiers based on your own royalties,” she advised.

While keyword or search-term targeting is the core of your advertising strategy, Margot strongly encourages using an integrated mix of both types.

She also said not to compare the different strategies (search terms vs. ASIN vs. category vs. interest ads) in determining importance.

“Each type of ad serves a different purpose and captures customers differently,” she said. Conversion is the goal.

Finally, Margot stressed giving your campaigns time to work before deciding they’re not converting. “Let it sit a few days. You’re looking for volume of data.”

She noted that keywords need to have more than 1,000 impressions before they can be accurately interpreted. Click-through rates over 0.1 are considered good, while those under 0.1 need to be evaluated.

A rule of thumb she advises is a 14-day window for books not in Kindle Unlimited. For KU titles, she notes it can take longer to get good conversion numbers.

“Look at trends with pages read, not precision,” she said, noting factors such as lost internet connections or readers who might download a KU title and not read it in the 14-day window.

“Don’t make changes prematurely without enough data,” Margot said. “It’s important to look at all the metrics when evaluating the strength of a campaign.”

In conclusion, Margot noted there is “no one-size-fits-all strategy.”

She encouraged auditing your metadata regularly, taking an integrated approach, and keeping in mind what works for one title might not work for another.

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR



Tia Louise is the USA Today bestselling, award-winning author of spicy contemporary romance. Her books will steal your heart, make you laugh, and melt your Kindle.

Variety is the Spice of Life—for Authors too!

Presented by Jasinda Wilder and Jack Wilder

Reported by Laura Resnick

Jack Wilder and Jasinda Wilder are husband and wife who write together, separately, and across a variety of genres. Their books include numerous bestsellers. Jack, Jasinda, and their six children live on a farm in northern Michigan.

During their years as indie authors, Jack and Jasinda Wilder have tried just about everything at least once: traditional publishing, KU exclusivity, going wide, audiobooks, foreign translations, serials, multiple pen names, and so on. In the process, they've acquired a bit of wisdom on the topic of multiple income streams, common pitfalls and mistakes, and self-care.

The Wilders got into this business via self-publishing at the recommendation of a neighbor and at a time when they were struggling and needed money. They had both been writing as a private passion for years, so they had some material. *What do we have to lose?* they thought. There was no plan: "We wanted to see if anything we put out there could make *any* money."

(As they noted during the workshop, Jack and Jasinda often finish each other's sentences; accordingly, this article quotes them as one unit.)

Their first release was a poetry book, which they self-published with information they learned from the Kindleboards. Their book reached #1 on Amazon's poetry list ... with three to five sales.

After that, they put out a whole bunch of titles (mostly novellas), just throwing darts at a board. The book that took off for them was a 2012 erotica novel, *Big Girls Do It Better*. So they wrote a whole Big Girl series: "Sexy was going well, so we pursued that."

They added sexy romance to science fiction, fantasy, paranormal, and contemporary stories, writing in multiple subgenres. They tried "everything and anything," just to see what would happen.

"Have as many eggs spread around as possible," they advised. "You don't want them in one basket. You want multiple income streams. If you have 18 ships and one goes down, you're still in the fight. But if you have only one ship and it goes down, you're done."

They also emphasized that their advice is based only on their own experience, and there is no One Correct Way to build your writing business.

The Wilders are firm advocates of self-publishing because: "We can try *anything*. We tried traditional publishing, and we probably won't do it again. We prefer the flexibility and control of indie publishing. We make our own schedule. We can change things that aren't working. We

saw things in our traditionally published trilogy that we could see weren't working—but we didn't have the option to change or fix them.”

They also tend to prefer wide release: “With an exclusive release, unless your readers *all* go to the exact same retailer, you're leaving readers [and their money] on the table. Or if you have just *one* retailer and they don't pay you, or they delay payment, that causes income problems.”

The Wilders also change their views based on changing conditions: “We were huge proponents of ACX. We've seen huge success with audiobooks. For years, we were having a five-figure or six-figure income each *month* in audio. But when the ACX romance subscription happened, our audio sales *tanked*.” The Wilders' opinion of ACX—and their commitment to self-producing audio—changed with the sharp drop they saw in their indie audio income as the result of the new ACX package where readers could get audiobooks for a cheaper price.

When it comes to foreign translations, the Wilders mostly “play it safe,” preferring to sell those rights in traditional deals with foreign publishers (who usually license rights for only a few years and then revert them in full) rather than self-publish.

The couple has also experimented (“*a lot*”) with multiple pen names. In their own experience, a male pen name sells far fewer books for them than a female one. Overall, they believe that having just one pen name—Jasinda Wilder—works best for them, even when writing across multiple genres: “Our readers love not knowing what they'll get when they open a Wilder book. We try to be transparent. If you loved X, Y, and Z, then you'll love *this* book. Being honest with readers is key. You must still meet the expectations within subgenre and advertised by the cover. Some of your readers will read everything you write, no matter what. Know yourself and your readership.”

The Wilders have a literary agent, but they also make deals themselves without involving the agent: “If you're indie and successful, you can broker a lot of these deals yourself just with a lawyer.”

On the subject of rapid release, they don't agree with the premise that you can put out “too much” for your readers to keep up with. “We've experimented with releases. We released more during COVID, but we experiment with releasing once a month, and we've also tried 45–60 days. The longest we've ever gone is three months between releases. We write fast—we taught ourselves how to write *really* fast. Now we can't slow down. We do have readers who'd read a book a day if we could release that fast.”

They're not fans of Facebook ads, Amazon ads, or any ads, really. They cite their newsletter, which they can control and therefore can rely on, as their #1 way of marketing. Social media platforms come and go. Ads require a lot of time and don't guarantee a good return. Your newsletter is your direct contact with your readers and your most consistently reliable way of reaching them.

The Wilders have made a decision to prioritize quality of life over everything else. As long as they know they can pay all their bills, they've made a conscious choice not to worry anymore about hitting bestseller lists and to focus more on their family and enjoying life.

A few years ago, they took a step back to invest in health and self-care. Prior to that, they were traveling two or three weekends every month for book signings, conferences, and personal appearances. “And we burned out. Now we only say ‘yes’ to events where we get a benefit. Now NINC is one of the only reasons we leave our house—reconnecting with writers and getting amazing information.

“It’s great to meet your readers at events! But you need to seriously weigh benefits, because you are a company of *one*. Your major resource is time. How will you spend your time? What is the most bang for your buck for each hour? Most of the time, it won’t be social media and ad copy. It’ll be writing the next book. The next book will always be your best marketing—and your backlist is your second biggest marketing tool.

“And make sure what you’re writing is what you *want* to write, material that makes you happy. Is it fulfilling you as an artist? Passion is important in your writing.”

It all comes down to you. As the Wilders said, “*You* are your brand. You make or break your entire business, which depends on whether you’re taking care of yourself.” They added, “We’ve made seven figures in a year, six figures, five figures. The best year of our lives was not the seven-figure year. Your happiness is very under-talked-about. Being happy as an artist and a creator is important, and it takes experimentation. What works for someone else may be the exact opposite of what works for you.”



Laura Resnick is a longtime NINC member who writes fiction, nonfiction, and short fiction.

Now Hear This! Audiobooks, Narrators, & Getting Your Book into Listeners' Ears

Presented by Veronica Giguere

Reported by Peggy McKenzie

Veronica Giguere is a storyteller of the spoken and written word who has more than 15 years in higher education, teaching academic strategies, and tutoring techniques. Her narration career boasts 90-plus titles with indies and small press authors, and she specializes in science fiction, fantasy, romance, and thrillers.

Audiobooks overview

There has been an uptick in growth within the audiobook industry in 2022. Genres experiencing the most growth appear to be romance, with a 75% increase in produced audiobooks, followed closely by self-help books at a 34% percent increase, and science fiction at 32%.

Although the noticeable growth in each genre should indicate a direct correlation to the popularity of that genre, data indicates the most popular audiobooks selling today are in the science fiction/fantasy genres followed by mysteries/suspense/thrillers, romance, general fiction, and finally nonfiction.

Giguere also indicated that advancements in accessibility and mobility are also reasons why audiobook sales are on the rise. The consumer now has the ability to listen on multiple devices, tune their audio experience to suit their preferences by adjusting speed and volume, and benefit from the improved inflection and intonation advances which improves listener comprehension and enjoyment.

Preproduction decisions

It's important to note that audiobook production has many facets and there are decisions that should be made prior to the production of an audiobook. Here are a few of those decisions:

- *Exclusive or nonexclusive distribution avenues.* Each avenue has the potential to reach different audiences.
- *Type of narration.* Single narration uses the voice of one narrator performing all a book's characters while dual narration uses the voices of two narrators. Each style can lend a unique appeal to an audiobook.

- *Investment involved.* Recording and mastering an audiobook can be expensive. There are several ways a narrator will hire on to produce an audiobook. One is per finished hour or PFH. This is a fixed fee based on the final (retail ready) audiobook length. Another popular way is the royalty share or RS which simply means each party shares in the revenue of the audiobook. And then, there is the royalty share plus (RS+). This is part royalty share and part per finished hour, which allows an author to diffuse some of the initial cost of recording an audiobook by reducing up-front cost and sharing royalty with the narrator over time.
- *Marketing and promotion services.* Some audiobook publishing companies will also offer to help with the advertising of an audiobook. This is on a case-by-case basis and by company and contract, so it's important to ask questions about these services beforehand.
- *Keep or sell audio rights.* A very important decision is whether to keep audio rights or sell them to an audiobook publisher. Most publishers require an extensive time commitment; therefore, it is important to take into consideration the benefits of that commitment against any possible monetary gains in the long run.
- *Finding the right voice.* Narrator casting is often a great place to start in search for an audiobook narrator. This can be both a fun and frustrating experience. Oftentimes, the audio publisher will manage this process and the author of the book will have final approval of the finished product. When selecting a narrator, listening preferences of fans, personal style of preferred narration, whether to produce the audio in first person or third person, how many characters, age and gender of the book's characters, and the narrator's experience with this type of book should all be considered.

Working with your narrator

It's very important to get off on the right foot with your narrator. This is a working relationship that requires professionalism, consideration, and planning. Here are a few items a narrator will need to get started on producing an audiobook:

- General information
- Character sketches — A narrator needs to understand how the author sees their characters and whether there are any distinguishing accents.
- Series-related details
- Additional inspiration

Audiobook timeline

Author's responsibilities:

- Deliver the script and any additional materials such as character sketches, series-related details, and any additional character nuances to help put the narrator into that character's world.

- Review the narrator's first 15-minute sample and provide feedback to the narrator.
- Be available to answer questions from the narrator via email as they arise.
- Upload files to additional platforms for distributions and market all versions of the book.

Narrator's responsibilities:

- Read the script and all materials provided. Prepare the script for recording.
- Record the first chapter as well as any character samples that may not appear in the first chapter.
- Record the audiobook, keeping the author apprised of any delays or emergencies.

Deliver the audiobook in the appropriate file formats and, if possible, be available for some promotional events.

Distribution options

Questions to ask are:

- Do the royalties for exclusivity offset the potential earnings from going wide?
- Is the plan to sell audio on a website or serialize it via subscription?
- Where are readers finding specific types of books?
- Where do others in a similar genre see their audiobook sales?
- Will library distribution be a benefit to sales?

Marketing the audiobook

There are so many ways to market an audiobook. These are some ways to consider:

- Listeners often want the next installment, so keep writing.
- Utilize popular audio-dependent venues such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.
- Tag your narrator. Many narrators will happily promote to their superfans and followers.
- Promote all forms of an audiobook so readers will know there isn't just one way to enjoy the story.

Audiobook investment

The audio market continues to grow. With nearly 74,000 audiobooks published in 2021, a 6% increase over 2020, 41% of listeners subscribe to at least one audiobook service and listeners continue to prefer professional narration over author-read books. So what does it cost to produce an audiobook?

- *Per Finished Hour*
 - More distribution options
 - Larger pool of narrators
 - Rates vary among talent
- *Royalty Share*
 - Limited distribution options
 - May require additional stipend
 - Locked into exclusive contract to share royalties with narrator

Contact information

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Peggy McKenzie is the author of 23 books in Western historical and Western contemporary romance. Her latest is Texas Promise, set for release in November 2022.

Lane? What Lane?

Writing in Multiple Genres & Ignoring the Rules

Presented by Jasinda Wilder and Jack Wilder

Reported by Michele Dunaway

Jack Wilder and Jasinda Wilder are husband and wife who write together, separately, and across a variety of genres. Their books include numerous bestsellers. Jack, Jasinda, and their six children live on a farm in northern Michigan.

Married couple Jasinda and Jack Wilder started off by giving some background, with Jasinda saying, “We’re giving the exact opposite talk as yesterday.”

Taking a conversational approach (no slides), Jasinda told the audience, “You’re an artist. Don’t be afraid to follow your muse.”

To reinforce this, she shared that she and her husband began during a time of huge stress for the couple, as they had two children in the hospital with RSV and because of this, they couldn’t work. Jasinda shared they were 30 days from losing their house. A “nosy neighbor” suggested they self-publish.

“We did a poetry book,” Jasinda said. “My mom, his mom, and maybe two others bought it. We were number one in poetry. I have the screen shots to prove it.”

After this, Jasinda said, “We published everything we had. Paranormal. Suspense. Erotic. Nothing took off.”

However, when nursing her child with “one finger on the iPad,” Jasinda wrote *Big Girls Do It Better*, a quasi-autobiography, according to Jack.

“My mom read it,” Jasinda said.

But it took off. Then the novel *Falling Into You* hit #1 and the couple got an agent. “It took off by accident,” Jasinda said. “The agent then said, keep writing the same book over and over. It didn’t work and here’s why. We got bored. It wasn’t the same. Stories come to us how they want.”

Because of this, Jasinda said they had to figure out what their readers wanted and what stories they wanted to write creatively. The couple figured out that readers were reading everything in their backlist. Jasinda mentioned Nora Roberts and Kristin Ashley as two examples of writers who readers know because they “feel her voice.” Readers know these authors by their voice, and Jasinda maintains that readers know the Jasinda Wilder stories because of her voice, no matter what genre the book is that Jasinda and Jack write.

"Ten years later, did what we do work?" Jasinda asked. "Maybe. But it made us better writers and more satisfied. It also maybe attracted readers like us."

Both Wilders read about a book a day and love to write "what inspires us."

To make it work, Jasinda said they are "honest and transparent" with readers. They are careful with the packaging of the books so it's clear what they are. This includes title, cover, blurb, etc. The Wilders want to make it clear to explain to the reader what they are going to get.

Later in the talk, they clarified this during the Q&A, saying, make it clear what you are promoting. If you are doing a thriller, make it look like all the others. They print their sexier books with glossy cover stock and use darker, bolder colors. For their softer books, they'll use softer, more pastel colors and matte paper stock. Jasinda said this is "easy signaling" to the reader, making it clear that they know what kind of book they are going to get. The title font and the name font might be the same, but the colors are a clue.

"It's important to know yourself," Jasinda said. "Stop fighting the 'Why can't I be like this person or write this?'"

She did a Myers-Briggs personality test and an Enneagram test. (Both she and her husband are 4s). What she learned was, "I am an artist and I have to be inspired. I can't do the same thing. I had to stop hating myself and embrace who I was."

"Don't be someone else. If you love Westerns and vampires, do it," she said. "We estimate the number of readers. There's a vast sea. They're looking for all kinds of reads."

They found that it didn't matter if they used separate pen names. They found that it was more work. In fact, they admitted sales went down under Jack's name.

"You package yourself in a smart way. Look at the genre and put the book out," Jasinda said. "Readers love you, your voice, and how you craft the story."

Jack agreed, saying "Readers want you. A story is a story." He said all fiction boils down to a want, why can't have it, overcome, and other side. That's the story. "How we tell the story is what separates us," he said. "We package the story in our voice. Readers immediately know this is your voice. At the end of the day, they want your voice."

"There are readers who can handle only cake," Jasinda said. "Then there are those who can eat spaghetti and cake. And just like you want your mother's spaghetti and cake, there are many that like your spaghetti and cake."

Spaghetti and cake here are referring to the different genres.

They admit to being proud of their work, and that it's satisfying to them. They've had "good years and ... eh."

"People focus on wanting the dollars," Jasinda said. "The other side of indie is the freedom to put out what you want. You are in control. It's between you and your reader. We found for us that it works better if we follow the passion more than the dollars. Yes, go for the dollars, but we're wanting that to be satisfying. What makes you creative? It might be as simple as life that's inspiring me."

Case in point, the Wilders went to a police vs. firefighter hockey game and it inspired them to write a firefighter romance. “We tell all our readers about a book because we want to reach our base and get the others who come along,” Jasinda said.

Jack added, “Sometimes we look at a trope or trend and think how can we do something different with it?”

For Alpha, they wanted to flip the “inarticulate weirdos.” Our hero is smooth, charming, articulate, reclusive,” Jack said. “Look at a trope or trend and ask, ‘What is your take on this?’”

“It’s important to remember the romance rules,” Jasinda said. “We broke all those. Our Ever trilogy was ‘too far outside’ and I got actual death threats. Let the readers know you are going outside the box. Be transparent. That’s the most important thing.”

Jack added, “Why are you making this change? If the sun is going to be blue, why? Why are you breaking this rule? We learned this the hard way. Fun is not a good enough reason.”

The Wilders once killed the hero in chapter four. They also had cheating in another story. “*Falling Into You* was inspired by a true story. The coma was real life. Readers might accept the events in real life, but they couldn’t accept it on the page,” Jasinda said. “We did make real mistakes. We were not prepared. I do know that when you find an audience, they are unique to you. Why are they coming to you? You want them on the edge of their seat.”

Audiences also want different things when they read. “They might want something comfortable,” Jack said. “Then they go a different way to something else.”

Jack gave himself as an example, saying he read the entire Kristen Ashley catalog then switched to *The Song of Achilles*.

For readers, reading a lot is “part of your identity” and readers “go through phases of variety.”

“What do you love to read?” Jasinda asked. “Our writing suffers when we don’t read. The writing fire is fed through reading. There’s a connection between your reading and your writing.”

Q&A

Pen name as you pivot to a totally different genre?

Jasinda: Depends on if you’re totally doing something else. If under a subgenre, keep same name. It’s too confusing. It’s more voice than name. Readers come along.

Jack: You have to start totally over with a new pen name. New rules. New market. New readers.

Jasinda: You’ll need two Facebooks, Instagrams, etc. It’s a lot of time spent on all these names.

Do you have different marketing for the different books/subgenres?

No, separate sections on the website. We do not do separate mailing lists. We don’t want to count anyone out. People change. While they might not read it now, they might pick it up later.

You never know where someone is going to be. In our newsletter, we advertise the book in the vein of something else. "If you liked _____, you will love _____." If you like *Alpha*, *Stripped* is its _____."

How often do you publish?

Every 45 days, no longer than three months between releases. We have 100-plus titles in 10 years. Our novels are 120,000-130,000 words. Never below 80,000. We go back and forth in our writing process.

Jack: We run longer. We set a goal of 70,000-75,000 but go over.

Jasinda: We write different subgenres each time so we don't oversaturate.

When we don't write we get depressed. During COVID, we homeschooled our six kids. We finally decided to keep our 9-5 office hours. We try to treat our business as a business. The author job never quits so we make it. We get off social media on the weekends. Sundays there are no electronics in our family. At dinner, we are done working. I set hours to have respect for family and for my mental health. You are the CEO. You can make all the rules. Quality of life is the most important thing.

Newsletter?

The open rate is the same and has been consistent since day one. We don't do newsletter separation. Know your readership. Jasinda likes a newsletter every day ("we're friends") while Jack would not. During COVID, they did Wilder Weekend and "here's what we bought/doing" and added it to the newsletter. The Wilders found these changes did nothing but advised authors to "try everything."

What does your agent do?

Jasinda: We said no to trad after doing a trilogy with Berkley. Our agent does all our foreign rights, international rights, audio/movie rights. Not a lot of agents will do that though.

From a practical sense, how do you find new readers in a new genre while still keeping up income?

Jasinda: Most voracious readers love our super sexy books. That's the least favorite for us to write. I rotate on purpose. One for you. One for me. Always push the first. If you do two-three (of the same) at a time, you'll be uneven on income. It used to be write five books then push them all out. Now do first and lots of promos.

Jack: Put a hook at the end. Put an epilogue written from a character in the next book and end on a cliffhanger. Leave them wanting the next book. Stop there.

Jasinda: Makes them all buy the next book. Who buys everything you write? Find those readers. They're used to getting a book from us. Find those readers. It can take a while.

KU or wide for certain genres?

Jasinda: I'm not a fan of exclusivity in general. We put everything wide with a handful of exceptions. Exclusive may find quick readers, but what are we training them to do? I think we're training them to read for free. We are leaving readers out of the equation and making it difficult for them to read us. But it's a person-to-person decision. There are readers who only do KU. There are readers who do KU and then will buy off KU. Try everything once. It's about stability. I also like having checks coming in from a variety of places.

Are you in audio?

Yes. We won an Audie. It was our number two income stream but after the changes at ACX with subscriptions, audio went to last. Our audiobooks cost around \$5,000 each so it can be prohibiting when you have so many books, and when the company makes changes and there goes the way to earn it back. We will test some with our readers later with the Google Play AI once they have dual readers.



Michele Dunaway writes traditional contemporary romance in small-town settings with vineyards, hot air balloons, or ice rinks. The *Love in the Valley* series debuts in January with *What Happens in the Air* from Harlequin Special Edition and continues in March with *All's Fair in Love and Wine*.

What Happens Next? Suspense for all Genres

Presented by Julia Spencer-Fleming

Reported by Cidney Swanson

Julia Spencer-Fleming writes the New York Times and USA Today bestselling Fergusson/Van Alstyne Mysteries. Her novels have won or been nominated for mystery awards including the Edgar, the Anthony, and the Agatha.

Julia Spencer-Fleming recounts an incident from when her children were small. Her daughter, who was too young to read on long car trips, loved listening to the stories Spencer-Fleming would make up on the road. Whenever Mom would pause for breath, her daughter would call out, “What happens next?” When writing suspense, we want our readers to enter that same breathless state where they are continually asking, “What happens next?”

Three ways to introduce suspense

Spencer-Fleming cites three types of suspense: atmospheric suspense, scene or plot suspense, and character suspense. Atmospheric suspense can refer directly to the physical atmosphere, but it can also be created by the constant reference to an expected event such as a wedding or funeral. Scene or plot suspense refers to specific events within the story. If there is a wedding, a writer can create suspense by means such as having the heirloom wedding rings suddenly go missing. However, character suspense is the most important type to work on because our fundamental reaction to suspense comes from our relationship to the character and how much they care about something.

Since character suspense is the most important, Spencer-Fleming insists on starting with an intriguing protagonist. If readers care, they will keep reading to find out more; readers want to know whether or not a character achieves a goal. Not just any old goal (get to the post office before it closes), but an important goal. It must be something the character yearns for so desperately that they cannot walk away from it no matter the cost. The author’s job is to put continual barriers between the character and what they want, forcing the reader to ask, “What happens next?” Spencer-Fleming believes that all conflict hinges on the suspense inherent in that question.

Spencer-Fleming discusses antagonists in terms of their threat to the main character’s goal. She argues that a *person*—with their own will—creates a stronger protagonist than an impersonal force such as weather. It’s not a bad idea to throw in additional obstacles such as a storm, but a “will against will” situation is inherently more suspenseful. The storm on the mountain is not willfully trying to kill the character.

To maintain suspense on the scene and plot level, scenes must begin with a goal and end with complications or questions. Spencer-Fleming thinks of the endings to scenes as having three possibilities. There can be a resolution that leads to another problem. “I loved my wife, but I hated her twin sister,” provides an answer resolving the detective’s question, but it also raises issues. Another possibility is to conclude a scene with the protagonist having been injured or attacked. Finally, providing unexpected, good news can be a sophisticated technique for building suspense. Readers already know things about story structure. If everything is going well, something is about to go wrong, and readers will begin to feel anxious.

Escalating stakes

In Disney’s *Cinderella*, the first stake for Cinderella is that she must sew her own dress to attend the ball. She achieves her goal with help from mice. When the stepsisters tear the dress apart, stakes are escalated. The fairy godmother arrives, but she introduces a new element: a ticking clock. The prince falls in love with Cinderella, and when the stepmother figures this out, she locks Cinderella in the tower. These are the highest stakes of all: Cinderella loves the prince, and he loves her, but if she can’t get out of the tower, all is lost.

As the example above shows, stakes don’t have to be global to be effective. All we need readers to track is whether Cinderella gains or loses her dreams.

Increasing the pace of events

To increase suspense, the pace must pick up and move. Setting descriptions can be dropped to speed things up *or* included to slow down the pace. However, once you hit the midpoint of your story, Spencer-Fleming says it’s time to leave description behind. Momentum itself creates suspense. As time passes, opportunities are lost and a character may not get their goal.

Techniques for creating suspense

Foreshadowing is a great technique. Introduce a gun on the mantelpiece, and your readers will wait for it to go off. Subtlety is best, however. A family heirloom sitting out on the table has the potential of being very important to the main character and thus contains the potential for creating disaster.

Introducing an anomalous event that fits within the genre is another great technique.

A dead body on the path fits within a murder mystery. The anomaly should surprise the reader for the best effect. For instance, you can have your main character break their leg. Now the character has a cast or crutches for the rest of story.

Point of view choice can create suspense in several ways. An author can change the POV character after ending a scene on a point of high tension. It is also interesting to introduce the POV of a secondary character who is ignorant about something the reader knows. Similarly, you can introduce characters who have knowledge that other characters (about whom the

reader cares) do not have. The important thing is to have as many characters as possible in a state of undetermined outcome.

An unreliable narrator—or one who doesn't recognize things the reader suspects—can help to ramp up tension.

As in the example of *Cinderella*, a ticking clock can be powerful. This can be anything from a bomb rigged to go off in six hours to a wedding set for 5 p.m. on Saturday.

We all learned in February 2020 that anomalous, unexplained events can be powerful as the story unfolds. Readers are sensitive to things like the mention of a new virus or strange influx of beetles.

Finally, it is important to threaten your protagonist whether this is by means of physical, emotional, or psychological threat.

Things to be aware of when creating suspense

Don't exhaust your reader with constant disasters. Rather, employ the technique of goal, conflict, and disastrous resolution. Allow the pace in the next scene to come down a little. While the A-plot is calming, the B-plot can be ratcheting up.

To avoid killing your pace, choose your details carefully. Don't describe the whole barn the hero enters when meeting the bad guy. Every step should feel as if it is bringing us closer to a disaster that could prevent the main character's goal from happening.

Flashbacks are pace-killers, as are summaries of conflict, since conflict ratchets tension. Know when to end a scene: *stop talking when you've closed the deal*. Make sure every scene or chapter ends with a hook, even if it is as simple as a character saying, "Well, that seemed easy...."

Spencer-Fleming disparages the use of heroes or heroines who are "too stupid to live," or "too good to be true." The more competent the protagonist, the more overwhelming the antagonist must be.

Scenes without conflict are the kiss of death. After you've completed a draft, read through and identify the goal/conflict/resolution in each scene. If you can't identify that progression, cut the scene.

Lastly, since readers must care about characters, be sure to create ones with personalities and not simply a collection of traits. Readers have no opportunity to care about the character if they only know things about them rather than knowing what they want.

Recommended readings for homework

Buried by Robin Merrow MacCready has an interesting POV character and plenty of emotional threat.

Lee Child's *Echo Burning* opens with two professional gunmen watching a Texas ranch. They are discussing the target, who turns out to be a little girl getting off the school bus: what happens next?

World War Z is a zombie war told as an oral history. The prologue reveals the world has been saved, but the suspense ratchets unbearably.

For craft resources, Spencer-Fleming recommends Dwight Swain's *Techniques of the Selling Writer* and *Scene and Structure* by Jack Bickham.



[Cidney Swanson](#) is an award-winning author of young adult sci-fi and fantasy with 30 titles to her name. Her novel *Saving Mars* was named to Kirkus Reviews Best of 2012 and was an honor book for the SCBWI Spark Award 2014.

NFTs for Authors in 2020 and Beyond

Presented by Dave Chesson

Reported by Jenna Kernan

Dave Chesson is the creator of Kindlepreneur.com and Publisher Rocket and co-founder of Atticus. He is also a self-published author and self-described serial entrepreneur. His software development company includes a blockchain/cryptocurrency division, making him feel able to shape an informed opinion of the state of this topic.

Dave Chesson introduced the session by saying the workshop contained a warning to authors. His takeaway is that blockchains and NFTs will not work for us at this time. He then covered the technical aspects behind the concept of NFTs.

Basic terminology

- **Blockchain** is a block of data which can be anything, but usually a collection of records such as smart contracts, files or documents, records of transactions (Ledger). The data is limited, fixed, and prevents hacking. The data is clear so anyone can see the code but cannot change or hack the code. Blocks have a limited space which is why they have to add blocks as previous ones fill and this makes a chain, thus blockchain.
- **Ledger** is what shows the full history of a purchase (publicly) and is incredibly secure through cryptography. It cannot be faked or changed. Additionally, this ledger removes middlemen, such as banks, institutions, and countries, and allows the transaction to move securely from one individual owner to another. In a **Distributed Ledger**, the code exists publicly, and everyone can see an individual has ownership. With a distributed ledger, the asset can pass directly from one node to another. This is different than a centralized ledger, like a bank, where a transaction between individuals must pass through the bank, the central point.
- **Smart Contracts** are a series of code that executes when an event occurs. This code is designed to perform a predefined contract or action. It is an *if this > then that* event. If the event occurs according to the predefined contract, the code is executed. This occurs publicly, is immutable and does not require attorneys to execute the settlement. The example Chesson gave was that every time someone buys a book through blockchain, 10% of the price goes straight to the author's crypto wallet.
- **NFT** is a *Non-Fungible Token*, which is a digital token or asset. When you are buying an NFT, you are buying the rights to that digital asset on the blockchain. It can't be lost in a robbery or fire because it exists on the blockchain. Usually an NFT is code only and rarely includes an image, but may include a link to the image on a hosted webserver.

Why would you purchase an NFT? They are seen as a collectible in the investment category.

What makes them valuable? It may hold value if you are the first to buy something, like the first tweet ever sent. The valuation may be arbitrary and purchase price could be greater than or less valuable on resale. This particular asset (tweet) famously sold for \$2.9 million. Another potential for value is if this NFT provides a real-world benefit, like an NFT of a Super Bowl ring owned by a famous player that comes with Super Bowl tickets. The NFT might be seen as unique or rare. And finally, an NFT may provide proof of ownership history and verify that physical asset is real. The example Chesson gave was the NFT that accompanies the sale of a Rolex watch.

The problem with NFTs?

According to Chesson, there are several problems. First, the technology is not yet mainstream, and NFTs are complicated to use because buyers need a crypto wallet. Few people have actually bought an NFT and even fewer have purchased something tangible with crypto. Also, the laws and regulations are not yet in place, creating some early adopter chaos.

For authors, Chesson posed several questions. What percentage of our readers will know what crypto is? How many know how to use crypto? How many of those will also know how to access their purchase? The process is difficult to understand, hard to set up, and if it is made easy it loses what makes it so awesome. Chesson contends that for a technology to be adopted it must have a sound concept, the technology needs to work, and the market must accept it. This is why Netflix worked. It was not the first streaming service, but it was the first to come along at a time when the technology was widely available, reasonably priced, and so, readily adopted. Netflix was in the right place at the right time. Chesson's next example was of a new technology failure. He stated that Jay-Z's production company appeared when the technology was ready, the artists were ready, but the market was not willing to adopt an entirely new way to purchase music. Unfortunately, at this point, even the market doesn't know what this technology is or will be.

What areas could be important for authors?

1. Copyright protection
2. Reselling of books
3. NFTs or other possible sales for authors

Idea: Create a better copyright protection through blockchain technology

The problem: This adds no value beyond just another marker. It does not negate applying for a copyright. More and more companies say if you don't do this, you don't own your digital rights. Chesson cautions that this makes this industry ripe for scammers to take advantage of authors' fear of piracy.

Does it help? It can. But authors own their intellectual property and do not need to file for digital copyright. He suggests authors continue to just file for copyright in the traditional way.

There is also confusion about what is being purchased. Chesson gave the example of a group that thought they were buying the story *Dune*, when they were actually buying the cover of a particular hardcover release. This group does not own the book or even a copy of the book and, contrary to their expectations, they will get no royalties from a cover.

NFT copyright adds no extra benefit beyond the current method of copyright. It will come at an extra cost and will come with companies trying to take advantage of authors. There is no legal system in blockchain. Finally, owning an NFT for a book doesn't count as a copyright.

Idea: Reselling of books—with blockchain, we can set up that if our book is resold, we get paid again.

The problem: NFTs might become the new platform for selling books. But right now, the platform is new, difficult to use, and not in the best interest of major sellers.

For NFT book sales to work, readers need to buy books through the blockchain system and abandon their current ebook readers and current markets like Nook, Kobo, and Amazon. There will be limited amounts of books on these markets, and resale would only happen if the reader can somehow convince someone else to use that same system and make the purchase from them.

Taking Amazon as an example, if a reader could resell a purchased book directly to a new buyer without Amazon, they make no profit on resale. Chesson said, "It would work if Amazon did this and there is no financial incentive to do this." So, though this system might theoretically be good for authors, unfortunately sellers and shoppers have no incentive to adopt this new technology.

So, where does Chesson see authors profiting from NFT sales?

Idea: NFT sales—authors can create extra income by selling NFTs of their covers or characters.

Potentially they could sell NFTs of their "preexisting aspects" like covers or characters in the form of something like a digital trading card. This could be a source of extra income and serve to drum up excitement centered on the NFTs and the sales.

The problem is that NFTs are costly to make, and most readers can't buy them. Chesson says that authors who are doing this have very techie audiences and have the skills and money to dabble. However, Chesson says, authors should be watching this industry as it would be unfortunate to make the mistake of Kodak, when they bet that digital photography was a techie fad.

Some places where NFTs are working well is in real estate, where contracts can clearly show a chain of sale. They are being adopted to accompany the sale of high-value, luxury items

like Rolex watches and Lamborghinis and for companies like Sotheby's selling valuable artwork. NFTs that are considered rare, unique, previously owned by famous people, or that accompany a product sale are working well. They are also benefiting sellers who can make buyers think an NFT is or will be valuable (ex. first-ever tweet). They can and are also used to gain access to exclusive members-only digital spaces with influencers or the rich and famous gather (ex. Bored Ape Yacht Club). This technology may also be used someday to transfer wealth from place to place around the world without transfer fees and, depending on laws that are not yet written, to heirs while skipping estate tax.

Finally, if you are familiar with the movie *Ready Player One*, you have seen how crypto could be used to purchase virtual items in the metaverse, like avatars, costumes, weapons, and other virtual objects that could help players enjoy or succeed in gaming.

Conclusion

Chesson's takeaway is that authors should be aware of this industry but only a small percentage of authors can currently benefit from this. Authors should be cognizant that there will be unscrupulous people out there trying to convince authors they must buy things they don't need, like digital copyrights of all their works. Someday this new technology may drive the market and someday an author might get a part of every resale of every "used" digital copy, but this is not that day.



Publishers Weekly bestselling author [Jenna Kernan](#) is the 2021 Florida Book Awards' bronze medal winner in Popular Fiction for her crime thriller, *A Killer's Daughter*. Look for her next book, *The Ex-Wives*, in October 2022.

Mindset and Methods: Leveling Up Your Amazon Ads

Presented by Janet Margot

Reported by M. Guida

Janet Margot is the founder of Book Geeks Marketing, a boutique agency focused on helping “book people” navigate Amazon and their ads platform. During her more than eight years in Amazon Advertising, she built a specialized team focused on ads for KDP authors and traditional publishers.

Janet Margot had three main points she wanted to explore that included mindset, decision-making, and methods.

Mindset

She defined mindset as clearing your headspace before you tackle growth. This can be frustrating. She said that many authors may look at “scaling” as being a dirty word. Scaling is the biggest challenge on Amazon for all advertiser types.

She encouraged authors to replace scaling with growth. According to her, scales can be daunting and won’t happen in the typical sense. Ad growth can occur incrementally in fits and starts.

Margot broke growth into two different groups. She defined the first one as what growth is. This included a willingness to spend without immediate return, tolerance for experimentation, and readiness to exploit. The second group is what growth isn’t, which includes cheap clicks, lots of campaigns, speedy sales, and a jacked-up budget. This type of mindset entails “throwing spaghetti at the wall” and trying to find out what sticks.

Mindset hotspots

She cautioned authors that there are four hotspots—impatience, cheap clicks plus high budget, overindexing on precision, and analysis paralysis. Ads need time to grow and trying to speed up the process with a high budget, aiming for low click rates, won’t work, because authors will not be getting the most qualified customer who wants to buy their books. In her opinion, customer feedback is very important and this is determined by the click-through rate. This metric gives authors the most relevance about the effectiveness of their ad.

Margot also cautioned about watching the ads every day and then having a gut reaction. Sometimes this can lead to paralysis, when authors become overwhelmed and can’t make a decision.

Analysis paralysis

Margot expanded on analysis paralysis, which is basically overthinking about ads. Ads can fall into a one-way or two-way door. A one-way door is using custom text and targeting segmentation that cannot be edited once launched. Her preferred method is the two-way door. This is without custom text, bids, campaign and date, and budget. Bids can be changed regularly. This can be one bid or all bids.

Decision-making

According to Margot, this is made ahead of time. She encouraged authors to determine how much money to spend, have budget tiers, and increase the budget based on performance.

This can be done by leveraging portfolio budgets. Ads should be organized into portfolios and then be assigned a budget. The budget minimizes the need to constantly monitor. Margot also said that if the portfolio reaches its maximum spend and Amazon stops showing the ads, this will not affect the algorithm of the ad. The ads will have the same relevance once Amazon starts showing them again the following month.

Margot said that if authors pause an ad, this will affect the relevance of the ad, because Amazon considers a paused ad as being the same thing as a stopped ad. Once a paused ad is turned on, it starts over again.

In addition, she said that ad groups don't do well and encourages authors to use portfolios.

Margot said that authors need to define their target-level metrics. Her formula was impressions need to be over 1,000 and the click-through rate needs to be over 10% and the advertising cost of sales (ACOS) needs to be higher than 70%. Kindle Unlimited authors need to revise the ACOS for pages read and wait at least one to two weeks before deciding whether an ad is working. Margot said that authors should bid to their value, not Amazon's. She said to avoid using Amazon's suggested bids and instead develop your own bidding tiers. This is based on analyzing the author's data, which will determine how high an author wants to bid based on the performance of their targets. Bidding tiers are divided up into sections based on the percentage of profit made from the ads. Margot also would not use *broad*, especially when targeting authors. Instead, she said use *phrase* and *exact*.

Methods

By analyzing the data, authors should be able to determine what ads are effective. According to Margot, there are three areas. Leverage bid by placement, which is increasing bids for placements that are higher converts. The next is experiment with dynamic bidding, which is bidding up on the core targets to test potential for increased qualified traffic. The last is assigning budget performance rules on campaigns that are consistently hitting positive return.

New for 2022

Margot announced that restrictions on non-KDP titles have been lifted and anyone with books on Amazon can advertise.

Expand on core targets

Based on their data, Margot encouraged authors to pursue their most successful targets. This strengthens the return on those targets by finding adjacent audiences. This is done by tracing the customer's journey. She said Amazon's web of consumption (customers browsing on Amazon) helps catch readers and makes them stick. This leads to a higher order value.

Margot reported that if authors know the consumer's path, this will lead to a higher conversion. However, this takes a long time to build and it's based on the strength of an author's metadata. Books will start to get associated with these targets, but beware that cost can start high. Eventually, the cost will decrease as relevance improves.

Conclusion

Amazon ads take time to build. By authors changing their mindset, adjusting their decision-making, and using best practice methods to improve organic sales, they can develop ads that will be successful on Amazon.



Award-winning author [M. Guida](#) writes urban fantasy romance and paranormal romance. Including her other pen name, she has published over 40 books since 2013.

Go Wide-R: Earn Seven Figures from Your Backlist

Presented by Vanessa Vale

Reported by Ines Johnson

Vanessa Vale is a USA Today bestselling author of over 75 books. She created a Facebook Group, Thrifty Tips for Authors, and also gives classes about self-publishing.

After losing access to her Facebook account, Vanessa Vale had to find other ways besides paid ads to get herself out there. So, she came up with ways that were inexpensive or free to grow her author brand and income. Everything in this talk is a **free** tip or strategy. You do not have to be distributing wide to use these strategies. It's about growing.

Vale is a bona fide freak in the sheets—the spreadsheets. She uses them to track her business growth. If you don't have the Microsoft Excel spreadsheets software, Google Sheets is free. Apple Numbers is also free.

She has spreadsheets detailing where her books are published, her book URLs, cowriting earnings and expenses, monthly income, and a spreadsheet of lifetime earnings per book that she fills in twice per year.

Vale's preference is for Google Sheets. Aside from being easy to use, Google Sheets allows access across all computers. It also does the math for you, and that math is updated on the fly. It helps to keep her efficient and accurate so that she can make informed decisions on her author business and not guesses.

A "published book spreadsheet" is what helps keep Vale hyper-organized because she has lots, and lots, of books. At the time of the presentation, she had 97 books in English and has a box in the spreadsheet for each book. Those books have been translated into various languages, which also go into the published books spreadsheet and take up a lot of boxes. She also adds paperback, audio, large print, and spots on the sheet for each retailer. Each format and retailer gets its own box in the spreadsheet. This translates into thousands of filled-in boxes on the spreadsheet.

To make your spreadsheet, in Column A, you will list all of your books. Be sure to include individual books, boxed sets (complete and partial, meaning Books 1-3, 4-6, etc).

Across the top in Row 1, enter the retailers where you sell your books including all formats (meaning Amazon ebook, Amazon Print, Amazon Large Print, Nook Hardcover Dust Jacket, etc.)

EXAMPLE SPREADSHEET

TITLE	Amazon	Amazon Paperback	Amazon/ ACX	Nook	Apple	Google	Kobo
Book 1	DATE	DATE	DATE				
Book 2	DATE	DATED					
Book 3	DATE						
Book 4		DATE					
Book 5							
Book 6							
Book 7							
Book 8							
Book 9							
Book 10							

Fill in the boxes with color where a book has been published. The empty boxes are your holes. Vale also inserts the date of the last upload so she can keep track of when she updated the back matter. Remember the purpose of the spreadsheet is to provide an at-a-glance view of where you've published.

But this talk is not about spreadsheets. There's an entire concept going on behind the scenes. There's the obvious of creating a spreadsheet, but the secret concept of the box method will show you your income potential.

Let's use the spreadsheet to grow your income. Imagine you have 10 books and only sell them on Amazon; this means you have 10 boxes. One box for each book on Amazon. If you add Amazon print, you have 20 boxes. If you add Amazon/ACX, now you have 30 boxes. Print is not exclusive, so you can add more boxes if you put your print on other retailers like Barnes and Noble, Ingram, Draft2Digital, etc. Now you could have over 50 boxes.

If you make \$1 per day in each of these 50 boxes, you're making \$50 a day instead of the original \$10 per day having your books only on Amazon as ebooks. This is an example of working your backlist and passive income. With 50 boxes at \$50 per day you could be making \$18,250 per year (\$50 x 365 days).

Now go back to the spreadsheet you started and count the colored boxes you filled in. Are there places you can add boxes? Are there places you can fill in the gap and upload that book or format?

You can grow your backlist with new releases as well as with filling in the empty boxes. A new release becomes a part of your backlist once you release the next book. If you write your book once in English, you can add additional formats and languages to grow your boxes. Passive income requires no effort to earn and maintain. No matter how many new releases you have in a year, you can make money from the books you've already written.

Using the box method example, books written years ago bring in hundreds of dollars per day doing nothing. As a new retailer or publishing method becomes available, you can add more boxes to your sheet. This doesn't include any sales (pair promo, CPC, etc.) or other efforts to invigorate a backlist book series.

For a real world example, Harry Potter is a seven-book series. It was translated into over 60 languages. It was turned into movies. There is Potter merchandise. There are theme parks and studio tours and more! Those seven English language books are making millions with no more content written by the author.

If you only have a few books, did you add print and audio to your spreadsheet? That is passive income and you just put it into action. You're probably doing this whole concept without even knowing it.

Now identify where you can grow more passive income. You can add more retailers, languages, audio, boxed sets, paperbacks, hardbacks, sell on your own website. Adding a series boxed set can grow your box count—and it's free.

Are you a newer author? If you add 10 books this year to five retailers, that's 50 boxes with an \$18K per year potential if each box earns you \$1 per day. Add 10 the next year and it doubles, leaving you earning \$43K a year. The third year, with 10 more books added, gets you to six figures with this boxed method.

Wide means making the bulk of your income off your *backlist*, not just the retailers. Vale makes more money on the English language books she initially wrote with all the boxes she puts that book in.

She cautions authors to choose which boxes to invest in wisely because some options aren't worth it. Test a new-to-you retailer with one book or series and see how it does. However, be willing to shift because if it's not worth it now, you may be surprised to see it pays out at a later date and you can take action then.

Vale has over 3,000 boxes in her spreadsheet to date. With this many boxes, she has the potential to make over \$3,000 per day, or over one million per year. She doesn't pay for CPC or paid promo (other than BookBub Featured Deals).

Join her in her Facebook Group, Thrifty Tips for Authors.

You can also take her classes at thriftytipsforauthors.com.



Lover of fairy tales, folklore, and mythology, [Ines Johnson](#) spends her days reimagining the stories of old in a modern world. She writes books where damsels cause the distress, princesses wield swords, and moms save the world.

Go Direct: Selling Ebooks & Audiobooks Direct to Readers with BookFunnel

Presented by Damon Courtney

Reported by Cidney Swanson

Damon Courtney is the founder of BookFunnel, supporter of authors who sing with abandon, and an all-around great guy.

Damon Courtney believes authors are leaving money and reader relationships on the table when they don't offer direct sales to their readers and listeners. Although BookFunnel is not a vendor, they help authors by providing seamless delivery of ebooks and audiobooks.

What is selling direct?

Direct sales are just that: sales made by you directly to your reader or listener. This can include setting up your own store with sales and delivery, offering one-time goodies via Kickstarter, or monthly items via Patreon subscription. In all of these cases, money must be collected and delivery must be made. BookFunnel can make an author's job easier by providing product delivery of digital items. In addition to a state-of-the-art delivery system, BookFunnel also offers support to any fans needing help with downloading.

Why sell direct?

Courtney argues that it's not primarily about the extra money. Rather, it's about connecting with readers. None of the ebook stores will tell an author who ordered their book, and this keeps authors from making a valuable connection with readers. Authors who sell direct get data that deepens their understanding of readers. (Courtney advises authors to use their data respectfully.)

Authors who sell direct can offer flash deals to their newsletter subscribers or online community fans: "Buy books 1-4 for \$4.99 this week only." Likewise, if you know a reader bought the first book in a series, you can offer a deal to get books 2-4 at a discount.

While Courtney doesn't believe the extra money from direct sales to be the primary benefit, it is certainly nice. A \$4.95 sale through an ebook vendor nets \$3.47 minus delivery fees. The same \$4.95 ebook sold direct nets an author \$4.51 after bank transaction fees. This puts an extra dollar in an author's pocket for every sale.

A \$14.95 audiobook sold through a vendor will give authors who are exclusive \$5.98, or \$3.74 for non-exclusive authors. Sold direct at \$9.99 on your website, you will receive \$9.40. This is nicer for author and reader.

Getting started

Courtney stresses that authors don't need to build out an entire store. You can start with small, quick direct sales for a box set that is available only directly from you.

When BookFunnel first offered direct sales in 2017, it took off in a way Courtney did not anticipate. He knows now that readers love supporting their favorite authors and encourages authors to tell readers, "I get a little more money when you buy direct." Courtney cautions that it will take time to train readers to buy direct and suggests that authors add value for readers by releasing exclusive content, bundling books at a discount, or releasing direct ahead of ebook stores.

But what about paperbacks?

BookFunnel does not deliver paperbacks. However, when someone buys a signed copy of a paperback, you can add value by having BookFunnel deliver a free ebook.

For print-on-demand (POD) services, Courtney suggests using KDP Print, IngramSpark, Lulu, or BookVault. Lulu (USA) and BookVault (UK) have ecommerce plug-ins with WooCommerce.

Courtney next shifted the discussion to the nitty-gritty of direct selling, comparing several ways an author might choose to do this.

Selling on Patreon

Courtney sees Patreon as tailor-made for superfans who want to contribute to the livelihood of their favorite author. Joining an author's Patreon is not attractive to casual readers, but for authors with fans who can't wait for the next title, it can be a great way to pre-sell a book. For authors who sell through Kindle Unlimited (KU), Patreon provides a simple way to launch the title directly to readers prior to placing the title in KU.

Courtney says success can be found on Patreon by authors who only post once a month as well as by authors who provide daily content for their fans. Support levels of between \$1 and \$25 per month are most common. For those patrons supporting at the \$25 level, perhaps offer a free ebook a month before other readers get access.

Selling with Kickstarter

Kickstarter is designed for projects that require extra cash up front. As with Patreon, this platform is for superfans. If an author is doing well, Kickstarter will bring in more fans. It can be a great platform for authors whose books were dropped by their traditional publisher. Running

a successful Kickstarter takes more investment of time than running a successful Patreon. In both cases, however, an author will have a list of reader emails at the end.

Pre-selling direct as a straight transaction with the author

When selling direct, an author keeps the maximum profit from any sale. Courtney suggests getting ebooks to readers early. This, Courtney believes, is perceived by readers as having more value than a discount. Readers love knowing they are getting something before anyone else.

Building out a storefront to sell your entire list of titles

Courtney lists multiple benefits for authors who choose to build their own store. As the seller, you control every pixel on the page. You design the sales experience. When someone clicks through from your newsletter, you send them to your store website, and they go through the shopping cart, which “trains” them to use your site.

In fact, Courtney suggests that when advertising a free book to readers, authors should send them to the storefront so that they become accustomed to purchasing directly. He further encourages authors to follow “supersizing” practices: when a customer adds a book to the cart, show them more books in the series available at a discount. Getting someone to your store is the hard part; convincing someone to buy a bit more once they’re already there is comparably easy.

So what’s the next step for an author ready to sell direct?

Selling with BookFunnel integrations

BookFunnel integrates with several sales providers (i.e., the companies that handle the money). For quick and easy selling, Courtney recommends using [Gumroad](#), [Payhip](#), or [Paypal](#). While Gumroad is free to beginning sellers, all three platforms will charge a percentage, and Gumroad eventually requires a monthly fee. Each of these platforms has the advantage of being simple to get up and running, requiring few computer skills.

For next-level selling, Courtney recommends [WooCommerce](#), which is a WordPress plugin. If you’re not familiar with WordPress, this will be challenging to do.

For those with even more skill or ambition, Courtney suggests using [Shopify](#) to set up a store. The cost for a full store is \$29/month. However, for a single-time sale of one product, there is a \$5/month option.

[Thrivecart](#) hosts everything for you, even your author website. They have features which allow for heavy upselling. The downside is it costs \$500 for a lifetime fee, but there are no fees after that. Thrivecart will also collect sales tax data.

BookFunnel delivery

No matter which of the above platforms an author chooses, BookFunnel will handle both the digital delivery and all delivery-related support for readers. They deliver audiobooks

through their app, cloud player, and downloadable MP3s. Authors can bundle the sales of physical and digital products together, with BookFunnel delivering the digital content to readers. Authors can also deliver bonus content bundled with digital sales. For example, an author could add things such as a recipe from their book.

BookFunnel can deliver as many digital products as an author wishes, be it an eight-book audiobook series or a 30-book series. Readers can then download the titles all at once or one at a time.

Finally, BookFunnel never takes a cut of an author's sales. Their revenue model is a subscription, billed annually, with several tiers to match where an author is in their career.

For inquiries, contact support through the [BookFunnel website](#).



*Cidney Swanson is an award-winning author of young adult sci-fi and fantasy with 30 titles to her name. Her novel *Saving Mars* was named to Kirkus Reviews Best of 2012 and was an honor book for the SCBWI Spark Award 2014.*

War and Books:

How Book Sales Trends Changed in 2022

Presented by Kinga Jentetics

Reported by Vicki Colgate Lee

Kinga Jentetics is the CEO of PublishDrive, a distribution platform for ebooks, print, and audiobooks. She's completed advanced digital projects in Silicon Valley and was a 2018 Digital Book Awards nominee.

PublishDrive's philosophy is simple and direct: publishing a book should not be the privilege of a few but be open to everyone. Toward that end, this all-in-one publishing platform has amassed a wealth of data on book sales which they make available on an easy-to-read dashboard to any author utilizing their services. Having overall market and sales data is a boon to any author needing to make decisions on how and where to grow their brand and footprint in the marketplace. In addition to tracking industry sales across multiple markets, the data also highlights the impact of current events on book sales, on both a global and specific regional basis, as well as following the trends of the fastest growing markets and book categories in the United States and internationally.

War, books, and current events

Keeping an eye on current events to take advantage of both upward and downward forces on book sales should be a key component to consider in growing revenue. Recently, there have been two clear examples of how current events on a global and regional level will affect book sales.

The pandemic was a global event that forced millions into home isolation for long periods of time. This had a two-prong effect on sales for both fiction and nonfiction. Readers wanted more information on the COVID-19 virus and the progress of the vaccines, as well as an established, affordable means of entertainment from home. This led to an increase of global sales in both nonfiction and fiction books, resulting in a 19% rise in overall revenue between 2019 and 2021. The key for authors analyzing current events during this period was to increase their book production to provide more books for readers who had an outside motivation to buy them.

The war in Ukraine certainly has a global interest, but can be viewed as a more regional event. In 2022, the total U.S. market of book sales has declined 6% (given the emergence of a

vaccine leading to the reopening of multiple avenues of entertainment), while the sales on PublishDrive, which is based in the same region as the war, rose 240%. In this case, authors who have a business plan diversified into the European marketplace are coming out on top.

Looking at regional market growth

As a single country market for book sales, the U.S. is the unchallenged leader, commanding 49% in 2021 and 44% in 2022. While still the primary book market, the larger *sales momentum* has shifted from the U.S. to the international market, with a spotlight on the sheer number of overseas markets experiencing a high growth rate. Looking at publishing on a global platform is an excellent option to consider and one that an increasing number of authors are including in their publishing arsenal. Statistics gathered on the PublishDrive platform show the top five growth countries as:

<u>Country</u>	<u>% Increase</u>
India	250%
USA	230%
Serbia	225%
Sweden	200%
Austria	165%
Germany	155%

Canada and Australia came in at numbers 11 and 12, respectively, with growth rates of approximately 60% each.

When you research an expansion into regional markets beyond the U.S., be sure to look at both the rate of expansion by geographic region in combination with any projected or continuing current event. This will give the clearest picture of where you should target your next market.

Focus on genres and subgenres

Once you have targeted a potential market region for expansion, then look at genres and subgenres that are also growing within those markets. According to the large statistical database gathered by PublishDrive, the categories growing at the fastest pace are:

<u>Category</u>	<u>% Increase</u>
Comics	1,116%
Young Adult	638%
Action/Adventure	202%
Sci-fi	125%
Mystery/Detective	118%

Romance also continues to grow, but at a lower rate than the top five listed above. However, one of the fastest growing *subcategories* is in Paranormal Romance, along with Action/Adventure Fantasy.

What the overall data tells us

The wealth of numbers clearly states that, overall, book sales are still rising. The best way to take advantage of it is to diversify your business onto multiple platforms that will allow you to capitalize on both domestic and international trends. Action items to consider include:

1. Publish globally. International sales is the fastest growing sector of the marketplace.
2. Publish more books. Every data analysis given at conferences or in articles indicates that publishing more books is the absolute best return on investment in the bookselling industry. For more detailed information on the sales split between current and backlist titles, click here: [Sales growth of backlist titles](#).
3. Publish in translations. Often foreign narrators are more cost-effective than the narrators that are based in the U.S., and there is the rising market for AI narration that should be carefully monitored for its growth possibility.
4. Publish in all formats: Electronic, print, and audio.
5. Always keep track of current events and event forecasts to keep your growth steady today with an eye on future and continued growth.

In addition to those five action items, there are two more detailed trends that authors need to consider.

The first is a growing interest in ordering globally but printing locally. PublishDrive is looking to expand its number of regional publishers, so paperback and hardback books that are ordered through the platform can be printed locally, cutting down on shipping expense for the author.

The second item on your detailed to-do list should be to learn about **Thema** as the up-and-coming international metadata standard. In short, it is a new, more precise way to assign book categories and is becoming the international standard in place of BISAC—which is the category system currently used by Amazon and most North American and UK platforms. To learn more about Thema, you can start here: [the basics of Thema](#).

About PublishDrive

In addition to offering a wealth of data on book sales, PublishDrive has over 400 consumer ordering points for distributing books, including entire library systems. They combine this large number of ordering sites into 49 (and growing) separate markets. While most authors are familiar with paying for distribution with a percentage of royalties earned, PublishDrive has adopted an alternate payment system. It is a subscription-based model which has a number of plans offered at a flat monthly fee. This allows authors to keep all of their royalties and avoid an increase in operating expense as their royalties rise. PublishDrive also offers many promotional opportunities for enhanced visibility, which includes featured positions in some of their contracted stores. They are also currently giving a 50% discount on the first two months of a subscription to any plan if you use this QR code:



If you'd like to learn more about PublishDrive, you can visit their [website](#). All of the offered plans are laid out in a simple, easy-to-read format under the pricing tab at the top of the page.

If you have any additional questions, or would like to chat directly with a representative of PublishDrive, the director of client services is Abhishek Sehgal. He can be reached through email at: abhishek@publishdrive.com.



Vicki Colgate Lee writes thriller action/suspense under the pen name of [C.R. Chandler](#). An empty-nester living in the San Francisco Bay area, she writes the Special Agent Ricki James thriller series and is planning to launch a second series next year.

How to Hook & Hold Readers Using Brain Science

Presented by Melanie Harlow

Reported by Michele Dunaway

USA Today and #1 Amazon bestselling author Melanie Harlow writes sweet, sexy, feel-good romance.

Melanie Harlow wanted everyone to know she wasn't a neuroscientist or a psychologist, but that she is a voracious reader of nonfiction. Harlow started her talk by asking what makes a book impossible to put down, and then said she did months of research to find out what makes us get those bloodshot eyes and brain fog as we stay up late reading (with no regrets) "just one more chapter."

A well-crafted story is addicting and we find stories irresistible, even after thousands of years of evolution. Here are Harlow's five neuroscientific and psychological insights for authors.

1. Story is a strong chemical cocktail.

Most say reading allows readers to escape stress and have wish fulfillment. It's true: enjoying a story causes a surge in the pleasure-rush neurotransmitter dopamine. Lab studies by neuroscientist Paul J. Zak have also showed that good stories increase our levels of oxytocin. Reading feels good. But it's more than that. Reading is more than an escape. Think of those stories where there are threats and danger. We run toward trouble in stories. We dive headfirst into trouble/risk.

In the 1990s, neuroscientists discovered mirror neurons, which showed that the same neural regions in a monkey's brain lit up whether they grabbed a nut or watched another monkey grab a nut. This happens when we're reading too. Whether we are reading or doing, our brains light up. We experience it. We find love. We face fears. We beat the bad guy.

But we don't literally risk our lives. However, this is the survival lesson. The internal journey of the character.

As Lisa Cron said in *Wired for Story*, "We don't turn to stories to escape reality. We turn to stories to navigate reality." Stories are about survival. Not just physical, but emotional, spiritual, cultural.

For authors, you must know your survival lesson. What they learn equals your point. The plot is great but a story is not 350 pages of things that happened. What a reader will actually respond to (even though they don't know it), what will fire those neurotransmitters, is the

internal journey of the protagonist, specifically how they transform from who they are on page one into who they are at the end, and what they had to learn to get there.

Harlow said she's a pantsner. "I know you're thinking, 'But Melanie, my books aren't about survival. I write romance!' or 'But Melanie, I don't want to teach a lesson! That's preachy!' and 'But Melanie, I'm not sure what my point is yet, I have to discover it while I write.'"

She responded with, "Here's why that's tough," saying that it's difficult to declutter a story once it's written. We are precious about our words. We fall in love with scenes and lines and it's not easy to chop away at things later once you realize what you want to say. And readers hate filler. The goal is to find the perfect balance of discovery and direction. In a good story, every scene has a point. It's better to assemble a road map than have no direction at all. Goal is balance.

She quoted Brian McDonald, who runs the *You Are A Storyteller* podcast, saying, "Before you begin writing, you must build an armature."

The armature (skeleton) is your point: the idea on which you hang your story. Think of *The Wizard of Oz*: You had what you needed inside of you all along.

It's not a one-word concept like love/money/revenge. It's an argument (money isn't everything, beauty lies within, you had what you needed inside you all along, everyone deserves a second chance, love is always worth the risk, being vulnerable is an act of bravery). You want something universal (an emotional truth that will resonate with us all) but specific to your protagonist. Don't be afraid of simple because you should be able to explain it to a five-year-old.

To find it, ask yourself these questions:

- What am I trying to say about human nature?
- What lesson does my character need to learn?
- What fear or misguided idea does he need to overcome?

In her book *After We Fall*, it's "Everyone deserves a second chance." In *Make Me Yours*, it's "Love is always worth the risk." In *Ignite*, it's "Being vulnerable is an act of bravery." Your protagonist will be trying to fight against or run around this truth throughout the novel.

Harlowe said these are some of the things a character might have to learn or overcome to help you decide what your point is:

- forgiveness (self or others)
- overcome fear
- learn to trust
- accept destiny
- trade selfishness for altruism
- earn redemption
- survival (find will to live)
- give and/or accept love (better together)

2. Narrative transportation is all about character.

It's a fancy term for getting lost in the story. We don't even realize it's happening. Harlowe said that Cron said this: "That the first job of any good story is to completely anesthetize the part of our brain that questions how it is creating such a compelling illusion of reality."

If we can't relate, we won't read. The brain is not anesthetized. It's one reason why readers do not finish a book, or say it was too slow to develop, had too much detail about things that don't matter, had weird plot twists that made no sense, or had characters that kept repeating themselves or weren't relatable, or that the heroine was brainless and the hero a spineless idiot. This is why readers are so good at telling people what they didn't like about a book. They were not anesthetized. When they are, they write good things.

The truth is, it's all about character. If we don't believe, care, and invest in the characters, if we don't feel, we don't read. From the beginning you must get the reader to emotionally invest. They don't root for a trope. They come to the yard, but the trope is not what keeps them there.

Matt Bird, in his *Secrets of Story*, says concept gets them to buy. Characters get them to stay. Harlowe said it's a big ask to play with readers' emotions. They take a chance on your story and you have to take that responsibility. You're saying, "Trust me, I'm an author," and they're saying, "But I could get hurt."

There are five tips to creating a hero that will transport the reader:

1. People relate to characters who are awesome but relatable—give them flaws.
2. People like characters who are active and resourceful.
3. Balance vulnerability with strengths right from the start. Readers love an underdog but not too zero. No total zeroes. No saints. No total badasses.
4. Give the hero a problem fast. But the hero should not know what they need to "win" from the start. In fact, he should have the wrong idea, followed by several other wrong ideas.
5. Give them an inner issue—an emotional wound/skewed worldview that will be revealed over time. But chapter one is not the place for huge backstory.

The hero doesn't necessarily have to save the cat, but a hero does need a moment of humanity that makes the reader go, "I love this guy." It can be funny, oddball, compassionate, but it should not be a random cat in a tree. Root it in the character's own emotional vulnerability. This moment of vulnerability matters.

Read this book: Matt Bird's *The Secret of Character*. Here are three of Harlowe's favorite tips:

1. Give them a flaw that's hard to abandon without losing something, can't be a no-brainer.
2. Give them autonomy—stories are about the consequences of bad decisions. No power, no decisions. Also explain why there are so many orphans. No parents.
3. Make them great at their job.

3. Brains love fluency.

Give us the same but different. This is why we want fresh voices and fresh stories of the same thing. Tropes sell because they are familiar. We like familiar. In *Hit Makers*, Derek Thompson writes, “Familiar ideas are processed faster and the sensation of quick and easy thinking—fluency is strong yet sneaky: people attribute the pleasure of the thought to the quality of the idea.”

Evolutionary psychologists have a reason for this preference for familiar things: If you recognize it, it hasn’t killed you yet.

If you think that you must write something no one has ever seen before, Harlowe showed a list of songs that all used the same four chords: I-V-vi-IV. You can Google “4 Chords” by The Axis of Awesome. Most consumers are neophilic (curious to try new things) and neophobic (afraid of anything too new). The best hitmakers are gifted at marrying old and new; they are architects of familiar surprises. The goal is to inhabit the space between “I know I will like this” and “Hmmm, this is a little different.” There are always outliers, but most are in the middle. Her bestselling books all have a small-town, single dad.

What does this mean for authors?

1. Embrace the tropes and genre conventions. They will sell your book. (What good will your lesson on survival be if no one reads it?) We worry too much about this one.
2. Mix fluency (familiar setups) with a little disfluency (a fresh hook, a subversion, a reimagining, a different point of view). Take a cue from Hollywood or the music industry.
3. Radical originality is not likely to pay off. Think familiar surprise. Do not worry about that “not seen before.”
4. Branding is part of fluency. Your brand is a promise about the feelings you will deliver. Stay in your lane, but mine it deeply for inspiration. The brand is you.
5. When in doubt, retell *Beauty and the Beast*. It will always sell.

4. Curiosity is everything.

Curiosity has helped humans survive. Once our curiosity is aroused, once we’re hooked, we have an emotional interest in what happens next. We will keep reading unless the author blows it. So how do you hook the reader and deprive them of sleep?

- Make the stakes public and private. You need emotional hooks, not just plot hooks. Public are external stakes. Private are internal, that third rail.
- Nail your opening. No backstory. No long descriptions. Know why your story starts that day. Readers want to feel they arrived at exactly the right moment (the edge of a crisis). Let readers know backstory at the right moment. Hook with a specific question. But don’t disorient them by dropping them in the middle of action they may not understand.

- Create a question in the reader's mind. What hooks the reader is a specific question about the character that arises from the intrigue you created. You can answer it but then introduce a new one.
- Keep the story as immediate as possible. Limit flashbacks. Backstory matters, but do not put your current story on hold to reveal backstory. Find a way to weave it in that doesn't make readers restless. *Stein on Writing* by Saul Stein has a chapter on this.
- Be a troublemaker, not a therapist.
 - Keep causing problems for your characters that have psychological fallout. Don't just give them obstacles. Give them trouble that presses on their bruises.
 - Never fully take the reader exactly where they want to go. You can offer respites from struggle where the reader can relax, but not for long.
 - Never end a chapter on a note where the reader sighs with relief. If you've resolved an immediate issue, give them a "yes, but..." that keeps them wondering.
 - Your character should make mistakes, bad decisions, and "fixes" that backfire. You know what they need to do and it's really hard not to let them just do it, but don't. Keep pushing their buttons.

5. The human mind likes to chew on things.

Feed it dots to connect, setups that pay off, and patterns to find. Humans love patterns. This is why we find dragons in clouds, faces of men in cliffs, and Jesus in pancakes. This is why our characters hang on to misbeliefs, because it serves them in some way, and why they are stubborn and resistant to change. So:

1. *Use setups and payoffs.* A setup is anything that implies a future action, any bit of information the author puts out there that will be significant later. Setups trigger anticipation, which readers love. If it's not going to pay off, don't set it up. Don't abuse these. Readers dislike details about things that don't matter, because they trusted you not to bore them, trick them, or waste their time with random things they don't need to know but are trying to connect to the big picture.
2. *Plant your obstacles early.* Don't lie or hide critical information—no convenience, coincidence, or contrivance. Readers don't like it when they are not privy to essential setup information. It makes the payoff much less satisfying. If fear of snakes or talent for reading lips is going to matter in the end, get it on the page in the beginning. It can be a forgettable throwaway line, which they will remember later. It needs to be there. Readers like to feel smart. You don't have to reveal big plot twists, but you must weave enough breadcrumbs to know intrigue is afoot. Don't give it away, but readers want a pattern of hints that in hindsight make perfect sense. As for red herrings, use them. Misdirection is not about withholding necessary information. Give the real clues along with the phony ones.

3. *Employ a cause-and-effect trajectory.* The human brain looks for this pattern: goal, action, fallout, reaction, decision. Do this even if you don't write on a linear timeline. The path needs to make sense logically and emotionally for the character. Your book won't be predictable. Characters can and will still screw up and make things worse, and they should. The readers are there scene by scene, and the outcome should not feel assured.
4. *Use bookend moments to close the loop.* So many things in nature are cyclical: days, months, years, seasons, life. We have a built-in desire for closure. Use that to make the end the most satisfying. Hint at your armature up front around 5% in. Your hero will think the opposite. Could be a question, could state the opposite. If everyone deserves a second chance, he could say, "Not everyone deserves a second chance." Start at a place and end up at that place, but things are different somehow. Constantly give readers a reason to care about the characters/conflict/what's happening.

Q&A

Romance readers prefer the hero to be the one to make the big emotional journey/growth arc. (They are less compassionate for women who start out less likable.) Do you have a process for both?

My readers like it when it's the hero. The theory is that the heroine is not entirely likeable and they can't relate to her. They are looking for themselves in romance.

What if the protagonist goes over several volumes?

Internal journey stretches over the books. Like trust issues, etc., might make baby steps forward across a whole series. Example: Stephanie Plum.

How often do I reinforce the armature?

You do not want to beat characters over the head. Be careful not to keep repeating the lesson you want a character to learn or them arguing against it. Be sparing with it. You don't have to spell it out but hint at the 5% mark. If every scene does its job then you don't need to reinforce.

What about poor choices so the reader doesn't go against the character and dislike them?

Readers should understand why characters make that bad choice, their motivation. Don't want these to come as a shock to the reader. Better if the reader thinks, "I knew he'd do that. He's such an idiot," about your character than for the choice to come out of the blue.

Referenced Story Genius origin scene being helpful?

When deciding on a character's skewed worldview or wound, go back and write the origin scene. Where did they get this view and why? You can draft this scene for yourself, but it doesn't go in the book. Don't flash back to it. No weird past perfect tenses. Weave in gently. She does origin as a pantsier. To her it reveals where the present story starts or where to go.



Michele Dunaway writes traditional contemporary romance in small-town settings with vineyards, hot air balloons, or ice rinks. The Love in the Valley series debuts in January with *What Happens in the Air* from Harlequin Special Edition and continues in March with *All's Fair in Love and Wine*.

Growing Your Readership Through Series, Connected Series, Universe

Presented by Susan May Warren

Reported by Laura Resnick

Susan May Warren is a USA Today bestselling and award-winning author of more than 90 novels, with over two million copies sold.

Susan May Warren presented a game plan for growing your readership through series, collections, collaborations, stand-alone novels, and a vast story universe.

“All of your books are marketing tools,” said Warren.

Your core brand—your main brand—is your main series. In Warren’s strategy, everything else is a branch of that series. And on each branch are other branches, and they all have fruit on them. Little birds eat that fruit, go down the trunk, and travel down to your main brand. You can create different kinds of fruit for different kinds of branches. And Warren’s strategy can also work for stand-alone novels.

Readers love series because they get to know the characters, the family, the setting. The first book can be challenging to write, of course, because you have to set up the world. Series can also help you build a bigger world and create new ideas for new books. You can create different entry points to a series. You can develop continued story lines and themes that go across all the books in a series.

Warren discussed the various kinds of series:

- **Family:** The characters and books are all connected because they’re members of the same family.
- **Occupation:** The characters are connected through their profession or workplace.
- **Location:** The characters and stories are all connected to a location, be it large (a state) or small (a ranch or café).
- **Event:** Usually a pivotal, high-stakes event that changes lives, often structured as a trilogy.
- **Character driven:** A character whose work or life allows for numerous interesting scenarios.
- **Theme:** Weddings, for example.
- **Crossover:** Combine any of the above types of series.

Warren noted there are also potential drawbacks to series. Readers might get bored with the series. Or your story might be better suited for just one book. You might be locked into a series when you'd rather be writing something else (*squirrel!*). Or you might write yourself into a corner. Additionally, if a series has many books, some readers might decide not to try it because 10 or 20 novels in the same series is more of a commitment than they want to get sucked into.

In Warren's case, when she was writing for multiple traditional publishers, she felt she had too many different series: "All these little different *kinds* of books out there."

She eventually realized she could use indie publishing as a way to connect many of her books and separate series to each other. So she started pulling characters from different publishers and novels into new books, and her readers liked it. (Her trad contracts assigned ownership to her of her characters, settings, etc.)

Where *There's Smoke* was Warren's first indie series, and it featured a smoke-jumper team. She deliberately included characters from other books she'd written, as well as putting in characters from future series she was planning. And she has continued doing this across all her books, whether series or stand-alone.

For example, she described a wedding reception scene she wrote in one book which included a lot of characters from other books. (If your characters are going to have 80 people at their wedding, why not make sure many of them are from other series and stand-alones you wrote or will write?) This gave a sales bump to other books that featured characters who appeared in that scene.

Warren might take a character from a four-book family series and use his profession as a reason for him to appear in a different five-book, occupation-based series. She might include a series character in a stand-alone novel, and vice versa. And so on.

"Find the characters that readers love," she said, "and use those characters more, let readers revisit them."

Warren describes this as "the magic of multiple firsts." Instead of a 30-book series (which makes picking up the first book pretty daunting), you can have multiple three-book, four-book, five-book, and stand-alone novels. So it's a 30-book series with multiple entry points (first books), with each subset of books containing fruit that encourages readers to keep buying and reading. Any book a reader chooses as the first one becomes the entry point into a whole world the writer has created, with characters leading her from one subset to the next to the next.

You can also think about placement for specific titles as a way to attract readers to an entry point, such as putting one book in Kindle Unlimited or publishing a free novella.

Yet another way Warren uses this strategy is to publish collaborations, such as the new books that revisit her old location-based *Deep Haven* series. "I don't have time to write more *Deep Haven* books. But I have time to let someone else write *Deep Haven* books and split the revenue." Susan supervises and edits the writers working on the new *Deep Haven* books, both

their names appear on the cover, and as the books are released, they also give a bump to sales of the older Deep Haven backlist.

This overall strategy of “magical firsts” and separate series connected by characters creates continued momentum in sales and earnings for backlist novels with every new release.



Laura Resnick is a longtime NINC member who writes fiction, nonfiction, and short fiction.

Plotting for Pantsers: How to Make Outlining Work for You

Presenters: Cameron Sutter and Celeste Barclay

Reported by Celeste Barclay

Cameron Sutter is an independently published author of indie young adult, a software engineer, and the inventor, lead developer, and co-founder of Plottr plotting software. A graduate of Brigham Young University, Sutter lives near Salt Lake City, Utah, with his wife and six amazing children.

General overview: What is Plottr?

- A visual book outline and story bible software for authors that's compatible with Mac, Windows, iOS, and Android.
- It can be used as a web app.
- More than 40,000 writers have downloaded it.
- Sutter explained why he developed the software. He'd work on a book, but he couldn't find anything that allowed him to visually depict his ideas. With a background in software design, he created his own program.

Endorsements

- The Hot Sheet
- Draft2Digital
- Reedsy
- Mark Dawson's Self Publishing Formula
- ProWritingAid
- Kindlepreneur
- Quotes from Michael Anderle and Celia Kyle

How can something called Plottr...help pantsers?

- Plotters: Outline before they write
- Pantsers: Don't plot—they just write

Is Plottr right for you?

- Visual thinker
- Don't like current process

- Need an easy way to track characters, places, events across individual books and series
- Disorganized and/or a repentant pantsers
- Worry about revising and losing sight of plot holes

Four ways discovery writers (aka pantsers) can outline

- Post-plotting
- Revising first drafts
- Managing story and series bibles
- Tracking tentpole events

Pantsers strategy #1: Post-plotting

- The author writes and outlines in Plottr as they go or after completing a scene/chapter.
- Core benefit: Keeps the story on track.

Pantsers strategy #2: Revising first drafts

- The author completes their first draft and revises using a Plottr template.
 - This can be used as a way to check for any plot holes or pacing challenges.
- It can be used when working with an editor because they can create a second line with their insights or questions.
 - It can be used with a co-author to collaborate on each author's contributions to make sure they correspond or maintain continuity.
- Core benefit: Hit your story beats.

Pantsers strategy #3: Story and series bibles

- Organize your characters and places.
 - Barclay displayed a sample of her Plottr file, showing how she uses the character description area to track the character's traits, role, and relationships to other characters. She also shared how she keeps research notes that she can refer to rather than having to search in separate documents or conduct another internet search.
 - She explained that users can upload photos into the different tabs (characters, notes, and places) and that this feature has been very useful for her historical research (castles, maps, types of ships). She also noted that for authors who like to use photos of people as muses, they could upload them into the character card.
- Use templates to inspire ideas.
 - There are more than 20 templates available on the Plottr platform and additional templates available in the Community Forum.

- Barclay described how she created her own Frehtag's Pyramid a few years ago before it was an available template. She moved through the outline, explaining how she added various parts to fit what she needed at the time. She pulled up the Frehtag's Pyramid template that's now available, so the audience could compare. She said she still prefers her customized template. She noted that was one of her favorite things as a pantser using Plottr. It's highly customizable, so authors can use what's provided or create what they need. She also mentioned that when she's had any difficulty with files or trying to customize her template, Plottr's tech support has been superior. She shared an experience where she'd had trouble opening a file that she tried to use in between updates. When it wouldn't open the way she needed it, she contacted tech support. Not only did they offer her a solution almost immediately, they also emailed a few days later to check if the solution worked. She couldn't think of too many other places that follow up like that.
- Track details across series.
 - Barclay explained how she brings details from previous books into her current Plottr project. She displayed her series page and how to move between that and the individual books.
 - Sutter explained the feature where outlines/timelines can be copied from one book to another with a couple of clicks. This makes it easy to maintain continuity through the series by seeing information from prior books alongside the current work in progress.
 - Barclay pointed out where she'd created her own template by adding an additional plot line and putting in cards for events from the previous book to ensure the dates of her events correlated. She noted that she was able to change the tags and names of sections on her outline to suit her needs. In this example, some had dates and some had indicators such as "3 weeks later" or "last week in Oct."
 - She also toggled between projects to show how simple it was for her to move from one to another if there were details in one file that she didn't bring over to the other. She described how she runs Plottr (she has the downloaded program rather than the web-based app) behind her Word document so that she can easily go back to the outline when she needs it.
 - Barclay wished she'd had Plottr when she began writing because she never imagined she would write so many books, so she assumed she could remember most of the details from her books. She discovered she couldn't, so she uses Plottr to avoid making the same mistake twice. Rather than having to flip back through her books or scroll through her manuscripts to remember someone's age or eye color, she can open that book's Plottr file to find it. She finds keeping track of

secondary characters very helpful; otherwise, all her cameo Highlanders would be named Malcolm. She intends to go back to her early books and create Plottr files for those too, so she has story bibles for all her series.

- Core benefit: Save time and energy.

Pantser strategy #4: Tracking tentpole events

- Visualize the main turning points of the story on a Plottr Timeline.
- Write what happens in between them (without additional planning).
 - Barclay displayed one of her outlines to show that she has major points she envisions if she's using it during the brainstorming stage and simply wants to do a brain dump on her Freitag's Pyramid because she has an idea of the overall story arc. She appreciates how easy it is to go back and change cards if her story goes in a different direction. She can also create cards after the fact if she wants to remember something she came up with while writing. She clicked on one of the timeline cards and showed the audience how it includes information about the characters in the scene, notes about what's happening, and how she can color code them as needed. One outline she showed had them color coded for when it involved the hero or the heroine or them together. She also had a color for scenes where neither the hero nor the heroine appeared. In another file, her cards were color coded for the section of the story, i.e. rising or falling action, climax.
 - She noted that ProWritingAid now integrates, so that feature can appear.

Barclay asked authors who already have Plottr to share how they use it

- An audience member said that they hadn't realized they could move information from one project to another, so Sutter demonstrated how to import a timeline across files.
- Another audience member hadn't realized there was a way to set up a series file, so Barclay opened hers and showed the difference between the series page and the individual book pages. She pointed to where a series page can be created.
- One author said she'd had a hard time finding the right template to use. Barclay said she had the same problem. As a pantser, she doesn't know far enough ahead to use a traditionally structured template. She created her own to accommodate what she needed. She also opened up the list of templates to show that there were more added over the past year. She encouraged authors to use the templates in the post-plotting stage where they could deconstruct their story and enter the information into existing templates.
- Barclay shared that she knows authors who use it to create and track their promotions or their newsletter content. She explained that Plottr is fundamentally a project management program, so there are functions that can go beyond story outlining.

Additional resources for pantsers: Video interviews available on the Plottr YouTube channel

- [Plotting for Pantsers: Outline As You Go](#) with Zoey Indiana
- [Outlining Tips for Pantsers](#) with Celeste Barclay

The tools pantsers need to stay organized and inspired

- Visual timelines to map out stories after writing
- Story and series bible functionality to track details
- 20+ templates to develop your characters
- Simple plot templates for identifying tentpole moments of your story (or create your own)
- Import work from Scrivener to review in Plottr

Our new chapter: Plottr Pro

- Access Plottr on web, desktop, and mobile
- Automatically sync across devices
- Built-in cloud backups
- Available for Chromebook

Coming soon: Characters by book

Characters that recur across a series but have different roles in each book can be carried to multiple files. Their attributes (i.e. main character, secondary character, protagonist, antagonist) can change depending on the book, but the rest of their characteristics remain the same.

Resources galore

- Weekly live training sessions
- Video tutorials
- Documentation
- YouTube interviews and deep dives
- Demos
- Facebook group
- Public roadmap

Upcoming features

- Advanced worldbuilding
- Chronological timeline
- Keyboard shortcuts
- Community templates (These have begun and are growing.)

Q&A

How does the online app sync across devices?

It syncs in real time.

How many licenses are needed for multiple collaborators?

A license for each user.

Are licenses annual or lifetime?

Both options exist.

Can it be used on tablets and other mobile devices or only computers?

It can be used on both computers and mobile devices.

Why should an author use Plottr if they have Scrivener?

Scrivener isn't designed to be a visual plotting software. It has some features for that, but its primary purpose is a drafting software.

Does Plottr integrate with Scrivener or Word?

Yes. Plottr files can be exported to Scrivener or Word, and Scrivener can now be imported into Plottr.



Celeste Barclay, a nom de plume, lives near the Southern California coast with her husband and sons. Before becoming a full-time author, she was a social studies and English teacher. She holds degrees in International Affairs (BA), Secondary Social Science (MAT), and Political Management (MPS). She channels that knowledge into creating rich historical romances that bring the heat.

Partnership, Collaboration, & Conflict Resolution

Presented by Krystal Shannon, from slides compiled by Becca Syme

Reported by Cidney Swanson

Krystal Shannon is the creative marketing director for the Better-Faster Academy and teaches their Ads for Intuitive Authors course. She also offers one-on-one marketing consults alongside running her own six-figure author platform. She presented a talk created by Becca Syme as Syme had a last-minute emergency and could not attend the NINC conference.

Authors often forget something essential about their job: they are running a business. Not only are authors running a business, but most authors are trying to *grow* their business. Inevitably, this will mean working and signing contracts with people you do not personally know. Editors, cover designers, agents, assistants, and others all fall into this category, and these partnerships and collaborations can be fraught with conflict.

So, if conflict is almost certainly inevitable, why bother? Simply put, an author's business can't survive without key partnerships. Shannon has collaborated with contractors, with other authors, and with traditional publishing houses. This has allowed her, along with Syme, to observe trends among author populations. Shannon and Syme have a clear sense of where there is a need for assistance, partnership, and collaboration.

The growth curve in an author's business

Shannon claims that growth in an author business is as predictable as gravity in that there are certain expected markers. Any business has phases which Shannon and Syme divide into three periods. Phase one will typically be a period of one to three years of initial investment, where returns on the investments of an author's time and money are low to nonexistent. Authors often expect profitability from day one, but Shannon points out that even our tax system assumes it is normal to have up to three years without profit in a new business.

If the business does not grow, phase one will never end. If it does grow, then phase two begins. In this phase, there will be an initial growth period even though return on investment (ROI) might be low. However, argue Shannon and Syme, growth is not sustainable indefinitely apart from a transition to phase three.

If an author's business grows at a rapid pace where ROI increases at too extreme a rate, a "Shark Tank Effect" may result. In this state, there is too much growth with no infrastructure, and a business will simply collapse. Authors in this situation will experience burnout and are very likely to go out of business.

Instead, authors need to recognize that when a business makes a large amount of money, there are a correspondingly larger number of tasks. An author who tries to do everything alone will quickly find themselves in a position where they have neither time nor energy left to write books.

A healthy phase two has a slowly rising ROI curve with another dip prior to entering phase three. This “dip” is a second investment phase where an author will do things such as introducing a personal assistant into their costs. When an author’s business takes on infrastructure, there is a financial cost and a lower ROI. However, it is precisely this infrastructure that allows a business to gain profitability at a higher level.

At some point in phase three, an author’s business will hit a sustainable level where growth happens as a result of increased demand. Syme calls this a “flatline,” although others refer to it as sustained income. Shannon and Syme agree that the goal for any author’s business is to reach this state.

Collaboration and partnership

At this point, it should be clear that business growth has everything to do with collaboration and partnership. While many authors believe they should do it all, the truth is that authors need to find people they trust if they wish to grow. Not all collaboration is fun, even when it is by choice, and some collaboration may arise that is forced in nature. Whatever the case, there are steps an author can take to help things go more smoothly.

Elements of good collaboration

Chemistry: Aim to work with people you like. Competency is important, but when you hire for fit and chemistry, you will automatically lower the potential for conflict.

Clear expectations: At least 90% of conflicts are unnecessary if the expectations are clear. Before you hire, have expectations. Or if there is a learning curve, set regular checkpoints to reset expectations.

If your expectations are high, you must be prepared to pay for capability and responsibility. If you need a project manager to take responsibility off your shoulders, then hire a project manager and expect to pay accordingly.

Perhaps you only need an assistant. An assistant is someone you must check up on; a manager is not. Honor the expectations you set. If you tell someone they have autonomy, then train them well and give them autonomy. Keep in mind that a truly capable person likes to work.

Self-knowledge: Know your personality, motivations, strengths and weaknesses, capacity, and limits. If you are the only person who can do a given thing, you should do it. However, if someone else can do it, someone else should do it *if you want to grow*. Hire staff or contract out for every single thing you don’t need to be doing.

Conflict knowledge: Knowing what a conflict is really about is critical. Understanding how conflict escalates is even more important. Shannon recommends *Crucial Conversations* by Joseph Grenny, Kerry Patterson, Ron McMillan, Al Switzler, and Emily Gregory. The book describes how conflict evolves and gets out of control and what to do about it.

Conflict is almost never about the content of the conversation, but it is rather about other things such as feeling slighted or disappointed. Keep in mind that both parties in a conflict will have strong emotions and that working with these alongside the supposed content of the conflict will be of the utmost importance.

Empathy, understanding the feelings of others: If a job is easy for you, you may think there isn't much training required. The reverse can be true as well. If you hate a particular task, you may assume no one will ever want to do it. In this situation, some authors will resist giving the task to others. In business relationships, Shannon and Syme insist that you cannot apply the Golden Rule. Empathy looks different in business. You must instead do unto others what they would have you do unto them. When it comes to collaboration and partnership, empathy is your most important skill.

Sympathy, feeling sorrow for someone else's misfortune: If empathy is the act of trying to see through another's eyes, then sympathy is having their heart in mind. Here, the Golden Rule can be applied. When something goes badly wrong for someone with whom you collaborate, it is best to assume they are trying their best. It can also be helpful to remember that failure can play a critical role in processes leading to success.

This is important not only when evaluating the performance of others, but it can help when evaluating your response to what you perceive as an attack on your efforts. Shannon cites the example of receiving criticism from an editor. She advocates trying to assume that it is hard for an editor to provide criticism. This act can then take you to a place of sympathy instead of reactivity.

There are two extremes of sympathy: giving everyone the benefit of the doubt or giving it to no one. Nothing makes people leave a job faster than being micromanaged and not having their feelings taken into consideration.

Evaluating your organization: Where to start?

All authors will benefit from doing an organization evaluation. Where is your time going? Is everything you're doing something that only you are capable of doing? Shannon and Syme are strong proponents of taking a strengths-finder test. A strengths-finder test will reveal those areas in which a person is able to expend effort and grow exponentially better as opposed to expending the same amount of effort and only growing a little better. A link to a short version of the test can be found at the bottom of the [NINC Resources](#) listed on the Better-Faster Academy website.



*[Sidney Swanson](#) is an award-winning author of young adult sci-fi and fantasy with 30 titles to her name. Her novel *Saving Mars* was named to Kirkus Reviews Best of 2012 and was an honor book for the SCBWI Spark Award 2014.*

Fiction Apps and Reaching the Next Generation of Readers

Presented by Monica Leonelle

Reported by Peggy McKenzie

Monica Leonelle has been independently publishing on Amazon since 2009. A USA Today bestselling author, she has been featured in the online publications of the New York Times, Forbes, Inc., Newsweek, AdAge, and more. She is a former software engineer, analyst, and marketing executive with an MBA. A partner of Writer MBA, LLC, she's written several series for authors including The Productive Novelist, Book Sales Supercharged, Book and Business Coaching, and her latest, Get Your Book Selling on Fiction Apps.

What are fiction apps?

A fiction app is a downloadable mobile app with in-app purchases available for Android and iOS. These apps are available in the Google and Apple stores to deliver content to the consumer. This content can be free or pay-as-you-go rather than selling a whole ebook at once, and they often also have a web version which uses a separate payment system.

There are dozens of fiction apps on the market and each one is slightly different from the next. These apps come in different types of content such as interactive, serialized fiction, webnovels, webcomics, webtoons, graphic novels, linear stories, chat stories, and short stories told entirely through text messages. A few of the most recognizable names are as follows:

- FanFiction
- Wattpad
- Royal Road
- Radish
- Tumblr
- Hooked
- GoodNovel

Why are fiction apps growing?

Acquisitions

South Korean internet conglomerates are acquiring mainstream players in the fiction app industry such as Naver, which includes Wattpad and Webtoon. Kakao recently merged Radish

and Tapas in August 2022, although this was done mostly for operational purposes to save expenses and staff requirements. More changes are possible in the near future that could bring new innovations to this industry.

Competition

Amazon created Kindle Vella because of the above-mentioned companies emerging in the fiction app industry. They wanted to ensure they had a similar share of the growing serialization and mobile reading entertainment markets.

Demographics

The demographics for the fiction app reader in the English language markets are:

- Females, ages 14–24, prefer steamy and erotica content.
- Males, ages of 15–30 years of age, prefer LITRPG.
- Firmly Gen Z, but this is changing as the population changes.
- Readers are looking for free or community-based reading consumption.

Psychology of a fiction app reader

- Instant gratification
- Love of cliffhangers
- Reading multiple stories at once
- Relevancy to current events
- Never-ending stories
- Mobile readers (convenience to read anywhere)
- Social components
- Enjoyment from author notes and bonuses

Why should authors care about fiction apps?

Authors can use fiction apps in a number of ways to generate additional income. Some of these ways are:

- Posting backlist content.
- Selling rights to backlist content for gaming rights.
- Posting serialization ahead of publication. Some of the fiction apps are Kindle Vella, Substack, Patreon, Royal Road, and Wattpad.
- Write for hire at a fiction app company.

Monica's estimates for earnings using fiction apps are as follows:

Fiction App	Ceiling	Averages
Radish	\$10,000-15,000 per month	Less than \$1,000 per month
Kindle Vella	\$7,500 per month (without bonus)	Less than \$500 per month (without bonus)
Patreon	\$25,000-\$30,000 per month	Less than \$1,000 per month
Substack	\$2,500 per month	Less than \$250 per month

Serialization

Subscription serialization is used to vary content delivery and create additional streams of revenue.

A fiction app can be monetized into different tiers, or levels, to include varied content delivery. An example of one such app would be Wattpad divided into tiers. Tier One content could be released in weekly updates whereas Tier Two would include everything in Tier One plus the new content in Tier Two. Tier Three would then include everything in the first two tiers plus even more content to be released more frequently. Two of these premium-tiered apps include Patreon and Kindle Vella.

An author can initially offer free content to gain reader interest and then anticipate that the reader will pay to upgrade for additional content delivery.

Success factors for authors

How to make more money on fiction apps:

- Temper expectations. There are many variables to making money on fiction apps. Genre, frequency, content type, and method of delivery can all hinder or enhance monetary gains.
- Strong contract negotiations. Don't take the first deal. Study industry standards and work for the best deal possible.
- Focus on serialization. Write new stories and offer serialized segments at a premium subscription.
- Exclusivity with new stories and taboo stories not accepted elsewhere can lead to additional premium opportunities.
- Don't write to trend. Instead, write to community.
- Get creative in how you use fiction apps.
- Make fiction apps a part of a larger marketing strategy.
 - Second stream of income after direct sales
 - Transmedia opportunities so not all products in one retailer
 - Being where new young readers are who are buying serialized content
 - More visibility to parlay into the entertainment industry

- More monetization beyond the book
- Wide and direct sales focus
- Align what's trending on the app of choice
- 10,000–15,000 words per week for ongoing series
- Devote to reliable consistency in posts
- Develop dedicated personal engagement with readers
- One episode a day with a cliffhanger can generate up to \$2,500 a day

Resources

- [Writing and Selling on Fiction Apps Facebook Group](#)
 - [Subscriptions for Authors Facebook Group](#)
 - *Get Your Book Selling On Fiction Apps* by Monica Leonelle
 - [Productiveserialist.substack.com](https://productiveserialist.substack.com)
-



Peggy McKenzie is the author of 23 books in Western historical and Western contemporary romance. Her latest is Texas Promise, set for release in November 2022.

Advanced Book Marketing

Presented by Nick Thacker

Reported by Elaine Isaak

Nick Thacker is a USA Today bestselling author of thrillers and action-adventure fiction. He helps authors reach the next level in their career by creating services like Author.Email, RadioWrite.com, and Book Career in a Year.

Nick Thacker opened his talk by announcing, “All of my books are terrible—but it doesn’t matter—I just have to find the secret to marketing them!” Then he laughed. “We can’t market bad books. That needs to be said up front, or nothing else about marketing matters.”

Thacker’s takeaways focused on two main things: A marketing framework—how to examine a marketing strategy to see if it’s worth the author’s time; and a marketing concept—getting deeper into what we, as authors, should focus on.

Thacker developed his talk while cooking dinner and slid the pan to the back burner. He noted that the term “back burner” is often used incorrectly, to imply something isn’t important, when in fact, in a kitchen, a pan is placed on the back burner to keep it important, because it’s foundational to what the chef needs in the kitchen. Thacker employed this metaphor throughout his talk as a touchstone to consider what the author needs to have at hand.

Authors tend to focus on the new and shiny, then are disappointed and put it aside—forgetting it when it doesn’t immediately work. Instead, we should consider the back burner: it’s not where we place all of our time and money, but it is foundational to what we do.

The concept

There are three things authors should do all the time: Email, social media, and advertising. These should always be on your back burner, constantly simmering and improving.

The framework: A-C-T

- Audience
- Content
- Trigger

Audience needs to come first. Thacker’s first novel tried to hit the military action adventure genre, but he gave the heroes a high technology not available in the real world—the tech didn’t work in the book because it didn’t make sense in the genre. Authors often do this, just have an

idea and write it, not knowing the expectations that readers have. This makes our marketing job much harder. As Thacker put it, “It’s easier to craft a book instead of an audience.” Often, authors are trying to find an audience that may or may not exist.

Chris Fox, in his book *Write to Market*, makes the same point. Instead of writing what we want and hoping the audience shows up, the author can work to understand the audience, then create the work. After removing the magical technology from his thriller, Thacker was able to target the market.

Regarding content, the middle term in his acronym, Thacker noted, “A good book written for a well-defined audience will outsell an amazing book written for a poorly defined audience.” Marketing fails because the author doesn’t have a well-defined audience, not because they don’t have a good book.

The final component is a trigger, the call to action, a link that sends the reader to a mailing list or to buy the next book. For a Facebook ad, that might say “Download Now” or “Learn More.”

Just as in the novel they want to sell, every marketing piece the author sends out has an audience, content, and a trigger to tell the audience what to do.

What’s on your backburner: email, social media, advertising

Of social media, Thacker said, “How to lose friends and upset people.” However, all of the readers, current and future, are on social media in some form, so authors need to engage.

It’s indirect marketing; your feed can’t just say buy my book, click this! Instead, build social media so that readers will like you *when* they find you, rather than so that readers will find you.

If you know your audience, you can provide value to them. Fill your profiles with the things you’re into. Rather than fear alienating anyone, think about revealing more of yourself, things that readers can be attracted to like sports interests, hobbies, and friends’ books. These elements help people feel like they’re connected to you. If you enjoy something, chances are your target audience will too.

At this point, Thacker asked the audience, what trigger have you used that works? Some examples shouted out included: sharing typos, asking for readers to give the author “Easter eggs” to work into the novel, and recipes of foods eaten in the book.

Thacker pointed out these are examples of content rather than triggers, for instance, “Sign up for my mailing list and hear about special content or character backstories.”

Advertising

In the Vietnam era, the Department of Defense said, “Don’t shotgun your targets, snipe your targets.” At the time, soldiers might use as many as 50,000 rounds per kill, while a sniper used only 1.3 rounds per kill. This 40,000X improvement happened because the shooter was focused, an approach that should guide authors in their advertising.

Thacker advised, “Fewer is better, more expensive is better, targeted is better.”

He advised building an Amazon ad to create relevance for your book as follows:

1. On the Amazon advertising platform, set up a Sponsored Product ASIN ad to target the 10-20 ASINs closest to your book in genre, title, content, etc. Make sure that your advertising targets are under 10,000 rank on the site. These works get the most eyeballs, so you get faster data.
2. Look at Amazon's suggested bid for each of your targets. Double the highest number on the suggestion, or just increase by a good margin if it's already a high number. Set your budget between \$10 and \$15 per day.
3. Using an incognito browser, check your target ASINs a day or two after creating the ad. Check where your book appears on the carousel of ads above or below the target content. If it's not there, your bid is too low. Increase the bid, and refresh the page until your book shows up as the number one. Once you hit that spot, you'll know the price for that slot. But you want your book in the center slot to appear directly below the target content. Tweak your bid until it shows up there. He stated that this technique works with 80-90% accuracy.

This ad places your book exactly where you want it. It builds visibility, allows you to manage your budget, and tells Amazon that your book is relevant to the target content. Eventually, Amazon will show your book for less and less because of its relevance to the target.

Thacker noted there is often a delay in reporting. Give it a week to run, because we want to change the bid and affect things. Look at which targets are getting over 1,000 impressions, keep watching until it gets to 2,000. Over time, the author can see which of these targets are good/better/best and thus worth paying more for the bids based on how many eyeballs. Turn off less effective targets, and consider increasing the bid on those that work, thus building one ad that's really good. Thacker suggested using a similar approach on Facebook: Build one ad and watch indicators for good data.

Email

Thacker stated, "You'll lose fewer subscribers sending to them once per day than you will sending to them once per month." He emphasized the importance of sending newsletters and using auto-campaigns with a trigger at the end. Your subscribers are a self-selecting audience that gives you permission to send them triggers.

Test and see what works in terms of frequency with your readership. Most email recipients delete a particular message rather than unsubscribe if they don't have the chance to read the message. Send more often than you might think is comfortable. Especially with Apple's new privacy policy, authors don't really know how to track open rates very well, so people may be opening and you don't know it—don't cull the list.

Focus on the content of the email rather than the timing. Don't just say, "Buy my book." Instead, give an update one day, a picture of your pet the next day, then intro the book, then the book launch message.

Audience members suggested some ideas for newsletter content including: the books the author is reading; ask what the reader is reading; "My purse broke, and I have to buy a new one—but I'm so fussy!"; woodworking hobby photos; parenting problems; teasers that excite readers; ask a question that gets to know the reader and share your answer (for instance, "What's your favorite holiday memory?"); weekly puzzle post where the author posts their score and invites the readers to try to beat them.

Thacker pointed out the value of questions as an engagement tactic. When people ask questions about you, you tend to like them more. He recommended brief updates rather than longer, more formal emails.

Thacker finished up by pointing to the free resources and email list at Bookcareerinayear.com, where he sends a weekly email about how he approaches each of the three categories on the back burner. "Engagement is the way," Thacker stated. "Figure out how to engage and your book marketing will rock." He then took a few questions from the audience.

Q&A

On social media, making yourself relevant—do you comment on political opinions?

I don't put them on mine. It's not something that's relevant to my books. Material should be attractive to people who are similar to the author. Political, cultural, and social issues can alienate.

Do you delete cold subscribers?

I never cull my lists. We can't tell who might be reading our stuff.

In that regard, if you have someone who's never opened the email you don't cull them?

No, I still don't. There's no downside to sending an email to the same address over and over. Find a cheaper email provider.

Talking about not opening—I've been retargeting. The questioner explains, I will send again to those who didn't open the first email one to three days later.

Agreed. Sometimes, people respond that they got the email three times, and that they opened it three times.

Do you use copy in your Amazon ads?

I don't, because Amazon kicked me off the platform, so just the book covers without copy. They seem to be changing all ads to have no copy, just covers.

When launching a new series title, how much do you focus on the first book given that folks may not be familiar with the series?

A lot. If I have a BookBub Featured Deal, I may cut down to save expenses. I may ramp up the Amazon ads on the first book prior to the new launch. Do more when launching the book. Pull back later.

When do you re-target, or send the reminder email?

I send in the morning, then again 24 hours later, then on the third day, then again a week later to the folks who didn't open. I'm sending the same message four times total and still getting opens.

When you talk about foundational elements; some say you don't need a website anymore. What do you think?

I think of my website as my home base. All other things are outposts that should point back to home base. I'm lazy about updating the website, so I send them (i.e., readers) to Amazon when the book comes out. But (a website) is a good place for a longer piece, like an excerpt. You can just have the book links page that Draft2Digital offers. We should all have them, but it may not be a pillar for you.



Elaine Isaak writes knowledge-inspired adventure fiction including *The Dark Apostle* series about medieval surgery as E.C. Ambrose and the *Bone Guard* archaeological thrillers as E. Chris Ambrose. She's a frequent workshop instructor and former adventure guide who makes wearable art in her free time.

Writing Beyond Tomorrow by Pontificating Past Presidents

Presented by Tawdra Kandle, Barbara Keiler,
Lou Aronica, Wayne Stinnett, & Patricia McLinn

Reported by Michele Dunaway

The presentation featured five past presidents of NINC. As this was a continuous flow of discussion including audience participation, after first reference, initials will be used. Audience members will be identified by number in which they first spoke. While you may not be able to read tone, the mood was upbeat, light, and humorous with some serious thoughts added in. Jokes flowed between the presidents, and the audience laughed and learned.

Patricia McLinn, aka McPat (**PM**) was president in 2007: “Chris Anderson of *Wired* magazine, who is now in charge of TedTalks, said publishing as you know it is dead. Didn’t know what was next. Keep your ears open at all times.”

Wayne Stinnett (**WS**) was president in 2019, which was “the highest attendance of a conference until now. I had the dubious honor of evicting someone.”

Lou Aronica (**LA**) said, “I have no idea. Was it 2012? 2011? What difference does it matter? Mine was the Hurricane Sandy conference. Oh, and I’m legally required to disagree with whatever McPat says.”

Barbara Keiler (**BK**) was president in 2001. “I know this because days later was 9/11. I’m a founding member. I’ve missed only two conferences, one being the pandemic and one in Lake Tahoe. Currently, Lou Aronica is my publisher so I have to be careful what I say about him.”

Tawdra Kandle (**TK**) said, “I was president in 2020 and 2021. Don’t ask. I guess we’re all presidents of disaster years. That’s accidental. I’m honored to be part of this distinguished group. It’s a list of names everyone will know. The genesis of this session was a question Lou asked which was, *What would you write if you could do so without any parameters, etc.?* That’s what launched this conversation.”

* * *

PM: But before we do that, everyone get a piece of paper and write down your top four reasons for writing. Make a list. [*Audience follows these directions.*]

BK: I’m going to read you a paragraph found in every newsletter. It’s the NINC statement of principle which reads, “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.”

The second DEI paragraph was added later. But I wrote this 15 years ago when McPat was president and said we needed a statement and [told me] to write it. I’m very proud of that paragraph. It’s a good starting place for us.

It says we should get paid for our work. We as writers should be servants to the word. Sometimes we forget we should be respected and sometimes society forgets. I read it every month and think, *Yeah, I wrote that.*

PM: You think about it. We take 26 letters and we create universes, people, worlds, the entire thing. Pretty amazing. We need to remember and honor ourselves.

LA: My corollary. Do love the statement. Can’t say I read it every month. But the corollary is we are gifted. Writers are gifted. Ninety-nine-point-nine percent cannot do what we do. What is our obligation because we have that gift?

WS: What do you all think?

Audience 1 (**A1**): We are creating worlds. That comes with an incredible responsibility in how we must respect and view that world.

A2: I was a strategist, and we did foresight. Foresight is painting a vision of the future. We inspire readers to build that world in reality.

WS: Yes, the five senses and the sixth one, thinking. It’s a big responsibility.

LA: Novelists can do this. I work with screenwriters and none of them have successfully done it. They have more tools than we do. We have to use words.

BK: Mothers tell toddlers to use your words.

A3: Trends. Some tend to follow trends. You have to create our vision of the future. That’s the heart of your story. If you’re chasing trends then you’re not going to move to the next level.

PM [*To audience.*]: Okay, cross one of the items off your list. Don’t delete it but cross it off. You’d keep writing even without this one.

A4: What we owe the audience are quality pieces. The next book is better than before. They should be entertained and feel good. We need to be learning all the time.

A5: We owe our readers the truth. We can't mask. We can't corrupt. We owe them intelligence, truth, story humanly true.

[Brief discussion here on movie As Good as it Gets.]

A6: It depends on brand. This will sound judgmental. But I present the difference between a good and a bad man. I present a theme. I am showing some truth about living your life, and living a life with meaning, a moral life. That's not true for all writers. I create worlds of teachers and firefighters, not sure they do the same thing I do.

PM: If you do not pay attention, you will not endure. You must tend to it.

A6: Writing releases endorphins. It's my happy place.

A7: When I'm not writing, I'm not as happy. *[Reads from phone.]* "The first duty of the novelist is to entertain. It is a moral duty. People who read your books are sick, sad, traveling, in the hospital waiting room while someone is dying. Books are written by the alone for the alone." That's from Donna Tartt.

LA: Fiction is one of the best ways to teach. We immerse people in an experience. I equate endurance and obligation as a continuum. Meet obligation and you will endure. People will keep coming back. Donna doesn't just believe writers are there to entertain. If you don't give them the world, then they'll leave.

PM: But I don't think serving the reader is first. It's serving what's in you.

LA: Agree.

TK: The best novels do both.

BK: Gifts, gods, we can control what happens in the universe but not in the real world. I've taken stuff in my life and I can write them in and create a universe. Like giving someone a tiny penis.

PM: And make money off it.

BK: My sister had breast cancer. All women in the chemo center. She told me everyone in there getting their drip were all reading romance. Will this help someone get through chemo? Do the worlds I create help them forget the horrors of their life?

WS: It's a burden when you think of it.

PM: Murder. Mine to kill. [*To audience.*] Okay, take another one off the list. That's never happening.

BK: McPat tells you and you have to do it. And McPat created us all. It's got to go.

WS: I put teachable moments in my sea adventures. Like when you pull up the anchor, it's chain, not a rope. Look for teachable moments.

TK: What Melanie Harlow said earlier. People get the same dopamine hits when reading as doing the action. We make the world a better place.

PM: Many ways to come out and say what keeps you writing. At the uncon, Tawdra said, well, she sent an email.

TK: Joy led writing and marketing careers.

PM: I originally said screw it and come to what you need. We look outside—reader, market—none exist if we don't tend to what we write number one.

BK: It's not a message emphasized at the conference. People come to learn how to make more money. If I really wanted money I would have gone to business school. I'm a writer because I'm a writer. We lose that in the clutter of marketing and promo. We have to remember our four reasons. There's a hell of an easier way to make money.

PM [*To audience.*]: Take another one off. Feel it in your gut. You'd still get up and create worlds and universes. Everyone down to one? Anyone surprised by the order you took them off? Writing takes people out of my head. They get cranky. Come to this often. This is what gets you to the computer.

A8: If I do number one the rest follow.

PM: Cheating.

A8: Smart.

A9: Observation, I wrote (romance) because I liked it.

LA: What would you write if you had no conditions or parameters attached? Ask that question. There's a high level of enmity from science fiction to romance. A sci-fi writer tried to prove anyone could do it. He'd write a book in the weekend. He had to admit he couldn't do it. If you don't feel it, you can't do it. Ask that question. It can't hurt. I do think it's worth asking that question. What would I write? One, it points you in that direction. Two, it improves the read. Reading is hard for everyone who is a reader who stays a reader.

A9: You know what your reader wants because you are one.

WS: This is why my publishing company is narrow. Sea adventures. I know those. We may add more later, but for now it's what I know and love.

A10: I promised myself if I couldn't read then I'd cut back writing. It makes my writing better to keep that promise.

PM: How many are reading less? [*Hands go up.*] How many are reading more? [*Hands go up.*] How many the same? If you want to stick around, don't look at hot trends right now. Take the long view.

A11: What do you need to fill the creative bucket? I've been thinking about that. What is the creative spark at 5 a.m.? Don't have an answer but I'm closer to finding it.

PM: Jo Beverly had her Sunday book. She did sci-fi on Sunday. Being totally different—that's a drop in the bucket.

A1: Definition of a hack writer is not genre or low budget. The true hack is a writer who disrespects the audience. That's the hack.

BK: Probably of the panel I've been published the longest. It'll be 40 years next February. Well, Anne Stuart has me beat. I've had many ups and downs. I've been dumped by publishers. I've done McPat's exercise. My career was a mess—I'm like, I'm quitting. I lasted two weeks. I can't not write.

A1: If anything else can stop you from writing, do it instead.

TK: Lisa [Hughey], you're up here next year after this conference. I can't do all the things I've been told to do in the sessions. This is work smart, but still can leave you wondering. Writing is a paragraph that becomes one chapter that becomes a book that becomes a series. Not having a sense of being overwhelmed, I can't not do it. It will creep back.

PM: I procrastinate. One year everyone was all about having street teams. The next year it was passé. Do other things. You can't do everything. Other stuff is all periphery.

TK: Joy led.

BK: You can go to every workshop and do it all. It will work for some and not others. Most did not work for me and made me anxious and feel like a failure. Not all information will work for you. Make peace with that. Filter out what you don't want. If we try to do everything because of the best speaker with the best PowerPoint slides... I put subtitles in after learning that. It made no difference.

PM: I procrastinated.

BK: Success can't be judged by artificial standards. Once I made peace with that it helps with my longevity.

LA: One thing I will say when I became publisher at Berkley and Bantam, Bantam injected everything with arrogance. They're still working out of that system. We do things before everyone else. Berkley was "nothing wrong with being second." Not setting the stage, not breaking ground or setting self up for the curve, that aligns with chasing after trends. It's not a winning formula.

WS: Second place is only a good place if first place goes off a cliff.

TK: Ask questions. Think about what kind of workshop sessions would help you to nurture yourself. Give yourself a respite. [*To audience.*] What do you think?

A12: Writing is a business. Not sure it's a workshop's job to nurture me.

LA: Big piece of the business is writing. Actually, a conversation the board has had. I believe craft should always be a focus of the convention. Books are fundamental to business. Great point. No one does the 101 class, that 400 level of what great writing is. That's NINC level.

BK: Philosophy of books. Explore emotion. Philosophical touchstones.

[More things tossed out to the panel on future ideas. Then it's 4:15 and time to go.]

PM: Go out and serve your number one reason for writing.



*Michele Dunaway writes traditional contemporary romance in small-town settings with vineyards, hot air balloons, or ice rinks. The Love in the Valley series debuts in January with *What Happens in the Air* from Harlequin Special Edition and continues in March with *All's Fair in Love and Wine*.*

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!*

Welcome to the month of December, the time of year when many authors are both looking back at what worked and what didn't go so well over the past twelve months ... while at the same time, we begin to plan in earnest for the next year of writing, releasing, and marketing.

For those of us who attended the NINC conference, as well as perhaps a few other author education events that take place in the last quarter of the year, we might be thinking about everything we've learned and wondering what to implement—and how to make it happen.

I love to plan. Give me a beautifully blank notebook, a spanking brand-new planner system, or a nifty spreadsheet on my laptop, and I'm a happy woman. But I've been in this business long enough to realize that the best-laid plans of mice and authors can often go awry ... and marketing can be one of the most unpredictable parts of our career.

So this year, as I contemplate the perfectly pristine months of 2023, I'm attempting to look at the future from a new and different angle—or maybe even from several different angles.

Late last year, at the suggestion of several uncon attendees, I joined a Facebook group led by bestselling authors (and NINC members) Renee Rose and Lee Savino. It was all about abundance and mindset, and to be honest, for the first few months, I didn't visit the group often. But once I did, I discovered a new dimension to my author business as well as a fresh way of looking at how I was doing things and how I felt about my books.

One of the most eye-opening lessons I've learned (so far) has involved my own complicated feelings about my books. Look, I understand the sage advice that we should treat our books as employees, as resources, not as extensions of ourselves. It would be fabulous if we could always do that. But even as we're savvy businesspeople, we're also artists and, for better or for worse, our art is part of our souls. We might not want to care about our books' success on an emotional level, but most of us do, even if it's just a little bit.

Consequently, it's all too easy in this career to jump to some conclusions that can lead to a downward spiral. A release doesn't explode out of the gate, or a long-planned sale falls flat, and we're often ready to blame ourselves or our books. But the truth is, even the most perfectly constructed and executed book can falter if other elements aren't aligned. And some books are simply slightly ahead of—or behind—their time.

In her recent release, *Write to Riches*, Renee Rose recommends that instead of being constantly and extremely critical about our own work, we should consider pouring love all over our books.

"Find out what you love about your book; it won't make you oblivious to what's not working. In fact, it will be the opposite. You'll know what tweaks are necessary to make it better."

Falling in love with our books can do more than help us see how to make them shine. Experiencing love for them can also help us attract readers.

"Being in an energy of love will in turn make your readers love the book," notes Rose. "When you pour your love into your book, they can feel it when they read it. "When you love your characters, you write them better. When you delight yourselves with plot twists, the readers will be delighted!"

Is all of this slightly woo-woo? No question about it. But there's an enormous amount of anecdotal evidence supporting the fact that this can work for us. Not only does Rose include numerous case studies in her book, but there are also a large group of authors touting the benefits of manifesting the best for our books and our careers.

I have a hunch that it's important to balance both sides of our personalities when considering leveling up our business through better, more efficient marketing. Yes, I'm wildly enthusiastic about what I've learned through meditations, manifestation training, and clearing my life-long money blocks. At the same time, I'm open to and curious about refining the more mundane, but nevertheless essential, aspect of authorship—things like LLCs, payrolls, and deductions, as well as how to make sure I'm giving every customer—or potential customer—the experience I've promised.

Which leads us to the flip side of the same coin. When I love one of my books and raise its vibration to attract the right readers, I'm doing it for my readers. Thus, I also need to ensure that the rest of their customer experience equals what I've committed to present.

Thinking about these valuable lessons and taking a longer, overarching, big-picture view of my business has been a recurring theme in 2022—and one that I anticipate carrying over into

next year as I put into action what I've learned so far. While I fully expect to be intentional and thoughtful about how I see myself, present myself, and love my own work, I also know that there are certain key parts of running my own business that I've neglected. It's past time for me to change that.

If you were at the conference this year, you may have attended a session led by Joe Solari called Author Business Makeover. In it, we discussed a project Joe and I have been working on for a few years. To put it bluntly, I'm the guinea pig in this author makeover. Joe's been working with me, helping me to develop a strategy to revamp my business model and rescue my career from fading into obscurity.

It hasn't been an easy process. In many ways, I've had to unlearn all of the lessons I'd accepted without questions over the past ten years. Let's face it: The indie publishing world has almost always been one where the new bright and shiny way of doing things gets the most attention. Rapid releasing? Let's all put out a new book every two weeks. Facebook/Amazon/BookBub ads? Take the newest, most popular course, and pour money into advertisements.

I'm not denying the usefulness of any of the tools we have available to us as authors. I'm grateful for everything that helps us to be more efficient, to reach new audiences, and to improve our relationship with readers. But not all of the current strategies work for the vast majority of professional authors ... and it's possible that we may have to radically shift our focus and our expectations in order to remain relevant.

What this means for us—and how we can all apply the lessons I'm learning, even if we're already experiencing overwhelming success—is something I'm going to unpack in this column throughout 2023. We'll begin by addressing the important question of how I arrived where I am after over a decade of steady publishing—and this matters because I know I'm not alone—I'm not the only one who's looking around and wondering how doing all the so-called right things has landed me in this position.

I hope you'll join me on this walk as I learn to maximize my own books and build a strong reader fanbase. I can promise a little bit of the woo along with the work, because I know that my mindset has to be in the right place for my business to soar.

The conference theme in 2022 was *Work Smarter*. My goal is to help all of us to do just that—and to help us become wildly successful along the way.

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.

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
- 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

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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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Central Coordinator

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Address changes may be made on the website.

Nink Newsletter

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

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

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