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# President's Voice

*By Celeste Barclay*



Welcome, 2023! May you be a year that brings health, wealth, and happiness.

As your incoming president, I'd like to start by thanking Lisa Hughey, our outgoing president. She served on the board longer than she'd initially expected, and we greatly appreciate her dedication to the organization. I'd also like to thank Halle Bridgeman, who is our outgoing secretary. Halle's position is often behind the scenes, but it is an integral part of our board. On behalf of our organization, I offer our gratitude for your service.

I'd like to take a moment to introduce myself. I've been publishing since 2018 and now have over 40 romance titles to my two pen names. I began entirely indie and joined a small house publisher at the end of 2020. I became a NINC member a year and a half after publishing my first book, and now I'm proud to serve as our organization's president. Before I became a full-time author, I was a teacher for nearly 16 years. As an educator, I constantly attended one professional development event after another, more often than not feeling like it was a repeat of the last 10. NINC's quality of presenters and presentations awed me from the beginning. Attending my first conference in 2019 was the first time I found a professional development opportunity that actually left me feeling like I'd not only learned new information but had actionable steps to move forward.

Volunteerism has always been important to me, both professionally and personally. I've served as president, committee chair, and event worker bee for numerous organizations. When the opportunity came to support NINC, I seized the chance to offer my time and talents. I'm proud to have this opportunity to support our profession and our membership since we offer something truly unique. I'm excited to work with our other volunteer board members and those who help keep our organization and our conference running.

As president-elect, I chaired the Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Committee and wrote the anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies, as well as the formal complaint form. I'd like to continue that work and broaden NINC's reach to more members of our author community. One of my goals is to engage in more outreach, especially to our underrepresented colleagues, and make the pathways to membership clearer. We also have the opportunity to create online resources intended for our industry, rather than specifically only for NINC members, so I'm thrilled at the prospect of not only more visibility, but serving our peers and colleagues in a new way.

We have a terrific board that comes to their leadership roles with varied backgrounds. I look forward to working with Caethes Faron, our new president-elect, as a partner and mentor. I'm eager for her to explore her interests and talents as a part of our leadership. We have a new secretary, Sylvia McDaniel, whom I'd also like to welcome. Lisa Hughey is shifting her role to become our conference registrar and, as a former president, she will join the Advisory Council. Our returning members are Timothy Cerepaka (treasurer), Harper St. George (newsletter editor-in-chief), and Steven Womack (Advisory Council rep). In addition to the board, Laura Resnick will continue as our central coordinator, and Hallee Bridgeman and Rebecca Zanetti will continue as our ACA representatives. I'm confident we have a strong team at the helm this year, who will continue to uphold NINC's goals and values. If you are interested in volunteering or supporting NINC in another capacity, please reach out to me via [president@ninc.com](mailto:president@ninc.com).

I pledge to serve and support NINC, continue its mission, expand our membership to reflect our profession's diversity, and ensure all members benefit from their participation.

Thank you for electing me to help guide the premiere international organization for fiction authors.

Celeste Barclay

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*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.*

## **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/>

## From the Editor

*By Harper St. George*



Happy new year and welcome to another year of *Nink*!

We have so many great articles in the works for you already. From examining how we as authors define success to utilizing nontraditional sales channels to rebooting your audiobooks, this first quarter of *Nink* is full of great information you can use to further build and grow your author career.

This year, in addition to our usual articles and columns, I am thrilled to bring you a new feature, Publishing News. Some of you may be familiar with The Hot Sheet. If you haven't heard of it, The Hot Sheet is an award-winning paid newsletter for authors edited by Jane Friedman that comes out every two weeks. It recaps publishing news of interest to writers, discusses trends, and includes links of interest for further study. I am happy to announce that *Nink* will be bringing you a condensed version of The Hot Sheet geared for NINC members. You'll find this in the new Publishing News section in every issue of *Nink*.

It's already 2023, which means that this is my final year serving as your *Nink* editor. I cannot believe how quickly the time passed. The editor role is a board position appointed by the president. As the year goes on, the board will be looking for a new editor to begin their term in 2024. The editor is supported by a paid team of three people: an acquisitions editor, a production manager, and a copy editor. This position will continue working toward NINC's focus on DEI and high-level content for the newsletter. If you think you might be interested in this role, please reach out to me with any questions you may have ([newsletter@ninc.com](mailto:newsletter@ninc.com)).

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



### **Book visibility on Amazon has changed (for now)**

Up until recently, authors self-publishing through Amazon KDP could apply up to 10 categories to their book and also rank simultaneously in all of those categories, if selling like gangbusters. But in early September, Amazon made a change that prevents most books, regardless of format or publisher, from ranking in more than three categories at any one time, even though 10 categories can still be assigned. (You can use this [tool](#) to see all categories assigned to a book and the three categories it's currently ranking in.) But no one is sure if this limitation is a deliberate change or a temporary glitch.

In one of his latest trend reports, Alex Newton at K-lytics offered an early, high-level look at how this change has affected rank and what books appear in Kindle bestseller lists in the Science Fiction & Fantasy category. K-lytics has been following trends for SF/F in particular for seven years, and sales in this genre have been trending high since the pandemic.

Within SF/F, some subcategories experienced a strong rank decline—what Newton called a “reset”—due to the new rules. For example, the subcategory of Greek & Roman Myths and Legends saw a 12-month rank change of -848%. Of course this raises the question of how a book's three ranking categories get determined if it can rank for more. No one knows, but Amazon says it's based on customer activity.

**What should self-publishing authors do, if anything, in response?** We reached out to Dave Chesson of Publisher Rocket about the situation, both to confirm that ranking limitations are occurring and to ask what a savvy author should do in response. After his team analyzed



the data, he was able to confirm that limitations are indeed occurring with 95% of titles and these limitations happen in a very specific way. In short, it appears that it's no longer possible for books to rank in more than three categories under a level 4.

Fully expressed, a ranking category for a book might look like this:

Kindle Store » Kindle eBooks » Science Fiction & Fantasy » Science Fiction » First Contact

Under the new rules, a book can only rank for *three* categories under Science Fiction, a level-4 category. Chesson says that if an author wants to rank for more than three categories *total*, then they need to limit themselves to three categories under a level 4, then look for *another* upper-level category to appropriately rank in.

Chesson says he's not entirely sold that Amazon made this change on purpose and worries it might be a bug. A handful of books, inexplicably, break the three-category rule. Also, when Amazon makes these types of changes, it's almost always to increase earnings, but Chesson doesn't see how or why this change would make more money or really do that much to "clean up" the overall browsing experience.

Ultimately, he doesn't have a firm recommendation for what authors should do. He understands that some authors might choose to adjust their categories for more ranking potential (as described above) and to make sure they rank for the things they care about. But he felt there was also an argument to be made for doing nothing at all in case it's a glitch.

## **Spotify seeks to grow the audiobook market**

The audiobook market remains in its double-digit-growth phase and is now edging out ebooks in sales volume for traditional publishers. Despite this growth, audiobooks remain complicated to access, with a distinct lack of choice in the market, according to industry insiders. At a FutureBook discussion in late November, Videll Bar-Kar of Bookwire (a German distributor) talked about the future of the audiobook market with Nir Zicherman, global head of audio and gated content at Spotify; Michele Cobb, executive director of the Audio Publishers Association (AAP); and Nathan Hull, chief strategy officer at Beat Technology.

Convenience, choice, and discoverability are the three critical factors in growing the audiobook market, said Spotify's Zicherman. Right now, there are more podcast listeners than audiobook listeners, and there are many more readers in the world than audiobook listeners. Why is that? "It's not convenient to listen to audiobooks," Zicherman said. "And [consumers] don't have a lot of choice." In some markets, consumers have only one option for how to listen to an audiobook, which hurts publishers and authors alike. Spotify entered the audiobook market earlier this year, starting with à la carte sales, and seeks to remedy these market problems.

Spotify isn't focused on taking a share of existing sales; they're targeting casual listeners and people who have never listened to audiobooks. Spotify reaches nearly a half billion people who consume all types of audio content, both spoken word and music. "That's a pretty big pond to fish from when you think about the potential to convert new users," Zicherman said. "I



don't think the opportunity here is carving out a piece of the pie. The opportunity is to grow the pie substantially."

Not all casual listeners are alike, and they can't be treated the same—and new business models must emerge as a result. Zicherman said consumers want to pay for content in different ways and listen at different times, at different frequencies, etc. In the Anglophone market especially, credit-based systems like Audible predominate, effectively pricing everything in the market exactly the same. (Not to mention the fact that the biggest publisher, Penguin Random House, doesn't make its catalog available at all in unlimited subscription services like Storytel and Scribd.) Many types of content are disadvantaged in a credit-based system if a book isn't seen as worth a credit. It penalizes shorter books and children's books, as well as books that are older. While existing business models might work for avid audiobook consumers, they're limiting for casual listeners. Spotify envisions a "buffet of options" for the average consumer as well as the publisher. "On the publisher's side, they will have a variety of options for how to distribute content on Spotify and, I hope, throughout the rest of the industry," Zicherman said, expressing the hope that other services will also offer consumers more options in audiobook listening.

Zicherman believes audiobooks today are comparable to the podcast industry in 2015. Seven years ago, podcasts were perceived as having reached their true potential, but today there are 15 to 20 times as many podcasts and two to three times more people across the world listening to them on a regular basis. Zicherman said that all podcasts sounded the same until *Serial* came along and changed everything. Audiobooks await the same moment. "You want to place a lot of bets across the entire industry and make it easy to create and easy to distribute and easy to get content discovered so that the next *Serial* can happen in the book space. When it happens, it's not going to lead to marginal growth on top of what we're already seeing. It's going to be an inflection point."

### **Additional reading**

- **As AI models take off, the legal questions stack up.** AI systems are trained on massive amounts of data scraped from the web, much of it protected by copyright. An expert tells the Verge, "Anyone who says they know confidently how this will play out in court is wrong." Two key questions: Can you copyright the output of a generative AI model (and who owns it, if so)? If you own copyright to works used to train an AI, does that give you any legal claim over the model or content produced? [Read James Vincent.](#)
- **A class-action lawsuit against Amazon is revived.** It still doesn't look like it will go anywhere. [Read Andrew Albanese at Publishers Weekly.](#)
- **Can U.S. printers make a comeback?** The capacity crunch is easing up in the U.S., but publishers need to be flexible about the type of paper they use. [Read Jim Milliot in Publishers Weekly.](#)

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*Reprinted and condensed from [The Hot Sheet](#). Jane Friedman has 20 years of experience in the publishing industry, with expertise in business strategy for authors and publishers. She's the co-founder and editor of The Hot Sheet, a paid newsletter for authors, and has previously worked for Writer's Digest and the Virginia Quarterly Review.*

# Resolutions for Marketing Books in 2023

*By Michelle Fox*



We made it through 2022! A round of applause and therapeutic chocolate for everyone. Now it's time to look forward to 2023, and I've put together a list of resolutions based on trends I suspect will drive book marketing throughout the new year. Where does this list come from? My own extensive research and experience running a small marketing think tank. I've been tracking data and trialing different ideas all year and this is what that work has revealed.

## 1. Peak click farms

The organic reach on TikTok and Instagram Reels that many authors have relied on is about to hit an iceberg known as click farming. Never heard of click farming? It's the practice of gaming engagement to grab traffic on social media. It started on TikTok in 2020 and Instagram is gearing up for a new wave of click farm activity in 2023 as well.

How does it impact authors? Click farming relies on bots or dozens of fake accounts to generate fake engagement in order to trick the algorithm into prioritizing a piece of content. This ensures their content gets the lion's share of traffic. Where most of us have been dancing and lip syncing to promote our books via video, spammers have been sucking up traffic with automation and this will reach a tipping point specifically for books in 2023.

The recent decline in reach on TikTok is symptomatic of the spam peak. There are so many click farms targeting book traffic now, there's not enough engagement left for your books.

While click farming is penalized throughout social media, no app has been able to eradicate it completely. There's not going to be a simple solution.

The upshot? The days of posting a few videos and selling hundreds of books are on their way out. Now it's going to be work and a lot of hustle. Authors can still go viral, but it'll be less and less often and it's going to take more and more strategy.

**Resolution:** Build beyond organic reach. Make sure you're funneling your readers into social media accounts to increase your engagement on those platforms so that your content is more competitive in the algorithm. At the same time, be sure to direct people to your newsletter as well to deepen your relationship with readers and create additional touchpoints for marketing. Also network with readers who are active on the platform and build your following through 1:1 outreach.

Want to learn more about the impact of click farms on social media? Here's a good [overview](#).

## 2. Book blog tours and street teams are back, baby

As the volume of work and know-how involved in marketing online increases, many authors will find they either need assistants, PR firms, or a base of active, engaged readers to promote their books. For 2023, marketing comes full circle and book tours, PR firms, and street teams are relevant again. Only this time, they're using TikTok and Instagram instead of blogs, and readers often want to be paid.

**Resolution:** Make a list of different PR firms and track their various campaigns to determine how you want to interface with the resurgence of book tours. In addition, identify social media-savvy readers in your network who may be a good fit for a dedicated street team.

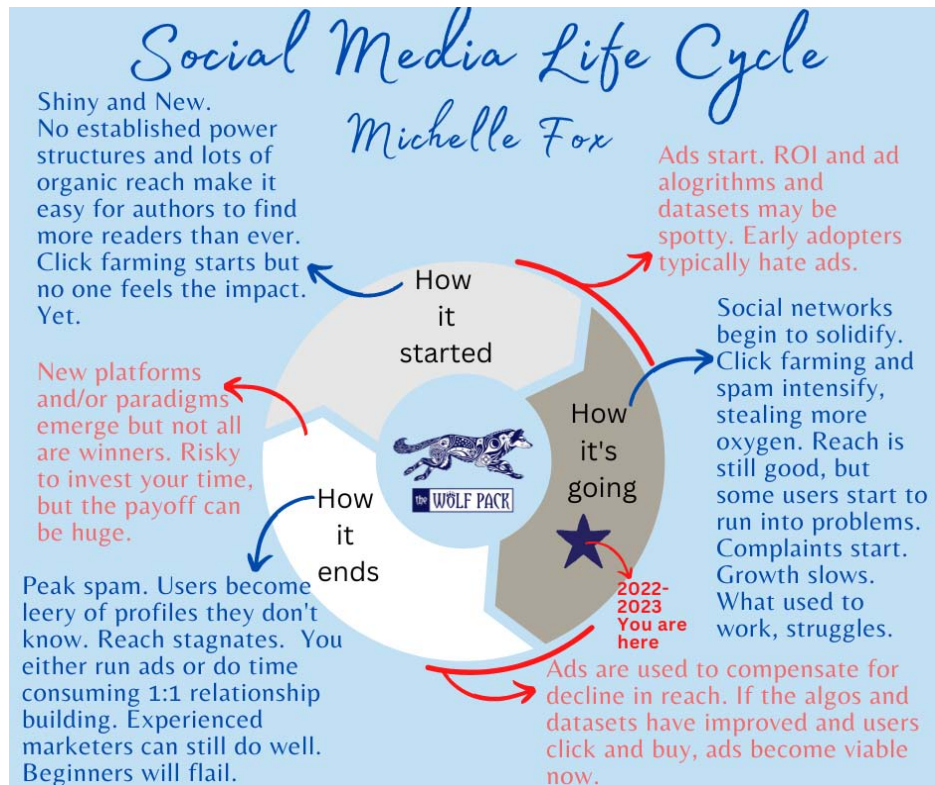
## 3. Ads meet demographics

Ads still work, but next year they'll start working in different places. Authors will have the opportunity to move beyond Facebook, BookBub, and AMS ads. There's a lot of testing going on behind the scenes, and early results signal authors will find more venues that can generate book sales. However, you have to know who your readers are and where they hang out online.

Demographics are going to play a much bigger role than they did previously. There are enough social media outlets now that users are siloed by age. Meaning, authors need to consider whether core users on a platform are their reader demographic before running ads.

**Resolution:** Research the demographics of the social media platforms you rely on and compare it to your reader demographics. You may be surprised by what you discover. This simple exercise is changing what platforms I focus on in 2023.

(And note that TikTok ads for books are still wonky—keep an eye on their ads platform. It's still not converting very well just yet, in part due to demographics and in part to their user datasets.)



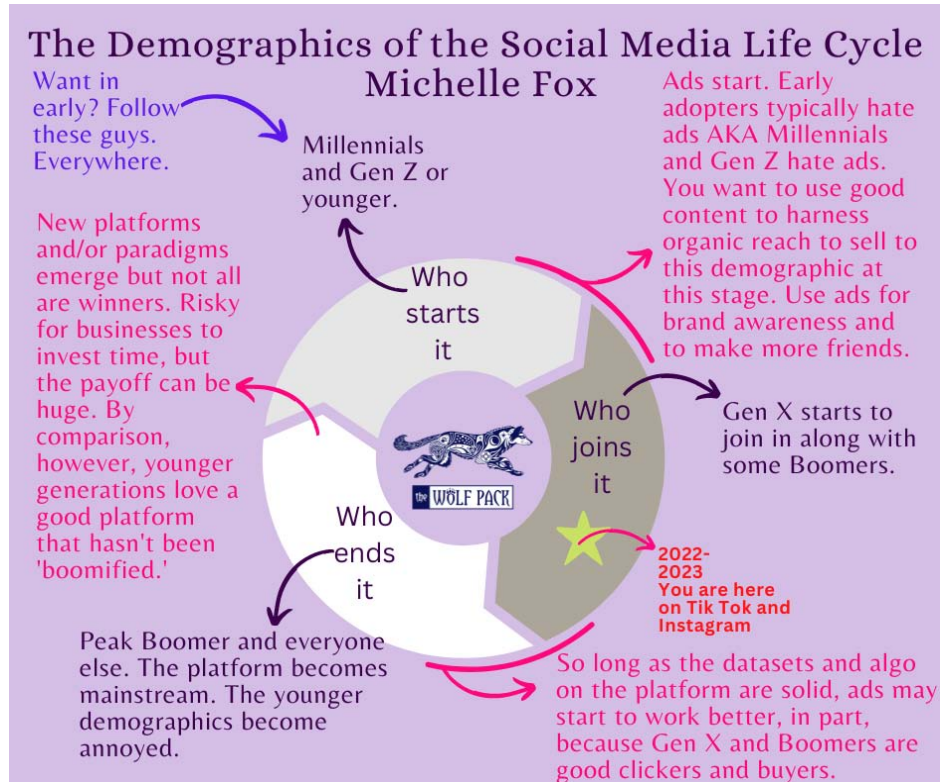
#### 4. Video, video, video

If you haven't made a video yet, you will in 2023. Despite most authors' aversion and the U.S. government's efforts to ban TikTok, video book marketing isn't going away. Video is everywhere now and the demand will *not* drop even if TikTok disappears. We are in the music video era of book marketing, and what little organic reach authors have on social media resides in TikTok videos and Reels on Instagram. Time to make like Micheal Jackson and do the moonwalk.

The good news is that we are "post face." Authors can opt out of being on screen now as readers will engage with book trailer content, which is much easier to produce and distribute. The bad news, making a book trailer that readers engage with is trickier than you'd think.

On Facebook, we had a paragraph or even a long snippet to market with, but with book trailers we have essentially movie loglines to work with, which means every word has to land. Being able to market your book in the equivalent of two or three loglines across a short video is key.

**Resolution:** Develop your book trailers and post them on TikTok and Instagram. If you've never made a book trailer, the app I'd suggest you start with is Canva as it's easy to use, very affordable, and has robust features.



## 5. The rise of AI audiobooks

AI audiobook narration is already excellent and will only get better. In 2022, some authors had strong negative reactions to the idea of AI audiobook narration; however, it's important to keep in mind that there are two major market segments for audiobooks: the one that can afford the high price of audiobooks and the one that can't.

The budget market segment has been underserved and limping along with having Alexa or other apps read ebooks to them. Compared to that, any level of AI narration is heaven. (Also, neurodivergent listeners often prefer AI narrators.)

Use your AI narrated audiobooks to offer price points for the listener on a budget. Not serving both market segments is costing authors.

Further, there's a lot of pressure on retailers to distribute AI narrated audiobooks, and they are signaling that it's likely to happen. Expect to see live narrated audiobooks competing with AI narration and the best marketer will win.

**Resolution:** If you haven't yet experimented with Google Play's AI narration, take it for a test drive in 2023. Or take a look at [DeepZen](#), which also offers copy editing and other support at a fraction of the cost of a live narrated audiobook. At least understand the technology.

Here's a [good introduction](#) to AI narration.



## 6. Avoid the pitfalls of AI art

2022 was the first time many authors dabbled in AI art, but the quality has fallen short, making it impractical for anyone not already an artist. However, next year, AI-generated art will just get better and better, and more and more viable, although that doesn't mean it's a good idea. Why? There's increasing backlash on how the technology scrapes copyrighted art and stock photography (the watermarks even show up in the AI art!) to teach itself without the creator's permission.

**Resolution:** Until we get some legal clarity and industry consensus on the ethical use case for AI art, anyone relying on it heavily for their business risks being caught up in the controversy. This one is a watch-and-see for 2023.

More information on the pitfalls of AI art [here](#).

## 7. Direct selling

In 2022, Kickstarter showed authors the potential of offering limited-time, curated experiences to readers, which further bolstered the trend of authors selling books and merchandise directly from their own storefronts. For the coming year, I expect to see more and more authors abandon retailer sales and market direct sale books as well as branded merchandise.

**Resolution:** With a potential recession on the horizon, it's a bit of a question mark how well this trend will grow or sustain in 2023, but if you've got an enthusiastic readership, be sure to find an upsell to offer them, whether that's special editions of your books, T-shirts, magnets, coffee mugs, or custom character art. The key to direct selling is having an audience and knowing how to grow it.

## 8. Optimize and organize

This coming year, there are more marketing work and monetization opportunities than there is time in the day for authors. If you can't outsource heavily, you'll need to be choosy about where you invest your time.

**Resolution:** Seek out expertise. Focus on making processes turnkey. Lean into what has the best ROI *for you*. Authors don't need to do everything; we need to do the right thing for our specific business.

2023 is going to be an exciting year for authors and I'm pleased to see so many new possibilities opening up. While there's more to learn and master than ever, there's also more opportunity to generate revenue too. As technology advances, authors have increasing control over their destiny, and that's never bad news.

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*Michelle Fox is a USA Today and New York Times bestselling author who also builds budget-friendly cooperative marketing communities and opportunities for authors.*



## For the Thrill of It!

*By Elaine Isaak*



Thrillers are the third-ranked fiction genre, according to Bookscan. On the Kindle side, K-lytics ranks “Mystery/Thriller/Suspense” third as well, with thrillers leading the category. As of August 2021, analytics firm The NPD Group, which owns Bookscan, said, “The evergreen staple of summer reading, thrillers make up nearly one in eight adult fiction books sold.”

That said, the market overall showed a downward trend during the pandemic. Explanations range from people not needing more tension in their lives to the placement of many recent thrillers, especially those written by or for women, in other categories.

### **Snapshot of bestsellers**

On Sept. 30, 2022, the top 100 bestsellers on the Amazon Thriller list included works by 73 authors or co-writing teams. Eighteen authors had multiple titles on the list, with domestic thriller author Freida McFadden leading the pack at 12 titles (all at \$3.99, representing nearly all of her total output of 15 books).

Thirty-three of the titles are branded as series volumes, and 68 are enrolled in Kindle Unlimited. Prices ranged from \$0.99 to \$15.99, with an average price of \$6.41 and a median of \$4.99. Interestingly, five of the books are priced at \$1.99—a price once considered untenable—including titles by James Patterson and Tess Geritsen. Eighteen of the titles are listed over \$10. With so many thriller titles in KU, most readers are likely not paying full price, but most of the books at the high end are not enrolled in KU.

Some trends definitely jump out, and I would highly recommend anyone considering the indie thriller market do a similar analysis in their subgenre. For instance, 32 of the books used

descriptive subtitles (not just “Book X in the Jane Doe series”), including some top names like James Patterson and Jeffrey Archer, who included subtitles referencing their bestseller status. Other subtitles rely on adjectives and superlatives, like “utterly addictive and unputdownable.” For those interested in targeting the Domestic Thriller subgenre, one font is used on almost all of the book covers (similar to Monocle Bold). These titles also included family-oriented words (wife, child, family, husband, sister).

Domestic and psychological thrillers have been trending upward since the release of popular titles like *Gone Girl*. Political thrillers are also a hot area. Authors I spoke with and my analysis pointed to an expansion in the market, especially more women as both writers and protagonists.

### **What makes a thriller?**

The principal hallmark of a thriller is the pace. As *New York Times* bestseller [Brendan DuBois](#), who writes political thrillers with James Patterson, says, “Usually the first chapter sets the pace, and then it goes quickly from there. In thrillers, there’s not much in the way of retrospection and long chunks of dialogue. Good thrillers tend to be action-packed, with cliffhangers at the end of most chapters.”

Military/techno thriller author [M. L. Buchman](#) agreed. “Pacing, extreme stakes, and often exotic settings, but mostly pacing.”

[Cindy Dees](#), who writes spy thrillers, said, “The promise of the genre is usually to save the world, or at least save your part of the world.” [Dharma Kelleher](#), who writes crime thrillers, had a slightly different take: “A focus on justice, the escalating action, and the burning question of how (or if) the protagonist will stop the villain.”

Many thrillers set up several different narrators, often using the perspective of the antagonist to create additional tension for the reader. Mystery novels focus on “Who done it?” Thrillers may spotlight the villain from the start, and the tension revolves around when and how they’ll be stopped. This structure places the protagonist on a collision course with the antagonist, often with a deadline for taking action before the next catastrophe.

Because of the emphasis on pace, thrillers have a reputation for neglecting character development in favor of pure action. Buchman observed, “To readers coming to thriller from romance or even mystery, I think they’d be shocked at how little characterization is commonly accepted in most thrillers.”

However, other authors are seeing a change in this area, with Dees noting, “Nowadays, I find thrillers are more willing to explore the human side of all that action. I think outsiders might be surprised by the depth of character development you can find in a thriller. Because of that, I find there to be more political and social commentary in them these days.”

In my own reviews, I was surprised to find that some readers strenuously objected to the use of cursing (by my ex-military protagonists, for whom it seems perfectly natural). Other thriller authors had a similar experience. An informal survey in an online readers’ group

suggests that many readers prefer not to have sexual content as well, and I'm starting to see the designation "Clean Thriller" used in reviews and promotions.

## Resources for writing

Several authors emphasized doing your research—and that the readership will let you know if you're getting it wrong, especially in the area of firearms. [The Writers' Police Academy](#) (no 2023 dates announced) is one way to learn the ins and outs of law enforcement and get some hands-on experience. You may also find that your local police department offers a Citizens' Police Academy.

Firsthand memoirs and blogs from retired military personnel, law enforcement, and those in other exciting careers can be great sources of inspiration and the details of lived experience. DuBois recommends reading the genre like "a forensic scientist, trying to see how and why things work together."

To structure her ideas, Dees uses Plottr to organize virtual note cards, laying out the different plotlines, and keeping track of the timeline to keep the thrills coming. I find that the outlining tools in Scrivener provide a similar function. Thriller authors James Scott Bell and Steven James have each authored several how-to books with exercises that might help you make the genre shift.

If you're not used to thinking of pace as the guiding principle, it can take some adjustment. One thriller author introduces a plot turn every three pages to keep the pace moving. In a workshop years ago, Dan Brown introduced specific types of plot turns including the time bomb, time trap (a choice must be made, and something will be lost), dilemma, crucible (character can't flee the conflict), reversal, revelation, and confrontation. Varying what type of plot turns you employ is another way to manage pace.

It is possible for a narrative to be too fast-paced, however, especially if the plot relies on the same kind of plot turns. Relentless action can grow monotonous if it's not having an impact on the characters, escalating the conflict or exploring new areas of the premise. Think of some recent action films where the scenes pile up but don't appear to create a cumulative effect. As Dees framed the thriller's focus on plot: Insert chase scene A followed by threat B followed by bomb C.

Thrillers have a different balance for scene versus sequel, to employ Dwight V. Swain's useful distinction. If you think of a scene as a unit of action, moving the plot forward, then a sequel is the character's response to that action. Sequel typically includes reflection, dilemma and decision, and a time to absorb what's happened and consider what happens next. For thrillers, sequels are short and may occur while the characters are speeding toward their next adventure. There's little inner monologue.

Another place to research those exotic settings is the [CIA's world factbook](#). Finding newspaper archives online can set you up with local information, even historical information if your plot calls for it—one Clive Cussler novel incorporated not only the facts of an early 20th

century mining accident but also the advertising around the article.

Some recommended resources on the professional side include the [International Thriller Writers](#) (ITW) who offer a number of promotional and educational opportunities, including [ThrillerFest](#), (May 30–June 3, 2023, New York City). When I took ITW’s online Thriller School I found it to be aimed at the beginning writer, but that may have changed. Their survey of the thriller readership is immensely valuable.

[Sisters in Crime](#) (which does admit male members) is a nationwide organization offering support and promotional opportunities. Local chapters offer good value for the professional seeking to expand their audience. Aside from ThrillerFest, major events with a thriller component include [Killer Nashville](#) (Aug. 18–21, 2023) and [Bouchercon](#) (Aug. 30–Sept. 3, 2023, San Diego).

## Marketing your thriller

Asked about effective marketing tactics, most authors I interviewed pointed to Facebook, whether for advertising or just for engaging with readers through frequent posting. Facebook’s ad platform allows for ready targeting of the older middle-aged women who are the most voracious readers of fiction—including thrillers.

DuBois, a prolific short fiction writer, frequently appears in the pages of *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* and in specialty anthologies.

While thriller readers seem drawn to ebooks and print in about the same ratio as for other genres, Buchman has found that audiobooks are especially popular with this readership.

## What makes it awesome?

Kelleher takes joy in the research required to craft a great thriller plot. “We all wonder if Homeland Security has us on a list due to our online search history. I’ve researched everything from the kill radius of C-4 to the process for manufacturing heroin to black-market organ harvesting. Also, we get to kill fictional people on the page.”

Dees agreed on the delight of killing fictional (or fictionalized) people. At the same time, “They can be time-consuming to plot. Sometimes I can get stuck for weeks on a single question of how or why something is going to happen.”

Buchman said thrillers can also be exhausting to write. “I find other genres to be a relief to duck back into now and then. A good thriller for me is complex, intricate, and fast-moving. Sustaining that as a writer takes immense concentration and energy.”

When Dees made the transition to thrillers (from romantic suspense), she found, “They’ll tend to be long, dense-packed with plot points and action, and take more time to research, plot, and revise than you’d think. I consistently under-planned my writing time when I started working on thrillers.”

Ready to dive into the action? NINC also has an [io group](#) just for thriller authors—hope to see you there!

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Former adventure guide Elaine Isaak writes the [Bone Guard archaeological thrillers](#) as E. Chris Ambrose. In the course of researching her books, she's learned to hunt with a falcon, clear a building of possible assailants, fire an AR-15, and pull traction on a broken limb.

## Success by Any Other Name

*By Mindy Klasky*



Frustrated by a recent decline in book sales, I complained to a writer friend that my writing career was not as successful as it once had been. After providing a healthy dose of chocolate, that friend challenged my definition of success, encouraging me to look beyond income and number of books sold. After much soul-searching, I compiled a list of 18 possible measures of success.

Remaining unconvinced personally, I posted a survey and asked other authors to evaluate those measures. I initially presented my questions to NINC members and my then-local Romance Writers of America chapter. I also asked responding authors to pass along the link to other professional writers. Ultimately, 67 authors responded.\*

### **Basic data**

My first question was: “Are you successful in your writing career?” 62.7% (42 people) of respondents said, “Yes.” Six percent (four people) said, “No.” A total of 31.3% (21 people) responded, “It’s complicated.”

I next asked respondents to rate my 18 possible measures of success, scoring each item from 0 (not important at all) to 5 (most important.) The maximum value for a criterion—if all respondents rated that item “most important” —was 340. The minimum value—all respondents saying the criterion had no value—was 0.

The 18 possibilities and their weighted rankings were:

- Receiving a contract from a traditional publisher (93)
- Amount of money earned (286)
- Number of books published (196)

- Number of books sold (266)
- Number of books given away (52)
- Quality of your books (e.g. ability to master genre expectations) (290)
- Number and/or quality of reviews (217)
- Years spent writing (124)
- Marketing in specific venues (e.g. a BookBub Featured Deal) (106)
- Attending public events (e.g. signings, readings, school visits, etc.) (75)
- Joining specific organizations (e.g. HWA, MWA, NINC, SFWA) (81)
- Winning awards (155)
- Winning contests (57)
- Receiving public recognition (e.g., newspaper articles, school name dedication, etc.) (91)
- Mentoring new authors (140)
- Outsourcing marketing, publicity, promotion, and/or other tasks (149)
- Leaving a “day job” to write full-time (225)
- Creating a balance between your writing career and other aspects of your life (235)

Therefore, the top five measures of success were:

1. Quality of your books
2. Amount of money earned
3. Number of books sold
4. Creating a balance between your writing career and other aspects of your life
5. Leaving a “day job” to write full-time

### **Pinning down specifics**

In an attempt to pin down specifics, I asked respondents to define success in terms of money earned per year, money earned over an entire career, number of books published per year, number of books published over the course of a career, number of books sold per year, and number of books sold over the course of a career. For each question, I offered a range of answers.

Those questions, however, proved somewhat challenging for respondents. In comments, many noted they guessed at numbers. Several made clear their answers pertained only to themselves; they wouldn't hold other authors to the same standard. Respondents might have also been frustrated by the ranges offered for their responses. In any case, no clear preferences emerged from those questions.

### **Always read the comments**

The comment section was illuminating. Several respondents noted that their definitions of success had changed over the course of their careers, expanding as various goals were achieved. A number of people vigorously resisted quantifying their careers, or ascribing value to that



quantification. A few respondents noted that they write for personal satisfaction and joy; they rejected any numeric measurement of those emotions.

With regard to earnings—the impetus for my launching the survey—respondents had various comments. One person said: “The questions struck me as odd—no one would say that an attorney or doctor who couldn’t pay the bills was successful. Why never earning a dime is on this questionnaire as an element of success is mind-boggling.” Another respondent said, “Writing for me is a business; either that business is making money and is viable or it’s not.” Nevertheless, more than 10% of the respondents said that the amount of money earned over the course of a career has no relation to success.

Other respondents expressed unease with using earnings as a success metric. “I judge success by how much I earn, which is not healthy and doesn’t allow me to celebrate how many books I’ve written,” wrote one person. Another commented: “I’d like to think that earning money isn’t important to success, but it is. No books sold and no money earned means no one is reading the book(s) and that’s sad.”

## **Whoops!**

When I compiled my survey, I worked hard to develop my 18 factors. Alas, when reviewing comments, I discovered that I had overlooked at least two definitions.

First, I failed to list “getting one’s letters” —*New York Times* bestselling author, *USA Today* bestselling author, or other bestseller lists. Some respondents might have included those milestones in my “Receiving public recognition” category, but a lack of clarity remains.

Second—and more importantly—I failed to include the notion of reader satisfaction in my survey. In comments, many authors noted this oversight, enthusing about fan mail, interactions in reader groups, and reviews. One respondent went even further and noted that they measure both the number of readers *and* the quality of those readers. Clearly, this metric would have scored highly if I had included it in the official options.

Ultimately, one respondent summarized everything I learned from this survey: “Learning to define success for yourself without basing it on the careers of others is one of the hardest tricks for a writer to master.” I hope that my survey will help others define success for themselves.

*\* While my survey is not statistically significant, it does shed some light on some authors’ definitions of success.*

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*USA Today* bestselling author [Mindy Klasky](#)’s most recent novel is the romantic comedy *The F Word*, the second volume in her *Love in 2020* series. Mindy learned to read when her parents shoved a book in her hands and told her she could travel anywhere through stories. As a writer, Klasky has traveled through various genres, including romantic comedy, contemporary romance, and traditional fantasy.

# Don't Use Those Lyrics (or Other Things)

A few key copyright takeaways

By Michele Dunaway



One word? One line? One paragraph? It's a song lyric; I can use it with no worries, right?

It's a good question. On a writing listserv recently, a member read a book written by a big-name author where song lyrics were used to start every chapter. However, no rights or permission notice was given on the copyright page. I just read a *New York Times* bestseller which embedded both song lyrics and Dumbledore quotes.

One of the top questions attorney Chris Stewart, of Burdett, Morgan & Williamson LLP in Amarillo, Texas, receives regarding copyright is when authors ask him, "Can I use other people's work?"

"People want to know how much I can take and use and how different my work has to be," Stewart said. "There is no exact percent. It comes down to the originality of the work, the part being used, how it's used compared to yours, and what the overall work looks like."

Copyright has something called the **Fair Use Defense**, and there are four factors that allow someone to use another's work:

1. How are you going to use the work? This is the purpose and character of the use. Are you making money off the work?
2. The nature of the copyrighted work. Is it an educational use of the work, for instance, like showing photos to teach a course? These would not necessarily impact the purchasing of the original product.
3. Amount and substantiality of the portion used, also known as the "how much did you steal factor." Yes, there is a difference in taking three lines from a 300-page book versus three lines from a five-line poem.

4. The effect on the market. Will your use of the work negatively impact the market? For instance, the argument on Napster long ago was how it was impacting record sales.

Stewart said a lawyer needs to lay eyes on the work/what you want to use; a lawyer can't simply tell you what you can use or not. However, it might be fair use if you quote a newspaper article. Newspapers are historical records, perhaps giving more latitude.

For song lyrics, there is no hard and fast rule. Stewart mentioned the 2 Live Crew case that went to the U.S. Supreme Court for the copyright violation of sampling portions of Roy Orbison's "Pretty Woman," doing so after the label had rejected allowing the band a license for the sampling. The court viewed the work 2 Live Crew created as a parody and that the band's actions were fair use instead of copyright infringement. You can read more [here](#).

To use the works of others—any work—Stewart has a list of four ways, with the first being the best way and the fourth being the one he calls the least advised, most troublesome way:

1. **Get permission, in writing.** This is always best, and using email is fine to ask and receive permission. Be specific and clear as to what you are seeking to use and how. You may have to dig to see who owns the copyright and rights and permissions. Having permission from the wrong person is not permission. For example, if a friend gives you their wedding picture for the cover of your book and you use it, did they have license for that use from the photographer who took the photo? If not, this might be considered innocent infringement, but the third party who gave you the photo didn't have permission. Rights must be granted by the copyright holder.
2. **Give attribution and credit for use.** This, however, is not a defense of using someone's work without permission, but Stewart says so far he's never seen anyone come in and say "Let's sue." Note that just because it's on someone's website, you can't simply copy things and distribute them (such as printing off a handout or embedding their work word for word into yours) and then providing linking to their site. All attribution and credit does is admit you stole it.
3. **Claim fair use or implied license.**
4. **Steal and apologize.** Stewart said you'd be surprised how often this happens, giving TikTok as an example. The creators who take your stuff will take it down and say "I'm sorry." But note that if you do take it and then apologize, it's not a defense. In fact, he said Getty Images will bill you even after it's taken down. Stealing and apologizing are huge risks. In fact, in July, author Mindy Klasky had to send a cease-and-desist to both an author and a conference for distributing her work to "an as-yet-unknown number of attendees" without her permission. "A citation never solves the copyright problem," Klasky said. "I've spoken with the author, and I believe she made an honest mistake; she responded promptly to my complaint. The conference responded promptly as well, taking its own steps to remove mention of the infringing materials in its recordings. The matter is resolved."

In Klasky's case the author and conference organizers reacted favorably. Stewart says one of the reasons there is so much infringement is that while you can sue the individual who put it there, you probably won't get any money or even a lawyer to take the case unless damages will be high. To prove infringement, authors must show their ownership, and that the person doing the copyright infringement had access, and that the works are substantially similar.

"Yes, substantially similar is vague," Stewart said. "It's somewhere between plagiarism and similarity."

Often evidence of access is circumstantial. As for substantial similarity, Stewart says lawyers put the works side by side and analyze, looking at the order of things, description and even sentence syntax. Access and substantial similarity work hand in hand and one can help prove the other. So, if your critique partner steals your scene and you have the email where you sent it to them, you can prove they had access. You might not be able to if Hollywood steals your script idea.

As for social media platforms, the [Digital Millennium Copyright Act](#) gives social media companies immunity in regard to third-party creation as long as the media companies have a policy for dealing with repeat policy infringers. This puts the burden on the copyright owner, who must have the exact URL of the infringement, prove ownership, etc. Basically, it is up to the copyright owner to police the sites.

Stewart admits the DMCA is controversial, seen as giving social media companies no liability and too much power. "There is a form on all platforms you must fill out and to a T. If you don't follow the policy, the social media company doesn't have to take it down," he said.

The owner must file the takedown notice. If the violator doesn't reply, it's an automatic takedown by the social media company. However, the other party can file a counter notice. Then there are 10 days for the owner to file a lawsuit.

"A lot of times they don't file a counter notice," Stewart said. "When you file a takedown notice, you're telling the other party they are going to be sued and that you are claiming rights. If they refuse and file a counter notice and they are wrong, the damages can be higher."

Stewart suggests you really have to pick and choose your battles. Some of his clients have teams that do this. Others go after the most egregious violators.

"Often you can get it down on your own," he said. If it's an individual, contact the person to "handle this between us." Sometimes that's more favorable.

"Pay attention to what's going on and keep an eye on it before it becomes a problem. You will have a 'so and so' uses it, etc., pushback, but while not a defense for them, it reduces what compensation you can get from them," he said.

Facebook is one of the worst to deal with because sometimes the copyright violation falls into multiple categories and you have to file notices for all of them.

"You must read the fine print carefully. On the social media company end, it's an automated process," Stewart said. "Social media companies are actually pretty good at it as long

as you dot the I's and cross the T's. They follow their policies. It's in their best interest to take it down."

Stewart advises authors to take charge of their online identities. Be able to be found and contacted, either through an author page, LinkedIn, etc. He suggests you should have a licensing agreement in place for those who want to use your work, making it easier for them to ask permission.

As to lawsuits, criminal charges are filed by the government, and civil actions are filed by the owner of the copyright.

One final note on social media. When you post, you are granting an implied license for people to share. These are in the fine print of the agreement you signed to be on that site. You aren't violating copyright if you repost, and neither are they.

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*Michele Dunaway* writes contemporary, small town happily-ever-after for Harlequin Special Edition. Her newest series, *Love in the Valley*, debuts with *What Happens in the Air* (February 2023) and *All's Fair in Love and Wine* (April 2023).

## Smart Marketing for Savvy Authors

By Tawdra Kandle



*This year of Smart Marketing  
is all reinventing our businesses.  
For the first quarter, we'll deep dive into:  
Why and when we might start over:  
A new way of looking at publishing goals;  
The crucial element of mindset!*

Happy new year!

I don't think I'm in the minority when I say that I love all of the opportunities that each year presents for us to start over. Each new month, even each new week, is a chance to examine our trajectory. September and the fresh start of fall is another time to rethink how we want to wrap up the calendar year.

But no one can deny that Jan. 1 is *the* time of year to make thoughtful and strategic goals. We look backward and note times when we've perhaps put forward a wrong foot, and where we've made great choices. We open up new planners, sign up for courses that promise to give us the six- or seven-figure year we've been hoping to find. Perhaps at the end of the previous year, we thoughtfully and carefully constructed a plan for our releases, sales, and marketing.

For the past nine years (I'm being generous here, as I'm fairly certain that my first two years of publishing were like a wild roller coaster ride of flying by the proverbial seat of my pants), I've been doing all of the above. I spend much of the autumn attending conferences and scrambling to sign up for any course that promises to increase sales or teach me how to maximize my launches and pump up my backlist. And then I take whatever I've learned at the conferences and in the classes and create a plan, a vision, for what the next year will be.

Does it work? I wish I could say yes. The truth is that usually, something that I've implemented turns out to have at least a small impact on my business, but I can't say that any plan or new way of doing things has revolutionized my career. Not even a little.

I've spent a long time swinging like a monkey on a vine from one great idea to another. I don't believe that I'm an anomaly. While this column is not about me or how I run my book business, a little bit of background might be helpful for the sake of context.

My indie publishing career began in December 2011. I had no idea what I was doing. After several years of querying agents and editors, I was ready to try a different way of getting my book into the hands of readers, so when a friend suggested doing it myself, I did. My first four books were a young adult paranormal romance series, and while I wasn't an instant success, I did begin to build a small but enthusiastic readership.

A few years later, I had an idea for an adult contemporary romance. In those days, indie authors weren't hearing much about staying in our lanes; I wasn't the only one who wrote in a variety of different genres. Perhaps if I had had a few other benefits working for me, the switching wouldn't have affected my business as it did. But I was working on a very limited margin, needing all of my royalties to go toward supporting my family, and I hadn't even begun to understand that writing and publishing my own books was a business.

It was also around this time that I began to buy into what might be the most dangerous idea in indie publishing: that someone has the secret to success in this industry. That there's a right way of doing things, of timing releases, of running ads that guarantees a successful and profitable business.

This is a dangerous theory because it can whisper into your ear that Author A has figured it all out, and if you only listen to her/follow her/do everything she does, you'll have the same kind of brilliant result. That's fine until it doesn't work, or maybe it doesn't work on your timeline, and then you happen to see that Author B is doing something quite different, and her book sales are exploding ...

Suffice it to say that I tried just about everything over the course of my career. I did rapid releasing. I wrote a series of new adult books when that genre was super hot. I tried releasing a series of popular trope romances into Kindle Unlimited. I reached out to different vendors and offered exclusive preorders. I changed titles, covers, blurbs ... you name it. For a while, I managed to keep my head above water, and I even saw some small blips of success. My newsletter list was strong and responsive. I had a decently active reader group on Facebook. My books all had overwhelmingly positive reviews. And because I had grown such a large backlist, it wasn't hard for me to score BookBub Featured Deals. I could submit a new book every week until I struck gold.

However, by early 2018, I'd hit a wall. Nothing was working. Ads were the biggest buzzword, but I didn't have enough money to invest in them, nor did I have a strong sense of how to create an effective ad strategy. I went from making a minimum of \$1,500 a month on Amazon (and smaller but still respectable amounts on the other vendors) to barely topping \$500



a month. Nowadays, at the end of 2022, there are months when I'm not even earning \$100 under my own name at Amazon on a catalog of over 130 books.

I had a choice to make: I could keep going as I was, working harder and harder for less and less money. I could give up and walk away from indie publishing.

I wasn't prepared to do the latter. As frustrating as it is to continue producing and working with little to no material reward, I can't imagine a world in which I'm not writing and releasing. At the same time, I knew I couldn't afford—financially or emotionally—to do the former, either. If the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results, continuing on my current path was downright crazy.

There was another option, though. I could start over. I could reinvent my author persona and my career. I could take all of the wisdom I'd collected along the way in the past 10 years and put it to use by republishing some of my books under a name that was completely distinct from my own publishing presence.

I didn't undertake this path lightly. I'd tried pen names before, though I'd only kept one secret from my readership, and even then, eventually I revealed the connection. This time, however, in order to make the fresh start work, I'd have to keep everything totally separate so that there was no way readers—or vendors like Amazon—could link the books released under a new name to me.

For those who are thinking that this idea violates Kindle Direct Press's terms of service, rest assured that I thought of that. I formed an LLC under which I established the new KDP account for my non-Tawdra author names.

What are the benefits and drawbacks to such a move? They are manifold, both of them, and as I tell author friends, only you can determine whether or not reinvention is the right decision for you.

The benefits first: it's essential to remember that Amazon is actually just a giant search engine that also happens to sell stuff. This search engine learns as it goes, and that knowledge creates algorithms which then govern how the engine will behave from that point onward. When I released books that weren't in the same genre, or when I ran an ad that was targeted to the wrong group of people, or when I did anything that caused people to click on my book page but not buy the book, I was teaching the Amazon search engine that clickers didn't buy my books. Since Amazon is a company invested in bringing customers to a place where they will spend money, the engine stopped showing my books. I had, in essence, poisoned my own name. But publishing the books under a new name kept the engines from seeing their poisoned past.

Another plus was that I could divide my backlist so that the new names were very tightly branded. The first group I moved over (unpublished under my name and re-released under a new name) was my football series, books known for being angsty and steamy with cliffhanger endings. Now, all of the books that are released by that author name will also be filled with lots of angst—and uncertain endings.

The downside is fairly obvious. It's a great deal of work to retitle, recover, and re-blurb these books. They all have to be formatted again. The books must be removed from all vendors.

And then there's the fact that in creating a new author persona, you should have a separate newsletter list, a website (or at least a landing page), and social media for that persona. Finding the hours in the day to be myself is tough enough—try putting on someone else's identity and doing all of the associated work!

Still, for me, it was worth it. Upon re-release under the new name, the books that had formerly languished when Tawdra was their author flourished and sold. It's still a little too early in the game to declare this particular part of the plan an unqualified success, but it's very encouraging.

You might not be in a place where you want to burn down your own author name and start over. You might be enjoying enough success that the idea of all that extra work sounds too much. I still believe that as I share my journey over the year via this column, there will be some elements that you can incorporate into your existing business. And if, on the other hand, you have considered starting over, I hope what I'm learning can help you as well.

If you attended the 2022 conference and saw Joe Solari's presentation, you may have heard us discuss some of this in broad strokes. I'm grateful for Joe's input and advice as I undertake this new dimension in my publishing life.

Next month, we'll discuss a new way of looking at publishing goals and how doing that has helped me see my business—and how I work it—in a totally different light.

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

# The Mad Scribbler

## Books at the Bottom of the Sea

By Laura Resnick



*"So at the moment, the situation appears grim. And yet there are plenty of reasons to feel hopeful about the future. To name just a few: (NOTE TO EDITOR—Please insert some reasons to feel hopeful about the future, if you can think of any)."*

—[Dave Barry's Year in Review](#), *Washington Post*, December 25, 2022

The best thing about 2022 was that it wasn't 2021 (a year that was essentially 2020: *The Sequel*).

COVID-19 is still a factor in our world, and the pandemic has wrought many changes; some are self-evident, and some may not be understood for many years to come. Nonetheless, 2022 saw a return to relative normalcy for most of us—including sell-out attendance at the annual NINC conference! I have high hopes that 2023 will continue on this "new normal" path, and I look forward to seeing the new year unfold.

But in the traditional publishing world, "normalcy" just means things are as gloomy as ever.

"The books business has had a difficult year," began a [New York Times](#) article in late December. Words used in the introduction include: pressure, upheaval, failed, strife, shake-up, angst, headwinds, worried, underperformed, bumpy, and fears.

The same week, [Publishers Weekly](#) [described](#) October, traditionally a time for major releases, as "a rough month for publishing industry sales."

A headline in [Library Journal](#) announced shortly before Christmas, "Association of American Publishers (AAP) Reports 'Publishing Industry Down 5.1% Year-To-Date and Down 9.3% for October; Trade (Consumer Book) Revenues Down 13.7% in October, and Down 5.1% Year-to-

Date.” (I visited the AAP website for more information, but I found it puzzling to navigate and soon gave up.)

As you may remember, publishing’s “difficult year” (which maintained the industry’s centuries-long streak of difficult years) began with the same sort of shipping delays, labor shortages, and supply chain problems that affected many industries.

Early in the year, *The Guardian* (among others) [reported on](#) various challenges in getting physical books produced and distributed: “Mills have cut back on producing paper for books and magazines, instead using pulp to make more cardboard, packing and other types of papers that are more lucrative. While [printers] once had the upper hand in the paper market and could order as much paper as needed, paper mills now tell printers how much paper they can give them. The shortage of paper has, in some cases, visibly changed the size of books.”

The *Guardian* recounts a printer citing supply problems with regard to glue, ink, and other materials, too.

(Check out this interesting [photo-article](#) in the NYT about the physical production of books in traditional publishing. The printing press “is 26 feet wide and 127 feet long, and weighs about 200,000 pounds.” The rolls of paper that go into it weigh 800 pounds apiece.)

Additionally, the *Guardian* reports, “Book printing capacity has diminished over the last decade. One large U.S. printer closed in 2018, while two others have significantly downsized their book printing operations in recent years.”

But wait! It gets better!

Some titles are printed in Asia, where costs are lower, and then shipped to North America. This is particularly common for books that require a lot of color printing (which also requires higher quality paper), such as cookbooks and art books.

And guess what? “Like many industries trying to ship goods across oceans, delays abound. Large ports on both coasts have been clogged for months, with dozens of ships floating offshore waiting to dock and unload their containers. Containers have piled up on docks, leaving a lack of space and a shortage of containers, as there has been a shortage of truck drivers.”

Early in the year, a container from Asia, awaiting its turn to enter the congested port of New York, encountered such huge waves during a winter storm that 60 containers fell overboard and sank to the bottom of the Atlantic. Among the books lost at sea was the entire print run of a cookbook by New Orleans chef Mason Hereford, who described the incident as the “most hilariously 2022 thing to happen yet this year.” Indeed.

“The printing capacity crunch eased a bit,” *Publishers Weekly* [reported](#) at the end of the year, “albeit not for a good reason—printers received fewer orders as book sales declined.”

Another problem for publishers that emerged in 2022 was growing dissatisfaction among the workforce. By spring, publishing personnel were resigning in droves due to the combination of excessive work hours, low pay, and little opportunity for advancement.

In March, an assistant editor at Tor Books (one of my former publishers), a division of Macmillan, shared her resignation letter on Twitter. Her request for promotion had just been

denied even as her first acquisition for Tor, *The Atlas Six* by Olivie Blake, was making its hardcover debut at #3 on the *New York Times* bestseller list. She said Tor told her that she needed “more training” before she could be promoted beyond her mostly administrative position. She had already worked in publishing for eight years, and she had acquired and edited “the runaway TikTok must-read fantasy novel of the year,” but the publisher advised her not to expect a promotion for at least five more years.

Unsurprisingly, she resigned. Her Twitter post about it was retweeted more than 700 times and attracted hundreds of comments and replies—many of them made by other people who had quit publishing for similar reasons or who were contemplating doing so.

*Publishers Weekly* addressed employee issues at length in September in an article titled [“Is the Publishing Industry Broken?”](#) An unnamed literary agent told PW, “In-house promotion just isn’t happening,” adding that when it did happen, nothing actually changed: the newly promoted editor was still expected to spend the bulk of her time working as an administrative assistant.

One young editor who left the industry told PW the problem wasn’t just how long she had to wait for a promotion, but the unclear requirements for getting one. “There’s no rubric of things to meet,” she said. “It just happens when they feel you’re ready.”

The enormous workload leads to very long work hours, and the salaries are low. A former editor from a Big Five house told PW: “I knew I couldn’t stay in publishing if I had a kid. I always heard that editors often quit when they had kids because they made less than it costs to cover childcare.”

In November, more than 200 HarperCollins employees went on strike, seeking higher pay, improved family leave benefits, a greater commitment to diversifying staff, and stronger union protection. *The Washington Post* [reported](#) in December that the strikers included employees from the editorial, sales, publicity, design, legal, and marketing departments.

“I wish I could be editing right now,” associate editor Stephanie Guerdan told the *Post*. She has been at HarperCollins for six years and describes editing as her dream job. “Instead, the management’s refusal to negotiate with the union has led us to stand outside in the cold.”

Senior production editor David Palmer, who’s been in publishing for 30 years, told the *Post* he decided to strike “primarily to help the people who are starting their careers, and who hopefully won’t have to put in 30 years before they can live in NYC without a roommate.”

As of this writing, the strike is ongoing.

Many sources in many articles about traditional publishing blame corporatization and corporate culture for the industry’s woes. There’s an interesting [profile piece](#) on Penguin Random House in the NYT that describes “decades-long trends that have made the industry more profit focused, consolidated, undifferentiated and averse to risk. Like Hollywood, which pours resources into universe-scale superhero franchises that are nearly guaranteed to get an audience, publishing has become increasingly reliant on blockbusters—a development that has left beginner and midlist authors struggling... The result is an algorithmic marketplace that

serves up mostly the hits, driving a cycle so self-fulfilling it's nearly tautological: Bestsellers sell the best because they are bestsellers."

Corporate culture is also cited as a factor in ensuring that employees feel disposable. Each time a major house merges with another big company or acquires a smaller one, there are layoffs.

Writers in traditional publishing (and also writers who have left it to go indie all the way) are certainly familiar with this phenomenon, since mergers and acquisitions in the industry so often damage our careers as our editors get laid off, the imprints that publish our books get reduced or closed, and/or our contracts get canceled.

Although a federal court in August blocked the latest big consolidation, Penguin Random House's attempt to acquire Simon & Schuster, multiple publications and pundits speculate that another company will make a move to acquire it. There's still a realistic possibility that the Big Five will become the Big Four. PW suggests it could be the biggest publishing story of 2023.

Until now, my frontlist has all been released via traditional publishing. For various reasons, it's likely that path is now closed to me. But all things considered... I find I'm not upset about being ejected from an industry that's pretty accurately summed up with words like: pressure, upheaval, failed, strife, shake-up, angst, headwinds, worried, underperformed, bumpy, and fears.

I wish you all a healthy, happy, and fruitful New Year!

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*Laura Resnick writes fiction, nonfiction, and short fiction.*

## NINC Member Discounts

*By Abigail Drake*



[Author, Author!](#) began operating as a bookstore in 1999, and they focus primarily on online sales, special events, and books for authors. It's a great resource, and they are pleased to offer NINC members their best possible discount.

If you purchase your own books from Author, Author!, they will give you 30-50% off (depending on the source and quantity). Author, Author! has accounts with all the major publishers (PRH, HC, HBG, MPS, Brilliance, etc) and over 50 mid-sized publishers as well.

The people at Author, Author! believe that authors should never pay retail for their own books. They can ship to you, a conference location, a school, a signing event, or a contest—wherever you need them. And they guarantee to get your books there on time.

They provide books only for domestic U.S. delivery, but they're happy to work with international authors needing deliveries in the U.S. You'll get personalized service from people who understand how publishing works from all three sides—the publisher, the bookstore, and the author—but whose allegiance is always to the author.

To find out more about the Author, Author! discount for NINC members, check out the [Freebies and Discounts section](#) on the NINC website.



*Abigail Drake, who writes contemporary romance and women's fiction, is the award-winning author of 19 novels. She majored in Japanese and economics in college and spent years living abroad, collecting stories wherever she visited. She and her husband, whom she met in Istanbul, have three adult sons.*



# Membership Benefits

Need industry intel, software, or legal help? We've got you covered.

Are you taking advantage of all your member benefits?

As a NINC member, your benefits include industry discounts, newsletter and website articles, professional services directory, networking opportunities, and more.

We've compiled all of these—which you can also find on our website—into this list as a helpful reminder.

## Networking (these groups are for NINC members only):

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

## Conference:

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

## Newsletter

- Propose an article: <https://ninc.com/newsletter/propose-an-article/>
- Submit a letter to the editor: <https://ninc.com/newsletter/submit-letter-to-editor/>
- Newsletter archives: <https://ninc.com/newsletter/news-archive/>

## Website (You must be logged in to access these services.)

- Legal Fund: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/legal-fund/>
- Sample Letters: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/sample-letters/>
- Articles & Links: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/articles-and-links/>

## Member discounts

NINC members are eligible for certain professional discounts. A complete listing of these can be found at <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/member-freebies-discounts/> along with other member discounts.

## **Volunteer**

One of the greatest benefits of NINC is the opportunity to volunteer your talents to benefit other members—which pays incredible and unexpected dividends in networking and knowledge. Learn more about volunteer opportunities here: <https://ninc.com/members-only/open-positions/>

Open positions include:

- Social Media Committee
- Tweet Team
- Recruiting New Members
- Anything!



*Founded in 1989*

### **NINC Statement of Principle**

Novelists, Inc., in acknowledgment of the crucial creative contributions novelists make to society, asserts the right of novelists to be treated with dignity and in good faith; to be recognized as the sole owners of their literary creations; to be fairly compensated for their creations when other entities are profiting from those creations; and to be accorded the respect and support of the society they serve.

NINC is committed to welcoming a diverse and inclusive membership to our organization and serving all members. No author will ever be discriminated against on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation, religious/spiritual beliefs if any, ability, nationality, or age. It is NINC's desire and goal to make sure that every author member feels welcomed and accepted and heard.

### **Founders**

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

### **2023 Board of Directors**

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

- President: Celeste Barclay
- President-Elect: Caethes Faron
- Secretary: Sylvia McDaniel
- Treasurer: Timothy Cerepaka
- Newsletter Editor: Harper St. George
- Advisory Council Representative: Steven Womack

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- Lou Aronica
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- Erica Ridley
- Marianne Shock
- Wayne Stinnett
- Vicki Lewis Thompson
- Victoria Thompson
- Steven Womack

## 2023 Committees

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

- Central Coordinator: Laura Resnick
- 2023 Conference Committee
  - Conference Director: Mel Jolly
  - Assistant Conf. Director & Programming Chair: Tawdra Kandle
  - Assistant Programming Chair: Dylann Crush
  - Trad Liaison: Lou Aronica
  - Sponsorship Chair: Sarah Woodbury
  - Assistant Sponsorship Chair: Hallee Bridgeman
  - Hotel Liaison: Karen Fox
  - Assistant Hotel Liaison: Tegan Maher
  - Registrar: Lisa Hughey
  - Assistant Registrar: Stephanie Julian
  - App Coordinator & Graphic Designer: Laura Hayden
  - NINC After Dark Coordinator: Tamsin Ley
- Authors Coalition Representatives: Rebecca Zanetti & Hallee Bridgeman
- Bookkeeper: Christy Wilson
- Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Committee
  - Chair: Celeste Barclay

- Misti Boehm
- Pooks Burroughs
- Malorie Cooper
- Lynn Emery
- Lisa Hughey
- Tawdra Kandle
- Ellis Leigh
- Alison Perry
- Harper St. George
- Social Media Committee
  - Chair: Violet Howe
  - Genevieve Jack
- Membership Committee
  - Boyd Craven
  - Sarah Woodbury
- *Nink* Newsletter
  - Editor: Harper St. George
  - Acquisitions Editor: Trish Milburn
  - Copy Editor: Cynthia Moyer
  - Production Manager: Laura Resnick
- Nominating Committee
  - Chair: Lisa Hughey
  - Tanya Anne Crosby
  - Michele Dunaway
  - Katherine Garbera
  - Cindy Kirk
  - Nancy Robards Thompson
- Discounts Program: Abigail Drake

### **Central Coordinator**

Novelists, Inc. c/o Laura Resnick  
 P.O. Box 331, Covington KY 41012  
[admin@ninc.com](mailto:admin@ninc.com)

*Address changes may be made on the website.*

### ***Nink* Newsletter**

*January 2023 edition – Vol. 34, No. 1*

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

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

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

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

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