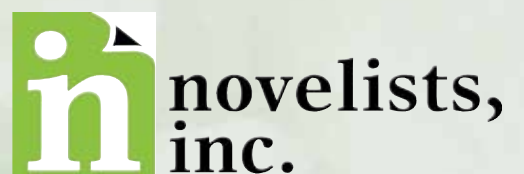




The official newsletter
of Novelists, Inc.,
a professional organization
of writers of popular fiction



VOLUME 34 : NUMBER 4
APRIL 2023

Nink April 2023

Contents

- ◆ President's Voice ~ Celeste Barclay
- ◆ From the Editor: Seeking A New Nink Editor ~ Harper St. George
- ◆ NINC Bylaws Update ~ Laura Resnick
- ◆ Conference Report: NINC2023: Elevate ~ Tawdra Kandle
- ◆ Publishing News: The Hot Sheet NINC Edition

Feature Articles

- ◆ Falling for Instalove Books: How to Write and Publish Romance Novellas ~ Mia Brody
- ◆ ChatGPT and Authors: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly ~ Troy Lambert
- ◆ All Things Being Equal... ~ Nikoo Kafi & Jim McGoldrick
- ◆ Is Direct Sales for You? Find Stability and Deeper Relationships Through Selling Direct ~ Katie Cross

Columns

- ◆ Smart Marketing for Savvy Authors ~ Tawdra Kandle
- ◆ The Mad Scribbler: Size Matters ~ Laura Resnick
- ◆ Member Discounts Highlight: Book Brush ~ Abigail Drake

- ◆ NINC Membership Benefits
- ◆ About NINC

President's Voice

By Celeste Barclay



When I began my author career five years ago this month, I never imagined the gauntlet I faced. What began on a whim soon became a second full-time job and within a year and a half, my only full-time job. My blissful ignorance soon shattered as I learned to navigate the publishing industry. Much of our day-to-day existence focuses on the character and story arcs rattling around in our heads and our methods for moving them from ideas and concepts into consumable products for readers to enjoy. Never did I imagine the challenges I would face in the latter half of that process. As though navigating retail platforms and marketing strategies weren't enough of a challenge, now we face external roadblocks that impede what began as a simple desire for me: telling stories people enjoy.

As much as I'd like to be an ostrich and bury my head in the sand, ignoring what's going on in the real world of publishing is not a luxury any of us have. A recently heated conversation among some of our members prompted me to consider a contentious topic that applies to any of us publishing in the United States. I firmly believe it's possible to discuss topics related to politics without devolving into rhetoric or vitriol. Book banning is a highly charged, highly politicized, and highly relevant topic for us as professional novelists. It's real. It's happening. And it's impacting us.

Whether it's books considered by many to be classics for generations or works we're yet to create, the idea that laws and policies might threaten our freedom to create and share stories, or that current and future generations might not learn and benefit from texts rich with social implications, is troublesome, to say the least. As a former history teacher, I have what many of my students likely thought were useless facts rattling around in my head. I shall put some of them to use during this conversation.

One of the oldest, if not the oldest, record of book banning began during the 200s B.C. when Chinese emperor Shi Huang Di allegedly buried alive 460 Confucian soldiers to control historical records during his reign. Historians believe he burned all the books in his realm, keeping only one copy of each for the Royal Library, and it's been noted that those were destroyed upon his death. Emperor Shi Huang Di believed that destroying all historical records ensured history would begin with him. Burning or banning books doesn't simply eliminate them from the annals of time or memory.

In 8 A.D., Ovid, a Roman poet, faced banishment for writing *Ars Amatoria (The Art of Love)*. Savonarola later burned his works in 1497 in Florence, and U.S. Customs banned a translation from entering the country in 1928. In 35 A.D., the ever-infamous Caligula opposed what he deemed dangerous ideas about freedom expressed in *The Odyssey*. Perhaps you've heard about the ancient library in Alexandria, Egypt, burning. Historians note the caliph Omar burned all 20,000 volumes in the library, arguing that if any of the Greek books agreed with the Book of God, then they were useless and didn't need to be preserved. Legend says that by burning these books, he provided the city with six months' fuel for people to heat their homes.

In more modern times, if you will, Queen Elizabeth I insisted Shakespeare remove a scene from *Richard II* because it involved a king being deposed. Martin Luther's German translation of the Bible was burned under the Pope's order. Galileo's theories led to his torture and jailing, along with his wife agreeing to destroy some of his manuscripts after his death. The Spanish Catholic Church placed *Robinson Crusoe* on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* ("List of Banned Books").

Fast forward to 1937 in Canada where the Quebec government passed An Act Respecting Communistic Propaganda, more commonly known as the Padlock Act, which enabled the government to close, for up to a year, any building found to disseminate "communism or bolshevism," terms left undefined. In 1960, Penguin Books faced prosecution for publishing "an obscene book." This was D.H. Lawrence's novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*; Penguin Books prevailed, and a remake of the film adaptation released in 2022. Among other books deemed controversial over the years are books we now consider classics, such as Darwin's *Origin of Species*, George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, Hugo's *Les Misérables*, Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, Doyle's *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, along with many others.

As recently as 2019, the [American Library Association \(ALA\)](#) reported people in the U.S. demanded the beloved Harry Potter series be removed from American libraries because "actual curses and spells" were in the books, and characters used "nefarious means" to achieve their goals. The organization reported that the entire series were the most frequently challenged books in U.S. public libraries from 2000 to 2009.

Why the walk down memory lane? Book banning is hardly new. There are the instances, such as the Nazis during World War II, that are widely known and studied. But I wanted to

share more obscure and lesser-known examples to illustrate how pervasive and aggressive book banning policies have been throughout the ages. There is a precedence, and there is history of opposition.

According to [NBC News](#), more than 1,600 books were banned in over 5,000 schools during the 2021-2022 school year. According to the anti-censorship nonprofit group, [PEN America](#), there were roughly 2,500 book bans enacted in 2021. Between Jan. 1 and Aug. 31, 2022, the ALA noted 681 attempts to restrict or ban 1,651 titles. This is an alarming increase from the 729 attempts that targeted 1,597 books in 2021. Notably, 96% of these bans were enacted by schools and districts without following the ALA and National Coalition Against Censorship's guidelines for best practices.

The NBC News article went on to state that the ALA's report "estimates that at least 40% of the bans listed on PEN America's [Index of School Book Bans](#) are connected to proposed or enacted legislation or to political pressure from elected officials to restrict the teaching of certain concepts." (Yurcaba, 2022) The majority of recently banned books focus on marginalized communities and matters of race and sexual identity. These are members of our author community and industry as well as members of our larger national community. These are topics authors within our community face personally and professionally. In an age where younger generations are more freely encouraging and accepting diverse populations, many of these policies run contrary to this movement for diversity, equality, and inclusion.

This trend, regardless of political opinions or leanings, is significant. The mere numbers and surge toward censorship are alarming, regardless of whether someone agrees or disagrees with these policies. As authors, we face challenges from every direction. The possibility that our own books may face such censorship is something present on many authors' minds. It leaves many of us wondering into what quagmire might our own works fall.

How do we respond if our works face censorship? How do we, as a community, share civil discourse about this topic, and what do we do to support and defend freedom of expression and our right to tell stories for public enjoyment? Being ostriches with our heads buried doesn't make this go away. Denouncing discussions about this because "it's political" doesn't make it go away. It's entirely possible to examine this topic without involving political rhetoric or vitriol.

These are events that will be recorded in the annals of history, and we should be concerned by this growing movement. Where does the line between public good and individual choice sit when it comes to books? How do we acknowledge parents' rights to choose their own children's exposure to material and content they may disagree with while balancing the rights of other parents to allow their children access to said material and content? How do we measure the greatest good for the greatest number of people? And what happens when policies and laws run contrary to the greatest good?

I encourage our community to have these hard and sometimes contentious conversations. I encourage our community to reflect upon how this might affect us as individuals and as an

industry where we both want to entertain and profit from books. I don't have solutions to this topic, and I doubt many individuals do. But as an industry impacted by these policies and laws, it behooves us to pay attention, speak up and speak out, and continue to advocate for our rights.

I appreciate my opportunity to lead the premier organization for novelists and to have a platform for discussions on these impactful topics.

- Friedman, J., & Johnson, N. F. (2022, September 19). "[Banned in the USA: The Growing Movement to Censor Books in Schools](#)," PEN America 100.
- Garcia, R. (Ed.). (2023, March 23). "[American Library Association reports record number of demands to censor library books and materials in 2022](#)," ALA News.
- Yurcaba, J. (2022, September 19). "[More than 1,600 books banned during 2021-22 school year, report finds](#)," NBC News.

~ Celeste Barclay

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

Seeking a new *Nink* editor

By Harper St. George



This will be my last year as your *Nink* editor. My three-year tenure will be up at the end of the year. It's been a fulfilling and enriching experience to help put *Nink* together every month. I've loved seeing the newsletter expand and grow while working with all of the knowledgeable contributors we've had over the years.

It's only April, but now is a great time to start thinking about if you would like to fill the editor role next year. The editor position is appointed by the president and is a member of the board. This means you would have full voting rights at board meetings and a voice in guiding the organization forward. You will also have a substantive role in planning what article topics and new features to bring to the newsletter. The position can serve for up to three years.

You will have an excellent and knowledgeable three-person staff to help you. The editor oversees the acquisitions editor, the production manager, and copy editor in the day-to-day running of the newsletter. I can't say enough good things about our small crew. They are efficient, articulate, and dedicated to delivering the highest-quality newsletter to our members.

The editor position comes with some pretty cool perks too. Your conference registration and hotel are comped, and there is a travel reimbursement. Plus, you get to work with some great people as you oversee the conference reporters during the conference.

This position will continue working toward NINC's commitment to 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 at newsletter@ninc.com or harper@harperstgeorge.com. I will be happy to discuss the duties with you in more detail to help you decide if this position is right for you.

*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.*

NINC Bylaws

Results of the 2023 vote to amend our bylaws

The proposed amendments, which required approval by two-thirds of the votes cast in order to pass, have met that threshold.

Total votes cast: 285

Article VII: Membership Committee

Amendment proposed to eliminate term limits for volunteers serving on the committee.

- 235 (82.5%): Yes
- 50 (17.5%): No

Article XV: Amendment

Amendment proposed to clarify the procedure for amending the bylaws.

- 280 (98.2%): Yes
- 5 (1.8%): No

The updated bylaws reflecting these amendments will be posted on the NINC website.

Laura Resnick
NINC Central Coordinator

NINC2023: Elevate

Conference Report

By Tawdra Kandle



Registration

As of this writing, member registration for NINC2023: ELEVATE (taking place at the TradeWinds Island Grand Resort in St. Pete Beach, Florida, September 20-24) is 97% sold out!

Assistant tickets sold out on the first day of registration.

Hotel and transportation

As many of you have discovered, our guest room block at the TradeWinds has been filled.

We understand how frustrating this situation is for you. The conference team is working hard to rectify this by speaking with the TradeWinds about options at the Rumfish. We are also in the process of arranging space at an overflow hotel.

Why aren't we simply increasing our room block at the TradeWinds? The answer to this question involves some intricacies with our contract. If you've never been involved in conference planning, you might not realize that when a previous board signed our hotel contract for 2023, we committed to filling a certain amount of guest rooms. If we don't fill those rooms, we, as the organization, must pay for the room nights.

Last year, due to the overwhelming response to conference registration, we increased our room block twice. Unfortunately, there were sufficient last-minute cancellations in August and early September that we failed to fill the contracted rooms, resulting in a fairly sizable charge to NINC.

If you reserve a room at the Rumfish, you may have the option to move that reservation to the TradeWinds if we have enough cancellations later in the year. We don't maintain a waiting

list for this possibility. As soon as we have set up the overflow hotel, we'll share the link to reserve a room there.

Thank you for your patience as your conference team works hard to find ways that will accommodate our membership and protect our organization.

In the past, we've used a reserved shuttle through the TradeWinds to help our attendees travel from the Tampa airport to the resort.

This year, we're asking that attendees *not* reserve shuttles directly with Shirley. Instead, we'll send out an email later in the year with information that will allow us to facilitate the process for our attendees.

Don't worry—we're not taking business from Shirley; we're just making sure that she is treated fairly and can manage the trips on her end.

Programming

The programming team is pleased to announce our current list of speakers:

- Erin Wright
- Alessandra Torre
- Nicholas Erik
- Leslye Penelope
- Sarra Cannon
- Steve Pieper
- Erica Ridley
- M.K. Williams
- Margie Lawson
- Melanie Harlow

Sponsorship

Confirmed sponsors joining us this year so far are:

- Down Island Publishing
- Draft2Digital
- Kobo
- Google Play
- BookBub
- Reedsy
- Vellum
- Writer MBA
- BookFunnel
- Book Vault
- Lulu
- Plottr

- Fairy-Plot Mother
- Written Word Media
- Publish Drive

Look for more updates on sponsors, speakers, workshops, and a detailed schedule coming soon!

Can't wait to see you on the beach!

Your NINC2023 Conference Team:

- Conference Director: Mel Jolly
- Programming Chair/Assistant Conference Director: Tawdra Kandle
- Assistant Programming Chair: Dylann Crush
- Trad Liaison: Lou Aronica
- Sponsorship Chair: Sarah Woodbury
- Assistant Sponsorship Chair: Hallee Bridgeman
- Registrar: Lisa Hughey
- Assistant Registrar: Stephanie Julian
- Hotel Liaison: Karen Fox
- Assistant Hotel Liaison: Tegan Maher
- App Coordinator and Designer: Laura Hayden
- NINC After Dark Coordinator: Tamsin Ley
- NINC After Dark Assistant: Deann Powell

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.



Recently in the headlines

- **Find out how many Amazon customers follow you.** For many years now, it's been possible for Amazon customers to follow authors they like, then receive notifications when those authors have new work releasing. (The Follow button is featured on author profiles—here's an [example](#).) While it's not possible for authors to see or contact those followers, earlier this month Amazon started revealing to authors just how many followers they have. You'll need to log in to your Amazon Author Central account to find the figure. [Learn more](#).
- **NPD BookScan is now known as Circana.** In August 2022, the NPD Group—the owner of BookScan—merged with another company known as IRI, a data and analytics company. IRI and NPD unveiled a new combined company name and brand identity: Circana. So when you see Circana mentioned going forward, we're referring to what was previously known as NPD BookScan.
- **Book sales update:** According to Circana, U.S. print book sales are down by 2% versus last year but up by 16% compared to 2019.

AI becomes a hot-button issue in contracts and agreements

A look at proposed remedies to rights issues in generative AI.

Earlier this month, the Authors Guild announced a new model clause for book contracts that prohibits the use of an author's work for training AI. This development is related to the recent discovery that Findaway—a leading audiobook distributor owned by Spotify—provided Apple with access to its files for such training. And it was the authors' agreement with Findaway that gave Apple this right, going as far back as 2018. SAG-AFTRA (Screen Actors Guild), which includes audiobook narrators among its membership, is now working with Findaway to address concerns regarding "safe storage of the recordings and data, usage limitations, and appropriate compensation."

The new clause suggested by the Authors Guild prohibits not only publishers but also any sublicensors from data mining authors' books. It [reads](#), "The Author expressly prohibits [Publisher/Platform] from using the Work in any manner for purposes of training artificial intelligence technologies to generate text, including without limitation technologies that are capable of generating works in the same style or genre as the Work. The Author reserves all rights to license uses of the Work for generative AI training and development of machine learning language models. Publisher will use best efforts to include a limitation in any sublicense of the Work prohibiting the use of the Work for training and developing generative AI technologies."

At a recent [panel](#), Authors Guild executive director Mary Rasenberger offered guidance on how to spot contract clauses or terms that permit AI training. "Sometimes they don't refer outright to AI," she said. Sometimes it's called "data mining," or the contract may refer to "internal research use." So far, these clauses are primarily seen in platform agreements—like at Findaway Voices, book distributors, and various tech services. "If you see these clauses, [email](#) our staff," Rasenberger asked. "We're reaching out to platforms that have these kinds of clauses and getting them removed." Plus, she said it helps their efforts when there is pressure from authors in general—so the more people who speak out and object, the better.

Aside from prohibiting AI training, authors might also consider contractual language to limit the use of AI in the publishing process. For example, book contracts often include author approval over the audiobook narrator, so that should be sufficient to avoid AI narration if you're against it.

OpenAI, the company that launched ChatGPT, has scraped the open Web to develop a corpus, including at least two large book databases. One consists of free ebooks available at the Smashwords online store. The second one remains a mystery, said Rasenberger. She speculated it could be [LibGen](#) or the Internet Archive's [Open Library](#), among others. Rasenberger and other panelists agreed that authors and other creators whose works have already contributed to AI datasets require compensation. That might happen through litigation (there are already lawsuits underway), legislative efforts, and/or through collective licensing. Panelist John

Murphy, an SFWA board member, said, “It’s not just professional writers whose work is being taken. It’s everybody”—anyone or any company/organization that has published online, whether on blogs, websites, or social media.

Bottom line: It’s still early, and no contractual standards or payments have been established. Victoria Strauss of *Writer Beware* told us, “Discussion of AI is everywhere, but very little of it seems to focus on books (other than the predictable worries about human authors being supplanted) or book contracts. I think we’re just at the very beginning of figuring out the rights issues posed by machine learning, and I don’t think it’s premature at all for agents and authors’ groups to be advocating for inclusion of language addressing AI in book contracts—especially in regard to audiobooks, where the AI takeover is already underway. The Authors Guild’s AI clause prohibits use of authors’ work for AI training—but what might also make sense is the kind of clause that was common in the early days of ebooks, where digital publication was identified as a separate right to be separately negotiated if the publisher wanted to exercise it. I think the integration of AI into publishing is inevitable, and authors and agents do need to fight for authors’ right to say no—but we also need to figure out how authors can say yes in a way that is fair, both in terms of how their work is used and how they are paid for that use.”

More reading on AI

- **Noam Chomsky on the “false promise” of ChatGPT:** The technology is incapable of distinguishing the possible from the impossible; it trades merely in probabilities that change over time. [Read Noam Chomsky, Ian Roberts, and Jeffrey Watumull in the *New York Times*.](#)
- **The moral panic surrounding AI:** Don’t worry, says one media commentator. AI regulation is inevitable, and early uses of AI are likely to be total duds. [Read Brian Morrissey at the *Rebooting*.](#)
- **SFWA members weigh in.** The writers of speculative fiction imagine a world filled with AI and machine learning, for better and worse. [Browse.](#)
- **The most important job skill of the century:** It might be talking to computers effectively, e.g., writing prompts. [Read Charlie Warzel at *The Atlantic*.](#)
- **The worst enemy of AI? The U.S. Copyright Office.** So far, copyright can only be held by humans. [Read Matt Ford at *The New Republic*.](#)
- **The intersection of AI and academia.** Two writers hope that “humanities educators can be leaders in helping students and the public to grasp the possibilities and perils of language models and other ‘generative AI.’” [Read Lauren M.E. Goodlad and Samuel Baker at *Public Books*.](#)
- **Humorous relief.** Publicist Paul Bogaards has a conversation about publishing with ChatGPT. Have fun picking out the human-generated content. [Read at *Substack*.](#)

AI tools to check out

- [AI Author](#): Generate writing modeled on the work of 1,000+ classic authors.
- [Perplexity](#): This is like ChatGPT, only the results show which underlying sources have been used to generate the answer. It raises the question of whether that should in fact be the ethical and legal default for all AI-generated material, and if it might play into licensing and payments for authors and publishers.
- Finally, in the realm of “God help us,” check out the [AI Book Generator](#), which will “generate a book in seconds” so you can start making money on Amazon today!!!
- [GPT-4 is here](#). The free version of ChatGPT is built on version 3.5. If you pay for the premium plan known as “ChatGPT Plus” (\$20/month), you’ll get access to GPT-4.

Draft2Digital print program is now open to all

After years of being in beta, Draft2Digital is now opening up its print-on-demand service, which is powered behind the scenes by Ingram, to all authors. Currently, Draft2Digital distributes more than 30,000 print books and nearly one million ebooks. A press release from Draft2Digital postulates that digital-only authors and publishers are missing out on 86% of the potential readership for their books. [Learn more](#).

Links of interest

- **What your publisher’s publicist wishes you knew:** This is a helpful Q&A with a university press publicist. [Read Laura Portwood-Stacer and Maria Whelan at Princeton University Press’s website](#).
- **An in-depth study on politics and school libraries.** Brookings analyzes the holdings of more than 6,000 schools across the country, across conservative and liberal counties. One finding: Access to controversial content is related to local political environments. [Read Kirsten Slungaard Mumma](#).
- **Amazon takes about 50% of Marketplace gross revenue.** This is up from 40 percent in five years. [Read Juozas Kaziukėnas at Marketplace Pulse](#).

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](#).

Falling for Instalove Books

How to write and publish romance novellas

By Mia Brody



Instalove romances feature one or more characters falling instantly in love. The hero might see the heroine across a crowded room and without even speaking to her, he knows that she is his soulmate. He's completely smitten, and his world now revolves around her.

These romances are the ultimate "love at first sight" books. What might surprise you about the trope is that it sells well to hungry readers who eagerly devour dozens of books a month.

In particular, instalove romance is sometimes used interchangeably with short reads or novellas. That's because the instalove trope lends itself very well to quick romance books. Some of these books are as short as 50 pages, which is roughly 14,000 words.

Imagine having your main characters meet, fall in love, and have babies all within the span of a few thousand words. It's a thrilling and exciting challenge to write a compelling romance with so few words available and it takes a skilled writer to make it happen. But if you're up for the challenge, here's what you should know ...

The pros of writing instalove

There are many advantages of writing instalove books for both new and established romance authors:

1. Writing instalove books can be fun and enjoyable. A prolific writer could have a new book written in as little as a week.
2. Instalove books can be a great mini project for those who typically write longer novels. That's because there's a rush that comes from immersing yourself in a project and quickly completing it.

3. If done correctly, you could add your short instalove books into your overall universe, allowing you to discover new readers and give clamoring fans something to enjoy while they wait for your next longer work.
4. Perhaps most exciting of all is that it's easy to create a lucrative backlist with instalove books if you choose a niche and publish many stories in it.

The cons of writing instalove

Although there are many advantages to writing instalove books, there are also a few disadvantages to consider before you decide if this is the right path for your career:

1. Rapid release is expected. Readers of the instalove genre prefer to have new material from their favorite authors every two to three weeks. If you can keep up with this demand, your income will quickly skyrocket.
2. The genre is becoming crowded. As more writers become familiar with the instalove genre, choosing a niche becomes more important than ever. Getting known for doing one trope well such as cowboys, aliens, or MC clubs (motorcycle clubs) can help you make a name for yourself and build your fan base.
3. Another disadvantage is that like many romance genres, instalove receives a fair bit of mockery. If you're hoping to earn the approval of your mother-in-law with your literary prowess, this is not the genre for you.

How to write instalove books quickly

Instalove books are sometimes harder to write than novel-length romances. When you have fewer words, you have to be more creative since every scene must count. Here are some tips to keep in mind when writing...

1. Shorter timelines work well for this genre. A few days or even a few hours together can be enough to have your characters falling in love and making passionate declarations of their feelings. One of the tropes that can be useful for creating a short timeline is forced proximity. For example, your main characters are trapped together in a snowstorm and take shelter in an abandoned cabin. Or perhaps your hero and heroine have to work through the weekend to finish a big project in your latest office romance.
2. Keep your cast small. The smaller the cast, the easier it is to focus on the romance. Ideally, you'll want your main couple and a best friend or two. Naturally, the best friend should be featured in your next book as instalove readers enjoy series. Remember that each book should tell the complete story of the couple you're writing about. Readers of this genre like their happily ever after and the more satisfying it is, the better! Use the sidekick or best friend character to launch your next book. Introduce them in an interesting or compelling way. Maybe hint at their dark past, their fear of love, or their new office job where, of course, they'll fall for the hot geeky co-worker (cinnamon roll) or the billionaire boss (alpha hero).

3. Allow for character growth. Although instalove books are short, you still want to create characters with an emotional wound that must be overcome in order to claim their happily ever after. An emotional wound might be a heroine who was left at the altar and now fears her new love will abandon her. It might be a hero who believes his disability will keep him from ever knowing love. For short reads of less than 20,000 words, I recommend only having one character with a wound to overcome. If you're writing longer instalove books (20K+ words), then giving both lovers a wound is ideal.
4. Go over the top with the hero. Whether you're writing an alpha male or a cinnamon roll hero, passionate, over-the-top declarations and gestures are loved by readers. This might be the alpha billionaire who demands his love marry him the moment they meet or the cinnamon roll cowboy who throws the heroine over his shoulder and marches her to the courthouse.

Publishing instalove books

When it comes to publishing instalove books, success isn't guaranteed. But there are things you can do to build a raving fan base that devours your latest release:

1. Create a universe. Whether it's a small town, a motorcycle club, or a mafia empire, carefully consider the world you want to create. Ideally, each series will be set within this universe. When all of your books connect, you can spend less time (and money) on marketing and more time writing. You can see examples of universe building by popular instalove authors like Hope Ford, who has the Whiskey Run universe, or Kat Baxter, who sets her books in the fictional town of Saddle Creek, Texas.
2. Trope your books. Just like full-length romance novelists use tropes, make sure you're using them when you're writing instalove. My personal recommendation is to use between three and six tropes with every book. Your tropes can include the hero's identity/occupation, the second love interest's identity/occupation, the setting, and the type of relationship the characters have. Now put your tropes together to create the premise of your story. You might have a billionaire CEO (hero) who falls in love with an innocent virgin (secondary love interest) at an auction house (setting), resulting in a quick marriage of convenience (type of relationship). All four of these tropes combined can give readers a sense of the story you're telling. A reader who is in the mood for an auction house romance will quickly snap this up. While a reader who loves a billionaire CEO might take a chance on this even if they don't normally read auction romances.
3. Go long with your series. Instalove readers are big fans of series with six or more books centered around a recurring trope such as eight cowboys who each fall for a curvy woman in jeopardy. While it might sound repetitive to keep a similar storyline in each book, readers often find it exciting and enjoy seeing authors presenting their favorite tropes with a fresh twist in every new book.

4. Know your brand. Think about what you want to be known for by your readers. Instalove author Nichole Rose is known for adorkable heroines and over-the-top alpha males in her rom-com novellas. Cassie Mint is known for her explosive chemistry between her lead characters in her instalove books. Both authors have their strengths and yet they have different and equally compelling brands. Once you know what you want to be known for, you can deliver it to your readers over and over again. This creates a fan base that's enthusiastic about your books because they know exactly what to expect from you.

In conclusion

Ultimately, writing instalove stories can be a fun and thrilling adventure. It's exciting to quickly publish new books for readers who are eager for your next installment, and if you follow the tips above it can also be a lucrative self-publishing path as well!

Mia Brody is an instalove author who earns a full-time living writing short romances. Her books, set in the Courage County universe, feature over-the-top alpha cowboys and grumpy mountain men who fall hard and fast for their curvy women. You can connect with her in the Writing Instalove group on Facebook where instalove authors come together to learn and grow.

ChatGPT and Authors

The good, the bad, and the ugly

By Troy Lambert



ChatGPT and other AI programs have gone from science fiction to something a few users were playing with in various beta programs run by OpenAI, the parent company of ChatGPT, to something that is a part of our everyday lives.

And as more authors, copywriters, and marketers use AI to ideate or create prompts, outlines, book blurbs, and more, one central question has risen to the top of discussion boards: when is the human operator no longer an author? When does AI become a co-author?

It's a question, among others, we can't yet answer. But what are the pros and cons of ChatGPT and other AI, and how do authors really feel about it?

Fast growth

It took nine months for TikTok to reach 100 million users and that seemed fast compared to the two years it took Instagram. But just two months after launch, [ChatGPT reached the same milestone](#), the fastest app to do so.

Whether or not we writers are ready to embrace ChatGPT, it's likely here to stay, although there are some obstacles for AI, in general, to be truly viable.

This meteoric rise has colleges changing the way they teach, some professors embracing the technology, and even some software geniuses developing technology to detect text written by AI. The thing is, to do any of those things, you have to study and use ChatGPT to fully understand it.

So a certain percentage of users are logged in and engaged to learn how to defeat AI. But that's a game it's unlikely they will win.

The financial and environmental cost

There is a big obstacle to the mainstream adoption of AI: money. Despite [investment of over \\$1 billion by Microsoft](#) and other companies, ChatGPT is projected to make a mere \$200 million over the next year. Why?

Quite simply, [AI takes a huge amount of computing power](#). Even with the potential launch of ChatGPT Pro (starting at \$20 a month, and with a waitlist) the expected growth that will result will likely cause costs to continue to outpace revenue.

This need for computing power has an environmental cost. While many big tech companies are nearing carbon neutral status, servers and data centers are still a huge contributor to greenhouse emissions and global warming.

So, while we'd love to keep using AI for free, in some ways this also causes us to overlook the other costs to humanity.

How do authors feel about ChatGPT?

- There are a lot of online forums and social media groups for authors where ChatGPT and AI dominate conversations. I conducted a survey including authors from all over and in several genres. When asked if they were using ChatGPT, about half responded yes. This may or may not be typical, but in several writers' groups, this seems to be a nearly accurate trend. But that's not where the real divide showed up.
- Because the survey also asked if writers thought AI was a good thing for authors, if they were not sure yet, or if it was bad for authors. To segment the unsure even further, I asked if the idea excited them or scared them.
- A very small minority feel it is actively bad for authors and their careers. A few felt that it is really bad, and that we are effectively training our machine replacements by using it. The majority, even those who are using ChatGPT, are not sure if it is good or bad. The writers surveyed are pretty equally split between being excited and being scared by the future of AI.

The interesting thing is that most authors are using ChatGPT for the same things. And those, at least in my mind, are good.

The good

Most of those surveyed are using ChatGPT for help with blurbs, ideation, and marketing copy, all things AI can be good at. The key is that AI still needs your input. "It's the same as any other program," one ChatGPT user said. "Garbage in, garbage out. You still need to feed the program the right information."

"Even if authors just look at AI and ChatGPT as a tool to have fun and experiment with, that mindset will help them to create stories in new and unique ways. I think AI is going to be

an amazing tool to utilize as we continue forward,” author and creator of Author Revolution Carissa Andrews said.

“I can see using it for a jumping-off point, especially if you are stuck. Especially for short pieces like blurbs. It depends on the writer and how they view their creativity,” said [Cindy Proctor-King](#), who has struggled with writing over the last few years after an accident. “AI might be helpful in breaking down pieces of work when things seem overwhelming.”

Some are using it, or other AI programs like Sudowrite, to spark ideas as well, and even to beat writer’s block. But some are not stopping there. And some of those things: well, some might think they are bad.

The bad

“The problem I see with it is the same problem I see with, for example, editing programs,” King said. “And that is the impulse to believe the program knows best when in reality you don’t have to accept every correction. So I think authors have to be careful not to sacrifice voice for the sake of convenience and efficiency. I would like to believe voice comes through best with original writing, but maybe I will be proven wrong.”

This is not an intentional or malicious use of AI designed to take anything away from the human voice or even human editors. However, the result, intentional or not, is the same. It’s bad for authors. But it is no worse than other things authors face: simply running books through Grammarly or ProWriting Aid and accepting every change, using programs like Autocrit and Marlowe and completely trusting a machine over their own judgment.

The other danger is becoming dependent on AI. More than once, due to unanticipated growth and the massive computing power required, ChatGPT has become overwhelmed and literally shut down. Not long before this writing, that shutdown lasted nearly two days, and some authors experienced several delays and lockouts for even longer.

“I’ve been using ChatGPT for blurbs and marketing,” [Neil Plakcy](#) said. “But I’ve been unable to get in.” Of course, ChatGPT has a solution. Those who pay will get a more stable platform, and monetization is underway. “Would I pay for it?” Plakcy said. “Yes, to a certain amount at least, because I already see the value for me.”

There are at least two keys to human writing that AI cannot, at least yet, take on. They are intent and author voice. But some writers are testing even those limits.

The ugly

As with any other tech, things can get ugly as well. There are those writers who will use AI to write the majority of their work, fill in some blanks, and post that work as their own. Readers might grab up such trope-filled and likely poorly written fiction with little voice and consume it.

This could, just as the initial forays into ebook publishing, result in a flood of AI-written drivel to water down the real books being created. However, it is unlikely this will last.

But things like derivative works, adapted from public domain works by AI and told in different styles or voices, might emerge, and the question becomes, “When is the writer a writer or are they just an adapter of someone else’s work?”

It’s not as much of a legal dilemma as a moral one. And it doesn’t have a good answer yet. The truth is, this could get uglier before things finally settle and resolve, and we as a society, authors, and a publishing industry decide AI’s place.

Takeaways

This article is hardly comprehensive. Several points in it could be the focus of entire articles. But in summary:

- Authors are using AI already. Most are excited by what it can do for them and for authors going forward.
- A few authors are scared of what AI means. Some are even hostile toward it. That’s understandable. No one wants to be replaced by a machine, but I think we are far from that.
- AI can be good or bad. It’s simply a tool, like a shovel, that can be used to turn over garden soil or used to bludgeon a victim and bury them. It all depends on how it is used. The next question may become, “Who determines how AI can and cannot be used?”
- As with other tools, AI can, and likely will, be abused. The hope is that this will be minimal, and most people will use it for good instead.

As for me? I’m using ChatGPT and Sudowrite for various tasks. Will I pay for ChatGPT when the time comes? Yes. I’m already on the waiting list for ChatGPT Pro. I already pay for Sudowrite and will continue to do so.

And AI art and other issues with this rapidly growing technology? Who can be sure? The one thing we do know is that art and writing and the industry around them are being challenged, similar to how the printing press did.

And much like those challenging times, artists and writers will continue to emerge. Because like our stories, this story hasn’t been fully written yet. And no one really knows the ending.

Troy Lambert is an author, editor, freelance writer, and the education lead for Plottr. He’s written over two dozen novels, loads of short stories and novellas, and spoken at writers’ conferences all around the country. He lives, works, and plays in Boise, Idaho, with his wife and two very talented dogs.

All Things Being Equal...

By Nikoo Kafi and Jim McGoldrick



Like many children, I (Nikoo) was a voracious reader growing up, and my favorite books were those in which I could see myself. I was born in Iran. My parents were Muslim, but we also had family members who practiced Judaism, Christianity, and Bahá'í, and we had our share of atheists. We respected and embraced all beliefs. My initial awareness of a lack of representation in literature happened when I was attending college in the U.S., and later when Jim and I were raising our two sons, also voracious readers.

What happens when the books children read are full of people who look nothing like themselves, whose families look nothing like theirs, and whose stories—while they might be otherwise relatable—don't include people they can identify with?

In 2012, Columbia University in New York hosted “The Muslim Protagonist: Write Your Own Story,” its first annual symposium for Muslim writers, scholars, and filmmakers. By then, as authors of more than 30 books, we were honored to be invited to speak and take part in a panel discussion in a packed auditorium.

For us, the symposium marked what we hoped was the beginning of a sea change in publishing. And since then, there *have* been many changes. Mainstream traditional publishers are featuring more and more titles by Muslim writers, with stories about characters whose heritage can include nations and cultures that are not necessarily “Western” or Judeo-Christian. Stereotypes and literary tropes that have existed for decades are being identified, if not challenged.

So, do these changes affect us as working novelists? Are these changes just elements of a temporary “wokeness” in America? Or do they indicate movement toward more permanent change, more permanent awareness, more permanent inclusiveness? Do the changes provide opportunities for storytellers? If so, how?

A little about our personal publishing journey. When Jim and I were offered our first contract in 1995 for a historical romance novel, the publisher insisted that we take on a Western-

sounding, feminine pen name. For marketing purposes—based on the publisher’s perception of what would be acceptable to the American reading audience—Nikoo Kafi wouldn’t cut it. Nor would Nikoo Kafi and Jim McGoldrick. Nor Nikoo and Jim McGoldrick. Nikoo’s actual identity was completely erased in the printing of our first novel.

Fast forward a few years. Another publisher. Another pen name: Jan Coffey. Coffey is an anglicization of Nikoo’s family name. Anyway, we decided that we needed to push the envelope. When we wrote a submarine hijacking thriller, we decided to make the sub’s commander Iranian American. He was a loyal American, having dedicated his life to serving his country. We think Darius McCann may have been the first Muslim protagonist in American romantic suspense. The novel sold very well, and it was even on the extended *New York Times* list.

A couple of years later, we ran into real trouble with the same publisher when our female protagonist in another thriller—a Muslim Iraqi Kurd who had been erroneously held in a CIA black site for five years—was misrepresented on the cover art. We had suggested a woman with a shaved head wearing an orange prison jumpsuit. Instead, the cover showed a shapely, long-haired woman wearing an orange mini-skirt. When we met with the publishers at our agent’s office in New York, we explained our concerns. The cover was inappropriate for myriad reasons. Heads nodded all around the table. Needless to say, the cover went out *unchanged*, and that was the last contract we were offered by that publisher.

We’ve been hybrid authors for a number of years now, and one of the blessings of indie publishing is that we don’t need to perceive the world as New York publishers do. When a friend asked us to contribute a novella to a Regency collection where all the stories take place in the mansion of an aristocratic member of the British ton, we decided to make our protagonist an Iranian prince who wanted to experience “real” London life before he agrees to a required marriage of diplomacy. Happily, reader reception was unanimously positive. Times really seemed to be changing.

Perhaps.

Numerous articles and podcasts by scholars and writers point out that the depiction of Muslims in print and film continues to be problematic.

To begin, many stories ignore the diversity of those who follow Islam. The majority of characters even vaguely identified as Muslim in film, television, and fiction are depicted as “Middle Eastern” and more or less Arab. The reality is very different. Arabs—who are spread all over Europe, Africa, and North America—constitute only 20% of the Muslim population worldwide. On the other hand, Muslims number over a billion and are of *every* ethnicity, skin tone, culture, and nationality. And yet, writers continue to do it. It’s like an American film in which a Dublin resident speaks with a Cockney accent, but it’s even *more* offensive.

The disregard for difference is found in a great deal of the published fiction and films currently produced. This situation appears to be due to what the scholar Edward Said called “Orientalism,” a Western construct in which we lump Arabs, Muslims, South Asians, and more

into one monolithic “Other.” Western nations have been doing this since the mid-19th century, and we continue to do it.

In a CNN article on Islamophobia, Mirna Alsharif enumerates nine tropes that consistently show up in depictions of Muslims. We mention only a few of Alsharif’s points here, but how often do we see writers create characters in which they demonstrate an ignorance of Islam or a disregard for cultural differences?

Some of these depictions include the misguided notions that Islam encourages the oppression of women. That Muslims are inherently violent. That the Quran demands intolerance toward other religions. That Muslims don’t respect Jesus’s teachings. That Islam is a political ideology, not a religion. That Muslims are using nonviolent “stealth jihad” with the goal of implementing Sharia. That Islam is medieval, foreign, and at odds with Western society.

Of course, these tropes, according to Alsharif, “mirror stereotypes and claims made about other minority groups throughout American history like Jews, Japanese Americans, and Catholics.” But since 9/11, this particular “group” of Others has been consistently identified in American media and literature as *dangerous*.

Being aware of wrong-headed and commonly used tropes identified by Alsharif is certainly useful to any of us who include these characters in our stories.

We would not want to ignore any advances that American publishing has made in producing authentic voices. YA books, in particular, are increasingly finding their way onto bookshelves, and they often serve to illustrate the diversity of Muslim protagonists. However, some reviewers question whether authors (particularly first-time authors) feel a certain pressure to frame their stories and characters in ways that are comfortable to the (still mainly) white editors in major publishing houses.

In a recent episode of the podcast *Muslim Matters*, host Zainab bint Younus discusses this topic with Canadian writer Hanain B. Together, they identify a number of novels written by Muslim writers and highly touted by publishers and readers. In these novels, some of the same tropes identified above subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) find their way into the narrative. The commentators call out stories where a line is drawn “between the ‘good Muslim’ characters (usually liberal and not overtly practicing) and the ‘bad Muslims’ (any/all religiously conservative Muslims, whether they are characters in the novel or not).” They identify novels that support the position that the binary opposites trope seems to appeal to the Western audience (and publisher). In addition, toxic masculinity is used as a stereotypical “Muslim marker” in stories where the author presents a “not-too-religious girl [who] falls for a white boy, then inserts the conservative Muslim man” as the antagonist, reinforcing a negative stereotype.

In other stories, if a Muslim man wants to reconnect with his religious or cultural origins, it is a red flag that he will be antagonistic to the female protagonist. Finally, in a retelling of a *Pride and Prejudice* story—a novel they found largely positive—at the conclusion, the Darcy character must cast off South Asian Islamic cultural behaviors to demonstrate his worthiness to the female

protagonist (and the reader). Bint Younus and Hanain B see all of these things as evidence of the authors' perceived need to cater to the "white gaze" of acquiring editors.

So, where does this leave us?

As authors, we want to tell stories that entertain and (perhaps) educate. Very few of us (publishers included) would consciously wish to misrepresent any ethnic, racial, or religious group. In our opinion, awareness of erroneous stereotypes and tropes is a must. One positive step that many authors and publishers are taking involves the increasing use of authenticity/sensitivity readers. These editorial services provide observations on our stories that do not amount to censorship. Instead, they offer conscious and unbiased observations for the author to consider before moving toward publication.

As always, change starts with each of us.

May McGoldrick, Nik James, and Jan Coffey are pseudonyms for USA Today bestselling authors [Nikoo Kafi](#) and [Jim McGoldrick](#). Together, they have crafted over 50 fast-paced, conflict-filled historical, contemporary, and Western novels, as well as two works of nonfiction.

Is Direct Sales for You?

Find stability and deeper relationships through selling direct

By Katie Cross



It's no secret that things are ... squirmy ... in publishing markets these days.

Power plays between market leaders have led to less-than-favorable advertising conditions for authors, not to mention the titanic reverberations we all feel when behemoths like Amazon lay down their god-like laws.

What's an author to do?

Despite all evidence to the contrary, you can find stability, higher royalties, and more control, even in the most volatile, competitive markets.

You just have to go direct.

What are direct sales?

Direct sales is when you control the way your books land in readers' hands. Typically, you see this when authors start a Shopify, Wix, WooCommerce, or other form of store and guide readers to buy from them.

They buy *directly* from your website, not the retailers.

Why are direct sales so great?

Control. You want to create a coupon? Go for it. Want to launch early? It's all yours. No need to upload five days before. You want only your book on the landing page and not dozens of others? Totally doable.

When you subtract credit card processing fees, you can expect a ballpark of 94–96% royalties on all purchases. No 60-day waiting period either. Your funds will often arrive in your bank account within 48 hours.

Those extra 24–65% royalties (considering that most authors receive 35–70%) add up quickly. So does the decreased time to get your money. Have you had to pay an unexpected medical bill but didn't have the funds because you had to wait two months?

Lame.

Not to mention that many storefronts don't take a percentage of sales, instead charging an affordable monthly fee.

We're talking less than \$35 USD per month to run your store.

Is direct sales for me?

After two years with an I'm-only-focused-on-my-website-the-retailers-can-do-whatever-they-want mentality, I'm here to say that direct sales can fit anyone ... but I've seen similarities in people that really drive it forward.

The people who are looking for hard data, have a desire for a bigger entrepreneurial experience, want more control over the buying process and dislike power in the hands of people outside their influence, tend to hang out at this water cooler more.

Not exclusively, of course.

Which leads me to my next point.

Can I use the retailers and direct sales?

Short answer: Definitely.

This isn't an all-or-nothing deal. You sign no binding contracts when you sell your own books through your website. You can have books in KU, manage a direct-sales store, and still make income from both.

For the KU authors looking for a modicum more control over their reader experience, try launching a book to your website a month early. (Even a week early!) Once you've given your readership the chance to read it from you, pull it and put it into KU for a second launch.

That leaves you with cash on hand and more data to work with to make better business decisions.

Wanting a bit more upfront cash to pay for a vacation? Have a contractor you need to pay, credit card debt to whittle down? Write a novella, sell it only from your website, and see what happens.

Do you have a massive back catalog of books that are often ignored? Bundle those series, put them only on your website, and give a discount to entice readers.

On wide launches, offer your book for a dollar cheaper on your website, then put your link at the top of your emails or social media posts. You can still provide all the Kobo, Nook, or iBooks links that you want ... but put yours first.

How do I set up direct sales?

There are a plethora of resources out there, but it comes down to a few basic platforms. Research and use whatever feels best for you, but here are some suggestions that have worked for me and others.

1. **BookFunnel.** I deliver all ebooks and audiobooks through them. They integrate with several ecommerce platforms and have all kinds of functionality. My favorite? Their sales action that collects all preorders, then delivers the download links on launch day.
2. **Email service provider.** I use [Active Campaign](#) and have for years, but several others work just as well. Just make sure they have integration capabilities with Shopify. The deep integration with Shopify that Active Campaign has is really nice for marketing emails. [Klaviyo](#) is another company with deep integration to e-commerce stores.
3. **Lulu.** I print my paperbacks through the Lulu app on Shopify. Their prices are higher than you'll see on KDP or IngramSpark (a book that's \$7 to print on KDP would be closer to \$12 at Lulu), but they print on demand *and* ship without me having to coordinate anything. I have kids to raise and mountains to climb. Printing hundreds of books to store at my house and ship myself is not on my radar, thanks. Which is why I willingly pay Lulu a little more money. I've also been super pleased with their customer service, that has always responded promptly when an issue crops up. You can always order the books in bulk and ship yourself, if that calls to you.
4. A storefront. I use [Shopify](#), but I've also used [SamCart](#) and have checked out [WooCommerce](#), and several others. I love Shopify's apps and versatility, though SamCart had better landing page results. Other places like BookFunnel also offer sales pages. [WordPress](#) sites can also integrate with PayPal or WooCommerce. Look around, find something that works for you, and stick with it.

Pros and cons

Sure, this sounds easy on paper, but there are ups and downs to every part of business.

Pros:

1. A more intimate relationship with my readers. They come to me for the deals!
2. When people click a link to check out my book, they aren't slammed with 500 other books that aren't mine.
3. Data. Data, data, data. Did I mention data?
4. Faster money.

Cons:

1. Customer support. You've got to be nice when the people are grumpy.
2. Getting it going. While it's easy to upload the books to Shopify and BookFunnel, you have to figure out the systems behind your email provider and delivery services. Once you set the process up, it's as simple as following it for each book.
3. Sales might be slow at first. It's a trickle that grows into a stream and then a surge with each launch. It probably won't come all at once.

Okay, let's talk taxes

My job is to create fantasy worlds, not advise you on how to run your taxes, but allow me to remove some fear. (I'm in the U.S., so I can't speak to anything outside of here.)

First of all, this is a lot scarier sounding than it is. Tackle it, move on. It's not worth stewing over, and it's certainly not worth holding yourself back. (This is where most indies totally freeze and never try it.)

Secondly, there are apps like TaxJar that can help you navigate individual state taxes, should you reach a threshold that would require you to pay sales tax.

Finally, there are bookkeeping and tax professionals you can trust to help manage this world. Speak with your bookkeeper or tax accountant. Let them know what you're doing, and see what they advise. If you don't have one, I highly recommend you find one. Start by reaching out to other authors. Find out who they use, know, and trust.

Another (somewhat unexpected) place to find accounting support is on podcasts, particularly entrepreneur-based interviews that provide team support to business owners. Bookkeepers and accounting firms interview on podcasts all the time and usually speak toward their niche (start-ups, online business, e-commerce, brick-and-mortar, etc.).

When you find a potential match, don't be afraid to interview *them*. Ask if they've worked with authors or in e-commerce before. Do they have digital commerce experience? A lot of e-commerce has nothing to do with digital products like audiobooks or ebooks.

I've used three different accounting firms, and have been happiest (and remain with) the one that had experience in the publishing industry, so don't give up.

Keep in mind—bookkeepers and tax accountants are different. Your bookkeeper can help you navigate some of these hurdles, but I always suggest relying on your tax accountant for final help.

Cautions

When it comes to direct sales, managing your mindset is key.

1. Start small, expect small.
2. You have to train your readers to buy from you. That takes time and persistence, but it does work.

3. Be consistent, whatever you do.
4. Don't give up after a single launch, or even five launches. Do it again and again. See #3.
5. Fail at something. Then figure out what didn't work, and do it better the next time. See #4.
6. Everything is going to be fine. See #5.

In summary

Direct sales is a fantastic way to generate faster income, build a more powerful relationship with your readers, test different marketing approaches, and make more money. While it's not without challenges, the stability that an immediate relationship with your readers brings has been so worth the time.

Katie Cross, CEO of KC Writing, loves working directly with her readers and meeting new authors. She lives in the mountains of Montana and writes full-time in her fantasy world, where she eats chocolate and drinks tea without worrying about silly things like adulting. If she's not chatting with readers or diving into a new story, she's probably hiking, eating sweet potatoes, or deadlifting.

Smart Marketing for Savvy Authors

By Tawdra Kandle



*This year of Smart Marketing
is all about reinventing our businesses.
For the second quarter, we'll talk details:
What starting over looks like;
Why business structure matters;
But what about the readers?*

Welcome to the second quarter of Reinventing Our Businesses!

Let's recap where we've been: after almost 10 years of publishing, I was tired of watching my monthly royalties trend downward despite trying all of the marketing and promotion trends, rapid releasing, and ... well, you name it, I tried it. Even with well over a hundred books available wide, I was grossing an average of \$200 a month, down from my \$2,000 a month average a few years before.

I talked to several industry professionals and business coaches. I did research, investigated options, and finally arrived at a dismaying conclusion: without knowing it, without intending to do it, I'd poisoned my own name on Amazon.

I'll add a caveat that during this time, my sales on other vendors stayed pretty much the same, provided I paid attention to them. It didn't seem that the mistakes I'd made earlier in my career affected non-Amazon booksellers to the same extent that they did my Amazon presence.

Quite a few people have asked me how, exactly, I'd managed to destroy my author name on Amazon. It wasn't anything personal; it actually wasn't anything Amazon did intentionally at all. First of all, I was very fortunate to nab a number of BookBub Featured Deals in the mid-years of my career. That's great, right? Lucky me! Unfortunately, I couldn't afford the categories that best fit my books, so more often than not, I settled for the closest fit. Those deals sent

thousands of readers to my book page—and unfortunately, a large percentage of them didn't download or buy, thus teaching the bots that people don't buy my books.

I also wasn't ever a Facebook ad genius, either. I'm sure that several of my ads sent the wrong people to my Amazon page, too, thus doubling-down on what the algorithm was learning about me.

So having established that I needed to become a new woman—well, at least a new author on Amazon—I faced several decisions: how was I going to do this? Who would this new persona be? And which of my books would I move into my new author name?

I began by choosing the books that I'd move. As part of my initial research, I'd determined which of my series sold the best on Amazon. They were football romance, angsty and steamy. I decided that these books would be the first ones to be republished, and they also helped to establish the brand of my new author persona. I came up with a name for the new me, bought her domain name, and began to work on her website.

Once those decisions were made, I huddled with my mastermind and we came up with a new series name and titles for all of the books, basing them on what comparable books in that category were titled—in other words, if one-word titles were selling well, we tried to come up with single-word titles, too. I worked with my cover designer to research the most popular, best-selling covers in that particular sub-genre. My designer came up with six gorgeous covers that reflected the new branding, focusing on two words: angst and steam.

I spent a good deal of time crafting new blurbs for the books, really drilling down on the tropes, the characters—and of course, the angst and steam.

I determined release dates and began to put together a newsletter—which reminded me that I didn't have a newsletter list. In the past decade, I had become comfortable with my usual process in releasing books: using my newsletter and social media, trading newsletter spots with comparable author pals, giving away an earlier book to push the new release ... all the usual tools in an author's tool box.

But my new persona didn't have any author friends. She didn't have any extra books to give away. She didn't have social media accounts, a newsletter list, or anything to incentivize readers to check her out.

All she had was my wisdom and hard-earned experience—and a really fabulous personal assistant who had agreed to add my new author persona to her client list. (I was already a client!)

I knew that building a strong and organic newsletter list was key. Consequently, I needed a cookie—a novella that I could use to lure readers into signing up for the newsletter of an author they didn't know. I had a good time writing that novella, enjoying new characters who were mixed in with my old favorites. I made it super tropey, and I began running Facebook ads—very low spend ads—to get the word out. Before long, I had a list that was decently sized and fairly engaged.

One of my early decisions was to place this series into Kindle Unlimited. As Tawdra, I have never had a positive experience with Amazon's subscription model, but we were hopeful that as my new persona, I might fare better. Also, as you might have begun to recognize, being more than one person, when there is intentional separation between the two authors' names, involves a great deal of work. Maintaining more vendor accounts would mean more work. KU was simply easier.

As I prepared to launch the new name, I also very deliberately kept her completely separate from Tawdra when it came to Kindle Direct Press. I didn't want any cross-pollution to sully my fresh new pen name. Since the Amazon terms of service forbid any business entity holding more than one account under that name, I formed a LLC so that my new personas (no, that plural is not a typo!) could operate separately from Tawdra. I bought an app called Burner which allowed me to choose a different phone number under my new name and used that number for KDP and for all of my social media accounts.

Several details I hadn't considered popped up along the way. I had to create (and in some cases, pay for) separate accounts for the new persona for support tools like BookFunnel, BookBub, and Goodreads. I also established separate accounts for her newsletter, first with MailChimp and then with MailerLite, and of course, her email accounts.

And then there were some missteps. Once I rapid-released the first six books, I hadn't made a plan for what came next. I had an idea about a new series I wanted to write, and I actually did release the first book under the new author's name, but I realized pretty quickly that while it was angsty, it didn't match the feel, steam, and emotion of the previous series. I ended up pulling it down.

Also, as previously mentioned, writing and managing a pen name that is completely separate is not easy. This may come as a surprise to you, but my new persona does none of her own writing, none of her own promotion or marketing—she doesn't even answer her own email. At this point, I intend to keep three contemporary romance series and all of my paranormal and erotic romance under my own name because they are unique and linked with Tawdra. That means I'm continuing to write and release books in those series at the same time that I maintain at least two completely separate names. I'll admit that sometimes, between Tawdra's work, conference commitments, and just plain life, two weeks will go by and I'll realize with guilt that I haven't done anything for my other author identity. It's all a balance.

It's been nearly a year since the launch of not-Tawdra. Initially, her numbers were very promising, giving evidence that supported our 'poisoned name' theory. Last summer, we chose another of my existing series to repackage and publish under her name, and that launch is going on right now. Joe Solari gave me some excellent advice about the timing of these new releases: he noted that I need to establish a rhythm for my readers, allow them to form expectations of when new books would come out. Consequently, I'm not rapid releasing the new books; I've set them up on a schedule that will allow me to write at a pace that feels more possible to me.

Is this going to revolutionize my career? I think it has the potential to help my books find readers and earn the money they should. Later this year, I'm launching not-Tawdra number two, an author who writes only small-town steamy contemporary romance. We're taking her release in an entirely different direction ... but I'll talk about that in quarter three.

Next month, we're taking a deep breath as we get serious about business structure and why it's essential that we take our book business seriously – something I ignored for far too long.

And guess what? It turns out business stuff can actually be fun!

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

Size Matters

By Laura Resnick



“Never confuse the size of your paycheck with the size of your talent.”

—Marlon Brando

According to my math, 219 new members have joined NINC in the past two years. (My math doesn’t go farther back than that because I got tired of counting and stopped.)

To put that into perspective, that’s double the number of members NINC had when I joined this newly forming organization and attended its first-ever conference more than 30 years ago.

Or, to look at it from another perspective, when I became president-elect of NINC years later, membership promptly declined by about 100 members, which is roughly the same number that have *joined* NINC in the past 12 months. I hasten to add that the exodus had nothing to do with me. (Not as far as I know, anyhow.) It was largely a consequence of how abysmally the publishing industry was treating midlist writers in the final years before the indie revolution freed so many talented novelists to pursue satisfying and often lucrative careers without traditional publishers.

At the time, NINC had been growing for years—slowly, yes, but it had been growing. But then, at the start of 2007, our numbers suddenly dropped from around 700 to about 600. Alongside then-president Patricia McLaughlin, I contacted many of the departing members to try to persuade them to stay.

There were a few writers who said NINC just didn’t offer what they wanted, they preferred [insert name of much larger organization here]. Our small size meant we had a small treasury, small volunteer pool, and no staff, which meant we couldn’t offer as many services as huge organizations with deep pockets, paid staff, and armies of volunteers.

Yes, size matters.

But many of the writers I spoke to said their careers were in such a steep death spiral, or already dead, they didn’t think there was any point in remaining in an organization focused on

career novelists. NINC was bleeding members because our industry was shoving established writers out the door and slamming it behind them.

This was an existential threat to Novelists, Inc. Shrinking membership meant shrinking capabilities, including a shrinking treasury. It wasn't feasible for NINC to return to the size of earlier years; to sustain it in those circumstances, we'd have to dismantle much of what we'd spent the past 15 years building. There was concern about whether NINC would get so small that it wouldn't realistically be able to continue as anything more than a club, which was not what anyone wanted.

By the time I became president the following year, 2008, conditions in traditional publishing were even worse. I was hearing many firsthand anecdotes that New York publishers were increasingly only willing to offer new writers a one-book contract, even in situations where that book was the start of a series or the writer had a whole trilogy available.

Publishers would release that one book and wait to see how it sold. Much of the time, the sales figures didn't "excite" them enough to sign the author again. Or the acquiring editor had often resigned or been laid off by then, so the author was orphaned. The agent often lost interest in the author whose career had gone "dormant" after one sale. Other publishers or agents weren't enthusiastic about a writer who'd released one "modest" book and was no longer potentially the "hot new thing." An author who, a couple of years earlier, had signed a contract and believed they were launching their writing career, now had to start all over again.

So, the prospects were grim for most new novelists, as well as for many established and longtime writers. This meant the prospects were also grim for NINC, which shrank by about 15% in 2007 *and* which also lost 25% of its existing treasury on that year's conference (fewer than 70 members attended, and we took a *bath*). If new writers couldn't make a second book sale, they couldn't qualify for NINC, and growth would be that much harder for us. Yet the bedrock of NINC, the founding principle, was that this was an organization for career novelists. From the beginning, the two-books-sold requirement had set the whole tone and content of the organization. Although growing NINC was challenging, there didn't seem much point in sustaining it at *all* if we changed that. There were (and still are) other organizations that serve the needs of new writers; becoming yet another such organization would just change NINC from being unique to being redundant.

The portion of my NINC presidency that was not focused on squeezing pennies until they screamed, so that we wouldn't further drain the treasury, was mostly focused on searching for ways to increase NINC's size over the long term.

We built a new website, which NINC really needed, and launched a blog. We created slick marketing brochures about NINC which we asked members to distribute at every writing conference, convention, retreat, and workshop they attended. We also snail-mailed those brochures to many non-member writers who were qualified to join. We held the conference in Manhattan, the epicenter of the publishing world in 2008, at a hotel that was within a very short distance of most publishers and literary agencies, and our conference team created a terrific program full of industry professionals, as well as events for mingling.

NINC was edging back up toward 700 members by the end of 2008, but we weren't there yet, and we knew we needed to grow well beyond that. At the time, we settled on 900 members

as our goal. This was the result of discussions I had at a summit I attended with officers from other writing organizations. We met to discuss publishing industry subjects that affected our members, as well as to exchange ideas and experiences about improving management of our organizations. The thing I learned there, and which I had not previously thought about as the president of an organization whose problems were largely due to small size and modest budget, was that when your organization gets bigger, you don't eliminate your challenges, you just trade them for a different set of challenges.

So, I went home to the NINC board after that summit and said, in effect, "Holy bureaucracy, Batman, there's no way we can cope with 1,600, or 2,000, or 5,000 members! But I think we can handle 900. Let's aim for that."

After I stepped down at the end of the year, it was a relief to stop thinking about NINC's size and how to increase it. Subsequent NINC boards shrewdly recognized that the new "disruptors" in publishing would change everything, and thanks to their wisdom, NINC became an early adopter, embracing innovative indie publishing models—and authors—before most other writing organizations were ready to do the same.

Indie writers helped spur NINC toward the size I had envisioned, 900 members—and then beyond. Bigger size meant more resources, which meant investing more money and manpower in the conference, as well as increased attendance. Our conference, the consistently advanced-level contents of *Nink*, and our reputation pushed us past a tipping point, and we've been growing rapidly in recent years.

Membership is currently hovering around 1,200, nearly double what it was back when I joined the board as president-elect, and a dozen times bigger than it was when I joined NINC as a founding member. Our organization now has a much more robust treasury and a comfortable budget, a sizable pool of volunteers, and staff. NINC offers various services, and the current board is planning for more.

The thing we're learning now is exactly what I learned at that summit years ago: we're changing one set of challenges for another. As NINC continues growing, the way it's managed needs to grow too. So, for example, this year NINC is changing banks, setting up more secure and streamlined financial practices, evaluating NINC's website needs, expanding some existing member benefits, and planning new projects.

I've also realized lately that with so many new members, there are a lot of people in NINC who may not know that much about how NINC works or why we do things a certain way. There may also be longtime members who know about some things in NINC but not others. So, next month's column will focus on how NINC works.

Laura Resnick's roles in NINC have previously included president-elect, president, conference chair, assistant editor of Nink, Outreach Committee co-chair, and Nominating Committee member. One of the hundred(ish) founding members of the organization, she is currently NINC's Central Coordinator.

NINC Member Discounts

By Abigail Drake



[Book Brush](#) is the easiest way for authors to create their own professional looking ads, social media posts, book trailers, book covers, and so much more. With an upgraded account, you can have access to even more features like instant mockups, the Reader Hub, animations, and unlimited downloads. Try it now and you'll see why authors say Book Brush saves them both time & money...and makes book marketing fun!

To find out how to get your 20%-off lifetime discount, check out the [Member Freebies and Discounts page](#).

For helpful videos on how to better use BookBrush, check out [their YouTube channel](#).



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, who 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
- 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

Advisory Council

- Lou Aronica
- Brenda Hiatt Barber
- Linda Barlow

- Jean Brashear
- Janice Young Brooks
- Laura Parker Castoro
- Meredith Efken
- Donna Fletcher
- Kay Hooper
- Lisa Hughey
- Tawdra Kandle
- Barbara Keiler
- Julie Leto
- Pat McLaughlin
- Kasey Michaels
- Diana Peterfreund
- Pat Rice
- 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

Address changes may be made on the website.

Nink Newsletter

April 2023 edition – Vol. 34, No. 4

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.

Copyright ©2023 by Novelists, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this newsletter may be used or reproduced in any manner without written permission.