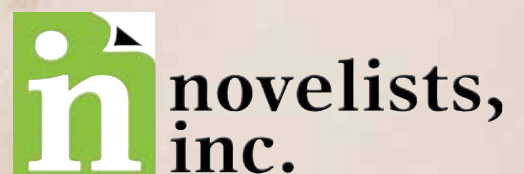




The official newsletter
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of writers of popular fiction



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President's Voice

By Celeste Barclay



In investing, we call it diversifying your portfolio. In publishing, many people use the same phrase, but it has an official term: transmedia. The concept is to get more mileage out of your IP by either diving deeper into your existing stories (deemed “East Coast”) or expanding your world into other mediums (deemed “West Coast”). Being a Midwest to East Coast to West Coast transplant, I know about the East Coast/West Coast battlegrounds. East Coast is commonly thought of as a natural-born model, while the West Coast method is often called the Hollywood franchise model. Either way, transmedia marketing allows you to get far more mileage out of your storytelling than simply words on a page (or ereader screen).

The West Coast (not necessarily the “best coast”) transmedia jumps into derivatives such as screen rights, comics or graphic novels, video games, card or board games, or even YouTube videos where a creator can explore expanding the original story into entirely new plots and content. An excellent example of this is the Jurassic Park franchise. The concept exists across multiple platforms and multiple installments. There have been various video games that accompany the storyline that stretches across six movies. There are Jurassic Park Monopoly and Jurassic Park Life, and there’s a game that is simply called Jurassic Park. You find this story concept expanding like an octopus stretching its tentacles.

The East Coast (not necessarily the “right coast”) transmedia is sometimes also referred to as the Madison Ave. of transmedia. East Coast focuses on the stories that already exist and what can be made from them rather than expanding the storylines into new projects. Our notions of traditional advertising derive from this concept. We advertise the paperback, hardback, large print, audiobook, and translations for the same story. But it can go far beyond that these days. Rather than creating derivatives or more products that generate new storylines or vice versa, this modern methodology tends to be more digital and interactive. You can take the original story and build it into more media forms piece by piece.

If West Coast is the massive Hollywood franchises, then East Coast is the indie films. As opposed to the West Coast model that generates various products over an extended period of time (franchises can take years to build), East Coast transmedia is generally set to a specific period of time (i.e., live release day activities or special events related activities). In this technological age, East Coast tactics may include tightly connected content that makes the most sense when it's followed across multiple forms of social media. It might look like choose-your-own-adventure style stories or plot-based scavenger hunts that take readers from Instagram to X to Threads to Facebook to YouTube. It could be short films or interactive art, but it tends to be web-centric.

I don't think there is a better strategy, and to split hairs on the merits of one over the other is time better spent brainstorming, testing, and implementing. East Coast might be a method to introduce new readers to your catalogue by giving them various entry points such as paperbacks, hardbacks, large prints, audiobooks, and translations for the same story. It's the one that's the OG publishing practice.

But we're seeing people diving in headfirst into West Coast practices because it's a means to grow and reward super fans. The ones that want any and everything from an author. They want to immerse themselves into the author's world and gobble up whatever's offered like they have all weekend at a smorgasbord. We see it with the rise and thrive of platforms like Kickstarter, Patreon, and Ream. These are spaces to offer derivatives unavailable anywhere else. The bonuses readers can only get through paywalls. Exclusivity as well as reward incentives are very powerful marketing tools.

None of us can do all the things. For me, I'd love to dive into the West Coast method with a Kickstarter, but I'm my own worst enemy. I draw an utter blank as to what anyone could possibly want from me beyond the stories I already tell. I'm completely stymied and need to research successful campaigns to get some ideas. I'm already comfortable with the East Coast method, and I think it's still the more prevalent. For those of us who have lengthy backlists, we're likely already utilizing the East Coast concept with our various adaptations, but we might not have delved into the newer digital concepts. The upside to this position is that once the adaptations are created and launched, they can be treated as passive income, or an author can push them more aggressively. But either way, they're there. The West Coast concept requires ongoing ingenuity to create new products from new storylines. One usually outsources the creation of audiobooks and translations, but the entirely new storyline products can be labor and time intensive while still trying to create the typical manuscript product.

For some of us, we'd rather keep those new storylines for new books. Others of us would like to explore the wide-open frontier. Either way, being able to identify your marketing paths is an important step in evaluating their effectiveness and planning for next steps. Creators can generate SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound) goals for these strategies to assess ROI, thus introducing, adapting, or eliminating tactics.

Time for my open-ended questions of the day:

1. Which methodology do you use and why?
2. How is this benefiting your business?

3. How could testing the other approach influence your business?
4. How might you implement a hybrid approach?
5. How will you evaluate the outcomes?

There isn't a better or worse, wrong or right marketing plan. The key is ensuring that either theory generates revenue. One or both can reap dividends and allow you to diversify your portfolio. That's the true goal: offer more than one way for readers to fall in love with you.

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/>

www.ninc.com



SEPTEMBER 20 - 24, 2023 | ST. PETE BEACH, FL



It's hard to believe another fabulous NINC Conference has come and gone!

In September, we welcomed our largest ever group of member *and* industry guest attendees as well as the most sponsoring companies in the history of our conference. The success of the conference is due to the diligent planning and efforts of our hardworking volunteers, the conference staff, and the individuals who attend. When it all comes together, it's a perfect mix of learning, networking, relaxing, brainstorming, and enjoying the industry we all share.

The conference team is fortunate to have received overwhelmingly positive feedback about the event from speakers (who said it was the most organized conference they've ever attended) and from members (who rated everything from meals to workshops to roundtables using the conference app). We've heard especially good feedback from our sponsors, who have been very complimentary about the overall vibe, flow, and organization of NINC, saying publicly that our event sets the standard for every other conference in the publishing world. (If you missed Draft2Digital's post-conference podcast wrap-up, [check it out here](#).)

So when will we start planning for 2024? We already have!

The conference team (which includes Conference Director Mel Jolly, Assistant Conference Director Tawdra Kandle, and about a dozen hardworking member volunteers) starts strategizing for the next year even while we're running the current event.

Shortly after the conclusion of the conference, the team converges via Zoom for our Post-Mortem Meeting, which is one of the most important discussions we have each year. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss what went well, what didn't, and where we can improve.

We thought you, as members, might like a peek behind the curtain.

What went well?

The sponsors loved Meet Our Sponsors Happy Hour (MOSHH). In the D2D podcast (linked above), James Blatch of Self-Publishing Formula noted multiple times how it sets our conference apart. We received generally positive feedback from the attendees about the prizes

and the overall flow of the event. Our sponsors were pleased with the change in day from Friday to Thursday, which gave them more time to plan meet-ups and appointments with attendees. Adding fifteen minutes to the Happy Hour also allowed more people to make their way around to the sponsors.

We received more raves about the meals this year than ever before. The change in the Thursday lunch menu was amazing, wasn't it? And the snacks were also varied and delicious.

Where could we improve?

Wednesday evening

We ran out of food at the Wednesday Welcome Reception. That was such a bummer! One thing you may not realize is that more than half of your registration fee goes toward purchasing all of those delicious meals. A company may sponsor a function, but their sponsorship only covers a small percentage of the cost. As you know, the cost of food has gone up significantly in the last few years. The conference team stuck to the budget available, and that meant we weren't able to purchase quite as much food for Wednesday evening as we needed. Don't worry—we'll fix that for next year!

Workshop etiquette

We received a number of complaints about the noise level in several of the workshop sessions due to side conversations going on between attendees while the presenter was speaking. This is unacceptable behavior, and while we would expect that most people would know that, it seems we'll need to find a way for moderators and other volunteers to enforce common courtesy in the workshops which may include asking Chatty Cathy to leave the room.

Assistant registration

We've heard some grumblings about assistant registration, both from members who weren't able to register their assistants because we limited registration to only ten percent of total attendance and from members who were upset that assistants were able to attend at all. As *a courtesy*, for the past decade, NINC has permitted members to register their assistants for the conference because we recognize the benefit to members who bring their bonafide assistants to workshop sessions.

However, we are also aware that each assistant registration takes away a member registration. Ultimately, the NINC conference is meant for our members.

The board and the conference team are currently investigating the best way to handle assistant registration in the coming years. While we can't say for sure what additional restrictions may be imposed on assistant registration, know that any assistant who is willing to take on additional clients is welcome to apply to attend as an Industry Guest. At the end of the day, our conference—the speakers, the workshops, the networking—is designed for our members, and members who wish to attend should be given priority.

MOSHH

You just can't hear what's being said over the microphone! Don't worry—we'll be working with the TradeWinds AV team to rectify that before next year. The conference team is also aware there was some miscommunication about the time of prize drawings, and we'll make sure it's crystal clear in the future. After all, as popular as MOSHH is with our sponsors, we can only assume the prizes are going to get better and better. We hope Plottr is planning to bring more (priceless) otters next year! Who knew that would be one of the most coveted prizes?

Overall, the 2023 conference was a smashing success, and we're already looking forward to next year! The volunteer slate for 2024 will be announced in January, and we will be sharing our initial list of confirmed speakers ahead of conference registration in March.

We can't wait to see you all again at the beach in 2024!

Tawdra Kandle is the USA Today bestselling author of over 130 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.



Hot Shots

Recently in the headlines

Highlights from the 2023 Frankfurt Book Fair

- A longtime literary scout, Bettina Schrewe, [observed](#) the following: “The trend to focus and publish books that will get a boost from TikTok continues to be popular.... Many of our clients are now looking for romance, romantasy, fantasy, literary and upmarket horror, and genre-bending fiction. Subjects that we have seen plenty [too much] of recently are post-pandemic novels, climate literature, and dystopia.”
- An international sales director, Gemma Davis, [noted](#): “There is one thing that everyone agrees on—BookTok has made reading fashionable, and young people are flocking to bookstores in a way that they haven’t since Harry Potter entered the global consciousness.”
- Nielsen BookScan, which tracks book sales in the UK, also highlighted TikTok’s effect on buying across the world: “Growth in fiction sales seen in six of the countries now monitored by NielsenIQ is primarily driven by romance and sagas titles appearing with BookTok hashtags,” Nielsen’s Hazel Kenyon [said](#).

Looking for more? [Browse Frankfurt coverage from Publishers Weekly.](#)

IMHO: The Most Interesting Parts of the Authors Guild Income Survey

One key takeaway: There isn’t a clear financial advantage to traditional publishing for commercial fiction.

Another takeaway: author hustle matters.

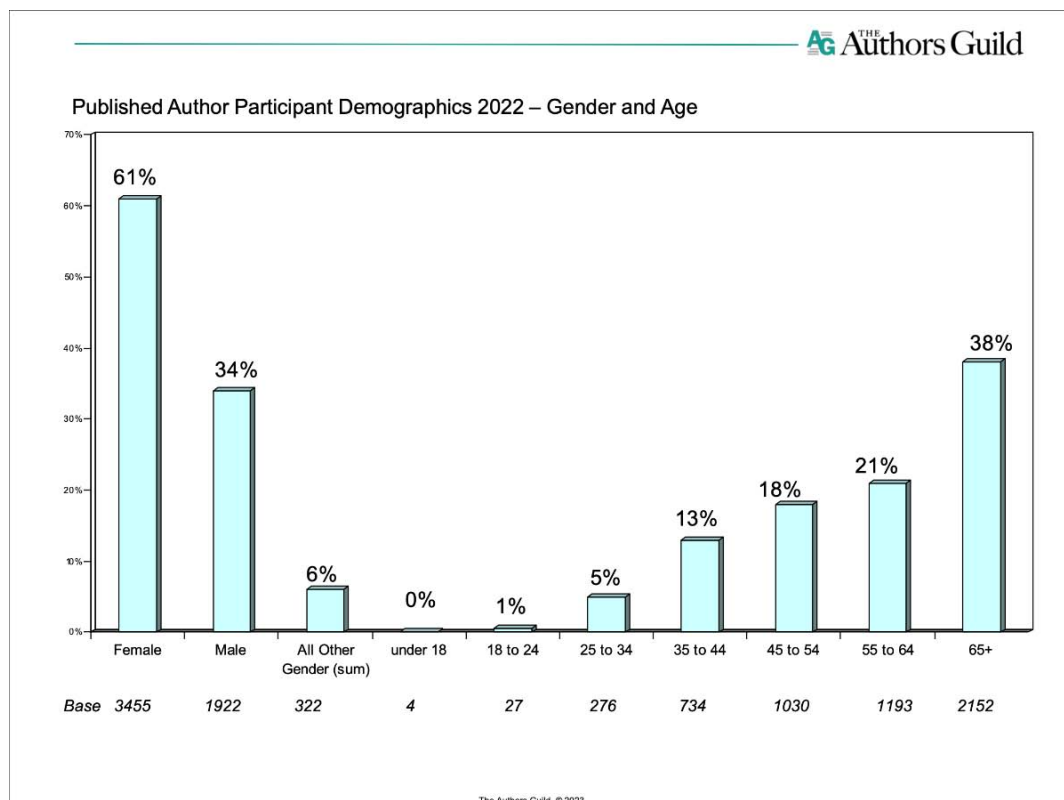
On a regular basis, the Authors Guild surveys its membership to ask incredibly detailed questions about writing and money. The results of these surveys seem preordained to deliver unfortunate news about the inconsequential and declining sums that writers earn. That's not to say the findings are wrong, but the situation for anyone trying to make money from their creative work is complicated and nuanced.

This latest study is the most comprehensive of its kind to date in the U.S. It was conducted in collaboration with 36 other organizations, including Penguin Random House, Hachette, Ingram, Draft2Digital/Smashwords, the Alliance of Independent Authors, PEN America, African American Literature Book Club, and many others.

The 2022 survey includes data and insights that haven't been part of previous studies. So far, the full scope of the 2022 results has not been made publicly available, only key takeaways. For what I'm sharing in this article, I spoke for two hours with Peter Hildick-Smith, who the Guild hired to help conduct the survey. He took me through about 170 pages of results, so there is a lot to consider, with many insights waiting to be unearthed.

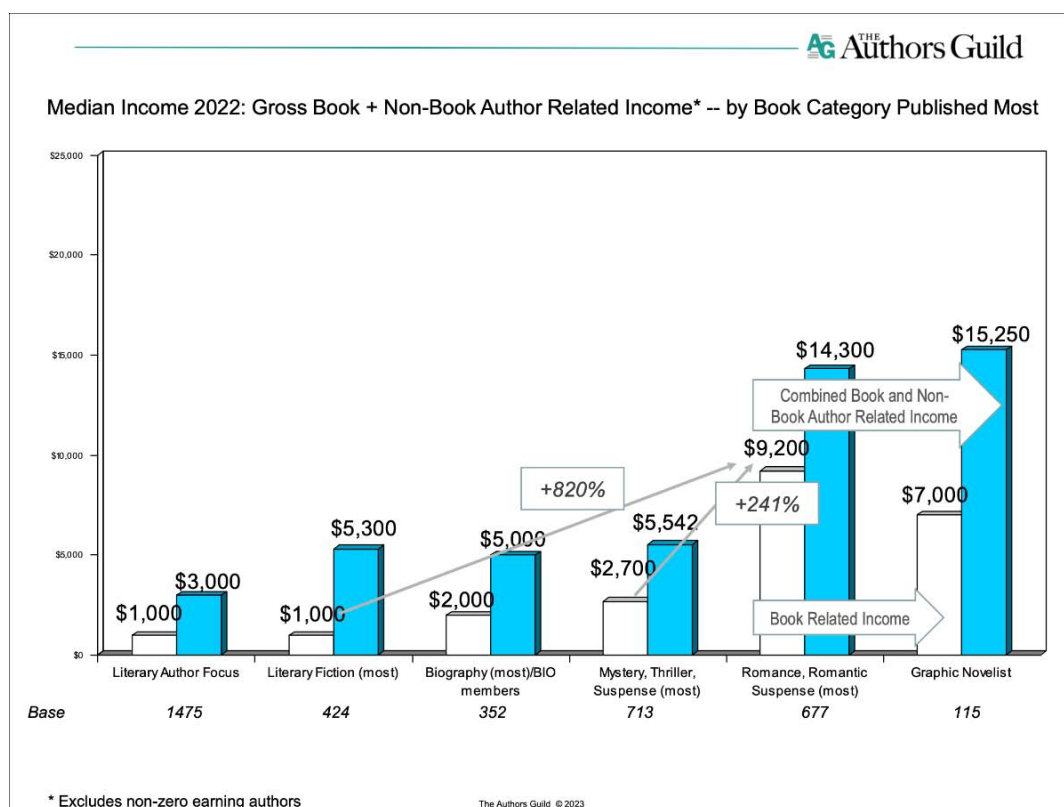
Side note: It is hard to collect good data for these surveys. For this latest survey, invites were sent to 280,000 (!) people; that resulted in about 5,700 survey participants total.

And this touches on the problematic nature of this research: You're only getting the people willing to give you this information, and that group skews older. Authors 65 and over make up 38% of the overall sample.



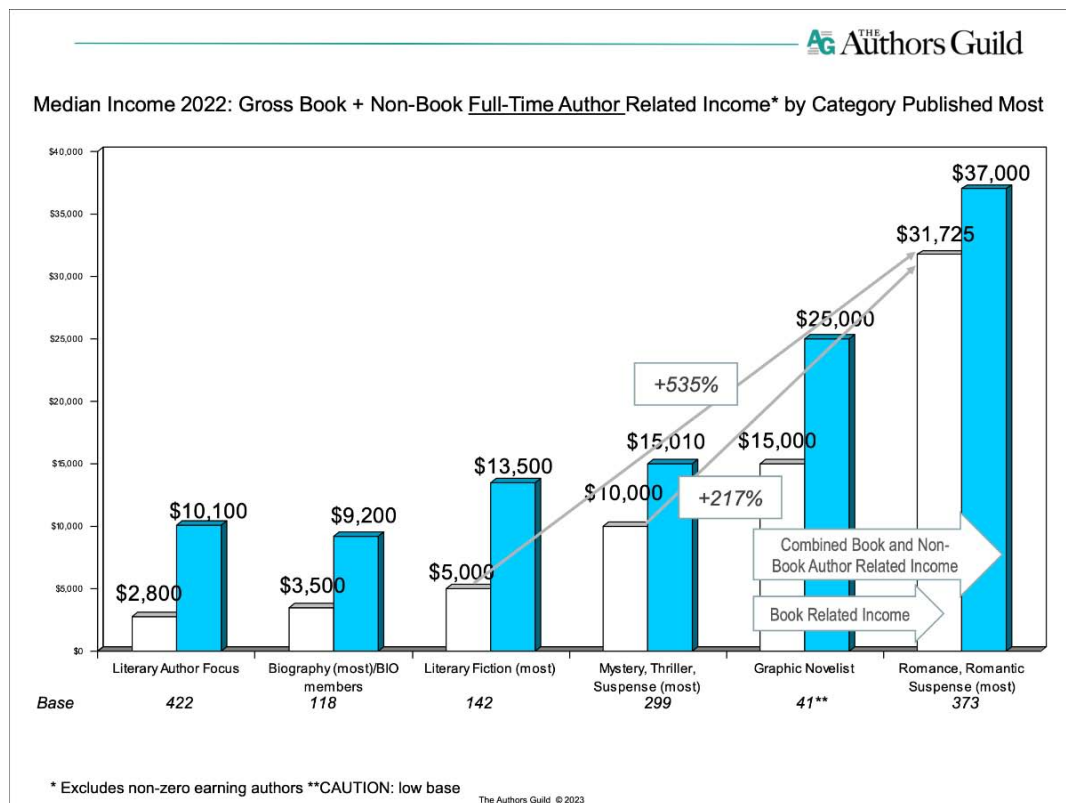
However, this new survey segments authors in ways that help bring meaning and clarity. Overall, about half of the survey respondents are traditionally published and half are self-published.

But let's look at income to start. For me, the survey underlines what most people know after being in the business of publishing for two seconds: The genre or category you write in directly affects your potential earnings in addition to how prolific you are as an author. Romance has long been the most widely read and published genre, and it has seen considerable sales growth in the last year. Other types of commercial fiction—like mystery/thriller—are also dependable for income. And who earns the least? Literary authors. No surprise there.



The blue bar shows total earnings from book sales and author-related activities (e.g., speaking, teaching, freelancing); the white bar shows book sales income alone, which includes licensing and subsidiary rights.

Where things get even more interesting is when you look at the same chart but focus *only* on the people who consider themselves *full-time* authors. In other words, anyone part-time has been excluded. Here, romance authors come out on top.



The blue bar shows total earnings from book sales and author-related activities (e.g., speaking, teaching, freelancing); the white bar shows book sales income alone, which includes licensing and subsidiary rights.

Again, note how the literary authors are bringing up the rear: because their books don't sell in sufficient quantities, they really need that non-book author income. In case there's any doubt, commercial work consistently sells more than literary work, just as the name indicates.

Authors most likely to report their income decreasing over the last five years? Traditionally published authors and those age 65 and up. I don't find that a surprising result, especially given how dramatically book discoverability has changed (it's more online-driven), and how self-published authors have taken away market share in certain genre fiction categories. But just as important, survey data shows that younger authors are spending more time on marketing than older authors on average. Also, as far as money invested, author marketing spend peaks among authors ages 45–54 and is lowest at 65 and up. Authors who invest less in marketing should expect author-related income to decrease.

Who is most likely to report their income is increasing? Authors publishing serializations and authors 25–44 years old. Overall, self-published authors were slightly more likely to report increased rather than decreased earnings; they were also far more likely to have published a book in the last year. A couple different details to highlight here:

- Last year, ALLi [surveyed](#) more than 2,000 authors and found that the median annual income for self-published authors was \$12,749. This year's Authors Guild survey finding

is *nearly identical* for that segment: \$12,800. For traditionally published commercial authors who are full-time? \$15,000.

- Traditionally published commercial authors appear to hold a significant advantage in securing non-book income related to their career—there's more upside in teaching, speaking, editing, and so on, with a median author income of \$25,000 when combining book sales with everything else. For self-pub, it's \$15,000 all in.

One of the most important income findings I saw: When self-pub authors start out, they tend to earn exceptionally little compared to those getting traditional deals (or advances), which makes sense. But if the self-published author keeps going and becomes established (if they can hit the five-year mark as far as this survey), they are likely to outearn their traditional counterparts.

The survey reveals genres or categories in which authors are more likely to self-publish today. These include romance (by a very wide margin) as well as science fiction and fantasy. Traditional publishing still has a dramatic hold on children's publishing and YA (where librarians and educators tend to rely on vetted material from publishers) and a moderate hold on mystery-thriller-suspense.

Kindle Unlimited can be critical to self-publishing author earnings. The KU effect is so important, in fact, that full-time self-published authors can expect to earn the same amount as full-time traditionally published authors, on average, if they use KU. And self-published authors *outperform*—by a whopping 67%—traditionally published authors when you look at book-only earnings. Nearly half of self-publishing author respondents distribute through KU, and 12% say it's a major source of sales for their most recent self-published book.

A big area of opportunity for all authors? The audiobook format. Audiobooks are not being exploited that well by self-publishing authors. But there's also a considerable missed opportunity for traditionally published authors as well. Only 22% of traditionally published authors have over half of their books in audiobook format.

What marketing works to sell books? In an optional survey for those who published a book in 2022, authors were asked what marketing and promotion was most effective in increasing book sales. The highest-ranked efforts were Kindle Unlimited (or other subscription programs, like Scribd), ebook discounts or promotions (e.g., BookBub), and the author's email newsletter. Marketing that was reported least effective: social media of all kinds and blogging.

And here's the final kicker: Romance authors outwork, outspend, and out-hustle most authors, and their investment bears out in the increased income we saw earlier. Romance authors spent an average of two full days a week on marketing and promotion of their work, tying with authors of African American fiction for most marketing hours spent per week. That's 45% more than the mystery / thriller authors who were surveyed.

Bottom line: Some of the most memorable takeaways from this survey involve the differences between traditionally published and self-published authors. Other data points I saw showed evidence of how well self-published authors are able to market, promote, and sell their books to earn a living—if they're able to keep writing and publishing over a sufficient period of time in a genre where there is market demand. I don't envy traditionally published genre fiction

authors, especially debuts, who must have a hard time competing against their self-published peers when trying to build a readership from scratch. They rarely have the advantage of competitive pricing, nor are they able to make use of KU in many cases.

Finally, the survey results look sobering for anyone with a Big Five house: Earnings have declined for those authors over the last five years at the rate of inflation. The biggest selling authors are seeing their sales soften, which indicates to Hildick-Smith that the big traditional publishers need to think of some new approaches for marketing and promotion. For the top 10 percent of traditionally published authors, he said, “There are a lot of folks out there nipping at your heels, and you’re having to share the winnings a lot more.”

Links of interest

Traditional publishing

- **Do small presses even exist?** This is an early, critical review of Dan Sinykin’s *Big Fiction*, which looks at how conglomerate publishing shaped fiction today. [Read Hilary Plum at the Los Angeles Review of Books.](#)
- **A study of romance novel covers:** They’re now more “approachable” and don’t automatically feature a scantily clad couple in a heterosexual clinch. [Interact with the data set analyzed by Alice Liang at The Pudding.](#)

Creator economy

- **How to start a private community for your Substack newsletter or podcast (or whatever).** Advice on how to start and moderate a community for your readers, fans, or supporters. [Read Claire Zulkey at Inbox Collective.](#)

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.

From the Editor

By Harper St. George



Welcome to the first of two conference report issues of *Nink*.

This issue includes reports from the first day of the conference through midday of the second day (Thursday through Friday morning).

The December issue will include sessions from the second day through the final day of the conference (Friday afternoon and all day Saturday).

For those of you who are new to NINC, our conference is unique in that we have a reporter in every session taking notes. Our reporters then transcribe their notes into a full report. This means that members who were unable to attend can still benefit from the fantastic workshops. It's even a great benefit for those of you who were able to attend the conference because it's impossible to go to every single session.

We do not cover any of the other NINC activities, including the evening roundtables.

Remember that our wonderful reporters are not infallible, despite their meticulous note-taking, so please excuse any mistakes or incomplete information. Reporters and presenters do not represent NINC or the views of NINC in any capacity. Please join me in thanking our dedicated reporters for doing such an amazing job. They bring an added value to the conference that would be impossible without their dedication.

Our regular *Nink* content will return in 2024.

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* and her upcoming series is *The Doves of New York*, coming in 2024. She lives in the Atlanta area with her family.

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Conference Reports

Road Repair: How to Stay in Your Lane Without Getting Stuck in a Rut

Presented by Melanie Harlow

Reported by Harper St. George

Bestselling author Melanie Harlow writes sweet, sexy, feel-good romance. She likes her martinis dry, her heels high, and her history with the naughty bits left in.

Melanie Harlow is a *USA Today* and #1 Amazon bestselling author who credits her success to staying in her writing lane. She began her presentation by promising to give us tips on how to remain nimble and reactive to a changing market while keeping our brand promises to our readers. She started with talking to us about how she's updated her lane in the past year and why. To do this, she gave us a little bit of background information.

Last year at the NINC conference (2022), she gave a workshop titled, "Don't Serve Spaghetti When They Ordered Cake." This workshop was all about understanding what your readers want from you and giving it to them over and over again. This is the essence of finding your lane. She always hears the same arguments when she talks to authors about this. These include: "That's boring," "My readers will read whatever I publish," "But I want to write everything." Harlow explained that these are all valid arguments, but she stands by her advice. However, she acknowledged that staying in your lane may not be the right move for you.

Signs that staying in your lane may be right for you:

- You are not a fast writer or still have a day job.
- You don't have the bandwidth to build and maintain multiple brands.
- Your goal is to build one loyal readership and serve them.
- You are willing to ignore the off-genre book of your heart.
- Discipline is your strength.

Since she had the realization several years ago that she should stay in her lane, her subscriber growth has increased and her income has grown from six figures to seven figures annually. She publishes around three books a year.

To help demonstrate some of the pushback she's heard about staying in your lane and how she refutes that, she went through a round of *Dear Melanie Harlow* letters she has received from authors.

Letter 1

This author shared that they finally found their lane, but their debut series is off-brand. What should they do with that series?

Harlow answered that her first series was a 1920s historical. She still has them for sale, but she gave them a new cover and bundled them. Her loyal readers still find them and read them, but they are not great sellers. Her advice is to let your old books be. Your loyal readers will find them, and you may find a few new readers.

Her advice might be different if you were telling her that you wanted to continue to write in both genres. In that case, you can establish a different pen name and create a brand for each.

However, if the original series is so different from what you are currently writing that it would cause massive algorithm mayhem (such as sweet to hot or going from adult books to children's books) then unpublish those early books.

Letter 2

This author complained that they were bored from staying in their lane.

Harlow shared that her top sellers are all single-dad romances. Her readers are not bored of them. She blames fluency for this. Fluency is when people are drawn to new ideas that remind them of old ideas. Familiar ideas are processed faster, and the sensation of quick and easy thinking is enjoyable. Readers love a familiar pattern in a fresh setting. You want to inhabit this world.

She offered these 10 tips for beating boredom as a writer:

1. Mix and match tropes.
2. Incorporate things you're curious about so you can learn about them.
3. Add subplots that don't follow the rules but keep the main plot in your lane.
4. Go back and read one of your older books.
5. Make sure you really know what your characters want. Characters who forget or don't know what they want are boring to write.
6. Go to your id list and search it for something that speaks to you. (An id list is all the things that push your happy buttons.)
7. Play old playlists from a successful book or series.
8. Write something totally not in your lane as a palate-cleaning session. (Session, not an entire book.)
9. Sometimes you can get more excited about something if you know how to market it.
10. Add a cohesive element, like mystery, to a series of standalones and make each character have to deal with a new part of the mystery.

She added that she took trendy tropes—billionaire romance and ex's dad—and incorporated them into her single-dad romances. They were her best two releases.

Letter 3

This writer shared that they were not bored in their writing but bored with their branding. They wanted to know how to make their brand exciting again.

Harlow shared that she was at Book Bonanza a couple of years ago and not having a great time. The authors around her were having a great time and seemed busier than her. In addition to their paperbacks, they had hardcovers and special illustrations for their books. She only had her usual books. Her table looked like it was from 2016, making her feel irrelevant, boring, and grumpy. She decided to stop complaining and breathe new life into her books.

She issued special editions of her most popular series. The man covers weren't going anywhere; the discreet covers were just an extra. They sold well. She also recovered some less popular backlist titles, as well as the covers on those ebooks. Women on romance covers never sold well for her, so she needed to refresh the branding on those. Nothing noticeable happened with the income on those, but superfans couldn't wait to get the new paperbacks in their hands. She created more special edition paperbacks and listed them on IngramSpark and was able to see her books on bookstore shelves.

After this, she decided to take a risk on her next release. She eliminated the men on her covers. Did the new covers work? Maybe, but she chickened out after a short time. Her goal was to keep her original readers and get new ones too. After looking at the sales, she felt that she hadn't done that. Some of her original readers thought the books didn't look like Melanie Harlow books. She pivoted and ended up putting guys on the ebook covers but offering a discreet cover on the paperbacks. When she put the guys back on the cover, she got a lot of email messages from her readers telling her how grateful they were. She was in her lane. This is not what she wanted to happen back in the spring when she planned this talk and had hoped to tell us how her big risk paid off. She was embarrassed to tell us that she had failed, but it did reinforce the idea that staying in your lane pays off and applies to your branding.

But how can you stay in your lane when the sky is falling? Every day we hear new things about the industry: Kindle Unlimited will kill the industry, *The New York Times* took the ebook list away, TikTok is ruining everything, etc. Her answer was that it will be okay. This career is a marathon and not a sprint. A lot of the panic centers on things outside of our control and that's hard.

Here is some good news to smile about. Many people started reading during the pandemic. Paperbacks have surged in popularity. Vellum makes it easy to format your own beautiful interior files. Indie authors are being sold in bookstores.

Here are some tips if you find yourself in burnout:

- Take time off to recharge your creative battery.
- Read for pleasure.
- Journal.
- Take time off to write the book of your heart.
- Get away from technology.
- Seek out Becca Syme's YouTube videos on burnout and recovery. Read her book *Dear Writer, Are You in Burnout?*

Sustainability is the goal of your career. When you are feeling stuck, know that trends will come and go, cover styles will change, and the wild success of the “it” book everyone is talking about this year involved a lot of luck and timing. But if you’re in that rut, you can break free.

At Book Bonanza 2023 she was much busier and happier. She had her special editions with her. She’s learned to appreciate her lane a little better. Even when it seems rundown and she’s tempted to pave over it with something different, she’s reminded of the trust she’s built and the promise she needs to keep.

Q&A

Do you have some ideas about how to figure out the boundary of your lane? What seems adjacent to me isn’t necessarily to my reader.

There’s no easy answer. You kind of have to figure it out. Thriller is a big umbrella; you might try one subgenre in one series and a different one in another series. Don’t try different subgenres within the same series with different books. You want to have read-through. Test it out with a new series. You will know when something is off with a release. You can feel it and see it. She goes to the reviews to see what they say.

I write historical and I see a lot of these discreet covers. We struggle more on TikTok. Are you only selling discreet covers direct?

She doesn’t do any direct sales except for one special hardcover book. (She uses Jotform and then closes the form at the end of the sale.) She opens her online store only a few times a year. Her discreet covers go up on all the retailers.

Given the way the market has shifted over the last five years, could a lane consist of trope elements vs. genre?

Yes, Catharina Maura did a whole series of arranged marriages. You can, it would take a lot of creativity on how to approach that trope. She’s thinking of an entire single-dads series. Why not try it?

I don’t write spicy romance, how worthwhile is TikTok? How long did it take you to see a return on investment?

She did not want to do it. One of her books went slightly viral on the platform, and she still dragged her feet. She reached out to a content creator who happened to live near her and asked her to help start her TikTok account. It’s definitely helped. It is worth it. It does sell books. As for how long it takes the investment of your time to pay off, she doesn’t know for sure. You’re going to give yourself more chances to be struck by lightning if you run outside with a golf club. Her goal is to post once a day and build slowly. For her it was worth the time and money to do it. To be frank, she hired someone, so it isn’t her on there.

How does audio do for you?

Audio is just under 10% of her total income. She produces her own and they do earn out. There is room to grow there, but she has not focused on it. Her audio doesn't even release simultaneously with her ebook. Her goal for 2024 is simultaneous release.

Do you do your foreign subrights yourself?

She has an agent handle her translation rights. She also recommends selling audio rights if you don't have the money to produce it yourself. It puts your name out there in front of audio listeners.

Did the #MeToo movement affect your writing?

Sort of. She has hesitated about something her guy might say. Also, she has content warnings now. In her August release, she put at the beginning of the book wording that explains that trust is important to establish with her characters, but there might be one scene that isn't for everyone. She put a link to her website in the book where she explained the book contains a scene of consensual non-consent.

What are you doing to get your mailing list subscribers?

She uses the bonus scenes in the back of the book. After the end, she'll put a prompt to subscribe to see what's happening next in the couple's story. If the book ends with a proposal, she'll go to the wedding. However, the book has to feel complete without the bonus scene. It needs to feel like an extra, a true bonus scene. She also did a short holiday anthology that someone else organized. It was for free, and readers downloaded it at Christmastime. She got around 20,000 subscribers from that.

If you have those bonus scenes, do you also do something to lead them to the next in the series in the back matter?

She uses [ConvertKit](#). The subscriber clicks *confirm* in the email and it takes them to the website to get that bonus scene. If the reader does not want to join the newsletter, she does have a page at the back that says something like, "Keep reading for a sneak peek at what's next." Keep the back matter limited to two things.



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* and her upcoming series is *The Doves of New York*.

Leverage YouTube for Your Author Business

Presented by M.K. Williams

Reported by Trish Milburn

Through a series of videos, books, and courses, M.K. Williams helps other authors on their independent self-publishing journey (and she still has time to write her own novels, too.)

Through her [YouTube channel](#), author M.K. Williams provides what authors often need—short, information-rich, easy-to-understand answers to common questions without a bunch of hype and hard sell. You'll find topics that range from "How to upload an ebook to Amazon KDP" to "Free vs. Owned ISBNs" to "How does USPS Media Mail work?" As of the writing of this report, there are 448 videos full of useful information targeted at authors on the channel.

Williams used this session to talk about how she started and grew her channel so that attendees would know it is okay to start small, to gradually learn, and to grow and refine their own YouTube efforts as that learning accumulates. It helps to know that she didn't start or quickly arrive at the more than 12,000 subscribers she now has. In fact, two years after she started her channel in 2018, she still only had 120 people subscribed to her channel.

"I learned what I was doing wrong," she said.

Among those things are words that will be familiar to professional authors, particularly indies, who market and advertise: tags, keywords, focus, and audience.

Why YouTube?

Williams said authors need to understand that YouTube is a search engine, the second largest one. So it's important to name, tag, and keyword your YouTube content with search engine optimization in mind. She said direct and simple are very important. How is someone going to search for that particular topic? Think about how you search YouTube to find out how to fix a leaky sink or some other household issue.

At least for now, YouTube is the least controversial social media option. If you give viewers useful content, you can build an audience—one that trusts both you and what you have to say.

But first ... some goals

Williams said her goal with the format of her channel was to help save time in answering common questions she receives from authors so she'd have more time to write her own books—both fiction and nonfiction.

This channel and its content led to a series of nonfiction books for authors such as *Book Marketing for the First-Time Author* and *Going Wide*.

According to Williams, the No. 1 goal of your YouTube channel should be reaching your readers. YouTube monetization can be No. 2, but that takes more time and content to achieve.

If the idea of creating and regularly posting to your own YouTube channel seems overwhelming or something that just might not be for you, there are still options to engage with YouTube in other ways. If you have a podcast already, you can add a video option and upload that content. Or you can work with BookTubers if you don't want to have a channel at all. These two options are the least intensive.

The most time-intensive is obviously starting your own channel. If you choose this option, you need to know going in that YouTube likes and rewards regular content—new videos posted at the same time on the same days that don't deviate much, if any, from a set schedule. Williams has a goal of putting up a new video every single week.

The first thing you need to determine: Who is the audience for your channel? Next, what are you going to talk about? It's best to be specific in the answers to both of these questions.

Instructional videos do better on YouTube. Again, if you've ever needed to DIY something in your home or car, you'll understand the truth of this.

Another option, particularly if you're focused on using your channel to promote your fiction, is to provide lists, things like "Top 10 Books to Read on a Rainy Day" or "Top Five Books to Read While You Wait for the New Season of *Bridgerton*." Make the lists so that one of your books can be the last one mentioned on the list. Voila, YouTube content to keep the algorithm happy and promo for your book.

"My YouTube channel sells my nonfiction books," Williams said.

Planning to launch

Williams suggested building a cache of videos before launching so that you can stick to that important schedule you set right from the beginning. If you say you're going to post a new video each Wednesday morning at 10 a.m. Eastern but suddenly life intrudes and you don't have time to work on the video, causing you to miss one of those regular slots, the YouTube algorithm gets very cranky. It can literally take months to recover from that bobble, so it's best to plan for three to six months and build up ready-to-post videos you can upload even when life is extra busy or chaotic.

Williams suggested using a project management program such as Asana, Notion, or Trello.

"They're all basically the same, just different interfaces," she said.

Another important aspect of planning your content is to develop scripts for what you're going to say. Don't just wing it or you risk ending up rambling. Also use keywords in these scripts.

B-roll video footage can also make your videos more dynamic. B-roll stands for "beauty roll" and includes imagery that is supplemental, often transitional. Think of a field of flowers gently blowing in the breeze. This type of footage can be found on royalty-free sites or you can film your own.

Making videos look good

Williams stressed that you can start out with your videos looking good even if they're not great. The great will come with experience, with trial and error. You can take your time learning about lighting, having multiple camera angles, video equipment, and editing software. There

are a lot of options available at different price points, but she did mention that she uses Wondershare Filmora.

It's important to choose your own thumbnail images for your videos or they will be chosen for you, even if they are unflattering. They should include one to four words and may include what she jokingly called "YouTube face"—exaggerated facial expressions that aim to get viewers to click on your videos.

Williams also mentioned that YouTube is gradually rolling out another tool with which authors are at least familiar—A/B testing. In this case, it's for testing thumbnail images.

Before investing more heavily in better video creation equipment, Williams suggested figuring out if you really want to keep going or if it's not really for you.

YouTube monetization

There are several ways to monetize your channel, the first being the YouTube Partner Program that rewards you for a combination of subscribers and watch-hours. This has been 1,000 subscribers plus 4,000 valid watch-hours in the past 12 months or 10 million valid public Shorts views in the last 90 days. YPP eligibility is changing, though, to numbers more quickly attainable—500 subscribers plus 3,000 valid public watch-hours in the past 12 months or three million valid public Shorts views in the last 90 days.

Another way to monetize your channel is to join affiliate programs.

"I looked for affiliate programs for every product I already used," Williams said.

Other options are offering coaching as Williams does through her Author Your Ambition site, seeking out partnerships (perhaps even in-kind ones), and the most obvious way of monetization—selling your books. Promote your books on your channel. Have your books behind you in your videos. End videos with in-house ads about your books. Include pertinent links in the video's description and mention those in the video itself. Maybe include a QR code in your video.

Williams said the bad news is that there is no "viral button" you can push to make your videos go viral, but you can dig into the analytics to see how they are performing and make adjustments if necessary. For instance, during the Q&A part of her session, she mentioned that she doubled her traffic by putting in keywords and tags in her older videos. She encouraged authors to use as many characters as possible when adding this information.

Q&A tidbits

Other information to come out of the Q&A session included:

- Williams uses a Logitech wide-angle webcam.
- Don't forget to do your thumbnails.
- Wondershare Filmora is a more affordable video editing software for those doing everything themselves.
- There are a lot of free options for royalty-free videos.
- It is better to be consistent in your upload schedule from Day 1 rather than uploading a lot at the beginning then fewer later.

- Upload a channel trailer of one to two minutes about who you are and what your channel is about.
- Don't skim off other YouTubers' audiences and brands.
- If you are a writer of spicier content and are putting audio versions of your books up on YouTube, you can demonetize specific videos in the series (such as a specific chapter if the book is broken down into one chapter per video in a playlist) and mark it as having an audience of 18+. YouTube will hide that video from any users it knows are under age 18.
- You can monetize through selling memberships to your channel. Members get exclusive content not available to the general public. These can be special discounts, a members-only live Q&A, etc.
- TikTok and YouTube have totally different audiences. TikTok is for entertainment and can be used to promote your books. YouTube is more long-form content and better at making connections.
- Williams has about one hour of time investment into each of her videos.
- She doesn't cross-post as much as she did in the beginning, especially after she figured out what she was doing wrong with keywords and tags.
- Williams doesn't use paid advertising to drive people to her YouTube channel. She keeps it as organic as she can.



Trish Milburn currently serves as the Nink Acquisitions Editor. After this year's NINC conference, she's finally going to get her Shopify site up and running and have more than two videos on her [YouTube channel](#). Really.

Your Books, Your Readers, Your Money: Selling Direct for Fun and Profit

Presented by Damon Courtney

Reported by Jennifer Stevenson

Damon Courtney is the creator and CEO of BookFunnel. He is also a published fantasy author.

Selling direct

Selling direct is all about fans. This is about the indie thing you can do. BookFunnel helps deliver things. “We are not between you and your readers; you are building your readership direct.”

Taylor Swift self-publishes all her music. She owns every bit of her music. She produces her own music, puts albums out herself. She is also brilliant at building rapid fan bases and going direct to fans.

Brandon Sanderson ran a Kickstarter, and reached \$41.7 million for four novels that hadn’t yet been written or titled.

These creators are super indie. This is about building superfans. So why sell direct? It’s not about the money. It’s about connecting with readers—and using the data, which can help deepen your reader relationships.

The value is not in the sale but in the relationship and the data. The value is in the direct connection with your fans. Taylor Swift will make half a billion dollars on this year’s tour because she’s selling direct.

If you sell an ebook on Amazon at \$5, you make \$3.45 in profit. If you sell at the same price direct, you make \$4.55.

If you sell an audiobook via Audible at \$15, you make \$3.74. If you sell it wide, you make \$5.98. If you sell it direct, you make \$14.22. Audible pays you based on what the reader paid them. If the customer bought their credits cheaper, they pay you only \$3.11. An audiobook in the best possible Audible deal costs \$9.58; of that, you get \$2.40. Wide, you make \$3.79; but selling direct, your profit is \$9.

What if you sold your audiobook for \$5 direct? You would take home \$4.55 per book. That’s more profit than any version of the Audible deals except when you’re exclusively at Audible, and only when the Audible customer has expensive credits.

There are four pillars of selling direct, not including in-person events—some authors don’t do them:

1. Pre-selling via Kickstarter, preorders, and direct before you go wide to etailers or at KU. This is your sale before you move on to public etailers.
2. Hot deals and bundles like Thrivecart, landing pages, direct. This is where you sell things you don't put anywhere else—something for more than \$9.99. Those bundles are sold direct.
3. Subscriptions via platforms such as Patreon, Ream, and Substack. (Note: If you're in KU, you can sell print and audio direct.)
4. The whole store at your website (using PayHip, Shopify, or WooCommerce). If you have a big backlist and big newsletter, this can be good. You don't have to have a whole store on your site. But you can.

Preselling direct

The platform is up to you. Some authors launch a new book on Kickstarter, then three months later it goes live wide, on KU, or direct. The benefits are that you're keeping maximum profit from the sale. Kickstarter and BackerKit take a little percentage, but mostly you get it all.

This works because customers are buying the book before anyone else. It's a huge draw for superfans. Sanderson's publisher wouldn't take the four books he Kickstarted. After his Kickstarter campaign for the four books hit \$41 million, the publisher wanted them after all. But Sanderson retained the rights to publish special editions. His leatherbound edition of one book was in two volumes. The special editions were only available early from Kickstarter.

Preselling special editions direct works for KU or wide. Until you put them in KU, they're yours to sell.

Dakota Krout writes RPG Fantasy, which is like fantasy with a bunch of baseball stats in it. LitRPG is heavy in audio. He has a Patreon where his true fans back him at \$5 to \$100 a month because they like him. He has a \$1,000-a-month level which currently has two supporters. If you back him at that level, he will get on a plane, fly the new books to you, and have lunch with you. Krout presells his trilogy. At Amazon they will be six weeks out (still on presale), but his Patrons get them first. At four weeks out from launch, the books show up at mountaindalepress.com (Krout's site). On the day of release, all the ebooks appear on KU, all the audiobooks on Audible. This is the only exclusive thing he does. His Amazon and Audible royalties kept ticking down (he's a big data nerd) so he thought, if I can get my superfans to follow me at my store, I can make a lot more money.

Kevin J. Anderson wrote *The Dragon Business*, a shortish YA comic fantasy. This was originally an Amazon imprint title. He got the rights back, wrote a second book, and put it on Kickstarter. He made \$46,000 from 804 backers.

Michael J. Sullivan wrote *Esraddon*, which had 3,800 backers and netted \$306,000. His fan base expects him to launch his new book on Kickstarter. Once it's out, he sells it wide. His fans have bought it already; 3,800 fans pay that much. The theory of "1,000 True Fans" works for him. He does an ebook, audio, and a special edition hardcover. He only sells the ebook on Kickstarter for \$5 but he still scores high.

Dangerous Tides was a bundle of racy fantasy romance created by Bonkers Romance. Six authors each wrote a new book for the bundle. They put out a hardcover with a slipcase, ebooks, and audiobooks. They had 2,776 backers and made \$413,000. That's split between six authors. They could pool their fan bases because they all liked that genre. They Kickstarted that in presale only. Once it was launched and the Kickstarter was over, the bundle broke up and the authors could go wide or KU or direct with their own books.

The deal is in bundles, special editions

Make your superfans super happy. When Sanderson did that, he did a special edition only in leatherbound hardback. Leather is not required. You can put out a paperback with a special cover only available in Kickstarter.

Attract new readers

Reader magnets are the most popular: a big bundle for a nice discount. Run Facebook ads. If you're only offering one book, it's a harder sell.

You don't need a whole store. You can just do one-off arrangements.

Work with other authors in your genre.

Attract new readers who didn't know you were selling direct. An example of such a project was Stuff Your Earbuds. Sixty direct authors in all different genres each offered a first-in-series audiobook for free. For the first week they promoted to their fans. This was a huge success, garnering the authors hundreds of thousands of readers. To get the deal, you had to come through those 60 stores. They used Shopify. This means the customer goes through the process once, and then they're connected to your store.

Britt Andrews wrote *Demons of Port Black*. The Kickstarter had 768 backers and made \$95,000. The offer was a two-book special edition hardcover of two books that had already been published. This was not even a new title.

Emily Kimelman is the author of *A Girl and Her Dog*. She's a box set deal queen. She runs Facebook ads to a direct sales page for the first eight books for \$14.95, a \$40 series value. Once you're on the landing page and you've ordered those eight books, you get this offer: "You can add the next eight books for another \$14.95." Then, "For an extra 99 cents, you can buy the whole series." This is not to her store. Just sending them to your website (without a store) is not good; sending them to a place where their first act is to buy a book is better.

Naomi Rawlings is also driving a lot of traffic to a landing page that sells a six-book set for \$19.99. Once you get them on the spot, upsell them to death.

Ann-Marie Meyer offers 50% off a 10-book series, at \$25.99. She's selling a lot. Superfans will back you on Kickstarter, but when you want a new reader, this is the audience you want. For \$17.50, if you are already purchasing the ebooks, she'll throw in the audiobooks. So now they get the \$35 worth of audio for \$18.

Subscriptions

To do this, you need a loyal fan base who will pay you every month for new work, sight unseen. If you're not there yet, don't make yourself crazy.

Put in as little or as much effort as you want. Fans get the work early. That's the only benefit. You don't have to send cover reveals and chapters and all that nonsense.

This is a great way to presell. Subscriptions are for superfans. Kickstarter and Patreon are sold to strangers.

Use the subscription model to give your biggest fans the biggest rewards. Swifties (Taylor Swift's fans) get their tickets early that way.

Lindsay Buroker has 624 members on her Patreon. Back her at \$5, you get the new release two weeks before everyone else. She is preselling through Patreon. These fans don't know what they're paying money for yet.

Michael Chatfield has a Patreon with 309 members. He offers early sneak peeks of chapters and a chance to be on the ARC team. They pay every month just to be part of his writing process. He posts new stuff constantly.

Tao Wong has 359 Patreon members and 629 posts and releases a book chapter by chapter. All they get is access to every chapter as he publishes them. Both he and Michael Chatfield have created their own Wattpads for free release, but this is paid.

Emilia Rose is part of the Ream business. At level one you get new chapters of a single series; at the next level, you get new chapters of two series; at the next level, new chapters of three series.

The whole store

This is your own Amazon. It's all about you.

You control every pixel on the page. The plug-ins let you add more features such as stars, reviews, and extra details about the books.

You design the sales experience. You decide how big the price splash image is, you can add upsells—you control all that. Once the customer is on your site, you own them.

You get *all* the data. You know who your readers are, you know what they buy, you know where they came from, i.e., how they arrived at your store. These are the first people you want to tell about your new book, whether it's at Kickstarter, or Patreon, or other presale sources.

Katie Cross doesn't run any ads driving traffic to other retailers. She runs ads only to her store. She releases all her books only on her store, then, if she has time, she goes wide. That's where she spends all her effort. She rarely does bundles and deals, maybe twice a year. She sets sales for individual books, regular-pricing them high and then marking them down.

At her store, Naomi Rawlings sets the regular price at \$7.99 and the sale price at \$4.99. This is a way to move books.

The bundles that you can get at super discounts, you won't find at their websites; you will only find them on landing pages for new subscribers. If you land on my website, I don't want you to buy a super-sweet bundle deal there. I've got you. I want new readers, so I offer new readers the super-sweet bundles.

Emily Kimelman does an eight-book box deal, but you won't find that on her site if you visit it. You'll see it only if you click through from one of her ads.

Anne-Marie Meyer does put the bundle deals up on her front page. The big discounts are visible (\$101 worth of audiobooks for \$35, for example).

You need a backlist to run your own store. These aren't all 100-book authors with 20- to 30-book series, but you need more than five books before you try to have a whole store. Even authors with two books are using preselling with Kickstarter. Building a whole store is different.

To deliver your work

BookFunnel handles digital delivery for ebooks and support. For print-on-demand (POD) paperbacks, you can use BookVault or Lulu. Once you're set up, the system handles everything. BookFunnel delivers audio through its app, via cloud player, or downloadable MP3s, your choice. (Romance readers don't download their audiobooks but LitRPG readers do.)

You can bundle physical and digital products together. For example, you can offer a special edition signed paperback bundled with an ebook. The customer gets the ebook instantly, and the paper eventually. You can sell a coffee mug and offer a free ebook short story with it.

You can bundle ebooks and audiobooks together. The bundle is listed as one product, but at BookFunnel those products are filed individually (behind the curtain).

You don't have to send your customer a giant Vellum file with 10 books in it. Instead, connect the books in the sale. Just tell the store (and BookFunnel) to deliver 10 individual books. This way the reader doesn't get a giant file, then get to the end of the first book in the bundle and wonder where the other books are.

BookFunnel doesn't take a cut of your sales. Sales delivery is included. Some retailers take 2.9% plus 30 cents. Kickstarter takes 5% of your total take. Patreon takes 10%.

Q & A

When you run Facebook ads directing to a landing page, is there resistance from the buyer to click?

If your site looks professional, they'll click.

But they're leaving Facebook. Does that warning come up?

No. You go directly. Facebook doesn't inhibit ad traffic that way.

You offer to host landing pages for us.

If you already have a website set up and want to add a secret landing page—yes, fine. You can also use ThriveCart. It's a \$500 one-time fee, and you can use it forever. They did a really good job of building in bumps and upsells. Emily Kimelman uses them. She doesn't have the big doorbuster bundles on her site; she uses Thrivecart.

About discounts on the book page (crossed-out price), Amazon bots will scour the net for price matching.

Amazon no longer has its most-favored-nation (price-matching) clause because a bunch of sellers took them to court for it. So that's no longer a thing. That said, Barnes and Noble, Kobo, and Apple all still have their price-matching rule. At BookFunnel, we check pretty regularly to see that those clauses are still in place. If that's the case, then you should sell different SKUs. This means, your lower price can be on your site, but for a different product (for example, Book 1 price-matches, but books 1+2 are discounted). Amazon and other retailers are not botcrawling to make sure that your prices are cheaper at your teensy little online store.

If you're at the beginning of the direct sales process, making decisions about an online store, wondering if you should use the Thrivecart landing page approach instead, any advice about how to decide?

Put them in order of where to start. Preselling (via Kickstarter or Patreon) doesn't work for older readers but "early release" does. Know whether your following will follow you there. Landing pages with bundles will show you where your discount buyers are. They can still be your fans, but they're cheap. Start with preselling or a discount bundle with just a landing page. Don't start with building out the whole store.

Once you do this, Shopify is probably the best storefront around. If you buy something on any Shopify store, you're hooked up to every other Shopify store at the Shopify main site. So you don't have the first-transaction barrier. Shopify costs \$30/month. The other store plug-ins take a percentage of each transaction.

If you don't want to go that far, do a preorder—a Kickstarter or a landing page that you make for yourself. Do a preorder or a fancy box set. "For this Black Friday deal, I'm boxing this eight-book series only this weekend. Purchase it only from me for this much at this link."

Say you have a book up for preorder. Lots of fans are already preordering. Then you decide to do the store.

It's not a discount, it's just a preorder. Do not discount your frontlist titles. Don't make it a different price if it's a new title. Don't offer a deal to fans who know about the book.

Thrivecart doesn't build your store; they build landing pages. All you can do is buy that book there. The customer can't click through to somewhere else.

Is there any advantage to clicking the KU box for a preorder?

No. Don't click that box until the day before you go live.

Can someone in your company look at my site?

We are doing webinars coming up. Your questions might be answered.



Jennifer Stevenson writes funny stuff, often with lots of sex. Find her at Book View Café.

The Secret Sauce to Direct Sales

Presented by Steve Pieper

Reported by Sidney Swanson

Steve Pieper, the founder of Author Marketing Mastery through Optimization, works with authors to increase their overall sales. Since 2018, his clients have shown an average increase of \$39,000 in annual sales when selling direct.

When authors consider whether or not they should sell direct, the promise of additional income is the biggest lure. However, there are several attractive benefits to direct sales. Instead of waiting for several months to get paid, a direct seller gets paid in a few days. After sales platform subscription fees (which vary widely) and credit card fees (typically 2.9% plus 35¢), an author can keep all sales revenue instead of keeping only 35%–70%.

Another distinct advantage of selling direct is that an author can gather the names, email addresses, and credit card numbers of purchasers. These collected email addresses can be uploaded to Facebook for the purpose of creating a “look-alike audience,” which is an audience that Facebook determines contains buyers with similar interests and habits. An author can thus create these audiences and market to them.

Pieper believes an author’s business is less fragile when they engage in direct selling. For example, an author is less at risk if an ebook vendor should inexplicably shut down an author’s account.

Another benefit is that an author’s backlist can work just as hard as an author’s frontlist when selling direct. Amazon gives preference to newer books, but an author who sells direct can give preferential visibility to whatever they wish. And, of course, an author’s own sales page will not be cluttered with ads like an Amazon sales page is.

Pieper did not shy away from pointing out the drawbacks to direct selling. It is more work to run a sales platform rather than utilizing a third party who sells on the author’s behalf.

Quoting Jeff Bezos, Pieper said, “Your gross margin is my opportunity.” In this infamous remark, Bezos admits to treating suppliers as competitors. Amazon controls the relationship with the customer at the point of sale, and this means that Amazon holds all the power.

Pieper identified several things that can make direct selling frustrating for authors:

- Dissatisfied customers may send angry emails.
- An author must do their own advertising, manage bookkeeping (including sales tax), and manage their own cash flow.
- Word of mouth can work against an author whose books are not up to par.

Anyone who sells direct must be more efficient with their time because there is more work to do. An author must set up web tools and track ad data and fill in spreadsheets. They must become excellent at things that they generally dislike doing.

At its heart, Pieper contended, direct selling is a mental game. He feels that expert guidance and a community of people doing the same thing are essential. Direct sales will almost certainly take more time and more effort than an author expects. No one should expect to be profitable after merely weeks of effort. Pieper urges authors to keep in mind that it took Amazon six years to turn a profit.

This brings up the necessity of capital. No one who is struggling financially with their author business should dive into direct sales. And even with capital, success requires perseverance, courage, and strength of character.

When discussing the structures required for direct selling, Pieper identified two main ones. First, an author must have a fulfillment solution. For ebook and audiobook fulfillment, Pieper recommended BookFunnel. For paper books, Pieper is hopeful about U.S. newcomer BookVault, but also suggested Lulu, IngramSpark, and even Amazon for print-on-demand sales.

The more challenging necessity is a checkout provider. While Pieper feels that most checkout providers work equally well, he prefers PayHip because it partners well with Klaviyo. Pieper enthused over this email software platform.

Klaviyo is most useful as an intelligent marketing automation platform. With Klaviyo, an author can view sales data and identify which item or items a customer has purchased. It would be more accurate, however, to say that Klaviyo itself sees completed sales transactions and then, in an automated fashion, makes additional offers or recommendations to a customer.

Anyone who has gone online to purchase a pair of socks and then been shown a pop-up deal for buying six pair of socks has received just such an offer. Machine learning allows Klaviyo to predict what other items in an author's catalog are most likely to appeal.

Not only this, but Klaviyo can be used to send an offer to a customer who abandoned their shopping cart prior to making a purchase. Pieper feels it is a best practice to hand-craft the language that goes in the offer. An author should always think about how to delight their customer.

Another benefit that Pieper cited is the affordability of expensive "purchase" ads on Facebook's ad platform instead of cheaper "traffic" ads. Purchase ads are the highest quality ads because they are shown to buyers and not just clickers. With the increased amount of profit that a direct-selling author keeps, these ads become affordable.

In addition to the clear benefits that Klaviyo provides to direct sellers, there are special benefits to using Klaviyo to create look-alike audiences for Facebook as described above. When ads traffic is directed to Amazon, Amazon's algorithm watches to see if visits to a given book's sales page results in sales. When a visit converts to a sale, the algorithm treats that book preferentially. This would be an example of benefits deriving from cross-channel marketing effects, i.e., marketing both directly and to retailers.

Finally, though this will not be visible to an author, it is likely that some readers who see an ad on Facebook will proceed to do their own search for the advertised book on Amazon. If they

make a purchase, this increases the positive feedback loop. And since people who are served “purchase” ads are people who have a history of buying things, this is at least a plausible benefit.

In addition to a sales platform and purchasing software, Pieper recommended the following:

- a graphics app such as Book Brush or Canva
- a landing page optimization like Unbounce
- Mouseflow to track user interaction data on web pages

When selling, there are a few key practices Pieper recommends. Copy that emphasizes scarcity and urgency will always increase sales. Thus, sending readers to an exclusive deal is smart. Any sales page must communicate the quality of product with such things as testimonials and awards. Pieper also believes it is best to offer a money-back guarantee.

In Pieper’s experience, bundled books are the most profitable thing an author can sell. He likes to have pop-ups that indicate a certain deal is available but will expire soon. This compels a customer to buy. Pieper admitted that with digital products, scarcity and urgency can only be manufactured; they aren’t real. However, he encourages sellers to use these tactics because they work.

Pieper recommended sending customers to a thank-you page with two critical pieces of information. First, the page should say that the free book is on the way, and second, it should ask the reader a question: “While you wait for your copy to arrive, would you like to see a one-time offer?”

Finally, it is good business sense to follow up with customers, encouraging them to open the book they’ve bought. He sees this as a secondary sales action: to get purchasers to read or listen, authors must sell *again*. Happily, this kind of follow-up also serves to build a one-on-one relationship.



Sidney Swanson is a Kirkus Reviews award-winning author of coming-of-age adventures featuring characters you love like family. Or possibly better.

What's the Visual?

Presented by Margie Lawson

Reported by Michele Dunaway

Reporter's Note: The examples Lawson presented in the workshop all come from authors who have taken her courses.

Margie Lawson developed deep editing techniques that help writers add emotion and psychological power to every page. She founded Lawson Writer's Academy where you'll find over 30 instructors teaching online courses through her website.

Margie Lawson has taught over 170 full-day masterclasses around the world. She started by asking the audience where its energy was. The light cheering and clapping didn't satisfy, so Lawson asked the crowd to "Wow me. Deafen me." The crowd delivered.

"There," Lawson said, "I made you happy." Lawson went on to ask the audience, "Do you trust me?" Then explained, "Why can I teach you? Because I analyzed several hundred scenes and developed lots of ways to help writers add emotional power to their writing. I call it deep editing. My psychologically based editing goes deeper than most editing. It's nuanced, multi-layered, and carries-more-power editing."

According to Lawson, you can have the most incredible story, with the most captivating characters, but not keep the reader glued to the pages. Each sentence should drive the reader. You know, "Show, don't tell." But it doesn't share the truth. Here's the full truth—sometimes show, sometimes tell, sometimes show and tell, and definitely show more than tell. And make sure what you're showing is clear. Because clear visuals make your writing stronger.

Writing should have a compelling cadence based on beats. Give yourself the litmus test of: What did I give the reader? For instance, "I've never seen Ace so angry." How does the POV character know that? Put that on the pages. Make what you're showing clear. The reader should see what you see. Readers need visuals. Visuals fill in the story movie that's running in their heads.

"What's the visual?" is the litmus test for "Show, Don't Tell" and a whole lot more.

Three critical points for "What's the visual?"

1. What visual did you provide for the reader in this paragraph? Is that visual clear? Does the reader see and understand what you want the reader to see and know? Beware of the Great Oz effect. You're the Great Oz for your story. You know, see, hear, and feel all. Your reader may not. Your critique buddies are foster buddies. They may not catch it.

2. Is it written in a clichéd way? Have we all read that sentence before? Or slight variations of that sentence. If so, you can do better. Since you are the Great Oz, you might think the reader knows what you know but they don't. They need more of the following:
 - a. Subtext—faces, dialogue cues,
 - b. Emotional impact on the POV, and
 - c. Visceral responses.
3. Does your visual carry emotion that grabs the reader? If not, it may not be amplified enough. Here's the fix:
 - a. Write visuals in a fresh way.
 - b. Add power.
 - c. Be strategic with style and structure—cadence is part of the structure. Play with rhetorical devices.
 - d. Amplify, amplify, amplify.
 - e. Add more subtext.

Subtext is the psychological message behind anything. Subtext lets the reader know how to interpret the dialogue, glance, gesture, tone, etc. If you don't put subtext on the page, you're putting a bag over that character's head and monotoning their voice.

Four scene elements that need clear visuals:

1. Facial expressions—most of the time, but sometimes they can be vague,
2. Body language—gestures, proximity, touch, hugs,
3. Setting—can carry power too, and
4. Action—it's got to be clear.

Faces

Lawson used an excerpt from *A Duke, the Lady, and a Baby*, written by Vanessa Riley.

What if Riley had written: *She gave me a knowing smile.*

That's telling. And the smile is clichéd. It doesn't deepen characterization. It doesn't treat the reader to fresh writing.

Riley really wrote: *Her face held a broad smile, her lips pursed with an I-know-something-you-don't arch.*

The reader gets a visual and a hyphenated run-on treat.

In *Like Father, Not Son*, Kristin Meachem, another of Lawson's students, could have written this: *She stares as if she's judging me.*

But what Meachem really wrote was this: *She stares as if she's my judge and jury, happy with her verdict.*

Instead of *She gave me a weak smile*, Meachem wrote this: *It's the same smile Mother displayed to the world when I was five and peed on her lap.*

Notice how these deepen characterization. Readers love things that are clever. There's also backstory woven in. Lawson calls this Backstory-Based Subtext. Notice how the power words carry a psychological message.

Lawson also gave an example of what she calls Flicker Face Emotion, from *Knifed in Nice* by Zara Keane: *A series of emotions flashed in Francine's face. Incredulity. Hurt. Fury. It didn't take a psychologist to work out that she and my mother were rivals. Love rivals.*

Lawson said you can hear the punch of "Love rivals." Incredulity, hurt, and fury are the flicker face emotions. They happen in real life so use them. It's okay to use flickered or flashed for several of them. Make them fresh. It's okay to use the word emotions. It's okay to label emotions.

Starter examples: Flickered, flashed, dashed, splashed, marched, paraded, washed across, moved, crawled, his features filled with, one emotion after the other....

You can also use two themed-to-itself sentences. From *Long Shot*, Hoops Book 1 by Kennedy Ryan:

Sentence one: *The rage prowling in his eyes is on a flimsy leash.*

Note how the rage is prowling, and there's a flimsy leash. This relates to one of the themes running through the book. It's also using animalistic imagery, which we also see in the next sentence:

Sentence two: *I deliberately offer Caleb a jaunty salute, my teeth gritting when he gives me that slick crocodile grin, the kind that spreads open all friendly, only to chomp you between its teeth when you least expect it.*

This second sentence also is fresh as it shows the contrast with what you expect to see and what you see, which Lawson called a switchback line.

The sentence shows the contrast between the grin the POV character sees and what she knows he's capable of doing. It's going one direction and then whips you around and gives you a surprise at the end.

Body language

It's the second scene element that needs clear visuals. Body language is facial expressions, gestures, stance, gait proximity, touch, hugs...

In *Like Father, Not Son*, Meachem could have written this: *Jen's arms wrap around Tom's shoulders.*

Instead, Meachem wrote: *Jen's arms wrap around Tom's shoulders, tight, pulling him close, as if Mother is a case worker from Child Protective Services.*

Who is more of a threat?

Instead of writing *She stands in front of us*, Meachem wrote: *She stands in front of us as if trumpets blow to announce her arrival.*

Look at the simile usage. What kind of a woman is this? This brings out a slew of emotion.

Setting

From *Drawn and Buried* by Dana Summers comes this from chapter one:

Political cartoons are supposed to **tick people off, not drive them to suicide**. That thought had **plagued** me in recent years. And it wasn't far below the surface as I stepped

off the escalator and **froze**. A man with a forehead wide enough to hold a flat screen, **fists clenched**, sprang from his chair and **stormed toward me**.

Shadows from the buildings across Orange Avenue muted the colors in *The Florida Post's* front lobby. But there was nothing muted about this guy. He had the kind of blunt-featured face I'd seen in graphic novels. Like someone had slammed on the brakes in his brain, and all the weird crap from the backseat had piled up against his smoldering eyes.

The words in **bold** are power words. A forehead wide enough to hold a flat screen? The first sentence of the second paragraph orients the reader to the setting. It's always important to share a clear visual of the setting in the first paragraph or two of every chapter.

Notice how the last sentence of paragraph two is also a crazy-fresh powerful multi-amplified simile with no speed bump. Readers get exactly what they need on the first pass.

Summers could have described the man like this:

A massive man with a huge forehead jumped from his chair. He looked angrier than anyone I'd ever seen, and he was coming toward me.

But this isn't as interesting and is not as powerful. Not nearly as much emotion is conveyed.

Action scenes

There are five ways to add power and clarity to your visuals.

1. Check for those make-a-difference power words and use as many as you can. This one seems simple, but like watching what you eat, you must be vigilant. Find them. Circle them. Know you've got plenty of them. Power words are words and phrases that carry a psychological impact. Some active verbs are power words.
 - a. Words like *hit*, *rape*, and *kill* carry psychological power. But a lot of active verbs are not power words. The word *run* may or may not be a power word depending on the context.
 - b. Do a search for *it*, *this*, and *that*. Sometimes you can nix them and use the word they referenced. Sometimes you need those bland words.
2. Always think subtext. You almost can't have too much subtext. Find more opportunities.
 - a. Think real life reactions to what's happening in your scene. How would your friend, boss, spouse, parent look? Picture that expression. Say dialogue out loud, with feeling. Then get that all-critical subtext on the page.
3. Be generous and strategic with your use of rhetorical devices. Play with them. Wow readers subliminally. Use things like, but not limited to, the following:
 - a. Anaphora
 - b. Asyndeton
 - c. Similes
 - d. Metaphors
 - e. Personification

- f. Polysyndeton
 - g. Alliteration
 - h. Assonance
 - i. Repetition
4. Get the most out of tapping your reader's emotions.
 5. Use a deep edit analysis checklist. Some questions to ask about your writing:
 - a. Power words—Yes/No
 - b. Rhetorical devices—Yes/No
 - c. Themed—Yes/No
 - d. Compelling cadence (how it sounds)—Yes/No
 - e. Fresh writing—Yes/No
 - f. Shares impact on POV character—Yes/No/Implied
 - g. Emotional boom—Yes/No

Here's an example by Jaye Welles, from *Red-Headed Stepchild*:

Digging graves is hell on a manicure, but I was taught good vampires clean up after every meal. So I ignored the chipped onyx polish. I ignored the dirt caked under my nails. I ignored my palms, rubbed raw and blistering. And when a snapping twig announced David's arrival, I ignored him too.

Ask yourself, how can I add power? Can I show what's not happening? That's also a way to add power.



Michele Dunaway loves creating romantic stories about characters who discover things about themselves as they travel the road to true love and self-fulfillment. Her latest is the six-book *Love in the Valley* series for Harlequin Special Edition.

Build a Following on Nook with Barnes & Noble Press

Presented by Julie Braunschweiger

Reported by Jennifer Stevenson

Julie Braunschweiger is the senior manager of Barnes & Noble Press, in charge of outreach, social media, and top-line marketing strategies. Before joining B&N, Braunschweiger was the lead bookseller from a local indie in Westchester, NY.

News and highlights

Nook now offers premium membership and rewards. Customers can collect stamps and get rewards to earn benefits. Ebooks are not yet part of this promotional program aimed at customers.

New device

The latest B&N device is the Nook GlowLight 4 Plus, which reflects B&N's continuing investment in the business. This device contains the updated Nook app and GlowLight, with integrated audio. With store endcaps, we will see more emphasis on Nook ebook reading devices: the GlowLight and Lenovo tablet. We are seeing a focus on local bookseller knowledge, no longer disempowering local managers to meet with their customer base.

Indie storefront

B&N has refreshed the online storefront, with a dedicated and refreshed space for indie content. Indie Books is now a separate tab on each department. There's now a cross-channel feature on the device and app; everything on BN.com is also on the device.

Paperback and hardcover editions

You can choose between glossy or matte covers on your paper books, and 20 trim sizes, including mass market paperback. B&N offers a six-month preorder window for paper, with good prices for printing and no setup fees. You can choose between a dust jacket and a printed case for your hardcover. Personal copies are shipped straight to your door, usable for ARCs, special editions, gifts, and giveaways. Watermarks aren't used on your copies. The deadline for holiday paper publishing is early November.

You can create your print covers using the customized layout tool, including interior print color and cover formatting, finish and color.

Samples

Samples are what readers see when they download free ebook samples. You can use the default sample (the first 5% of the book) or define a custom ebook sample for online viewing. Exclusive coupon codes and special deals are available. You can include a personal note for your readers or present a brief recap of previous books in series. You upload these directly.

My contributors

This is an opportunity to share work with your team, projects, sales, reporting, or promotions. Unique links give access without having to share your sign-in information. The contributor creates their own B&N account and you give them a link to the stuff they should have access to.

More transparent vendor onboarding process

Your taxpayer type and ID can never be changed once submitted. If you opened with a SSN and want to change to an LLC, you'll need a new account. Any changes to personal information require a new IRS Form W-8 or W-9. Please use only the latest form and sign and date it! If you're a U.S. citizen but don't live here, choose "not a citizen" and then send the Form W-9 with your Social Security Number and a letter of explanation to VMTax@BN.com. Payoneer and Wise are no longer allowed to link to BN.com.

Who are B&N/Nook readers?

They're fussy and loyal. They want quality, professionalism, and consistency. They will buy at a higher price point, such as \$5.99–\$6.99 for ebook or \$14–\$16 or higher for print. Here's a tip for reaching readers: the "Notes from your bookseller" is a piece of real estate you can use to add a personal note, quote, or other product promotion.

You can use a simple coupon code for Nook. B&N allows BOGO (buy one, get one) campaigns and encourages exclusive price deals for Nook readers. (This is not price-matching.) Every coupon has easy share buttons. The author can monitor redemptions and get data from these campaigns. You learn how many were used, but there's no identification of customers.

Dynamic merchandising

This is accessed via your dashboard. Dynamic merchandising is available by invitation only. The standard opportunities are Top Indie Favorites, Free Ebook Favorites, Nook Books Under \$2.99, Free Fridays, and Nook Daily Find. You can also participate in invitational promotional placements, guest blog posts, and partner programs.

Invitationals

The promotions that are available by invitation only are Bundles and Series, Category Spotlight, seasonal sales, indie special, BOGO, guest blog posts, and partner programs. The Top

Indie Favorites feature is a bi-monthly selection of new and upcoming releases. More than 100 titles are chosen.

Merchandising free books

Sample promotions for merchandising your free books are Top Free Nook Books, Start a Series for Free, Free Ebook Favorites, and Free Friday. You must apply for these promotions.

The ebooks \$2.99 and Under promotion is the most frequently visited. These books are already \$2.99 or discounted to \$2.99. This is a reliable collection included in the merchandizing dashboard under Nook Price Promotions.

B&N Press has a blog featuring indie author voices, a cross-channel promotion that reaches customers via the Nook device, social media, and their website.

In-House Ads is a pilot program with three slots for B&N Press authors. These ads are shown across the website. Barbara Freethy had the first one. While the program is in beta, it is free to the author but invitation only. If you are interested, ask Braunschweiger privately to see if you qualify.

Virtual events

B&N Press offers a Nook Zoom video livestream. Speakers do virtual events on Zoom, hosted by B&N Press and Nook social. If you have an idea for an event, contact Braunschweiger.

Self-publishing resources

On-site guides at B&N Press walk you through the publishing process. There is also basic information available there for beginning indie publishing authors.

Trusted third-party partnerships

B&N Press has relationships with Reedsy, BookTrib, Inkubate, Findaway Voices, and NaNoWriMo. B&N Press has no plans to do any audio uploading. They have a partnership with Findaway Voices to sell audio. You can find your comps with Inkubate. B&N Newsletters mention Inkubate's free webinars. B&N Press also has a featured partnership with NaNoWriMo, hosting in-store writing events. Contact your local B&N store to see if they may be hosting a "write-in."

Staying in touch

The B&N Press blog is a strong venue for indie voices, with cross-channel promotion, the latest news, advice, and marketing tips. Guest post pitches are welcome!

Social outreach and contact: You can find B&N Press at X (formerly Twitter) [@nookBN](#), Instagram [@readnook](#), and Facebook [@nook](#).

Email:

- Jbraunschweiger@bn.com
- BNPressSupport@bn.com

Q & A

Do you promote coupon codes, BOGO campaigns, and exclusive price deals, or do we?

The author promotes them. Authors sometimes add coupon codes to the interior content of the book, such as, “You got to the end of this book, so buy the next at Nook at 50% off.” You can find coupons in the Managed Promotions section, on the left side of the page.

On dynamic merchandising: Do you have data to show which are the best options, or which will work better? I’m on B&N there and not getting any traction. Which options are better for traction? Anywhere to find that data?

Good question. We don’t have that data to show. Look at your sales and check the trends. I highly recommend the \$2.99 as the better choice. Use it in conjunction with something else you’re doing. Free Fridays work really well, but we only do one book per Friday, so there are fewer opportunities. There’s no specific genre for the more curated promotions.

On the \$2.99 and Under promotion, am I better off at 99 cents in that promotion than at \$2.99?

Did you see better traction with \$2.99?

Why would you do 2.99?

That’s just our benchmark. Experiment. Do it along with a BookBub, for example. Lower may be better.

If you’re going wide out of KU, should you release them right away (rapidly) or stagger them?

It’s a good idea to stagger them a bit. Treat them like new releases. Don’t just dump them out of a bucket.

For Free Friday: Is it for the more popular genres only?

We do romance twice a month, as our readers are primarily romance, then mystery and thrillers. In the past, we favored permafree, but now we’re preferring books priced down to free temporarily. The cover must be appealing—nothing overtly sexual—no menage covers, for example.

The promo tab—is that different from the merchandising tab?

No. I just used two different phrases for the same thing. Our “Managed Promotions” are three tabs, if you have access to the additional promotions. Coupons and BOGO are available to all, but then there is the exclusive monthly promotions tab next to the standard promotions tab.

About Free Friday: The Romance Daily Find went away. Have you thought about doing a Romance Free Friday and then an Everything Else Free Friday?

Yes, I’ve proposed that to our lead merchandiser on the Nook team. I will keep bugging him about it.

Do you need us to sign a petition about that?

Thank you, I'll let him know there is more demand.

At the beginning of next year, I'm doing my first original indie launch. Do I need to price differently to launch a new release? On some stores, there are many 99¢ or free original launches. Should I consider that? Or should I price it "regular" and discount? How do I price a brand new release most successfully?

Our readers aren't as price sensitive. I think readers would pay more for a strong book than 99 cents. Start at full price. Look at what other books in your genre are selling for. Look at B&N. A lot of authors are raising their prices to \$6.99 and \$7.99. Top Indie Favorites would be the promo for a preorder of a new title. We have a 12-month preorder window.

Do you allow preorders on print books?

Yes. Six months in advance.

How long in advance do we submit if we have a sale coming up?

We can be really more agile and flexible—we know you don't always have advance notice on those. Once you have a BookBub, always put the book in a price promotion. Nook Daily Find and other promotions are less agile. They can be scheduled months in advance. I don't get to choose the Daily Find or Free Friday titles. Get your request in as early as you can, especially with a preorder.

About the author page: Is that ever going to be rolled out to get your own author page?

We did have that feature, and then with the retool of the site, we're looking at going back to that.



Jennifer Stevenson writes funny stuff, often with lots of sex. Find her at Book View Café.

Direct From the Page

Presented by Ines Johnson

Reported by Pam McCutcheon

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

Ines Johnson (aka Shanae Johnson) has a direct sales store that earns five figures a month, though she didn't start out that high. She shared how she built her store (which she prefers to think of as a sales funnel) to help authors build their own e-commerce sites and attract readers to buy books directly from them. Though she cautioned that a lot of the advice she gives is specific to romance, if you don't write romance, you can translate it to your genre.

Johnson's definition of success is bringing in \$3,000 per month (that's her metric—you should decide on your own measure for success). However, she didn't quite achieve her goal when she first launched her direct sales store. In May of 2022, she made \$235, then \$418 the following month. In July, she lost money, so she revamped her strategy and her landing pages. After the update, she made \$1,200 in August, over \$3,000 in September, and over \$5,000 in October. All in all, she made just under \$16,000 in direct sales in 2022.

To help you succeed, she offered the following nine tips.

One at a time

Creating these landing pages is very time-consuming (she hasn't done all of hers yet), so focus on one book or series sales page at a time. Once you've created the sales page, link your offers to the landing page or product page on your e-commerce site, not to Amazon or other stores.

Though Johnson started out using PayHip, she switched to Shopify for the new sales pages because of the additional tools available such as the ability to handle Barnes & Noble coupons and Google Play bundles to increase her "average value order" (AVO). First, she used Unbound Insights software to test everything on her squeeze pages for the optimum conversion rate, then copied the best performing ad copy to the product/landing page. She suggests you follow her example—test everything first, then copy what works.

Choose your player(s)

To attract binge readers, group your books (by trope, series, first in series, one book in all of its available formats, or whatever works for you), then bundle them together to make them

attractive to readers. She uses Canva for her graphics and offers examples of how she created her graphics and bundles at ineswrites.com/CanvaBundleGraphics.

Get organized

Before you upload the books, gather all the files you are going to need, along with the metadata. She offers a cheat sheet at ineswrites.com/metadata to let you know what information to collect.

What's the deal?

Determine what deal you will offer. Bundling books together with higher prices is what earned Johnson more money. For new readers, lure them to your store with free or discounted books. For established readers, use pre-orders, bundles, bonuses, merchandise, etc.

Make the Grade A+ style

Johnson stated that what is missing from a lot of direct sales pages is the story, which is what readers care about. Use the content on your landing page the same way you would on Amazon A+ pages to sell readers on the things they care about.

For example, Johnson leads with her story world for one series—ranches with wounded heroes. You could also focus on the types of characters, such as alpha males, cinnamon roll characters, military heroes, etc. (perhaps putting the sales copy in the character's voice). Or you might focus on the popular genre tropes you use in your books (for examples, see tvtropes.org or Jennifer Hilt's *Trope Thesaurus*—choose the thesaurus specific to your genre). Another option is to focus on you. If you're charismatic, tell them your story and sell them on you.

Funnel your readers

Johnson used spyware on her own website to determine what to put at the top of the sales page. Tools such as [Mouseflow](https://mouseflow.com) and [Lucky Orange](https://luckyorange.com) helped her track visitor behavior using heatmaps and other conversion optimization tools to show where readers started, stopped, and browsed on her site. Once she rearranged things on her page to optimize her conversion rate, she stopped using the tools. She suggests you also research your e-commerce site software to learn what upselling, cross-selling, and discounting tools they have available.

Get with the flow

Connect your e-commerce site with your emailing software and use automated emails based on triggers from your e-commerce site. Johnson recommends [Klaviyo](https://klaviyo.com) for this.

Soft launch

How can you get “warm” readers to cheat on their ebook retailers and buy direct from you? Give them a free short story, but have them download it from your e-commerce site so it collects their information. Once you have that, send them a coupon for a discount on your e-commerce

site (especially for an omnibus). You can also attract them to your e-commerce site with reader events.

Hard launch

To obtain “cold” or new readers, Johnson uses Facebook ads. She starts with six images (still photos and/or videos) that hit her story’s tropes, conflicts, world, characters, etc., then chooses between one and three interest targets (author names are best). She prefers to use all six images in one ad set.

Once she has 400 impressions, she checks to see which has the best return on ad spend (ROAS). She duplicates that ad image and iterates the primary ad copy (the post text above the image) until she has a winner. Then she duplicates that ad and iterates the headline to see which performs best. Ditto for the description below the headline. Once she has an ad that works well, she checks it again after another 400 impressions. If she is making twice (in profit) what she’s paying for the ad, then she will consider scaling to increase her ad spend, add ad sets, add another country, etc. See ineswrites.com/AdCheatSheet for a graphic explaining this strategy.

In answer to a question about trilogies, Johnson suggested the author add the books along with reader magnets, short stories, etc., to a bundle until they could price it at \$19.99. Why? It’s hard to sell well with Facebook ads unless the price of the offer is in double digits. When asked what the minimum number of books was for bundles, she stated the price is more important. To make money, you need to be at a minimum price of \$15.99. It costs her \$10 in ads to make one sale, so she spends at least \$25 per day on Facebook ads.

To learn more, Johnson recommends the Author Marketing Mastery through Optimization (AMMO) course, or you can take her courses, available at ineswrites.com/direct.



Pam McCutcheon writes romance and nonfiction books for writers under her own name (PamMc.com), and urban fantasy under the name Parker Blue (ParkerBlue.net). She lives in Colorado Springs with her rescue dog, Honey.

The Power of Connection

Presented by Joe Solari

Reported by Elaine Isaak

Joe Solari founded Claymore Consulting, which aims to assist authors to “make more doing less.”

Solari’s presentation focused on forging two types of connection: first, the reader’s individual connection with your characters and brand, and second, connecting those readers with each other to create a community around your work.

He opened by showing a few photos, beginning with the cover of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, a book which inspired many people to become writers. He asked how this photo made people feel. Audience members spoke of knowing their Hogwarts House, an example of drawing a reader into the world of the book.

Next, he showed a photo of J.K. Rowling, making the point that readers can have a very different reaction to the author than to the work.

In his second audience experiment, Solari showed a photo of a large group of people from the 1930s, asking whom the audience recognized. Immediately, people pointed to Albert Einstein, seated in the front row, calling out words associated with him (genius, brilliant, etc.). Other people in the photo included Marie Curie, Max Planck, Schrödinger, Heisenberg, Niels Bohr—but they are unrecognized. Einstein is known today because of a company with the goal of building his brand, so that his estate continues to make money long after his death.

In summary, Solari said, “All of what you experienced was based on your interpretations and feelings. It all happened in your head.” An author’s fans want to escape to places that the author created, to have that experience from the books, as much as possible in the real world. His approach is to make that the heart of author marketing.

This kind of connection begins with the reader making a parasocial, emotional connection to a character. This is the power inherent in a book. Ideally, the reader will see the author’s brand as part of their identity. Solari supported the idea of parasocial connection with research by Professor Jonathan Cohen about identification and transportation, i.e., that an effective way to change behavior is by wrapping that behavioral change in a story—making it a narrative.

Transportation brings the reader into the world of the book. Identification encourages the reader to feel that the choices the character makes are those the reader would want to make. The reader thinks of the character as a friend. Neural responses show the same areas light up when people are asked about fictional characters as when asked about friends and family. Characters manifest identically to human beings.

Solari encouraged the audience to use this reader/character connection in their marketing. Bring the story world and identification out of the book and closer to the reader during the discovery process.

With this core group of readers invested in the work, it's possible to create a community of such readers, offering a home where those readers feel good, and giving the author a seed audience to prime the pump in an algorithmic market. Rather than simply drive traffic to Amazon, which can reduce the conversion rate, driving this distinct audience, with its higher investment in the author's work, feeds Amazon's algorithms.

The purposes of building the reader community are:

1. Helping readers who identify with the author's brand find their tribe,
2. Becoming a place to retain fans, and
3. Acting as a sample of the work's audience for marketing purposes.

Community provides belonging, status, attention, autonomy and control, purpose, and identity to the members. Setting up systems where fans think they're in control, but the choices are provided by the author, can deliver on these benefits while building on humanity's innate tribalism.

To create a marketing system that connects readers with the work, and with each other, Solari created the [Game of Cults Recipe and Model](#), which members can download to see in full.

The goal is to build a positive feedback system to turn prospects into brand cultists by way of discovery, indoctrination, scaffolding, and the author's endgame. The author can capitalize on a variety of motivations to move the readers' behavior to encourage community.

Solari then talked through an example of what this might look like.

Step one: Brand Promise—Solari recommends the book *Fans First* by Jesse Cole, about the Savannah Bananas, a famous example of how to create a brand promise. The ideal is to encourage a fan, in conversation with a friend, to deliver the author's brand message. What statement about the author's work might get a fan to suggest it to a reader, who then immediately wants that experience?

Next, consider the endgame, the business goal the author wishes to achieve. For this example, Solari used higher email engagement. The email sequence needs to focus on getting them to read, not merely download, your book. Get them to finish the book and make the decision that you're now their favorite author. Does the author's welcome message and onboarding sequence reflect this need?

In the third step, define user types. Who will be targeted? A KU author can't target the identical customer when they shift to direct sales. Instead, they're looking for people who will pay full price. Who are these customers? What is their buying behavior?

Next, select the motivation the author hopes to trigger, for example, attention, intimacy, or belonging, and define the desired action, like replying to the author's welcome message.

Choose triggers that might result in this behavior, asking questions like what are you reading right now? How long until my book comes up in your TBR pile?

Set up appropriate feedback mechanisms. Getting any reply improves reputation with the customer's email, delivers information about comp authors, and enables the author to connect personally with readers.

In step eight, define incentives and rewards. Build ways that readers feel heard and seen in the community: give them personal replies, offer bonus material, or recognition in future emails for their responses and support. These kinds of rewards can be built into your email onboarding process.

Finally, build game paths that guide players to win-states aligned with the author's business goals. By this point in the process, readers have shown that they are engaged and ready to buy.

Initially, these efforts will garner only a small response, but that can snowball rapidly as engaged readers share the author's brand message.

Solari hopes that, after his presentation, authors will understand the psychology of readers and how to use it. They'll understand the importance of creating a community for their readers, a sanctuary from sales that helps readers feel at home. Finally, his method enables authors to induce behavior and generate ideas around the author's brand promise.

The act of purchase becomes an act of devotion to the brand of the author, a marker of identity.

Create inception moments where the feedback encourages readers to the next step and delivers feedback to the author about what they want.

Q&A

Do you find reader Facebook groups an effective way to build this community?

For some authors, yes. One thing to consider is what works for you as a brand and an author, rather than what everyone's doing. Are you a person who likes Facebook and is that where your readers are? Would you do it through email? Some do it in person at conventions. If it's not working—you post and post and get no response—you're probably not creating that sense of home. In a perfect world, you'd have the readers running it.

How do you get people to come to the group? Through social media? Backmatter?

You have to create community. One member has encouraged readers to set up lunches to meet up during their travels. Make swag bags and give them out; some people travelled 150 miles to get there. During the pandemic, they switched to a Friday pizza lunch. Five readers would receive pizza that day. That stuff builds. If only two people show up, start with them. People who received pizza, who weren't readers, then feel like they want to know the author and start interacting with their superfans as a result.

Do you have a list of things to avoid when creating this connection?

The biggest one is, don't be selling. When you are constantly selling, people see you treating them like a transaction. There's a million people on their Facebook feed treating them that way. You want to be the one giving them a sanctuary from that. The more you treat your customers as you'd like to be treated, they feel that.

How do you feel about branded merchandise?

I think it's great. First, you can put in some kind of loyalty system, rewarding the fans with points and give away the merch, even if they don't buy something. Physical products suck: they're lower margins and require running a retail shop (returns, shipping, etc.), which can take over the business you want to be in. Can you have things on the website that, when people buy your stories, they can choose an item with their loyalty points? On Kickstarter, etc., you'll need some kind of merchandising.

How is creating extra value for readers through an email system different from onboarding someone who downloaded a freebie and now you want to sell them the book?

A reader magnet is a great way to get people interested in your book. We need them to get over the hurdle of reading it, putting their time into your work. It must keep their attention long enough; it needs to be great.

The thing that most readers want from you is more story. This is something you're really good at, and they want it. Have a special, secret book that only those who've finished all of them can get, and you'll put their name on your website. Give them a trophy at the end of the road—there are those people who will do that. If you get a hundred people like that, you can build your marketing around that list.



Former outdoor guide and climbing instructor Elaine Isaak writes the *Bone Guard* archaeological thrillers as E. Chris Ambrose.

So You're Traditionally Published! Now What?

Presented by Lou Aronica and Barbara Keiler

Reported by Harper St. George

Bestselling author Lou Aronica is a long-term book publishing veteran and a past president of Novelists Inc. Writing under the pen name Judith Arnold, Barbara Keiler is the award-winning, USA Today bestselling author of more than one hundred novels and several plays.

Barbara Keiler began the discussion by explaining that she started in traditional publishing around 25 years ago. When her career flatlined, she pivoted to indie publishing and did that for 10 or 12 years. However, she has an MFA, not an MBA, and found that with indie, she spent more time doing other things and not writing. She wanted a company that would do all the pieces she didn't want to do: cover art, marketing, editing, etc. She wanted a publisher.

Her creative concern with going back to a traditional publisher was that she was tired of writing genre fiction. She was floundering. One evening over a glass of wine with Lou Aronica, who is a publishing veteran and chief literary officer of [The Story Plant](#), she asked about the publishing company, and she became a traditionally published author again. While Keiler acknowledged that there are problems with traditional publishing, she doesn't sit around and worry about having a particular ad fit a particular platform, and she doesn't look at her numbers every day. She is happier now than ever before as a writer.

Here, Aronica jumped in to point out that supporting Keiler is the easiest thing in the world because her writing is so great. He believes that some people think that the writing must be dumbed down to be a bestseller. He disagrees with this. Dumbing down is not a viable plan in the book business. He ran a BookScan report for bestselling hardcover fiction in the last 52 months. Of the top 10 books, seven were serious literary novels, two were serious commercial novels, and the other one was a genre novel.

Traditional publishing embraces ambition, editorial ambition, in a way that indie publishing cannot. In indie, if you stray too far outside of your lane, then it becomes too difficult to market. He believes that you can push yourself creatively in the traditional book world, but especially in hardcover. Pushing harder means allowing your editorial ambitions to reach fulfillment and you push harder creatively.

He also pointed out that there is a difference in readership between traditional and indie books. Some of this is by choice. Indie is very much about volume consumption, priced a certain way, and length. Traditional publishing, particularly the Big 5, has gone completely in the other direction. They know they can't compete at that level and have ceded that market.

He explained that there are key services that a traditional publisher provides that authors have some agency in, even if they don't realize they have that agency.

Packaging

Every author at a traditional house should be having a conversation with their editor about the packaging, or cover, of their book. The cover generally happens eight to nine months before publication. If your editor hasn't approached you by this time, ask to have that conversation. You have a right to that conversation with your editor. You'll want to share with them what you are trying to project emotionally in your work, so that it will be conveyed on the cover.

He explained that there are certain fiefdoms in publishing. The art department is one of them. The art director might be an autocrat. Just because you have this conversation, it doesn't mean you'll get the cover you want because the art director may not go along with it.

Position

Aronica explained that position is putting your book in a certain part of the market and having that market respond to it. You need to make sure you are 100% on board with what they are planning. Always have a positioning conversation with your editor. This conversation will be part packaging, part copy, part overall design and look, and part marketing. Key words should be a part of this conversation. Publishers get to use 100 key words for a book which should lead to more discovery. Make sure the key words you want are in there.

Marketing and merchandising

In traditional publishing, these concepts go very much hand in hand. Publishers tend to not spend a lot of money on outbound marketing (advertising). This is because it largely doesn't work to move the needle. What does work for the Big 5 is merchandising and working in concert with booksellers to give your book prominence in some way. This could be a kiosk or a display at the front of the store. This is way more successful than advertising. This is where publishers prioritize what they are going to do for you.

There is a code to know what they are planning to do for you. If a book has a page in the publisher's catalog or if they are offering co-op, this means they aren't doing anything extra for your book. Every book has a page in their catalog and co-op. Additional co-op, however, means a lot. Co-op is a deal the publisher makes with chain stores that provides placement for a fee.

Amazon builds in a substantial co-op fee in their agreement with the publisher. They give the publisher the right to direct where a piece of that goes. The publisher can use that to your benefit. Ask if you can get a co-op campaign for your book. Ask if it is possible to have merchandizing at Barnes & Noble or Indigo. These things are not available to indie authors.

Promotions

Another thing that publishers can do with a huge backlist is to offer promotions. Every publisher usually does two backlist promotions a year. These are generally discounts on their catalog to retailers. You can ask if your books are being offered in these promos. It can be a laundry list of say 500 books and those books have special terms.

Manufacturing

Ask about manufacturing. Can you get a different coating, special foil, matte, gloss, etc.? These are things that are possible for the publisher to do that could help your book sell. These extra things cost money and they may say it's not in the budget, but it's good to bring it up and ask.

Q&A

If the cover isn't what you were looking for, when would be a good time to put your foot down?

Aronica answered that the only time to put your foot down is if you are actively willing to walk. He acknowledged that many times writers don't actually know the best cover for their book. However, if you have to have that talk about a disappointing cover, then come armed with tools. Go to the Amazon bestsellers in your category and come to that meeting with those covers and show how those covers are different from your cover. Keiler suggests finding photos online that have the feel of your books to help preemptively guide the cover process. Audience members chimed in to explain that they create mockups of the cover they want and share that with their editor early in the process. Keiler reminded us that people in the art department probably haven't read your book, so communicating about mood is helpful.

Are co-ops still available at Barnes & Noble?

Yes, they are doing it, but less of it.

When did mass market become the ugly stepsister in publishing?

Retailers (big box stores) decided that mass market was for airports and supermarkets, not for bookstores. Essentially, it became a format of last resort for bookstores at the same time airports and supermarkets were scaling back on mass market.

Some customers will walk into a bookstore and buy a \$27 hardcover book, but when you have a Walmart customer, would they buy the same book in a larger size?

The problem is the math is never going to tell you to sell mass market because the profit is bigger. However, the book market works by word of mouth. If you shrink the amount of people who are recommending your book, you are shrinking the market. Revenue may not be down even as the amount of books sold has shrunk. Keiler added that she thinks of mass market as an inexpensive impulse buy. Some of that market has been replaced by ebooks.

Keiler went on to explain that, in her experience, traditionally published books reach a different audience. She has an agent to handle her foreign translations, and her agent read her earlier Harlequin titles. The agent asked if she could sell those reverted rights. The agent knew those books because they were traditionally published and was able to sell the rights to Hallmark.

She said that we are all NINC members and we have a lot more experience, clout, and power than we are aware of. In her early career, she often felt like a supplicant, because she was so grateful they were publishing her. We need to start using our clout. She would be happy if

we could attract more traditionally published authors to NINC. She would love it if we could exert our power on traditional publishing. Assert yourself. If they say no, they say no, but you have to ask.

Aronica added that there is no filler in publishing anymore. In the past, publishers tried to push a lot of books into the marketplace. That does not exist anymore. Every book being published by a traditional publisher is because that publisher wanted that book. Somebody had to stand in front of a group of people who wanted to say no and fight for that book to be acquired. You are valuable. Make sure you go into the relationship understanding that. There are no casual acquisitions anymore.

I had to take a sabbatical from writing and now it is harder than ever to get a book deal.

Aronica agreed that it's harder than ever to get published, which is why fewer agents want to represent fiction anymore.

Keiler mentioned Simon & Schuster being purchased by a private equity firm and wondered if it was a good thing for publishing. Aronica believes it's a win. He knows someone in the firm and thinks it will be a good thing.

A final note at the end was that the talk did not really apply to Harlequin category which operates under different parameters.



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 and her upcoming series is The Doves of New York, coming in 2024. She lives in the Atlanta area with her family.

Elevate Your Focus with a Gameboard Strategy

Presented by Sarra Cannon

Reported by Cidney Swanson

Sarra Cannon, bestselling indie author of more than twenty-five Young Adult contemporary fantasy novels, hosts the successful YouTube channel, [Heart Breathings](#), where she focuses on productivity and building positive momentum.

Whenever Sarra Cannon has tried to follow a long-term plan, it has not worked, for a variety of reasons. Her brain doesn't like to write to schedule. Her creativity goes in cycles, mirroring events in real life. Often the industry changes quickly, forcing unexpected pivoting. With these personal and professional variables, Cannon used to find herself frozen in indecision.

Even authors with effective long-term strategies can find themselves caught in a cycle of toxic expectations followed by disappointment. Cannon does not believe authors should simply give up on planning, though. An author can't just throw spaghetti at the wall, expecting a career to arise out of the mess.

Examples of "throwing spaghetti" might include haphazardly pursuing the latest trends such as direct sales, subscriptions, TikTok videos, and so on, out of a fear that not doing these things could mean that our dreams will never come true.

However, our creativity does not thrive when we are stressed or feeling as if we are always catching up. While authors may imagine their career should fall into place like a giant domino chain, Cannon feels that a better analogy is a gameboard or video gaming. In gaming, the goal is to dominate, whether this means beating an NPC (non-playable character) or a friend, either of which are potentially coming for your "village."

In the same way that a gamer finds delight in "building all the things," upgrading, and so on, so too an author can gamify their processes. It is all about resource management and maximizing personal strengths. Unfortunately, this means that there is no plan that Cannon can prescribe to ensure success for all authors. Because each author has their own strengths, each must strategize to work with those strengths.

Cannon pointed out that it is especially toxic to try to follow what another successful author did without knowing whether or not you share their strengths. And even when you do share someone else's strengths, there will be marketplace variables that you cannot control because things shift constantly in bookselling.

Cannon loves gaming and met her husband playing an online game. She has come to see that success in her writing business can be approached as she would approach winning a game. That is, she must prioritize the actions that will help her, and she must engage in wise resource utilization. Once she made this connection, she began "winning" in her career.

Cannon's gaming goals typically include gathering loot, killing the final boss, and winning the zone. There are multiple layers. A gamer can't simply walk up to the final boss and fight them. You must solve a series of puzzles to reach the first gate, climb the stairs, enter the basement, and so on. Cannon pointed out that there are YouTube videos of other gamers fighting and winning where it looks deceptively easy. Similarly, as authors we might do this, ignoring the skill level or resources required to "win." We see someone's success and perceive it as overnight, when it wasn't.

Instead of focusing on the win, Cannon suggested enjoying the individual challenges at each level of the author game. She now gamifies her author strategy in 90-day stretches, using a combination of long-term vision and short-term implementation. She is focused on the order of operations rather than on deadlines. This approach is flexible, exciting, and feels more achievable to her. Here are her steps for gamifying your author business:

Step 1: Know your objective

In this step, an author must determine what "winning" means to them, individually. Cannon likes to make vision boards, including phrases and images that will both inspire and remind her of what "winning" looks like for her.

Cannon suggested that if you don't know what you want, you can start by listing what you don't want. Match your objectives to your core values and not someone else's. Cannon's objectives act like her GPS system, guiding her to her destination. To get there, she will work backward, asking herself what she must put in place first.

Step 2: Line up your dominoes

To create a cascading domino effect, you don't need to know what all the steps are. Rather, you need to know what the *next* step is.

Cannon used her own goals for the purpose of example. She wants to make seven figures a year, have a strong supportive community, enjoy more independence and control, spend time with family, and pursue joy and good health. While these are not highly specific, they provide a vision that defines her "win."

From here, she works backward. A seven-figure author needs a bestselling series, which requires good writing habits. Having a bigger support team, doing livestreams, Kickstarters, and subscriptions might help. Selling direct, creating a better website, advertising, and creating sales funnels may also help.

To increase positive time spent with her family, she will need to improve the boundaries between competing components in her life. To increase joy in her life, she will need to practice patience, remember to play, and to seek a healthier lifestyle.

While these are examples of how to work backward, Cannon cautioned that it isn't necessary to nail down every step. Nor should you be in a rush to do all of it on a specific timeline. Even a professional juggler can only keep so many items in the air at once.

It is important to start from where you are. Are there things you're already doing that you can continue or amplify? Are some of the items on your list conditional on other items? That is,

what must be put into play first, prior to other things? Direct selling is conditional on having a website to sell from and enough backlist to sell.

While it is important to identify “big impact” items, it can also be useful to identify which items on your list sound like fun.

Step 3: Play the game

For Cannon, playing the game means setting up a 90-day calendar with successive steps that will drive her forward. This compact timeline means that she can decide every three months what “game” she is playing. A “game” is a concrete objective or outcome which can be put into play within that time frame.

Just like in the game of Chutes and Ladders, sometimes luck will move you forward faster than expected, and sometimes you will get sent back to where you started.

Cannon likes to imagine recurring projects as mini gameboards. For instance, each novel project requires repeatable steps such as outlining, a first draft, commissioning a cover, securing an editor, sharing with critique partners, and so on. Rather than worrying about deadlines, Cannon finds she is more productive when she simply focuses on the next step in the process. While she acknowledged that for some it is better to set a date, she encouraged those who are made anxious by deadlines to think in terms of *next steps*, which allows for the feeling of “winning” on a regular basis.

Step 4: Reflect and align

Cannon stressed that it is important to determine periodically whether you are still headed toward your true objective. She encourages authors to check in with their levels of energy, joy, and stamina. How much do you have to put toward the next 90-day round? Has your overall objective changed? Are you choosing projects that fully align with where you want to go?

Conclusion

Cannon encouraged authors to enjoy themselves along the path. The gap between where we are and where we want to be can feel like failure, so it is crucial to have something in your life that reminds you that what you are doing brings joy and meaning. Prioritize faith over fear, because joy alongside unshakeable faith *plus* a *strategy* is a magnet for success.



Cidney Swanson is a Kirkus Reviews award-winning author of coming-of-age adventures featuring characters you love like family. Or possibly better.

Triple-Threat! Author, Narrator, and Producer: Self-Publishing Audiobooks

Presented by M.K. Williams

Reported by Laura Resnick

Through a series of videos, books, and courses, M.K. Williams helps other authors on their independent self-publishing journey (and she still has time to write her own novels, too.)

Prolific indie novelist M.K. Williams is also the founder of [Author Your Ambition](#). Through her nonfiction books, courses, and YouTube channel, she has helped countless authors on their own independent publishing journeys.

Should you make your books available in audiobook format? According to author [M.K. Williams](#) the answer is unequivocally yes.

Why?

Making your book available in as many formats as you can (print, digital, and audio) increases accessibility and can expand your audience. There are readers who prefer audio for a variety of reasons.

Audio is a thriving market. Audiobook sales in 2022 amounted to \$1.8 billion, according to figures Williams cited. This represents 3.43% growth over 2021. Audiobooks comprise 9% of all book sales.

And producing your own audiobooks doesn't have to cost you a fortune. There are currently more options available than ever before for audio production.

How she began

Williams's audio journey began serendipitously when several friends of hers who were professional actors decided they wanted to get into audio work. Although they had trained voices, they didn't have audio narration or audio production experience. So they each offered to narrate an audiobook for Williams for free. They would use the experience to learn the new skills they needed. Williams, in turn, would get a professionally narrated audiobook she hadn't paid for. Win-win!

But eventually, as one might expect, Williams ran out of professional actor friends who wanted to narrate an audiobook for free.

By then, she was seeing the market advantages of making her books available in audio format and wanted to keep going, but the audiobooks weren't earning so much that she thought it would be wise to spend a ton of money on a narrator. So she decided to learn about narrating her own books.

When Williams first tried “self-narrating,” she was interested in saving money, of course, but that alone wasn’t her only reason—and probably shouldn’t be anyone’s only reason.

Williams has a YouTube channel where she shares advice and information with indie writers (see conference report “Leverage YouTube for Your Author Business” elsewhere in this issue of *Nink*), so she thought that even if self-narration didn’t work out for her, she could turn the experience into a good YouTube video.

But even if you don’t expect to leverage a potentially *unsuccessful* attempt at self-narration into a good video, podcast, or article, Williams nonetheless advocated trying it at least once, because the self-education is likely to be so valuable.

Even if you find that you hate your voice or hate dealing with the technical aspects of production, and you therefore decide not to publish the audiobook or do any more self-narration, you will learn a *lot* about audiobooks. You’ll understand why it’s so expensive to hire a narrator (and why it can be risky to base your choice of narrator on who charges the lowest fee), how the process works, why it takes time, and what to require in narration and production skills.

Williams said narrating your own work will also help you improve your craft. Reading the whole book aloud, as well as listening to it while you edit the audio files, you’ll catch issues with the language, dialogue, pace, and repetition that you didn’t notice on the silent page.

And the only downside to all that self-education is that you might feel you wasted some time narrating an audiobook you won’t publish.

However, you may find self-narration a viable path, as Williams did. And so she became a triple threat! In this business model for audiobooks, the author wears all three hats: narrator, producer, and publisher.

The script

As narrator and producer, you must create an audiobook script. This necessarily includes opening and closing credits. Something like this, for example:

- Opening credits: “*My Novel*. Written by M.K. Williams. Narrated by the author.”
- Closing credits: “You have been listening to *My Novel*, written and narrated by M.K. Williams. Copyright 2023 by M.K. Williams. All rights reserved.”

Also, for nonfiction text, pay attention to phrases like (for example) “as you’ll see below” or “as mentioned above.” In narration, you’ll want to change phrases like that to “as you’ll see later” or “as previously mentioned.”

Williams said she also revises dialogue tags when self-narrating. Due to using voice acting techniques in audio format, she said, you don’t necessarily need to include “he said” if you’re narrating that male character’s dialogue in his voice, or “she whispered” if you’re whispering that line of dialogue in that female character’s voice.

(An audience member asked how this affects Amazon’s Whispersync option, which requires virtually identical content between the text and audio formats of a title. Authors concerned about that might not want to eliminate dialogue tags.)

The recording process

Williams recommended that you limit the amount of time you're recording without a break. After 30 minutes, she gets tired. Narration is acting. You need to bring the emotion to the voice, which probably includes smiling if your character is happy, frowning if they're angry, etc. None of this works as well in the narration if you're getting tired or not as focused as you were when you still felt fresh. So take breaks when you need to, or stop for the day when you feel your energy decreasing.

Keep in mind, you don't have to record the book *in order*. Each chapter will be a separate file, as will every other element of the book: opening credits, closing credits, dedication, acknowledgments, author's note, epilogue, etc. Williams recommended starting a narration project by working first with the shortest sections of text. Use those shorter files to check the sound quality, your voice, etc. It's better to discover an issue in the audio quality after narrating an author's note or a very short chapter, rather than after narrating a 25-page chapter.

Just as you can fix your writing mistakes when you revise the text, you can fix your recording mistakes when you edit. You can record a line 10 times—or more!—if you feel you're not nailing it. No one will ever know, since you will be editing the audio files. So if you aren't sure about the best way to deliver a line, or if you make some mistakes, just repeat the line during narration and then deal with it later when editing.

There are also some techniques you can use, if you make a mistake, that will make editing easier.

For one thing, Williams advised slowing down and taking a beat, so that if you mess something up, you have space within the narration to edit it.

You can also clap—just a single sharp clap of the hands. This will show up visually in your audio editing software as an obvious spike in the audio, so you can easily find the spot where you made a mistake.

If you have the right software and recording set-up for it, you can also “punch and roll.” This means that when you make a mistake while recording, you can stop, back up, and record over the mistake, and it should sound seamless.

Your recording set-up

You need to record in a space that is *quiet*. Although some people have a full recording studio in their home, which is a fantastic asset, that's a big financial investment. If you're starting out with self-narration, go into a closet with lots of clothes—this can be a great space for eliminating echo. Do some recording in there and see how it turns out. If you persist with self-narration, you can start researching other solutions for your recording space. (YouTube is full of ideas, many of them very affordable.)

Wherever you're recording, if the air conditioning kicks on, or the washing machine is running, or your toddler shrieks, or a plane flies overhead, stop recording or pause, because that noise *will* be present in the background of your recording.

A few tech details

You'll need a good microphone and some audio editing software. There's a huge range of options available. You could easily spend thousands on high-end professional equipment, the sort used by professional studios—but there's no need to do that. Williams advised starting out with affordable options.

She uses an ATR 2100 microphone for audiobooks, which is the same mic she uses in her YouTube videos. [Based on my quick online search, it looks like you can get one for under \$100.] You might also want a comfortable mic stand, and probably a pop filter (which eliminates “popping” noises [ex. **p**erfect **p**oetry **p**erformance **p**referred, **p**lease] when you speak directly into a mic).

For editing software, Williams uses [Audacity](#), which is free, easy to use, and has so far met all her needs. She said Audacity has a lot of good “How To” videos. It's also convenient: when ACX notifies her that she must correct a quality-control issue on an audio file she has submitted, ACX provides instructions specifically for fixing the issue in Audacity.

(Someone in the audience recommended an editing software called [Reaper](#).)

When editing, you'll eliminate flubs and mistakes, and make sure you have proper “room tone” (no echo or sound-bounce). Ensure a specific amount of time between chapters, as required by vendors. Look for decibel rates and peaks in the editing software. Your finished audio files should be in MP3 format. ACX has a sheet that lists all requirements for these tech specifications.

Williams also recommended using ACX's Audio Lab to doublecheck your audio files. It's a free tool that will analyze your files and tell you what needs to be fixed. She has found that any file approved by Audio Lab will also clear the requirements of other audio vendors, not just ACX.

If you find you really hate the tech aspect of this, you can try outsourcing the editing. There are audio production services that will edit your files. However, this is a service that tends to be expensive, though Williams said a few companies are starting to offer better prices.

Alternatively...

If you decide not to narrate your own books, you can be “only” the producer and publisher. It's still a lot of work, and still well worth doing.

Hiring a professional narrator is an excellent option. But if cost is an issue (a good professional narrator is expensive), then narration by artificial intelligence (AI) is another option. Williams advised considering this if, due to cost or circumstances, there won't be an audiobook at *all* unless you use AI. (She reminded the audience that you can still produce a different edition of the audiobook at a later date.)

When using AI for narration, you must listen to every word of the book. You'll need to correct pronunciation. AI can globally fix mistakes (such as mispronunciation). A notable problem with AI narration is that the program doesn't understand how to build emotional peaks and valleys with its delivery. (An audience member says she has found it helps to use **bold** or CAPITALIZED words in the text to signal to AI that emphasis is needed in the narration.)

The cover of an AI audiobook must include a disclosure that it's AI-narrated, and Williams recommends pricing it lower than a self-narrated audiobook. (She prices hers “much lower.”)

Finally, most platforms don't currently accept AI-narrated books, so your distribution options are more limited. Google Play and Apple each sell AI-narrated audiobooks that are produced using their own AI tools.

Distribution

With self-narrated and professionally narrated audiobooks, Williams recommends going wide. This doesn't just mean uploading to all vendors. She also suggests you consider podcasting your audiobooks, whether you serialize it (ex. release a chapter a week) or drop a whole “season” of a series at once. You can also release your audiobooks through YouTube.

Keep in mind that you can only upload an audiobook to Amazon/Audible—whether you go direct through ACX or aggregate via a service like Findaway—if the ebook edition of the title is already available on Amazon (but it's fine if the ebook is a pre-order).

Williams also does direct sales of her audiobooks on her website. She recommends BookFunnel as a good way to distribute advance copies and freebies.



Longtime Novelist, Inc., member Laura Resnick is currently NINC's central coordinator.

The Creator Economy: The Next Era of Publishing

Presented by Michael Evans

Reported by Michele Dunaway

Michael Evans is the author of 12 novels, as well as two nonfiction books for authors . He's the co-founder and CEO of Ream, the subscription platform by fiction authors for fiction authors.

Michael Evans broke his session down into three areas:

1. Why the creator economy
2. What is the creator economy
3. How to build your creator economy

For the first part of his talk, he started off by proving he's funny, joking with the audience and sharing his journey from high school, to his gap year where he tried to be a vlogger, to Harvard, to being CEO and co-founder of [Ream](#) (the subscription platform by fiction authors for fiction authors). He's the author of 12 sci-fi thriller novels and is on a mission to empower people to create a better future for themselves and the people they love through the power of stories. But the ride wasn't smooth, and he told the audience how he got into a dark place, went on a four- to five-month road trip with friends trying to get validations and views on YouTube, until he crashed his car into the median. This was his wake-up call. He says he learned three things:

1. I need to go to therapy.
2. Algorithms are abstractions of our real emotions—connection and community are king.
3. The tools, mindset, and strategies for authors to build their own creator economy.

He said the creator economy is so big now that it's crazy stuff. He showed a slide that had names of apps for content creation (examples: Spext, Lowkey, Slice); for financing (ex: Juice, spotter, Karat); administrative tools analytics and operations (ex: Linktree, MOE Assist); blockchain (MakersPlace, ZORA); courses (Podia, Virtually); merchandise (CALA, Printify); ad platforms (Captiv8, #paid); community management (Circle, Notify); subscriptions (Substack, Fanhouse); and fan interactions (Cameo, Payhip). (*Reporter note: the slide had far more examples, I've selected only a few to give you an idea.*) We've moved from the gold rush to the golden age.

So why the creator economy for authors?

- Networked age of publishing changing the rules of discovery.
- Higher CAC (customer acquisition cost) and lower LTV (lifetime value) makes extending product offering + revenue streams essential.
- Readers want and desire deeper immersion into the worlds we interact with.

Some definitions:

- A **creator** is an individual who builds businesses with distribution and scale amplified by the internet, centered around digital communities.
- A **creator economy** is an ecosystem of creators and their teams, platforms, and digital infrastructure (think software products, email marketing services, etc.) that empower people to build digitally native businesses and communities around their passions and earned insight.
- **World-building** is a creator's ability to immerse their audience into their story world, create shared experiences for their community, and operate a business that uses their intellectual property as the foundation for experiences and products readers desire.

It's a blurring of media boundaries, such as your books expanding into comics, video, etc. Think of your genre as a community. It's passion fiction. Authors are world builders. Can you offer more products?

We are in the networked age of publishing. The gold gush died when everyone came online. There are only so many hours in a day people can read. Network effects rule our industry—and who owns the network holds the key to discovery. This means looking at how books are discovered, who owns the data, and what we do with that data.

What makes book discovery special is that books are an extremely high-friction media format: they take hours to consume and need minutes to be able to tell if it's a good story. TikTok creators have about two seconds to capture a viewer in a 30-second video. YouTubers have eight minutes. For books, time is needed to decide—like at least 10–15 minutes or a good half hour to decide if the read is worth continuing. This makes social signals more important in determining a book's success compared to most other media formats. In reading, social signals are more important. Word-of-mouth recommendations, not YouTube or TikTok, are still how most readers discover books.

This means that in a world where social signals rule, who sees those signals can sway the future. The foundation of direct sales is controlling the relationship with your customer:

- Contact information/purchasing history
- Payment data/merchant of record (ex: sales tax)
- Reader experience data (ex: Who has read the book/who is engaging?)

If you think about it, Amazon built the everything store. Started with books and now is so much more. Books are high friction, but extremely high trust once a consumer finishes. *You can create your own world around your books to sell almost anything.* Who is doing the upselling now? It's time for storytellers to rule the world. Books equal trust, so leverage yourself.

However, there is the profit problem. Reading is growing at a slow rate each year—we are fighting for the same eyeballs. Ad costs are up and payouts from KU and other big programs are down 30%+ since 2017 when adjusted for inflation. Customer acquisition costs have gone up. This means you have to increase your lifetime value (LTV).

Three ways to increase LTV

1. **Write more**—increase the raw hours people consume your writing. (Many who did this as their business model may have weathered this 30% drop better than others; however, there are only so many hours in a day.)
2. **Package your stories** in ways that extend value and access—i.e. different media formats, early access, etc. Ways to package your story:
 - a. Change the medium—audio, comics, visual novels, foreign translations
 - b. Change the release format
 - i. Early access
 - ii. Serialization
 - iii. Exclusive novels for passion projects
 - c. Bundle
 - i. Offering your backlist at a discount.
 - ii. Bundling different mediums into one price

Most strategies are on bundling, and changing release and bundling are picking up as author strategies.

3. **Expand your product offering** to solve different problems in the life of your readers (identity, belonging, status, consumer packaged goods, etc.). There are so many customers on the planet. How can you fulfill the needs of your reader? Why do they buy your shirt or coffee cup?
 - a. **Community-based offerings** are things like book clubs, voting on character names, Zoom calls.
 - b. **Product-based offerings** are often consumables such as make-up lines, stationary lines, coffee, etc. Merchandise and swag are also product-based offerings.
 - c. **Experience-based offerings** are things like travel guides to new cities in your book and things like cookbooks.

You need to know what works best for you. In community-based offerings, one author has different tiers where fans get to name characters in the books, but those at a higher paid level can then veto those at a lower level. Another has a virtual book club where readers pay \$25 a month to join and have roles. The fans gather on the platform every month—the author isn't even necessarily there. The income is \$500 a month and the club has a 90% retention rate. Another author does a weekly call. In product-based offerings, you can bring out products. There are apps/sites that allow you to create make-up lines and other items. There is software to design travel guides and perhaps a cookbook for your franchise.

The core question is, how can you give your readers an experience that further immerses them in your world? Work on building your own amusement park. Think of all the ways Walt Disney Studios diversified: TV shows, movies, amusement parks, member clubs, merchandise licensing, cruises ... the list goes on. Evans mentioned [Pietra](#) as a site that helps you make your own product lines.

Five steps to your creator economy

Step One: Determine your platform core.

You are only one human. Focus on things that matter to you. What are you passionate about as an author? What is your brand purpose and mission? How will you filter your ideas and decide what to say “no” to? What does success look like to you? Is it \$20K a year or greater control?

Stay true to your brand. Your core emotional arc is probably close to your brand. Evans said he used the word “no” deliberately—yes, you could do it, but you can’t say yes to everything. So when you say no, know why.

Step Two: Pick your first offer.

The rules are no overthinking. Don’t distract yourself. Focus on your MVP—your minimum viable product. This is determined by the minimal outlay of cost + time. One successful product line—find what works. It’s better if backed by data from fans. Make it fun.

Step Three: Build your offer.

He said he’s trying to give you the framework.

- What will your business model be? Do you want à la carte sales? Subscriptions? Crowdfunding? À la carte is low friction. Consumers get in and buy. Subscribers need to know what is the benefit, what are you offering. You get cash in and can launch in months. It’s harder to do but it’s recurring. Crowdfunding is a big one-time payment.
- What will your payment gateway be? Who owns the credit card data? And you must pay sales tax.
- What software will you use to deliver the product to your readers?
- Will you contract any of this out and, if so, is that built into your business model?

Step Four: Launch your offer.

Make a big deal out of this. Your readers need to switch. Make sure to lubricate the process.

Principles of a good launch:

- Supply- or time-constrained
- Perceived deal or bonus value
- Meet your readers where they are currently, in terms of:
 - Platform
 - Language
 - Existing relationship with your work/business

Step Five: Reflect and iterate.

What worked? What didn’t? Why? Did you meet your goal? What have you learned about your readers that you didn’t know before?

All five steps then go on repeat.

Takeaways

You are better than you think. You have the ultimate superpower.

- Storytellers rule the world because we are the ones with the trust in this industry.
- Taking control of our customer relationships and expanding our product offering is essential in the age of the creator economy.
- You must take an experimental approach to new product lines, always looking to maximize your leverage and minimize stress.

Evans shared this about his company: Ream is the subscription platform by fiction authors for fiction authors. Authors are making nearly \$700,000 a year on Ream just four months after launch. More than 3,500 authors in their Facebook group, Subscriptions for Authors, are learning about how to grow the subscriptions. *(Reporter note: It was not clarified as to whether the \$700,000 was collective by all authors or per author.)*

Other details as answers to questions

Travel guide app: [Thatch.co](https://thatch.co/).

Other apps: [Geneva](#), [Koji](#), [Printful](#), [Reamstories.com](#), [Pietra](#).

If just starting, best first step? Don't spend a lot of money or time. You might miss in the beginning. Being in your niche is fine. It's too early to see the ceiling. Onley James is currently killing it.

Ream & Patreon bring a social aspect. You can schedule. On Ream they can follow you for free. Ream is not censored.

Ream is platform diversification providing subscription and access. At Amazon you get a product only.

Community spreads everywhere. Evans wants to build one home community with subscription books all in one place.



[Michele Dunaway](#) loves creating romantic stories about characters who discover things about themselves as they travel the road to true love and self-fulfillment. Her latest is the six-book Love in the Valley series for Harlequin Special Edition.

Bringing Your Books (and Income!) Back to Life

Presented by Alessandra Torre

Reported by Trish Milburn

Alessandra (AR) Torre is a New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and USA Today bestselling author. She has written over 30 romance and suspense novels and is an Edgar-award nominee.

Bestselling author and entrepreneur Alessandra Torre has made a name for herself with her dynamic and detail-packed workshops full of actionable information such as this session on reviving one's backlist to make it pull its weight. Torre, who is a co-founder of [Inkers Con](#) and the CEO of [Authors AI](#), said that reworking and marketing her backlist is important to her author business since she's currently only publishing one new book a year.

What exactly is backlist?

According to Torre, backlist isn't just every book other than your most recent release. She defines it as any book that isn't in a new release promotional cycle. If you write multiple books a year, you may have two or more books that are instead frontlist, still in their promotional cycle for a newer release.

Taking a backlist inventory

Torre said the first step in reviving your backlist to make it work better for you is to take an inventory. Look at the last 12 months, cataloguing your backlist titles and how they have been performing. We often tend to release a book and then after the initial promotional period forget about it, particularly if it's a "loser book" (those that have way underperformed or that we perhaps shouldn't have written and released in the first place).

After preparing this inventory of backlist titles, divide them into categories. Torre calls hers Duds, Chuggers, and Superstars. Duds are self-explanatory. Chuggers are the reliable titles that pull their weight but they're not doing great. Superstars are your top performers. However you break down your list, it's going to be different from those of other authors. Torre said that it's imperative not to compare yourself to other authors here because while \$75 a day of earnings on a book might be disappointing for some authors, it could be superstar-level sales for another.

Ask yourself if your Duds can become Chuggers and if you can turn your Chuggers into Superstars. You may also have some Superstars that are beginning to flag a bit because you haven't paid them attention in a while. Torre said that was the case for her book, *The Ghost Writer*, and that she needed to develop a new marketing plan for it.

Other books may need a more substantial plan of attack, such as what she did for her book, *Black Lies*. She re-wrote and re-released it under a different title.

Then there are the Duds, which can be divided into the ones worth the effort of trying to revive them and those that aren't. Torre said that her book, *Tripping on a Halo*, wasn't worth the

effort because it's her only rom-com book. Even if someone reads it, she has no other books like that to serve them.

After you have a good idea of where all your backlist titles stand and which ones may be worth the effort of revitalization, identify the low-hanging fruit: current trends, outdated packaging, past winners, and prioritizing first-in-series titles. Spend one to two hours a week focusing on a backlist book and creating a plan for promoting it.

"Release any attachment you have to pricing, taglines, covers, and descriptions," Torre said.

Think of your backlist as a bunch of tools. You've already "paid" for them, now use them freely to:

- Increase your income
- Grow brand and exposure
- Generate leads
- Test everything

"It doesn't all have to generate income," Torre said. "They can work for you in other ways. My backlist is my favorite testing ground."

One thing at a time

When making changes to try to improve a backlist title's performance, be sure to change only one thing at a time. Testing multiple things at once makes it difficult or impossible to determine which change made the most or any difference. So change one thing (i.e. cover, title, blurb) and measure the effect.

How to make more money on backlist

Torre said that cover trends change more than anything else, and those are tied to click conversion. But blurbs are tied to purchase conversion, which is what you want.

She gave an example using her first book, *Blindfolded Innocence*. She said the original cover for that book was a "crotch shot" which got lots of clicks, but when the people who clicked read her blurb they didn't buy it. When she re-did the blurb, however, she went from selling 10–15 copies a day to more than 2,000 a day.

"My entire career changed based on that one moment."

Torre said it was important to set a baseline with a small amount of traffic before making any changes. To do this, run ads with a \$5–\$10 daily budget for five days. Then make your change, such as to the blurb, and measure the effect.

To surgery, stat!

Sometimes small changes aren't all that's needed to give a backlist title the refresh it needs to sell better. The book that Torre overhauled, *Black Lies*, had earned \$6,707 in the 12 months prior to her working to breathe new life into it. Then she added 20,000 words, did a full rewrite, extended the epilogue, re-titled, re-blurbed, and re-released it as *A Divided Heart*. The result earned her \$3,181 in the 32 days prior to the NINC conference.

Another example is how she took four original, connected novellas and first put them into an omnibus and then later rewrote and republished the stories as one book under a different title.

When republishing under a new title, however, she communicated this to her current readers in every way she could so they didn't mistakenly buy a book that they'd read before—even if it was substantially changed. She was told by Amazon to put that fact in the first line of her blurb, though she didn't like giving up that valuable real estate. She said you might start out that way and perhaps move that message to the end of the blurb later.

Creating traffic

Once you've optimized, create traffic. Don't throw money at promotion until you've maximized your conversion. You can create this traffic via paid advertising (Facebook, Amazon, BookBub, etc.); through sales and freebies as well as other marketing efforts; or through prequels and your back matter.

Torre gave a freebie/sale checklist:

- Plan in advance.
- Highly publicize it through ads, social media, and your newsletter.
- *Or...do a stealth sale.*

"If I do a stealth sale, I don't tell a soul about it and see how much Amazon pushes it on its own," she said.

Alternatively, you can promote it in only one spot to measure its effectiveness.

More high-quality traffic comes from prequels and back matter. Torre said that she believes Meghan Quinn is the queen of back matter. She showed an example from the end of Quinn's book, *See Me After Class*, where Quinn invited readers to keep reading for an extended epilogue about the characters in the book they'd just finished. But before that, she put an excerpt for the next book in the series. Therefore, readers would hopefully get hooked enough to buy the new book before even getting to the extended epilogue for the current book.

Traffic can create more than immediate sales. Lead generation is important as well. Giving someone a free book in exchange for their email address on your newsletter mailing list also holds value.

"I have given away over 100,000 copies of *Hidden Seams*, and it's brought me lots of readers."

Some other income opportunities noted in Torre's slides were:

- Box sets
- Special editions
- Serialized content
- Expanded distribution
- Audio
- Foreign translations

Q & A

An audience member asked about wanting to do major surgery on her book but wondered how it would affect her audio since it would be expensive to re-record the audiobook.

“Don’t let that stop you,” Torre said. “You don’t have to change the audio. You can label the revised non-audio version of the book as a new edition.”

Another attendee asked if republishing a book after majorly revising it would negatively impact an author’s social proof since all the previous reviews would be gone. Torre said that readers just want to see some social proof. That doesn’t have to be hundreds of reviews. She also noted that sometimes Amazon will bring over reviews if the book isn’t retitled.



Trish Milburn came away from this session eyeballing her woefully neglected backlist indie titles determined to make a plan to revive them. Now if she could only clone herself to implement that and all the other things on her post-conference to-do list.

Making Silence BOOM!

Presented by Margie Lawson

Reported by Michele Dunaway

Reporter's Note: The examples Lawson presented in the workshop all come from authors who have taken her courses.

Margie Lawson developed deep editing techniques that help writers add emotion and psychological power to every page. She founded Lawson Writer's Academy where you'll find over 30 instructors teaching online courses through her website.

We've probably all read these lines or variations of these lines:

The room went silent.

We all quit talking.

Everyone was silent for a couple of minutes.

For presenter Margie Lawson, silence is another way to give your stories power. Lawson said that silence happens—in real life and on the page. Think about silence—it can bring a visceral response. It can be heavy and unnerving. It can be emotional and cause a trigger. Silence can be subtext, or as Lawson said, “Hellooo, subtext. Hellooo, instinctive reactions and visceral responses. Hellooo, glances, gaze aversions, and veiled or loaded facial expressions.”

An instinctive reaction is something you can do at any time, but often you don't realize you're doing them; however, you could think about them and do them anytime. A visceral response is emotionally triggered, immediate, involuntary, and anchored to the body. We can't control them. We can't make ourselves blush. That's how you separate which ones are instinctive and which ones are visceral.

An instinctive reaction are things like gasps, hand to mouth, stepping back, making a fist, crouching, and blinking. Visceral responses are things like dry mouth, sweaty palms, rocky stomach, tight throat, racing pulse, and pounding heart.

When writing, silence can do the following:

1. Strengthen emotion
2. Elicit a visceral response
3. Share relationship dynamics
4. Add tension or release tension
5. Create a chance to slip in backstory
6. Add more power to pauses and hesitations
7. Strengthen scenes by sharing how silence emotionally impacts the POV character

Subtext is the psychological messages behind the look; the tone of voice; the quick, barely touching hug.

Power words are words and phrases that carry a psychological message.

Backloading is placing power words and phrases at or near the end of a sentence.

NYT means phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that are so fresh and strong, they'll boost you toward selling more books. (*Reporter note: NYT means New York Times, as in its bestseller list.*)

Impact on POV character is sharing the POV character's reaction to something. It's showing the reader how something like silence (or anything) emotionally impacts the POV character.

Margie shared this example from Monica Corwin's *Pocket Pair*:

There's this **moment that I love**, a **heartbeat of silence** between when the smooth plastic cards touch my fingertips, and the first **action**. Is this the hand which **propels me** to the next **win**, or **cuts me out of the game** for good?

It's a **silent moment charged with possibility**. With **victory** and defeat. The making of **champions** and **losers**.

The bolded words are power words that are amplified. The cadence drives the reader throughout. Think about that silence and its impact on the poker player.

When doing a deep edit analysis, we see the following:

- Power words, backloading—yes
- Fresh writing—yes
- Rhetorical devices—yes
- Compelling cadence—yes
- Visceral response—no
- Impact on POV character—yes
- Taps emotion in reader—yes
- NYT—yes
- Emotional boom—Yes!

Another example is Lainey Cameron's *Erasing Grace*:

I trail a finger along the planks of the pier, a gap widening between us. The silence isn't subtle, it's heavy. Full of fear and every memory I'm not brave enough to admit out loud. Even to someone I trust.

Look how this amplifies the fear. Notice how this paragraph shows what it (silence) was and what it wasn't. She took silence and dressed it up.

This is from Cassandra Shaw's *Blood Ring*:

Silence surrounded us. A silence both natural and unnatural in the world where I stood. The weighted pause of all the prey waiting for a predator to move on. But I did not know if the cause was Kylan and I or a bigger monster. The monster we both hunted.

When doing a deep edit analysis, we see the following:

- Power words, backloading—yes
- Fresh writing—yes
- Rhetorical devices—yes
 - Anaphora (a double)—Silence, A silence
 - Alliteration—prey, predator
 - Anadiplosis (a device in which the last word or phrase of one clause, sentence, or line is repeated at the beginning of the next). monster. The monster...
- Compelling cadence—yes
- Visceral response—no
- Impact on POV character—yes
- Taps emotion in reader—yes
- NYT—yes
- Emotional boom—Yes!

Natural and *unnatural* is also a play on words. Notice how Silence and A Silence both start sentences.

From the same text:

Miranda let out a bloodcurdling scream of a monster's true death. And then there was silence. Silence so profound not an insect, bird, or animal dared make a sound. Silence so absolute the blood rushing in my ears sounded threatening.

The words *blood rushing in my ears* is an understated visceral response.

And for a minute, other than Keeper's constant purring, not a sound was made. No noises from Kylan moving through the house. Not even the sound of breathing from Stirling. Nor sirens from help on its way. Just the harsh doom-doom-doom of my pulse in my ears.

In a deep editing analysis, note how the silence deepens characterization by sharing what is not happening. The author uses onomatopoeia (word that shares the sound it represents) with doom, doom, doom. There's asyndeton (omission or absence of a conjunction between parts of a sentence) when there's no use of *and* between the *doom*. There's also epizeuxis (repetition of word or phrase in immediate succession), which is the repetition of the word *doom*. Then there's also compelling cadence. The reader also gets a visceral response when reading *doom, doom, doom of my pulse in my ears*. Using *doom* for the sound of a visceral response and playing off the meaning of the word too? Lawson describes this as brilliant.

Silence can also be used to imply backstory and be themed to the world.

Look at these sentences by Jenny Hansen:

Her room echoed with the silence of his absence. Nothing cowered, nothing cringed, nothing cried.

This was written during COVID lockdown. Notice how there's power words and backloading. The piece uses the rhetorical devices of anaphora in a triple beginnings. The piece has shared what's not happening.

She would be stuck inside, slowly going mad, in the smoldering silence of quarantine.

This piece uses power words and backloading. It's themed to our world. The piece uses the rhetorical device of alliteration (the initial consonant S). The piece also has compelling cadence. Another example, from Linda Dindzans' *A Certain Man*:

The silence echoed with wells of unspoken words.

This sentence is themed to their world—the characters get their water from wells.

Another technique that can amplify silence is the use of similes and metaphors. However, Lawson cautions that there can be sometimes too many of them.

Lawson shared this example from Stina Lindenblatt as a way to develop the silence further:

Before: Silence shrouds the room in a heavy veil as we try to digest everything Lucas told us.

After a deep-edited 49 words: Silence shrouds the room in a heavy veil as we try to digest everything Lucas told us. It's a dizzying silence that sucks all thought from the room—that leaves you unable to put words to the truth. A silence that leaves your words too broken to piece back together.

Lawson said *sucks* is always a power word. Notice how this paragraph empowered silence and amplified it.

Another example Lawson shared that shows how alliteration can amplify silence was from Kimberly Belle's *The Marriage Lie*:

Silence stretches, long and leaden, and I feel the need to defend myself.

There's the S sound in *silence* and *stretches*, and then also the L in *long* and *leaden*.

Lawson gave additional examples as well. This one from Kimberly Belle's *The Stranger in the Lake* shows backstory:

Paul's silence makes it all too easy to believe the rumors. That Jax cheated Paul out of money or popularity, or he slept with one of Paul's girlfriends. That there was a fight

that got out of control, a fit of jealousy, a push too hard. That Jax hit his head, knocked something loose. That the devil made him do it. Lake Crosby gossip and speculation because the people who know—Paul and Micah and Jax—aren't talking.

Notice how the *silence* slips the backstory in seamlessly.

In a wrap-up, Lawson shared, use silence to add emotion and power to your scenes. Remember to use the Deep Edit Analysis checklist. Write fresh. Avoid using expected words, avoid overused word pairings, and avoid clichéd phrases. Share the emotional impact on the POV character. You'll love what it does for your scenes.

Deep edit analysis checklist

- Power words, backloading—yes/no
- Fresh writing—yes/no
- Rhetorical devices—yes/no
- Compelling cadence—yes/no
- Visceral response—yes/no
- Impact on POV character—yes/no
- Taps emotion in reader—yes/no
- NYT—yes/no
- Emotional boom—yes/no



[Michele Dunaway](#) loves creating romantic stories about characters who discover things about themselves as they travel the road to true love and self-fulfillment. Her latest is the six-book *Love in the Valley* series for Harlequin Special Edition.

Amp Up Your Income with a Personalized Plan

Presented by Carrie Elks

Reported by Laura Resnick

Carrie Elks is the author of 30 contemporary romance books. Since 2014, she has been both traditionally and self-published, and her stories have been translated into over 10 different languages.

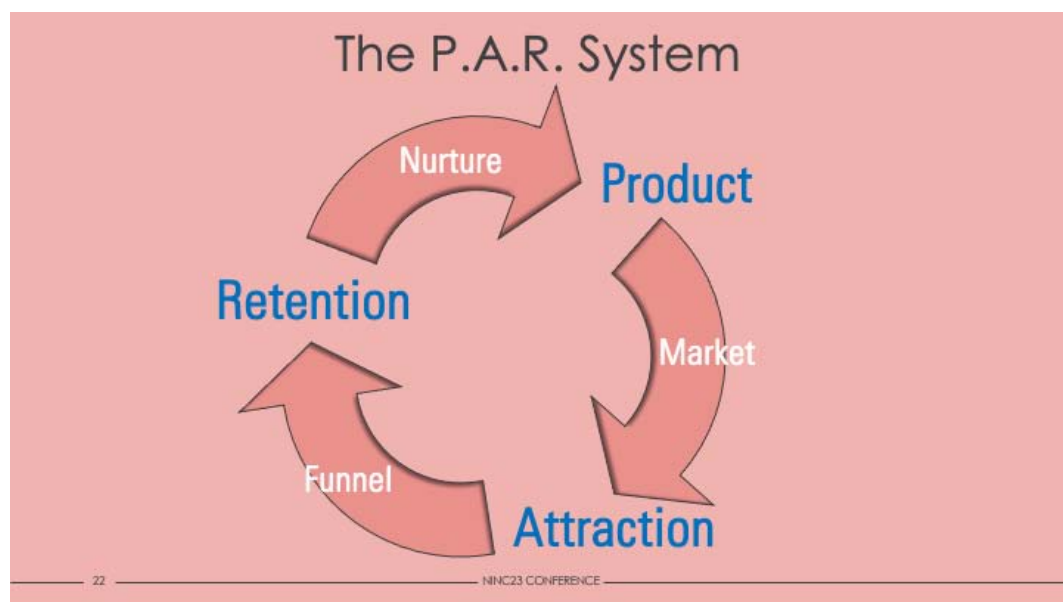
Carrie Elks told the audience she is not a bestseller, but—indie-published since 2019—she currently earns a six-figure annual income from her writing. Last year she earned about \$500,000 and she's on track for similar earnings this year.

Elks started off in traditional publishing in 2014, first by selling to a small press, then by writing for one of the big houses. She described a career pattern that's familiar to many authors: her sales declined, her publisher didn't offer her another contract, and her traditional career petered out. So Elks turned to indie publishing.

Fiercely determined she would not fail at this, Elks studied what other successful authors were doing—not outliers and bestsellers, but consistent midlist authors with strong careers.

The P.A.R. system

Elks identified three elements shared by the authors she studied that she has emulated in her own indie career and which she calls the Product, Attraction, and Retention (P.A.R.) system, a regularly interacting, interdependent group of three principles that form a unified whole.



The authors Elks studied mastered their *product*. These authors consistently delivered the books their readers wanted, they were consistent with their covers and content, and they consistently made it clear to their readers that new books were coming.

They worked out how to find and *attract* their readers.

And they learned how to *retain* their readers, keeping them coming back for book after book, ensuring their readers continually returned to them.

Product

Marketing begins with the product, Elks said, the book.

In traditional publishing, editors don't immediately fall in love and offer lots of money. They have acquisitions meetings with the marketing team, the accounting team, the rights department, etc. Elks advised: Be your own acquisitions team. She holds acquisition meetings in her head, asking questions like, "Can this book make money and keep a roof over my head?"

Elks says the answer to that question is *yes* if the book is part of a series. Writing series has been a game-changer for her, much more profitable than stand-alone novels. Some advantages of series:

- Readers love series—especially binge readers.
- Series are easier to market.
- Series make financial sense, because your advertising budget goes further, and you get a higher return on your advertising investment.
- Series novels can include various types of "push" to get the reader to buy the next book.

Elks discussed different types of popular series, such as series that make use of cliffhangers (ex. the series that began with *Fifty Shades of Grey*) and series that feature the adventures of a continuing character (any number of mystery or thriller series). Series of stand-alone books that rely on interconnected characters can also be very successful if the branding works.

The deeper the connection between the books, the more marketable the series is and the more people will want to read the next one:

- **Good:** a group of friends in a small beach town
- **Better:** a group of brothers in a small beach town
- **Great:** A family + Christmas + make the setting itself (a small town) like another character in the series

Always put a preorder link for the next book in the series at the end of the epilogue. If you're risk-averse, consider writing two or three books before launching the first one in a series (and then you might choose to do a rapid-release of those three books).

Remember that tropes sell books. In romance, for example: enemies to lovers, one-night stand, forced proximity, a heroine with a secret. Check out what's selling well in your genre—what's selling well on Amazon, what's popular on TikTok—and try to work out why that resonates with readers. But don't write a trope you hate; there are readers for every trope, so stick with ones you enjoy writing.

Attraction

Now that you've got your product—your book or series—how do you get people to buy it?

Your readers are out there somewhere! There are many ways to find new-to-you readers. Go with what works for you personally—and for your budget.

Advertising is Elks' No. 1 method of finding new readers. She said it's perfect for introverts like her, since it doesn't involve dealing with rejection. She spends around 35% of her income on advertising. She's had a lot of success with Amazon Marketing Services (AMS) ads, and also with Facebook ads. She recommended stalking the Facebook ad library; search for author names, calls to action, pictures and text, etc. And don't spend more than you can afford.

TikTok rocket-fueled Elks' business in 2022, though it has not been as effective for her this year. She recommended watching a lot of TikTok videos to learn how to do it effectively. The algorithm changes all the time, so it's not always a reliable marketing option, but it is free. Also, if you don't want to deal with TikTok, try sending your books to influencers, or pay a service to do daily posting for you (can cost around \$300/month).

Newsletter swaps and round robins with people who write in similar genres as you is another effective, cost-free way to find readers. She also suggested trying [BookFunnel swaps](#).

Some additional tools of attraction Elks recommended include putting books on sale or making a book free (can be any book in a series, doesn't have to be the first book), doing in-person events (a book signing, a multi-author signing, a public talk or workshop), and creating lead magnets. A lead magnet is something to get a cold reader to read your book. For example, Skye Warren puts the first few chapters of a book on the Amazon sale page. A lead magnet needs to be complete, something that can be enjoyed on its own, that can persuade readers to get a book.

She also mentioned some marketing methods that others use, such as reaching out to influencers, hiring PR companies, using Twitter/X, or being a personality on social media.

Retention

Once you find your readers, you want to *keep* them. You want to take the readers you've attracted and nurture them into becoming fans.

Key "funnels" for retaining readers include your backlist (the more books you have, the more readers will connect with you, your voice, and the worlds you've created), making yourself easy to find online (use a consistent handle across social media platforms), and particularly your newsletter.

Your newsletter is your top tool for nurturing your readers. Unlike a social media platform, you own the content and the subscriber list. One of the tools Elks has used with success to build her subscriber list is writing bonus epilogues that are available only via her newsletter; she gets 1,000–2,000 sign-ups per month this way. If you don't want to write bonus content, offer readers something extra in exchange for signing up for the newsletter (a map of your fictional worlds, character profiles, etc.). Email your readers regularly, at least once a month; Elks sends an email weekly and uses the newsletter to build excitement for each new release. She also recommended engaging your newsletter audience by asking them questions or telling them stories.

Other tools for reader retention and creating a community of fans include: reader groups (such as a Facebook reader group); selling special editions or artwork on your website; doing direct sales of merchandise related to your books; using Kickstarter or Patreon; hosting reader weekends.

The overall goal is to keep readers excited about you and your work between releases.

Conclusion

Try to have multiple ways to attract and nurture readers. It's good to have more than one way of achieving the goals of your P.A.R. system. But don't try to do everything, because burnout is a real thing. Find what works for *you* (and for your readers).

Being consistent is the most important thing. Send your newsletter on the same day every month or every week. If you post on social media, post consistently on the same days. Release your books consistently, whether it's once a year or once every three months.

And be ready to pivot. Things change all the time, so try new things and be prepared to change or shift what you're doing. Be open—because that's how growth happens.

Q&A

What is your length-of-series strategy?

I did one with nine books. That was a bit long for me. I did five, and then I couldn't package two box sets of three. So six is the perfect number for me. I don't get bored with writing same series, and I can package two box sets of three books.

Can you describe your typical book launch?

I don't put much emphasis on a launch, though I do have a checklist for the release date. I focus on getting readers excited about the upcoming release with teasers, a countdown, TikTok hooks, a Facebook ad. I'll also put the first book in the series on sale.

What is your TikTok strategy?

I started in 2021 by posting five times a day (I had energy and a lot of time on my hands during COVID). I try to think of creative things to say on TikTok. In 2022, it felt like every time I posted (twice a day), it went viral. I mostly use slides—the same picture with different words on it, set to music. It's all about finding the emotional hook of your story. Sometimes a TikTok goes viral but doesn't actually sell the story. (I don't put myself on TikTok telling a story, because some people there have thought my story was about *me*. So I prefer to find an image that works.)

What is your box set strategy?

None. I should have one... BookBub likes a \$0.99 box set—but make sure you can use it to point people to something else (such as a second box set). And ask your readers to review it, to keep the rating up.

How do you use a bonus epilogue for new newsletter sign-up?

BookFunnel will create a landing page and automatically send the person a book and integrate it with a welcome email from your email service.

A final thought?

With AI impacting the world, creating personal relationships with readers is more and more important. Let people know you're a real person, not a machine.



Longtime Novelists, Inc., member Laura Resnick is currently NINC's central coordinator.

Grow with Google Play Books

Presented by Amy Skinner

Reported by Cidney Swanson

Amy Skinner is the Partner Operations Manager at Google Play Books.

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful. As a products operations manager for Google Play Books, Amy Skinner is positioned between tech and products. She is thus able to provide recommendations for authors (referred to hereafter using the Google Play term "partners") based on her ability to look in both directions.

Available in more than 75 countries, Google Play Books is visible to over two billion readers who use the app on Android or tablet. Play Books excels at personalized recommendations. Two people will see entirely different recommendations tailored to them specifically. Authors can now sign up to become partners at g.co/play/publish with no invitation codes or waiting period required.

Skinner advises all partners to opt in to receiving email from Google Play Books by going to Account Settings>Email Preferences. Here, she recommended selecting all five categories. Partners should additionally sign up for the Play Books affiliate program which allows authors to earn an additional 7% on all attributed sales using easy-to-construct URLs.

Play Books has made a series of incremental improvements to its promotions and to its auto-narrated audiobook offerings in 2023.

Promotions: Managing and marketing series in 2023

In the past year, Google Play Books has made its series bundle discounts available to all partners, and sales data shows that Play Books users love reading series. Visitors to a book's page will now be able to see quickly that it is part of a series. Play Books prioritizes the display of series information, including a visual representation of multiple books shown together in a single image. This way, readers can quickly tell that it is a series.

In addition, the platform now pushes out series recommendations, allows for series search, and offers partners the opportunity to set series bundle discounts. A series page can have its own description, separate from the description of the first-in-series book.

On the user side, readers who have purchased at least one book in a series will view that book as part of a series and can view all of the series they are reading, displayed as series.

Partners who meet certain release frequency requirements *may* be eligible to offer series subscriptions to their readers. A consumer will see the opportunity to subscribe to a series featured prominently on page.

Also for partners, a new series catalog page makes it easier to find and manage a series. On the far right, there will be text indicating "LIVE" in green. If it does not say "LIVE," this is

probably due to incorrect or missing metadata supplied by the partner. For instance, if you enter a series title preceded by the article “a” and later forget to include the “a” for future books, the system will read this as two separate series. Most errors are now prominently indicated on the book level as well, but partners who cannot figure out what they have entered erroneously should reach out to support.

Skinner stressed that metadata, which is used to remind a reader who’s purchased one book in a series to buy the rest of the series, must be both up to date and complete so that partners can benefit from this new series recommendations feature.

Promo codes and discounting your books and series in 2023

There are several options available for providing books at a discount. Happily for partners, none of these options will trigger price-matching by other ebook retailers.

One method of discounting is to create series bundles discounting. Partners can choose the discount, which will serve to incentivize larger purchases, thus developing a more loyal customer base.

For users, when they open a page of a book that is in a series, they will see the opportunity to purchase the next book at a discount. Discounts are applied at checkout. Play Books prominently features series bundle discounts everywhere the series is available: that is, on each book’s detail page, at the end of each book in the series, and in personalized recommendations sent to readers of the series.

Partners can now easily identify series bundle eligibility and can even apply the same discount all at once to *all* eligible series. If any series are marked “ineligible,” partners should go to that series page and search for incorrect metadata.

Some partners may be eligible for setting up series subscriptions. In this case, readers are able to preorder a next-in-series book so that they don’t have to order on release. For now, subscriptions are only available in limited countries. A partner must have \$10,000 in total series revenue over the last three years to be considered. Google Play Books may lower the requirement in the future. An additional requirement is that the most recent book in the series has to have been published within the last two years. Interested partners can apply for this feature.

All partners, meanwhile, can create temporary price drops via:

Partner Center > Promotions > Create a promotional price.

Prices should be changed *here* and not on the Book Catalog page. By creating the price change in promotions, partners ensure readers will receive notification of sales pricing.

Partner tips for series bundle discounts:

- Do not set an end date to your bundle discounts.
- Do not require readers to purchase ALL titles for the discount.
- Offer multiple discount tiers to allow readers at different stages to take advantage of your offer.
- Offer the pricing to as many or as few countries as you like.
- Offer unique tiers for different series, depending on size of series.

2023 updates to auto-narrated audiobooks

Auto-narrated audiobooks are a fast, simple, and low-cost way to create audiobooks for ebooks that might never otherwise become audiobooks. It requires an epub for which a partner holds rights, and the ebook and audiobook must be for sale on Google Play Books. Narration is now available in English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, and German.

Auto-narrated audiobooks increase accessibility to the 2.2 billion people who are visually impaired, thereby supporting Google's mission.

To create an auto-narrated audiobook, partners first select an existing ebook. Next, they choose from over 50 different narrators, including a variety of gender and accent combinations. On the "Edit a book" page, partners can begin removing anything that should not be included in narration, adding things that should, and listening to sentences, words, and chapters to hear it at all levels.

When a word is mispronounced, click the word, and either type in the suggestion or tap the microphone button to give the right pronunciation. When the narration is complete and satisfactory, partners simply add metadata and publish to Google Play Books. After this, partners can download the audio file to sell it elsewhere as long as it remains on Play Books. Some partners may wish to create tiered audiobook pricing by offering both auto-narrated and human-narrated versions.

The platform now supports multi-narrator functionality. Adjust the speed of the voice to create a voice that is unique to one character. Once you create the character, you can apply that voice to each place where they speak.

Google Play has also added the ability to add a dramatic pause or spacing between chapters or sections, varying from .5 seconds to several seconds. It is also possible to change the speed at which a single word is narrated.

Get started at g.co/play/autonarrated.

Future plans include the addition of more narrator voices, and in the more distant future, Skinner said adding a translation feature is under consideration.

Finally, in regular (human-narrated) audiobooks, Google Play Books is planning to make it possible for partners to directly upload and sell their audiobooks within the next year, rather than going through a distributor to upload and sell.



Cidney Swanson is a Kirkus Reviews award-winning author of coming-of-age adventures featuring characters you love like family. Or possibly better.

AI for Authors: How to Use AI to Supercharge Your Marketing

Presented by Nicholas Erik

Reported by Jenna Kernan

Nicholas Erik is a science fiction and fantasy novelist who has written over 25 books. He also runs marketing campaigns for authors in multiple genres and writes guides for fellow authors on how to sell more books.

The workshop began with an overview:

- Hype/How useful is AI, really?
- Recommended tools
- Workflow with exercises/resources

The two AI (artificial intelligence) programs he discussed were Claude.ai and ChatGPT. Erik aimed to show some **ethical ways to use artificial intelligence** and explained that these programs are generative, meaning they will only respond to the prompts users provide. What authors input in those prompts is critical to what kind of output one can expect and how useful that output may be.

[Claude](#) has a free version as well as a Plus version option which costs \$20 per month. Erik said the Plus version gives you more messages but no additional features.

[ChatGPT](#) also has a free version or, for \$20 per month, users gain access to GPT-4 “which is *strongly* recommended.”

Is AI worth the hype?

Erik said yes, AI is worth the hype, based on a study by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) that found that using AI increased task completion, speed of completion, and quality of work. Erik also ran his own test on the same book at the same time using the same settings, audience, and images. He took a three-book box set and wrote ad copy and found it gained a 26% conversion rate. He next had an AI program write the ad copy based on a sample of his work. His final test was the ad copy he had rewritten using the output by the AI. Comparing all three ad versions, he found that the AI copy performed better than his, and the same as the one he rewrote from the AI version. But the AI version was delivered at a lower cost per click.

According to Erik, AI is a powerful tool but it's not a magic bullet because it takes time and effort and experimentation to make the output of use.

How useful is AI, really?

Erik believes some of the benefits of using generative AI include saving time, allowing authors to test more options, discover ideas you might have missed, and improved quality. The quality of the output depends on working with the program and not only outsourcing work to AI. Erik also feels that it is easier to curate the AI's output than generate content.

Recommended tools

- **Images:** Adobe Firefly (trained on licensed stock)
- **Writing:** ChatGPT Plus/Claude.ai
- **Fiction writing:** Sudowrite
- **Data analysis:** ChatGPT Plus (advanced data analysis)
- **Automating workflows:** Zapier
- **More customization:** fine-tuning, training your own models

Tools like Jasper (a copy writer) use AI, fine tuning this tool for specific applications, and Erik advises not to get bogged down on finding the perfect application as most are interchangeable at this point.

Erik emphasized that you ***must read the terms of service as even some of the paid models are not for business use.*** Erik noted, "It is really critical to check the terms of service." He also cautioned to "be aware of what they are using your data for." Claude.ai, for example, has a better word flow and allows up to 75,000-word uploads, compared to 2,000 words in ChatGPT, but ***Claude.ai is training on what is uploaded.*** In other words, it is training on your data. Erik continued his cautions by saying that users should never put sensitive or private information up on these platforms because this is sharing them.

The AI can also let you consider different "angles" with which to pitch your book to readers in ads, newsletters, and social media posts. Erik defines "angles" as the lens through which you view the book and the approach with which you pitch the book to readers. Erik shared a slide with three different angles that pitched the same story. These angles included a billionaire antagonist, the protagonist's special gifts, and an amnesia angle. Erik reminded attendees that ***all output needs to be curated and revised*** because AI produces a lot of mediocre and strange output. "You still have to work it." Erik also said, "The information you feed it is really going to influence the quality of what it gives you." The point is to widen the advertising reach for a story. For example, one book with two angles might appeal to different readers, though they are the same book. The example given was a story with both an amnesia angle and a billionaire antagonist angle. By using both angles, the author reaches two different groups of potential customers.

Workflow with exercises

Erik demonstrated using ChatGPT to summarize a blurb. Erik's input prompt (available in the spreadsheet) asked the program to write a blurb. Next, he had the AI rewrite the blurb, focusing on a specific angle from the story, generated in a previous prompt. ChatGPT has "...

transformed my marketing,” said Erik, because it gives him so many more ways to advertise his work that he had not thought of. Another way to ask for angles is to input a sample of the story and let the program pull out tropes and angles for marketing. He demonstrated the AI’s output, creating blurbs using various angles derived from a writing sample from a story.

During the demonstration, Erik commented that one of the outputs was not great and joked that this might be because the AI program knew he was presenting live. But Erik suggests that users ask the program to regenerate another version and curate the output. He also cautions that “some of the things I don’t like are things that market really well.” He further cautioned, “Don’t outsource all your marketing to ChatGPT. That will not go well.” He then took the output he was not happy with and said, “Sometimes it helps to punch it down to the absolute best stuff.” The following prompt Erik used included asking: *Can we condense to two paragraphs?* Prompts can include genre tone. Erik’s next prompt was: *Hey, can you rewrite this with a super cheerful tone?* The resulting flowery, whimsical description of a paranormal thriller brought the audience to hysterical laughter. Erik said it can also write the blurb in haiku.

In the next example, Erik prompted ChatGPT-4 to act as a book marketing expert and added certain prompt information including that he would like 10 angles that would be effective for marketing in this genre. The program returned with 10 effective angles for marketing, some of which Erik liked, some he did not and (perhaps most importantly) some he had not thought of. This output can serve as a foundation for an author’s marketing.

Erik indicated the AI is very good at advertising condensing, summarizing, finding angles, keywords, generating newsletter spots, and creating ad copy *if* it is given the right prompts.

Resources

Erik’s spreadsheet includes exercises, what to use them for, the prompt that he has honed, and a place to put the best AI output. This *very useful* spreadsheet, titled **AI: Marketing Workflow Exercise NINC**, can be found [here](#).

Erik’s slides for this workshop are available [here](#).



Jenna Kernan’s bio was condensed by ChatGPT using the following prompt: *Please shorten this bio to 50 words that includes the website. Here is the unedited output: Jenna Kernan: Bestselling author of 40+ novels, known for domestic thrillers. A Killer’s Daughter won bronze at the 2021 Florida Book Awards and The Ex-Wives took gold in 2022. Don’t miss her upcoming release, The Nurse (October 2023). Get ready for intense, twist-filled thrillers! Visit jennakernan.com.*

Worldbuilding for Any Genre

Presented by Leslye Penelope

Reported by Hallee Bridgeman

*Leslye Penelope writes award-winning fantasy and paranormal romance as [L. Penelope](#). She hosts the *My Imaginary Friends* podcast and lives in Maryland with her husband and furry dependents.*

Your setting is the place where your story takes place and the things you can experience with your senses exist. Worldbuilding is the umbrella over the setting. It's everything—world is character, world is conflict, world is story.

When you create rich, immersive worlds, readers really respond to them.

The best place to start is at the beginning. Ask questions like:

- What is unique about this place in time?
- What does your reader need to know to understand this place and time?

For instance, in a Jane Austin novel, the reader will need to understand the cultural rules, customs, mores, laws, government, etc., to understand the character conflicts. You have to communicate the technology, science, and laws of your world.

Penelope quoted the popular Brandon Sanderson's first law of magic: An author's ability to solve conflict with magic is directly proportional to how well the reader understands said magic. Penelope added her first amendment to that law: Your ability to solve conflict in your story is directly proportional to how well the reader understands the solution.

Laying the groundwork

Your world can solve your problems, but the reader needs to understand the solution.

Places to start for speculative fiction:

- Geography
- Climate and weather
- Natural resources
- Migration patterns
- Origins of magic
- Myths and legends
- Technology
- Food
- Light
- Origin as far back as you can go

Places to start for realistic fiction:

- Population and origins
- Geography and climate
- Beliefs, customs, myths, and legends
- Levels of technology
- How you're representing the people who live there
- Conflicts (historical and modern) with the people
- Where people come from

All of these building blocks go into each character. They are part of the characters and how they think about and react to the things happening in their world.

Your world can also create a place of conflict. It can itself be a force of antagonism. For instance, if your population exists in an arid region and water is always a high priority, then the world is automatically an antagonist.

What do people value and cherish? That gives motivations for what people are doing and why they are doing it. If the motivations are viewed through the lens of the world, readers can get more connected.

- Culture
- Customs
- Religion
- Rituals
- Family structure
- Education

All of this can impact the character and the plot.

How do characters come into conflict? Conflict is the basis for our plot and drives the characters' motivations. Things to consider when building/creating your world:

- Values in conflict
- Historical conflicts
- Inequitable resource distribution
- External influences
- Who are the outsiders? Who is hated and why?

Figure out backstories and histories and how you are going to present it on the page. You want to avoid info dumping. When it comes from a character's perspective, what they care about and how that relates to the society and the culture in which they live, then you can give the information without the information dump.

Who is telling the story? You're revealing the world through the eyes of the characters. So pay attention to how characters see things. Utilize deep point of view to reveal this world. Immerse the reader through the character's experience. It's acceptable to do worldbuilding in the first chapter, but there's a stronger way to do it—parcel out backstory as you go along and

ground it in the character's POV. For instance, someone fresh off the bus is going to give us New York City in a unique perspective and give us that world from that new experience.

Use mainly what you need, but sprinkle things that have "awesome factor." There's a way to add some of the id list to keep the reader engaged in the world and in the story. (*Editor's note: An id list is a list of things that you, the writer, enjoy and add to the story.*)

Tips for improving your worldbuilding

- Get really curious.
- Dig into the reasons why—why things happen, why people react a certain way, why actions and reactions are the way there are.
- Consider the reasons behind character motivations.
- Research improves worldbuilding. Learning about our world and the real world will help you with worldbuilding in any world. Knowing the why of things really helps you with characterization and solving specific problems.

Tips for weaving in the world

- Keep your exposition as active as possible. When you have to explain something, try to keep it active and insert conflict or tension.
- Review character as much as possible by their actions and reactions—by their choices. Character development is also worldbuilding.
- If you must dump a bunch of information, make it fascinating and give it tension. Answer questions, but leave us asking more.

Ask these things:

- Does the reader need to know this?
- Do they need to know it right now?
- How much later can they learn this?
- Exactly how much of this do they need to know to understand the story? You want to put in the least amount of it as possible; you don't need to put everything you learned and dump it into the story. Think of an iceberg where you can only see 10%.
- What is the most interesting way I can get the information across?

Q & A

I never thought about using geography for conflict. Thank you.

How do you keep all of the worldbuilding research organized?

I use a story bible or series bible to keep it all together.

Do you build the whole world before you start writing?

No. Do what you need to do so you can keep writing books. Build the world and have the foundation, and have enough to build the world around it. When I'm ready to start writing, I think: How much of the world do I need to know about before I start?

How many drafts do you do?

Usually four or five. My editor will see the second draft, then I do another draft.

Can you speak a little more about sprinkling in the awesome factor?

When you start the story, there's usually something you're fascinated with—or the id list about things that you think are really cool. Or you have an idea for a scene and don't have the whole story around it. Try to figure out how you can inject those into your character or plot and how that will affect the world.

Do you use Scrivener?

Yes.

Do you have a separate file for your story bible or do you keep it in the book's Scrivener?

Usually it's a separate file.

Do you use maps?

Yes. I used tutorials on YouTube to make the first version of my map. Then I gave that to a map builder and she created it for me with my vision. There are some map-making programs.

Resources

- Free worldbuilding checklist: <https://lpen.co/checklist>
- [Imaginary Worldbuilding course](#)



Hallee Bridgeman is the USA TODAY bestselling and Carol award-winning author of several action-packed romantic suspense books and series. An Army brat turned Floridian, Hallee settled with her husband in central Kentucky, where they have raised their three children.

Strong Authors, Strong Stories

Presented by Wayne Stinnett and Sam Hoster

Reported by Ana Ashley

*Sam Hoster is the owner of [Stay Strong Fitness](#). Hoster co-authored the book *No Collar to Tank Top: From Bestselling Author to Athlete in Two Years*. Wayne Stinnett is a *USA Today* bestselling novelist and the CEO of [Down Island Publishing](#).*

Every author wants to be better, stronger, sharper. Stinnett's own experience is a testimony to how improving physical fitness can have long-lasting effects, not just on authors' health but also on business.

Stinnett approached Hoster right after NINC 2021. At that time Stinnett was 63 years old, weighed 216.9 lbs, had 32.8% body fat, and a near-drowning experience. He had very little to no energy and lots of mental fatigue.

One of Stinnett's biggest concerns was longevity. As a father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, he wanted to be around for his family. He didn't have big fitness aspirations, just the motivation to be able to survive and feel comfortable.

Major problems authors face:

- Getting into a rhythm writing
- Sitting a lot
- Coming up with new ideas
- Arthritis
- Age
- Repetitive motion injuries
- Posture (neck, back pain)
- Physical dysfunction
- Mental dysfunction
- Tension headaches (Why? Because of blood flow issues caused by bad posture. We stay in these positions for hours a day.)
- Writer's block
- Getting into the zone
- Family and life issues

Anybody can relate to any of those things. Working with a lot of professionals from various industries, these are reoccurring themes that Hoster sees popping up.

There are two major problems, he noticed, with authors in particular:

- Physical dysfunction, which usually leads to pain or discomfort.
- Mental dysfunction, which is a byproduct of the physical disfunction. Brain fatigue where authors forget sentences or struggle to focus.

Both dysfunctions will come up and they both create different levels of pain.

What can authors change?

Workload? Authors usually try to get better, more efficient at it, but the workload itself rarely decreases.

Family or household responsibilities? Is it realistic or fair to take away family responsibilities when authors are the ones who want to better themselves and grow their business?

So what's going to change? *You.*

This is the most difficult one, but the one authors also have the most control over.

But...you do not understand!

- I don't have time to exercise.
- I don't have money to go to a gym.
- I have an injury.
- I've never exercised before.
- I'd rather keep writing and not break the rhythm.

Sounds familiar?

Hoster mentioned that studies on productivity in the workplace show that the more breaks someone has during their working day, the more productive they are. He breaks down some blocks authors use to stop themselves from changing.

- **Time:** It takes less than 90 minutes of exercise a week to make a difference. This is 0.8% of the entire week and 1.3% of waking hours. This can be split into two 45-minute sessions or three 30-minute sessions.
- **Cost:** It can cost less than \$20 a day to hire a fitness coach to help with a program. If fitness is a priority, there are ways to cut on other costs (fast food, entertainment, restaurant outings).
- **Injury:** The best thing for injuries is to keep moving if you can walk. Find a professional to kick-start the process.

When Stinnett started exercising with Hoster, lifting a 200-pound barbell wasn't the first thing he did. In the first few weeks, it was about adjusting to the new routine, doing body squats, pushups, and progressing up from that.

Stinnett said that once he got to where he lost 20 pounds, he wondered if there was something else for him to do. He joined USA Powerlifting and has since set five state records. He did qualify that by saying there were no existing records in his age and weight class, but the message is that he kept going and seeking to do more. Stinnett intends on breaking those records again in March.

Strength training benefits for authors

1. Stress relief, boosted creativity and focus:
 - a. Releases endorphins, reducing stress and anxiety while promoting a sense of well-being and relaxation.
 - b. Increased blood flow and oxygenation to the brain during physical activity can boost creative thinking, problem-solving abilities, and sharper storytelling skills.
2. Counteracts postural issues:
 - a. Prolonged sitting and hunching lead to poor upper and lower body posture.
 - b. Strength training helps lengthen tight muscle and strengthen weak muscle to help correct these imbalances.
3. Adaptability and resilience:
 - a. Training builds your capacity to adapt to and deal with stress.
 - b. Allows you to better adapt to changing trends, technological advancements, and the demands of a dynamic literary market, leading to a long and successful writing career.

How to get started

1. Start moving: walking, body weight squats (simple compound movements). Things you enjoy doing and you can track your progress.
2. Follow a plan: Identify goals, where you are currently, be honest and be patient.
3. Stick to the plan: Keep it simple, expect to sit in traffic, keep moving through the roadblocks over time. You're winning as long as you keep moving.

How to keep results

- **Fitness:** Make it sustainable
- **Nutrition:** Make changes that help calorie control.
- **Accountability:** Form a group, hire a coach. Get a calendar and make a note.

What science tells us about weight loss is that it starts quick, it plateaus, and it slowly goes up when there's no accountability. There are countless stories of people who achieve the same results. The biggest separator between those who succeed and those who don't is the willingness to take action.

As Stinnett's current fitness journey stands today, he's a 4x Powerlifting state record holder, has taught his son how to breath hold, wrote seven books in one year, and feels stronger and sharper than ever.

Hoster is offering NINC members free access to the My Accountability App and his Stay Strong Nutrition Guide PDF. To get access to these gifts from Holster, NINC members can email him directly: sam@staystronggym.com.



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

Digital Publishing in the Modern Age: Insights from Kobo

Presented by Tara Cremin and Rachel Wharton

Reported by Michele Dunaway

Tara Cremin is the Director of Kobo Writing Life (KWL), Kobo's independent publishing platform. Promotions specialist Rachel Wharton can be heard on the Kobo Writing Life Podcast.

The agenda for this session focused on five areas: (1) A quick Kobo overview (2) the latest Kobo eReaders (3) digital publishing tips for 2023 (4) Kobo Plus news, and (5) a freebie.

Kobo is owned by Rakuten, which is in 30 countries and regions, has 1.7 billion global members and 70-plus services, which include things like insurance, sports teams, banking, mobile, e-commerce, etc. Kobo is in the digital content arm, which also includes TV and Viki. The three major areas of Rakuten that all the services fall under are Communications, Membership, and Data. You may have even seen the [2023 Super Bowl ad for Rakuten](#) with Alicia Silverstone.

Kobo wants to be your favorite local bookshop, perfected. Kobo says it embodies everything you love about your favorite bookshop but perfected for your modern life. The company's mission is to bring the power of reading to your world—because they're book lovers just like you.

By the way, if you didn't notice, Kobo is an anagram for book.

Kobo wants to help you go shelfless with your book collection. Their award-winning eReaders are comfortable, convenient, and designed especially for booklovers. The latest innovations to the eReaders include: ComfortLight Pro; Bluetooth integration for audiobooks; note-taking capabilities with the Kobo Stylus; and eco-friendly materials. They've even got waterproof models so you can read in the bath or the pool without worry.

The new Kobo Elipsa 2E can convert your handwriting, is made of recycled plastic, has a 10.3-inch screen and blue light reduction, and is made of 85% recycled plastic. You can watch the one-minute video shown in the session [here](#).

Kobo Writing Life stands for writers. In a slide, Michael Tomlin, Kobo CEO, is quoted as saying: "In each of the markets that we are in as Kobo, self-publishing [...] is the first, second, or third largest publisher in that market for us. Just to put this in context [...] for us self-publishing is like having a whole other Penguin Random House sitting out there in the market that no one sees. It's like the dark matter of publishing. It's difficult to detect because you only see it if you're at the end point where you're selling or if you're working with the authors who are passing through the platforms."

Publishing reports on print. Kobo sees indie. The presenters then shared a timeline of “10 Years of Kobo Writing Life.” Kobo Writing Life launched in 2012 and kept adding things, such as Europe in 2017 and in 2019, at NINC, direct audiobook publishing. In 2021, Kobo Plus was in Portugal, France, Italy, Australia, and New Zealand. And in 2023, Kobo Plus launches in the UK and U.S. and a new sales dashboard arrives.

Digital Publishing Tips for 2023 include the following to reach the four types of readers

Tip 1: Embrace the global market.

1. *The Kobo ebook reader is the first type of reader.*
 - a. Kobo becomes like brick and mortar—we give them books.
 - b. These readers like reading books in a series. Romance is tops.
 - c. Other growing genres in 2023 are police procedurals, action and adventure, paranormal romance, and fantasy.
 - d. Expand your universe—Kobo readers are a big fan of author collaboration and Kobo has noticed an increase in popularity of this.
2. *The Kobo global ebook reader*
 - a. There is a big audience for translations, and it’s a great opportunity for backlist books.
 - b. Local Kobo teams are in key territories like France, Italy, and the Netherlands.
 - c. Kobo has exclusive promotional opportunities.
 - d. Kobo Plus is in 10 countries worldwide and growing.
 - e. Pricing is available in 17 countries. You earn 70% with no price cap. Books should start at \$2.99.
 - f. Optimize your pricing for all regions. Kobo will autocorrect to every currency, but then round it up to .99 after that.
 - g. Review older pricing. Do those price points still work for your business?
 - h. The presenters showed a slide of Joanna Penn’s social media where she showed she’d sold books in 178 countries.

At this point, the presenters talked about the promotions tab on your dashboard. It’s regularly updated with new offerings such as VIP sales, daily deals, box set sales, Buy More Save More sales, and price-drop promotions. They said that the first book of a series free is still a strong reader magnet. As for box sets and bundles, readers love these. Bundle multiple books from the same series or titles with a common theme—two or more books up to a complete series. Popular series genres are cozy mysteries, thrillers, and romantic suspense. They stressed that you should avoid 3D book covers on plain white backgrounds as they do not take up the full space. And no higher price cap, you earn 70%.

Tip 2: Diversify your portfolio.

The second type of reader is the Kobo listener.

- The audiobook industry is worth \$1.6 billion. The Audio Publishers Association reports 10 years of consecutive growth.
- These are multi-task readers who love things like listening to audio while on long walks.
- They listen on Kobo apps and eReaders using Bluetooth headsets.
- Popular genres that are trending up are women sleuths, paranormal romance, fantasy, and historical fiction.

Kobo has an easy publication process. Books are published within 24 hours. You can create pre-orders with no time limit. There is pricing in 16 currencies. AI is accepted and there's no exclusivity. Kobo Plus is included and the new dashboard features audio sales. Audiobook promotions include promotion mailing lists, Buy More Save More, price-drop promotions, and promo codes. There is also Kobo Plus audio.

The Kobo reps stressed if you are not on their email list to receive promotion emails to contact them. These promos are available only for authors who sell direct from Kobo.

Note: Any books for audio promotion must be direct on Kobo. They cannot come through Findaway Voices, for instance.

The third type of reader is the borrower.

This is the library user who accesses books through OverDrive. Readers like good librarians and getting recommendations from them; readers are dedicated to libraries. Kobo has OverDrive built into its eReader.

Overdrive reported 555 million loans in 2022, which is up 9% year-to-year. Read on the Kobo eReaders and Libby app.

Genres increasing in popularity are historical romance (the *Bridgerton* effect), romantic suspense, women's fiction, and cozy mysteries.

Kobo offers an easy opt-in to OverDrive. You'll get 50% royalties, no aggregator fee. Increase the cost of the book to at least a mass market paperback or two to three times your eBook price because the book is loaned out. One-quarter of the library purchase requests are user driven. Sales are reported in monthly invoices and ask to get the promotional emails. Kobo runs library promotions and is working with libraries to bulk buy.

Tip 3: Embrace non-exclusive subscriptions.

The fourth type of reader is the subscriber.

These are your most avid readers. The big growth areas of this reader are in fantasy and paranormal romance, mysteries and thrillers, box sets, consuming backlist content. They read and listen. Global audiences have different tastes. Paranormal is hot in Canada and the U.S., while in the U.K. and Australia/New Zealand it's thrillers and romantic suspense.

Kobo Plus is for this reader. Your pay is calculated by the minute and it's a revenue-share model. No required opt-in time. No exclusivity. Available in 10 countries: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, U.S., U.K., Netherlands, Belgium, Portugal, France, and Italy. More coming soon.

Main metrics are price point and ebooks/audio. The total revenue taken in calculated with the total minutes consumed and this gives you value per minute. For the title payout, the total minutes consumed per title is multiplied by the value per minute and then multiplied by the author share (60%), and then this equals the payout for that title. For the number of readers, the total minutes consumed by title are a percent of 300 minutes and this equals reads. This is done to decrease and eliminate gamification. One read is calculated at 300 minutes. If the book doesn't hit 300 minutes, the book rolls over. They've seen an increase in revenue over time.

There is English readership in every market, so they prefer all territories to be selected. You can test out different regions. New territories coming in 2024.

Kobo Plus promotional opportunities

Kobo Plus is leaning into the genre. The company is putting ads into the wild, like on bus stops in Toronto and TV spots like one which played in Canada. Another was "Be a reader, not a follower."

At NINC, Kobo went live with dashboard promotional opportunities, which are paid placements. It's all genres, has an exclusive carousel available to subscribers on kobo.com and authors who publish directly via KWL can take advantage of these to reach readers in Canada, the U.S., the U.K., Australia, and New Zealand. You submit your titles for paid Kobo Plus using the KWL promotions tool.

Summary

Kobo wants you to reach readers however you like to read: reader, listener, subscriber, and borrower. Kobo gives you a small, dedicated team of experts and is proud of its reputation as the most author-friendly platform out there. They said they have a lot of fun and a real person answers your emails.

Contact writinglife@kobo.com and follow [KoboWritingLife](#) which also has a help center that contains social assets for your use. It also has the [Kobo Writing Life Podcast](#) which features advice on growing your self-publishing business with tips from top authors and industry news. There are 300+ episodes. Kobo also has the [KWL Quill](#), which is a monthly newsletter with current news, author success stories and writing tips. There are also KWL Live Q&As, which are monthly on Facebook and YouTube and provide Kobo insights and genre-focused roundtables.

Freebie

Go to bit.ly/NINC2023 for 10 Years of the Kobo Writing Life Podcast. This is one podcast from each year selected for NINC members.



Michele Dunaway loves creating romantic stories about characters who discover things about themselves as they travel the road to true love and self-fulfillment. Her latest is the six-book *Love in the Valley* series for Harlequin Special Edition.

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MARK DAWSON'S
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Smart Marketing for Savvy Authors

By Tawdra Kandle



*This year of Smart Marketing
is all about reinventing our businesses.
For the fourth quarter, we'll cover:
How to maximize author learning;
Lanes, trends, and opportunities;
Planning for the new year!*

It's been a little less than a month since the conference kicked off, and I have to admit that I'm still processing everything I learned.

While I was not able to be at every workshop, I attended quite a few—and more than that, I talked to many people, and I listened to so many smart folks at both the UnCon and the PostCon. Not surprising to me—or to anyone, probably—the two buzzword phrases of the conference were *artificial intelligence* and *direct sales*.

It's all too easy to hear the newest catchphrase and think that it's the answer to all of our marketing challenges. That's especially true when we see others in our community succeeding using what's new and shiny. I've been watching authors at the top of their game adding Shopify stores to their websites for well over a year, and I have to admit that it's given me serious FOMO. The idea of being able to retain more of what my books earn and control a list of buyers is so enticing.

I listened with rapt attention to Steve Pieper's presentation on building a website store, and I appreciated his honest assessment of how much time, energy, and money goes into the creation of a top-notch website store. Damon Courtney of BookFunnel added more expertise during his presentation, and Ines Johnson shared how she learned to make her direct sales page more alluring to readers. What they said made it very tempting to run home and sign up for all of the apps they recommended.

Luckily for me, I stayed in St. Pete Beach for an extra day to participate in the PostCon, a small group discussion of everything we learned at the conference. I was privileged to hear real reports on direct sales from authors who are actually doing it, who are building their stores and are on the ground, learning the ins and outs. The disclosure of how much money goes into running a direct sales store on a monthly basis made me wince, but still... you have to spend money to make money, right?

About a week later, I was listening to the Author Conference room on Clubhouse. (Side note: if you're not on Clubhouse listening to some of the savviest authors in the business talk candidly about what they're doing and why, you're missing a free and accessible source of information that could help your career.) A question was asked about direct sales and all of the energy and money it requires. One of the authors who has done all of the work agreed that the initial investment of both money and time was substantial; she advised planning to be able to run the website store for a minimum of six months before it could be expected to turn a profit.

But it was the input from yet another author that caught my attention. She noted that she herself has a PayHip store which offers her some of the benefits of direct sales without requiring as much financial or energy outlay. She made a reasonable argument for not diving in headlong to something that might not be the right move at this particular point in her career.

What she said clicked with me, gelling a thought that had been knocking around in my head since just before the conference: not all advice and expertise is applicable or meant for all authors—and some of us are too quick to forget that. We want to believe that every teaching has the potential to be exactly what we need to level up, to give us the unicorn we've been trying to find.

Continuing to use direct sales as our example of this, even an author who is seeing phenomenal success might be wise to wait until she has a significant backlist before she tackles building a website store. On the other hand, I have a fairly large catalog of books, but I'm not in a position to afford the necessary initial output of funds to create an ambitious Shopify store. If I poured all of my resources into something like that, I could miss something better for me, something more suited to my particular time and place in publishing.

But I do have a PayHip store. I've used it for over six years, and over that time, I've learned quite a bit about maximizing my sales there. It doesn't cost me anything in terms of monthly payments, and the ease of use is a tremendous benefit. I'm slowly but surely training my readers to go to the website store when I have a freebie to give away, or when I'm fulfilling a Kickstarter campaign, or if I want to release a super-special edition of a boxset.

I pondered this after listening to the Clubhouse session, considering some of the turns and choices I've made in my publishing career. I thought about how many times I did something—or stopped doing something—because I saw other authors making a similar choice and finding success. More often than not, I pivoted before I was ready, or before I had the necessary resources to make it work.

I might have thought this was only a Tawdra problem if I hadn't had several conversations at the conference that told me otherwise. Other authors shared that they, too, have made shifts they can now see were not optimal for their careers. Most of them are coming to the same

realization that I have, and they're also hesitating before they jump onto the latest and greatest bandwagon. This is a positive development, I think; as a group, we're remembering what it really means to be *independent* authors.

It means that we alone make the decisions that impact our books and our sales. We have the responsibility to look around at what's available to us, to determine which new tools or ideas will work for our branding and our very particular situations. It is incumbent upon us to continue learning—conferences, both in-person and online, courses, and webinars are always a good idea—but we also should listen and watch with a discerning ear and eye.

This is something I'm keeping in mind as I review my notes from the conference. This year, I'm trying something new: I'm segmenting all of the actionable items I took from workshops into three different categories: Definitely Implement, Research First, and Maybe in the Future. Doing this has eased the pressure I often feel after standing in the firehose of information for four-plus days.

Whatever key takeaways you found at this year's event and/or through reading the excellent reports in *Nink*—and I hope there were many!—I trust you will ponder them with care as you continue to elevate your career!

Tawdra Kandle is the USA Today bestselling author of over 130 romances that span genres from contemporary through paranormal. Her engaging and realistic characters bring readers back again and again to devour the steamy love stories she spins. She lives in central Florida with a husband, a mischievous pup, and too many cats.

NINC Member Discounts

PES Editorial and IngramSpark

By Abigail Drake



[Peter Senftleben](#), [Editor](#), offers many services for writers. From manuscript critiques, to developmental edits, to line edits, to proofreading, Peter does it all, and he's giving us a **significant discount**. NINC members can now get their first 10 pages edited for free, **plus** get a 15% discount on all other services. To find out more, check out the [Freebies and Discounts page](#) on the NINC website.

Also, the IngramSpark team has a new offering for our members. NINC members can use a special promo code to waive up to five revisions fees.

[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):

- [Ninlink, email list for all NINC members](#)
- [NINC Facebook group](#)
- [Follow NINC on Twitter](#)
- NINC on [Clubhouse](#): Novelists, Inc. Virtual Tiki Bar
- [NINK Critique](#)/brainstorming group
- [Traditionally published authors](#)
- [Swords & Ray Guns](#): SF/F & speculative fiction writers
- [Authors of thriller/crime/suspense](#)
- [Cover Creators](#): Discuss creating book covers

Conference:

[Conference information](#)

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

- [Legal Fund](#)
- [Sample Letters](#)
- [Articles & Links](#)

Member discounts

NINC members are eligible for certain professional discounts. A complete listing of these can be found at [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: [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.

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2023 Committees

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

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 - Assistant Programming Chair: Dylann Crush
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- 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

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

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