

Writing Tips on Marketing

by

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1. Do Debut Authors Really Have A Chance In Today's Market?

"The E-Book Gold rush Is Over." "The Market Is Saturated." "There Is A Tsunami of Crap on the Internet."

There's doom and gloom in the world of publishing lately. Articles and blog posts, forums and feeds all dissecting the state of the industry, and for the most part, it's not pretty.

What's Happening

Many authors, Indie and Traditional, report declining sales. The average price of books has dropped as well, which means more units must be sold to make the same income as in prior years. Competition has increased as self-publishing has exploded, and established authors also republish their backlist as e-books online. Even the classics are being republished as e-books, now listed for .99 a pop.

Sure, a few years ago, the Fifty Shades of Grey Trilogy raked in a bajillion bucks, but that was a phenomenon unto itself. Unless you happen to have the next mega hit (and how would you know in advance—are you psychic?), is it worth even trying to break into today's crowded market?

How can a newbie hope to get noticed, as one tiny drop in an ocean of content, when even established authors are struggling?

Trends Are Changing Rapidly

There is about as much advice out there as there are authors trying to get noticed. But with everything (new technology, algorithms, buyer's habits, the next hot social media site, etc.) changing so rapidly, by the time you read an article the advice may be outdated. The volume of books and authors trying to get noticed is so great that as soon as a trend begins, it becomes oversaturated to the point of being ridiculous. A recent case in point is how many box sets are being offered right now? Probably more than any of us could read in a lifetime! 22 books for .99? Some even offer that many books in a set for free. I understand the strategy behind it, but when the market is flooded with bundles the strategy may soon become ineffective.

Becoming a published author has always been a difficult road. For a short time, it seemed that self-publishing online was the answer to the prayers of unpublished authors everywhere. And perhaps it still is. But even if you have written the next literary masterpiece or popular mega-hit, you still have to find ways to initially get your work discovered. And traditional publishing isn't much easier. Often publishers expect the author to do most of the marketing, and the window for discoverability (time on the bookstore shelf) is very short.

What Seems To Be Working Right Now

From what I have read the debut authors who have a decent chance today, assuming their work is professional quality, and they have a media platform and marketing strategy in place, are those that are incredibly prolific, churning out several books a year. Target numbers vary, but at least 4-12 or more (including novellas and short stories). The consensus is that having a volume of titles available creates more of a following, as binge readers can feast on a constant supply of titles. Turning out a new title every 30-60 days is almost required to get noticed, gain traction and build a fan base. But that kind of schedule is simply out of reach for many of us. So what can you do if you are not a high-producing author?

Slowly building a following still works well for some authors, especially if they write for a niche market. So if you aren't prolific or a fast producer, you can still have a successful career. Just be prepared for a marathon, not a sprint. The good news is there are many new marketing techniques constantly evolving, such as Facebook Groups, Marketing Co-ops, newsletters, and cross-promotion with other authors.

And it looks like free books still work as a sales tool, especially the first in a series. But even that is not the panacea it once was. If you use it in conjunction with ads, or as a reward for signing up for a newsletter, for example, it does help. Just keep in mind it's a loss leader and part of a long-term strategy of selling more books overall.

Should A New Writer Even Try?

So if you are new, and it is taking a while to get something ready to launch, can you even hope to have a chance by the time you are ready? Won't the market be even more crowded by then? It is entirely possible. But, just like the lottery, if you don't play, your chance of winning is zero. If you love writing, take your craft seriously, and spend the time and money to make your work the best it can be, why not take a chance?

You will never know what can happen, unless you try.

So, yes, despite the Chicken Littles who say the publishing sky is falling, I say give it a shot. As the saying goes, "The truth is sometimes stranger than fiction". Make your own truth!

(If you'd like to discuss, contact info is at the end of this mini ebook. I love to hear from readers!)

2. The Holy Grail of Publishing—The Quest for Discoverability

There's been some buzz lately on the internet about the devaluation of ebooks. There have been many blog posts and online discussions on how indie authors have contributed, perhaps unknowingly, to the devaluation of ebooks. In a rush to grab readers' attention, prices have fallen so low, that free or close to it is beginning to look like the new normal for ebook prices.

But when nearly everything is cheap or free, how do you get back to having value? And does the tactic really help sales?

The Battle to Get Noticed

To me, it seems like the reason this all started stems from authors seeking to have their books discovered. Yes, they want to increase sales, but for that to happen, readers must first know your book exists. It used to be enough just to put it up on Amazon, or promote it on social media. But now the marketplace is so crowded, and the flood of new content just keeps coming, so it is increasingly difficult to gain attention for any one book. Or even for a series of books.

When a business lowers prices, they are hoping to attract attention. By discounting or giving something away, they hope to lure in customers who will make other purchases. But that strategy is only effective if the other (or future) purchases offset the discounted or free item. Otherwise, it's a loss. And if all the other businesses like yours are having the same discounts, your product won't stand out. I'd like to point out that many traditional publishers now also discount heavily at times, using Book Bub and other advertising sites to attract the discount and freebie-loving crowd.

Low Prices No Longer Working?

So price cutting no longer helps sell as many books as much it used to. Too many have jumped on the bandwagon with their bundles of fifteen books for .99. Readers are flooded with choices, and even putting out books every thirty days, a strategy which used to be recommended, may not make much difference. Blog tours, Facebook parties, social media blitzes...reports are these tactics just are no longer working for many like they used to. Even freebies have problems—many readers are now trained to “expect” free books. Some retail sites now have entire sections dedicated to “first free in a series”.

There's no doubt the strategy does work for some books, and for some authors and publishers, but not as well as it used to. And if a low price (or free) is no longer enough to entice a potential buyer, what will?

Sell The Experience

Books are entertainment, not a necessity, so authors are selling an experience. You have to entice the reader to obtain your book in order to have the experience they desire. To achieve that, I think the following questions will help:

What genre is your story?

What tropes are you using?

How is your story going to make the reader feel?

And how are you going to convey all of that to potential readers?

First, the cover has to catch the browsing reader's attention with a promise of what they can expect while reading the story. Everything plays into that—the photo, the colors, and the font. Then the cover copy must describe not only the plot and characters, but the emotions the reader is likely to experience. Will this story make them laugh? Scare them? Arouse them? Drive them crazy trying to figure out what happens next?

The sheer amount of competition is frustrating, but here's some good news. I've seen a few reader polls, and talked to other authors, who report that word of mouth promotion still works. When authors help promote each other they expose their readers to the other author's work, and vice-versa. People tend to trust the opinions of other readers, and authors they admire. So helping other authors can expand your network of readers organically.

But word of mouth promotion is elusive. It tends to happen over time, and there is no way to track or predict it.

A Moving Target

So, unfortunately, right now there is no Holy Grail or perfect method to be sure your book is discovered. By the time you hear about a tactic that works, it seems to get overused in no time. It's probably just something we have to accept for doing business primarily on the internet. But I think it all boils down to this:

Write the best book you can.

Get the best cover you can afford.

Get the word out in whatever way works best for you—social media, book clubs, ads, etc. The possibilities are endless and constantly evolving.

Be willing to try new things, and expect the unexpected.

Help out others when you can, and assist those who have helped you. Cross-promotion works!

Discoverability may be a moving target, but the readers are out there. Now, let's go find them.

What has worked for promoting your work recently? Anything you've tried that flopped?

(If you'd like to discuss, contact info is at the end of this mini ebook. I love to hear from readers!)

3. Developing Your Author Brand

So you've worked hard on developing your "Author Platform" on social media, but what about your Author Brand? Do you know how they are different? And if you are not yet published, should you even worry about it?

Why You Need A Brand

Like it or not, the internet has exploded the amount of opportunities and methods for marketing just about any product or service. This is a good thing, because it means there are many options to choose from when planning a marketing strategy. The down side, of course, is the sheer volume of competition in the marketplace. The end goal, then, is how to get your product noticed when potential customers are being constantly bombarded with tons of information and choices.

As an author, your stories (books, novellas, shorts, etc) are your **product**, and you, the author, are the **brand**. Your social media **platform** is how you engage with the general public, and readers in particular. Advice gurus, agents, and even some publishers are currently advising authors to start building their author platform on social media as early as possible, pre-publication, to find their audience and gain potential readers. We've been told to post, tweet, blog, share photos, and engage with the public. I agree that social media engagement is important, and can be effective, but only if you enjoy it and are consistent. Pick the social media outlets that appeal to you and work them into your routine. Or hire someone to assist you (a Personal Assistant or Virtual Assistant).

Your Brand is Your Promise

But your Author Brand is much more than your social media profile; it's how you represent and market YOU. Your author brand also represents your style, your voice, the genres you write in, the themes of your stories, and your body of work as a whole. As author **Roni Loren** explained in a recent guest post over at **Fiction University**, it's your author promise.

Just as each book (or novella, etc) you release needs a marketing plan, so does your author brand. The right tag line explains the essence of your work and not only tells potential readers what to expect from you as an author, but is a great tool to get people to remember you. For example, BDSM Romance author **Annabel Joseph's** tagline, which is prominently displayed on her website, is "The Romance of Dominance and Submission."

It's simple, easy to recall, and if you've ever read her books (and if you haven't, you should), it succinctly describes what you'll find, from her historical romances to her contemporaries. A good author tagline

should be broad enough to describe most of your work, without being vague. It gives readers a hint of the experience they'll find, without being specific to one story or genre category.

Once you come up with that perfect tagline, put it everywhere. On emails, newsletters, business cards, your blog, your website, and in your books. Be creative, but be consistent. Those few words identify the feeling you are hoping to evoke in the reader, whom you want to entice to purchase your product.

Identify Your Tagline

Even if you are a newbie and writing your first draft ever, start thinking about your potential brand. I am no marketing expert, but I have been observing how other authors approach branding in an effort to develop my own marketing plan. But how do you figure out what your message, your author promise, is?

Some writers may know what their niche or brand theme is when they begin their writing career. But for others, it may take time, and several different drafts or years of writing to figure out what the common themes are in their work. That is what happened to me, but when the idea of what my brand might be crystallized, it felt right. I worked with a designer to create my logo, a heart entwined with branches, like a tree growing through it. I write about mismatched people who beat the odds to be together, so my tagline, "Love Grows In Unexpected Places" felt right the first time I heard it.

So, it's never too early to start working on your brand, or to start marketing yourself as an author. Social media and your brand are two ways to get started.

Have you developed your brand? I'd love to hear how you did it!

(If you'd like to discuss, contact info is at the end of this mini ebook. I love to hear from readers!)

4. What to Do if You Hate Blogging

What? You hate blogging? That's okay. Writing and maintaining a blog is not for everyone. It can be a lot of work, and many writers feel it takes away from time they could be working on other writing projects. However, I believe it is one of the best tools for writers available, and here's how you can still learn from it, even if you never blog.

In Favor of Blogging

Blogging seems to be waning in popularity, but I still recommend it. I have learned so much from the five years I have been writing post. Why?

It trains you to produce. You have to come up with a topic, research, write a draft, revise, publish, promote, and respond to feedback (comments). It's fantastic training for writing books, but in mini form.

It develops your voice. Your blog represents you, which is your authentic voice. The more you write, the more you learn how to express yourself.

You become more visible. Having a blog helps to get your name recognized by search engines. Connecting on social media is fine, and a following can be built using whatever social media outlet you prefer. But if you don't have an actual website, a blog is a great way to get your name out there. Some authors convert their blog sites into author websites when they are ready, and it makes for a smoother transition.

You are in control. Since you're in control, you can discuss any topic you like. This will help attract followers who like what you like. I enjoy discussing New Age/Supernatural topics from time to time, and

I'm also a big fan of Diana Gabaldon's Outlander series. If you don't want to blog about topics, you can use one of your character's and let him or her "blog". If it is an engaging character with a following, you'll get more traffic as readers stop by to see what they'll say next.

If you are a new writer, you don't have to blog about the subject of writing. In fact, it is probably better if you hold off on that until you have more experience. But you can share certain aspects of your journey, as I have, on such topics as writing a first draft, how lack of confidence can affect your writing, trends you notice in the marketplace, etc.

Targeted Learning

It is okay if you still find blogging is not for you. What you can do then is learn from other writer's blogs. There are tons of blog posts about pretty much any topic you can think of, especially writing tips. If you are a new writer, blogs can be a great educational tool. Supplement your craft studies and conferences by subscribing to the blogs that speak to you. That is what I did, and it was easier to learn that way, in small doses, than to try to get through an entire book of writing instruction.

Build Your Own Reference Guide

Here's my final tip: subscribe to the writing tips/instruction blogs that you like, and they will send you an email when they post. If they are discussing a topic you want to read later, or feel you may need to refer to at some point, move it to a file in your email. For example, I have files broken down by topic: Plotting, Character Development, Dialogue, etc. I also have files pertaining to marketing and the business side of writing, such as: Formatting, Web Design, Covers, Advertising, etc. I have amassed a trove of information, available at my fingertips whenever I need it.

What blogs do you subscribe to? Do you enjoy writing your own blog, and has it helped your career?

(If you'd like to discuss, contact info is at the end of this mini ebook. I love to hear from readers!)

5. Facebook Groups- Why Authors Need One

If you have spent any time on Facebook lately, you may have noticed a proliferation of Groups. Groups on Facebook have evolved as a way for people with common interests to share information. They can be private and closed, or they can be open, but most require you to request admittance. Simply press the "+Join" button on the group's page, and a member of the group will add you. (I have not heard about anyone being rejected and not added, so I'm not sure what happens in that case. If anyone knows, please share).

A Great Tool For Authors

Groups are a great tool for authors. If you don't have your own group page just for your readers, set one up as soon as possible. It's best if you can think of a catchy name that ties in to your books or your author brand, but if not, at least think of how it might look in a Facebook search. Mine is called, "Renee Regent's Readers", and I'd love for you to join us! Message me on Facebook and I'll send an invite, or you can enter my name in the search bar, and it should come up. I'm showing this as an example, so authors can set up their group, and readers can find the authors they like. It's a great way to interact with your followers or others interested in your books and to share news, ask for feedback, and do giveaways. I've already given away books and swag and plan to do much more in the future.

Why A Group Page?

But why have a reader group page when you have your Author page? The answer is visibility. When you post on your Author page, Facebook restricts how many people see it in their feed. They want you to boost your posts by paying for them. Unfortunately, even that doesn't get maximum viewing, and several authors are saying they no longer use their pages as much as they used to since hardly anyone sees it. But in a group, all members get notifications when someone posts (it can be the author or administrator of the group, or a member). Thus they are more likely to be aware of posts when they occur, and you may have a higher rate of engagement.

How To Get Members To Join

Once you have set up your reader group, spread the word through all your social media channels, your newsletter, any place you have contacts. Some marketing groups will do a promotion for a minimal fee to help build your group. Ask other authors or join a few author groups and see what is working for them.

Group Etiquette

Facebook also has a way to add people to your group, by listing your friends next to an "Add" button, but don't use that. It is considered rude to add someone to a group without asking first, so get their permission or invite them to ask to join your group. It's a good idea to welcome new members when they join, and when you post, ask questions to get everyone to join in, or have members post their own pictures. Eye candy photos, pet photos, talk about favorite tropes, etc. You can be creative because it's your group.

Keyword: Anything Goes

There are also many groups now focused on the business side of writing, especially marketing. You can ask questions to the group and get feedback, or simply share your own experiences. There are groups for every genre and subgenre, and every interest under the sun, really. Enter any keyword in the search bar and related groups will appear. It's that easy.

So take advantage of Facebook groups now, while they are still free and unencumbered by ads. Oops! Did I say that out loud?

What Facebook Groups do you belong to?

(If you'd like to discuss, contact info is at the end of this mini ebook. I love to hear from readers!)

6. The New Breed of Author- Entrepreneurs

A "cottage industry" is often described as one in which the labor force is comprised of individuals or family members, working primarily from home. The term pertains to small and informally organized industries in which there are significant numbers of people independently producing the same or similar products.

That certainly sounds like the state of Indie publishing, doesn't it?

Indie Entrepreneurs

In the past few years, more and more authors are choosing the self-publishing or "Indie" route for getting their books to market. Other businesses supporting them have emerged, such as cover artists, editors, formatters, and book marketing services, to name a few. The vast majority of these are run by entrepreneurs, small business owners who have a passion for books and publishing. While some may embrace the idea of being an entrepreneur in this new era of do-it-yourself publishing and jump into it

with gusto, others may be reluctant, or even fearful of running their own business. Even if all they have in mind is publishing their own books, and no other related services, the prospect of starting a publishing-related business can seem daunting when one is just starting out.

Also, many writers (and other creatives, too) are introverts, who may be uncomfortable with the idea of having to sell themselves, market their products, and all the other tasks of starting and operating a business. However, being an introvert can be a significant asset. Just ask **Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg,** and **Warren Buffet**. Yes, some of the most successful people in the business world describe themselves as introverts, so it should not be a barrier when it comes to entrepreneurship. Author and professional coach **Beth L. Buelow** wrote an excellent book which explores how introverts can succeed as business owners, using the skills most introverts naturally possess. Her website (<http://theintrovertentrepreneur.com>) is also a trove of helpful information. I reviewed the book in more detail in a recent post on my blog, because I found it not only fascinating but inspiring.

Who's the Boss? You!

Being your own boss is one of the riskiest things you can do in life, but it can also be the most rewarding. If you are considering becoming an author-entrepreneur, here are three things that will help you to get started:

Do your research- find out what other author and/or publishing-related entrepreneurs are doing. The internet is filled with blogs and websites full of information on how to do anything and everything connected with the business side of writing. Ask around on social media or other forums for feedback. Research will help you determine your interests, so you can decide which tasks you might do yourself and which you may outsource to others.

Be cautious, though, of any business which promises to do everything for you, for a price. It may sound like an easy solution, but there are several scams and predatory businesses preying on the unsuspecting and uninformed. Check with **Editors and Predators** (<http://pred-ed.com/>) or **Writer Beware** (<http://www.sfw.org/other-resources/for-authors/writer-beware/>) websites before using any unknown service provider.

Write out your business plan- I know this sounds like a classroom assignment, but it doesn't have to be formal unless you want it to be. The goal is to get an idea ahead of time of what you want to accomplish so your goals can be broken down into reachable steps. Do you only want to write books? How many can you write and/or publish in a year? Do you want to be an author with a side business, such as editing or cover design? Deciding what you want to accomplish short term and long term will determine the scope of your ambitions.

Set a budget- your research should have given you an idea of the costs of self-publishing, i.e., editing, cover design, formatting, marketing, etc. Once you have ballpark figure of what it will cost to produce and market your product, you can determine what you are willing or able to spend on each part of the process. Then you can decide how much to spend on professional help, and which tasks you can do on your own. Some authors help each other out by trading services, too, so if that is an option available to you, figure that into your overall plan.

Expect the Unexpected

As is true in any new business (I have owned several start-ups throughout my career), the only thing you can count on is the unexpected. Having a business plan and goals in mind helps tremendously, but be prepared to change course or tweak your plans, your vision, and your budget when necessary. As you progress, there will be other aspects to deal with, such as taxes, accounting, marketing, and hiring others to assist in growing your empire. That's too much information to include in this post, but there are many great resources online to help with researching those subjects as well. The good news is, you can start

small and add to your business as you go. This is not the case when opening a retail business or a restaurant, for example. The start-up costs and time required for an Indie publishing business are relatively low. Of course, that also means it may take longer to achieve success.

The Risks

There are definitely risks in becoming your own boss, especially in Indie publishing. You alone are responsible for the success of your product and all aspects of your business. Even though you may contract out editing, cover design, etc., you have the final say. Having responsibility for everything from start to finish means you have to research, decide on and execute all aspects of your product. It takes time, energy and resources on an ongoing basis. You also have to have some sort of presence on social media, because building a platform of followers and contacts is essential to marketing an online-based business.

Not everyone can or should take on the workload and the emotional toll of being an entrepreneur. But if you do, having a support network of family and friends is vital, because you need someone to vent to, to bounce ideas off of, and to brainstorm with. Working in a vacuum all alone is not only limiting but can drain the joy of entrepreneurship in a hurry. Having someone to talk things over with, even if all they do is listen, can help keep you going when the unexpected problem or other frustrations hit.

The Rewards

But the good news is, being your own boss can also be incredibly rewarding, in a way no other venture can. If your product is successful, you alone get to reap the rewards. The sense of accomplishment you get from seeing success from your own creation can be deeply satisfying. Having the freedom to choose your course, being in control of your product, and the power to move toward your vision at your own pace...for some, those are the rewards that come whether the product is profitable or not. Because when you are in charge, there's always tomorrow to try again.

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