

INDIE AUTHOR MAGAZINE

LAYOUT & FORMATTING

Issue 31

**FINDING
POCKETS OF
INSPIRATION**

Kevin Tumlinson

**FREE
FOLLOWERS
TO ENGAGED
SUPERFANS
WITH REAM**

10 Tips for:
THREADS

Time for
Show and Tell

**AN INSIDE LOOK
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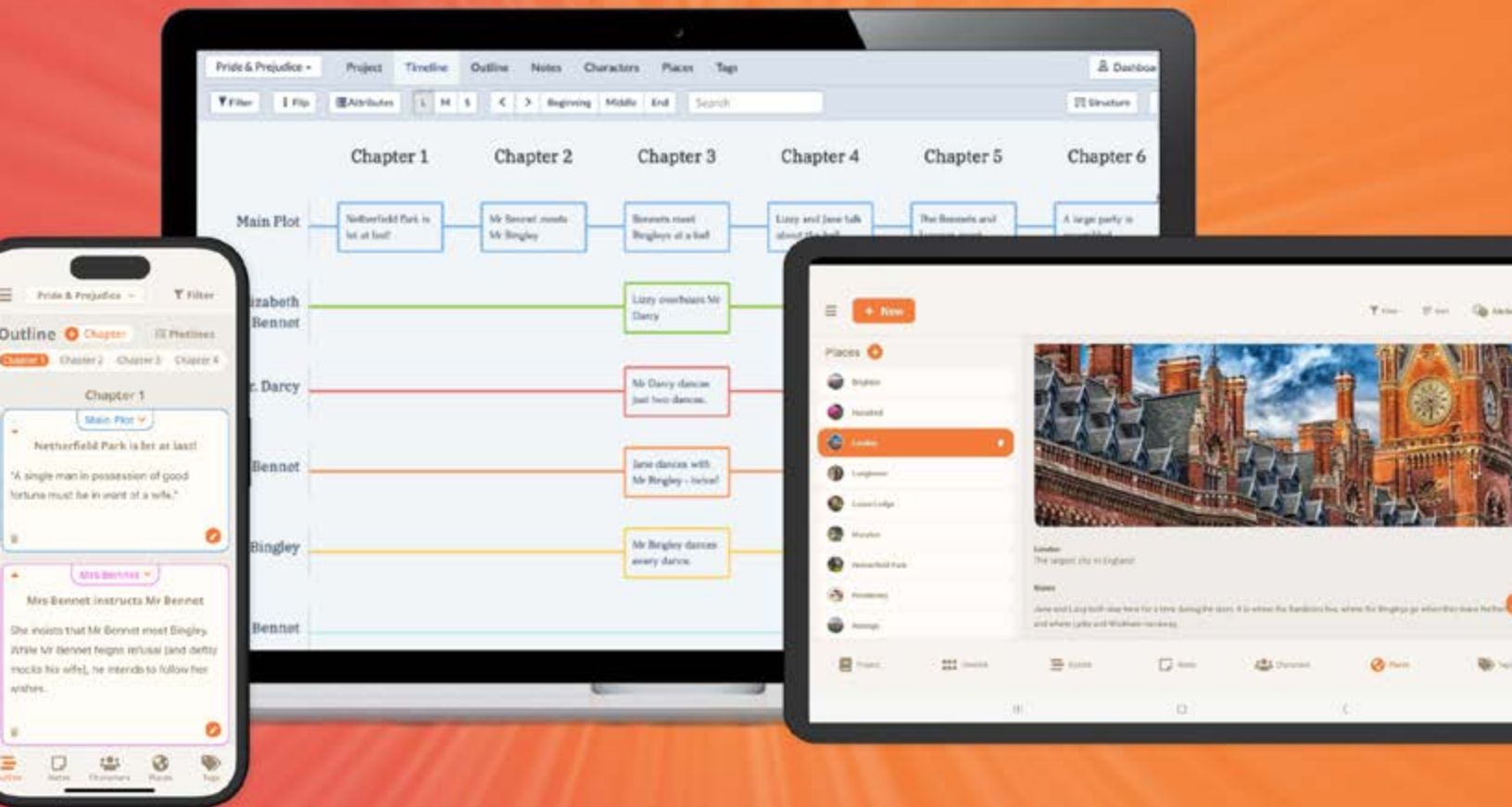
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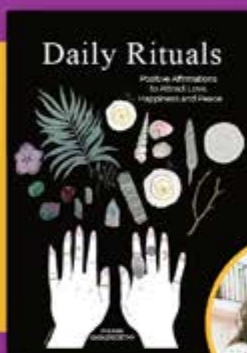
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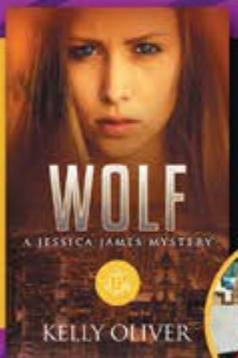
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From the EDITOR IN CHIEF

I once had a college professor remind me that, in some professions, doing everything right means most people won't see the work you did. I can't remember now if the advice came as part of a journalism or editing course, but after several years of working in both fields, I'll admit it seems to apply to either fairly well. A good editor's work will be invisible in the final version of a story and recognized only by the author. And in the world of journalism, criticism is almost always more common, or at least louder, than praise. (It's especially true if your story topic waxes political, but I digress.)

It's nice that the same isn't necessarily true for authors. Right?

Well, sort of. We all receive reviews of our finished books from readers—ideally, plenty of positive ones. But even in our profession, there are so many elements of the publication process that can go unnoticed or unappreciated. These steps are often tedious and time-consuming on our end yet essential to the process of creating that finished work. And if we do them right, almost no one will even notice them.

This issue focuses on interior formatting, one of those “invisible” steps in indie publishing. It may not be the most glamorous or the easiest part of bringing a book to life, and it certainly isn't something most of your readers will acknowledge ... unless you do it poorly. But it's paramount to making your story readable, your print book look professional, and your e-book accessible. Your readers may never comment on your book's margins or running heads in their reviews, but that's okay.

Sometimes, it's praise enough to be invisible.

Nicole Schroeder
Editor in Chief



Nicole Schroeder is a storyteller at heart. As the editor in chief of Indie Author Magazine, she brings nearly a decade of journalism and editorial experience to the publication, delighting in any opportunity to tell true stories and help others do the same. She holds a bachelor's degree from the Missouri School of Journalism and minors in English and Spanish. Her previous work includes editorial roles at local publications, and she's helped edit and produce numerous fiction and nonfiction books, including a Holocaust survivor's memoir, alongside independent publishers. Her own creative writing has been published in national literary magazines. When she's not at her writing desk, Nicole is usually in the saddle, cuddling her guinea pigs, or spending time with family. She loves any excuse to talk about Marvel movies and considers National Novel Writing Month its own holiday.

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ALLI EXCLUSIVE:

The Basics of Book Production

Professional layout and formatting is crucial to a book's success. All authors worry about their book covers, and rightly so, but a beautiful cover and wonderful content can quickly be overshadowed by poor layout and formatting. The Alliance for Independent Authors (ALLi) has a comprehensive book, *Creative Self-Publishing*, that covers the seven processes of self-publishing step-by-step, including book production, covered in chapter 19. The book is available for free to ALLi members and for purchase to non-members at <https://selfpublishingadvice.org/bookshop>. However, for a brief overview, here are a few formatting basics every author should understand before they start.

Layout is how the content of the book is organized on the page, such as where pictures appear and next to which specific text. Formatting refers to the perhaps “invisible” aspects of preparing a book for publication, such as margins and font sizes.

Indie authors today can use digital tools to produce e-books and print books and format them properly. For most indie authors, the core format is that of an e-book because it is easiest, cheapest, and quickest to produce. If this is your first time publishing, start with an e-book, as it will set you up fastest for sales.

Some genres have very specific needs and make use of creative and inspiring layouts. Children's picture books require pictures and words to work seamlessly to tell stories, and some nonfiction relies on the layout of information to make its content successful. In one example, a self-help book

published many years ago had excellent content but little in the way of case studies, chapter summaries, to-do lists, or diagrams, which made the advice in the book hard to implement. When it was later republished by a traditional publishing house, the content of the book hardly changed, but with the layout heavily revised to include the above elements, it became infinitely more accessible.

Even while writing your manuscript, look at similar books to understand what your reader may expect in the way of layout. Even a novel's layout can benefit from creative elements, such as images included in chapter headings. You can consider what additional marketing elements can be added, from a request to review at the end to historical notes or images such as maps to help bring a world alive, and where to best place these elements to please the reader and enhance your long-term relationship with them for future book sales.

When it is time to format an e-book for publication, authors must decide whether its format should be fixed, or unadjustable, or if it should be reflowable, allowing changes to font size and adjusted dimensions according to the reader's device and settings. On the whole, e-books work best if they can flow, which requires that authors upload them as a specific file type—most commonly an EPUB.

Formatting for e-books can also include things like having live links available, on which the reader can simply click to leave a review, visit your website, or purchase the next in series. Fortunately, software is available that can take care of this for you, and

you can learn to DIY your layout and formatting, provided you are prepared to put in time and effort to learn your chosen package and what it can do. Because the software often offers a range of templates to speed up the process, a text-centric book will leave you with professional-looking interiors with little effort. There is a free formatting package available online at Reedsy, and the two most commonly used paid software packages are Vellum (for Mac only) and Atticus (for Mac and Windows). For a comprehensive guide to formatting e-books, visit ALLi's blog on this topic: <https://selfpublishingadvice.org/how-to-publish-an-ebook>.

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ALLi recommends all authors seek to maximize the formats they offer readers, so once your e-book is ready, also create printed book files (PDFs), which can then be printed on demand. Even with simple layout options, like novels, it is still important to choose an appropriate trim size for your category and to consider what kind of chapter headings, margins, and so on will do your content justice. You do notice these things if they have gone wrong or if the author or publisher makes odd choices—you don't find novels that are A4 size! Font style and size matters for a book to be a pleasant reading experience, so it's important to use the professional software mentioned above and to proofread for any issues. Poor formatting can also lead to issues when uploading to online platforms: being told your margins do not follow guidelines that have been set can lead to much muttering and nail chewing!



Melissa Addey



The Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi) is a global membership association for self-publishing authors. A non-profit, our mission is ethics and excellence in self-publishing. Everyone on our team is a working indie author and we offer advice and advocacy for self-publishing authors within the literary, publishing and creative industries around the world. www.allianceindependentauthors.org

When it's time to format your print book, this blog post will help: <https://selfpublishingadvice.org/the-ultimate-guide-to-formatting-your-print-book>.

If the thought of learning yet another skill leaves you feeling weary or you prefer to outsource tasks that are not in your zone of genius, there are companies who offer professional layout and formatting services. These professionals commonly use InDesign, a more complex software. ALLi's Approved Services Directory of publishing services—free to members or available for sale—lists organizations who offer this service and many others, including editors and cover designers, all of whom have been vetted by ALLi to ensure they provide a quality service you can trust, as part of its watchdog efforts within the industry. ALLi's book *Choose the Best Self-Publishing Services: ALLi's Guide to Assembling Your Tools and Your Team* by John Doppler can be useful in choosing services that work best for you. The book is free for members and available for sale to non-members.

A final tip for your longer-term success: don't forget that while we often remember to update the covers of our back catalog when they look dated, we should always consider our interiors as well. Over time, expectations around things like font style and size also change.

Whether you choose to do it yourself or hire a publishing service, don't rush to publication without making sure your layout and formatting are the very best they can be. The success of your book could rest on it.

As part of ALLi's advocacy, we also offer a guide on how to self-publish for free, as we do not want finances to be a barrier to any writer. You can find the guide here: www.allianceindependentauthors.org/campaigns/selfpub3. ■

Melissa Addey, ALLi's Campaigns Manager

MARTELLE'S MOTIVATION

Ready or Not

If you're an author, your success is growing, even if it's only from one book and ten readers. This status vaults you into the public eye. Are you ready?

The accolades from strangers about your storytelling prowess can be strangely invigorating. The growing number of five-star reviews is intoxicating.

Authors tend to work alone. We're at home in our jammies with our computer, oftentimes a cat or a dog too. Maybe you even have a few curtain climbers toddling around. Yet we can be known on the international stage. To some, you'll only be little Katie's mom, or a dog parent (Stanley's dad). To others, you could be world famous. When I ask if you're ready, I'm asking if you can stay above the noise, find new plots and characters, and then tell that story. Rinse, wash, repeat.

I know you've already thought about your book being cheered, your characters beloved, your plots lauded as intricate and enticing. The readers want more! Can you produce another volume that's better than the first? You spent your whole life thinking about the plot and characters you used in those initial books. How will you respond to those inevitable readers with bitter voices and angry words?

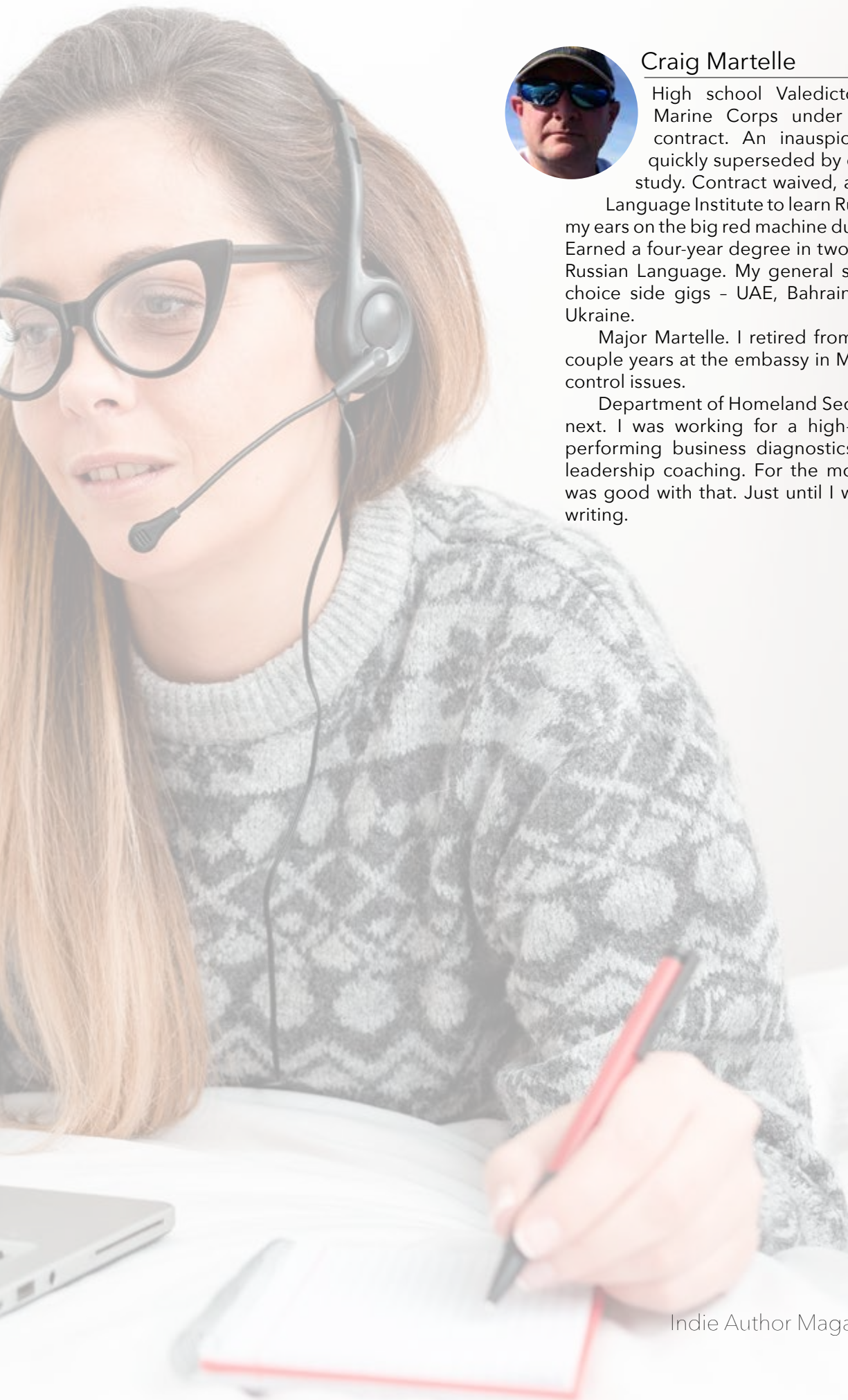
We sit here at our computers, alone and very afraid that we might stop measuring up. But you will. As you get better at your craft, you're going to find that your standards will rise, and you'll tolerate fewer and fewer of your own foibles. You'll challenge yourself to do better.

But a word of warning: you must not create a standard that you can't reach. That's the kind of pressure that crushes a soul. As you move forward in your career, you'll gather a team of insiders whom you trust because they want the best for you and your stories. Listen to them. They'll tell you when you're being a nob. They'll tell you when the story is good or even great. They'll help keep you on track.

Don't give that power to strangers, only your insiders. How can you trust someone whose motivations you don't know? Think about those one-star reviews. There are people who are so angry with life, their only desire is to bring everyone else down. See that for what it is.

And sometimes you'll miss the mark. You'll hear about it. And it's okay. That's when you'll know that you're ready. ■

Craig Martelle



Craig Martelle

High school Valedictorian enlists in the Marine Corps under a guaranteed tank contract. An inauspicious start that was quickly superseded by excelling in language study. Contract waived, a year at the Defense Language Institute to learn Russian and off to keep my ears on the big red machine during the Soviet years. Earned a four-year degree in two years by majoring in Russian Language. My general staff. career included choice side gigs - UAE, Bahrain, Korea, Russia, and Ukraine.

Major Martelle. I retired from the Marines after a couple years at the embassy in Moscow working arms control issues.

Department of Homeland Security then law school next. I was working for a high-end consulting firm performing business diagnostics, business law, and leadership coaching. For the money they paid me, I was good with that. Just until I wasn't. Then I started writing.



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Dear Indie Annie,

I have been looking for books where the author strings together a collection of short stories that build into a larger story. *The Magnus Archives* is a fiction podcast that I have discovered, but I'm looking for other works that do something similar. Do you have any recommendations? Does this kind of storytelling have a name?

Searching for Serials

Dear Searching for Serials,

You sweet little serialist. I am so glad you asked me this question about story cycles because cyclic storytelling is having what I believe the youngsters call a “glow-up” at the moment, though this style of storytelling has been popular for millennia. A story cycle is when an author strings together a collection of short stories or vignettes that revolve around a central theme, storyline, or cast of characters. The individual tales can stand alone, but they also connect and build on one another to form a larger, more expansive narrative.

Story cycles have been around since before books were even bound—think Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. Scheherazade spun her interconnected tales in *One Thousand and One Nights* to survive. Contemporary examples that may ring a bell are Ray Bradbury’s *Illustrated Man* or Amy Tan’s *Joy Luck Club*.

But lately, cycles are seriously back in vogue across all mediums. On TV, think of shows like *Lost*, *American Horror Story*, and *Fargo*. Novelists are getting in on it too—Elizabeth Strout’s *Olive Kitteridge*, Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, and Louise Erdrich’s *Love Medicine* are just a few examples. Short story cycles are also surging. Carmen Maria Machado’s *Her Body*

and *Other Parties* or Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Unaccustomed Earth* will give you all the feels (another phrase I believe is popular with the younger generation).

As for why cycles are having such a significant renaissance right now, I think it’s because it allows authors to explore a world through different lenses, like a multi-faceted diamond. Take Emily St. John Mandel’s post-apocalyptic cycle, *Station Eleven*. Each chapter follows new characters and binds the narratives as humanity attempts to rebuild after tragedy. There’s also Tommy Orange’s *There There*, which dives into the lives of various Native people converging at a powwow.





Got burning questions about the wibbly-wobbly world of indie authoring? Eager to unravel the mysteries of publishing, writing woes, or anything in between? Give your quizzical quills a whirl and shoot your musings over to indieannie@indieauthoringmagazine.com. Your inky quandaries are my cup of tea!

Cycles leave plenty of room for experimentation and surprise. You can play with the chronology, mix in different genres, and take the story in wild new directions, such as in Leigh Bardugo's fantasy *King of Scars* duology. Or consider how Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah's *Friday Black* uses satire and surrealism across each searing vignette.

So feast on those cycles, sweet pea! This style allows for boundless innovation. Whether it's revisiting beloved worlds or exploring new territory, we clearly have not seen the last of the genre.

If you want to try crafting your own story cycle, start by brainstorming a specific setting, theme, or group of characters to link your stories. Outline each tale like they are individual short stories while planting clues, references, or characters that connect them. Take advantage of the format to experiment with styles, perspectives, and timelines. Most importantly, focus on making each mini story compelling while advancing the overall narrative. Map it out so it flows seamlessly, then dive right in, my little serialist. A captivating world of possibilities awaits.

But before you leap, a few words of caution! While the short story format offers flexibility, be wary not to isolate the tales too much. Build in overlapping characters, settings, and themes—bridges between the

stories. Don't just loosely connect tales; interweave them intentionally.

Remember:

- Cycles are not necessarily constrained by chronology, but take care the story order makes sense and builds momentum. You can play with the timeline, but avoid confusing your readers.
- Resist the urge to tie every story up neatly with a bow. Let some details or character arcs carry over to be resolved later. Leave room for mystery and discovery.
- Take advantage of the format to experiment, but avoid radically changing styles or genres from chapter to chapter unless you have a compelling reason. Allow variety but with some coherence.
- Allow ideas to emerge and evolve as you go. Story cycles are organic. Keep track with a spider graph or a similar tool to guide development.

Most importantly, make each individual story shine in its own right. The micro makes the macro!

Happy writing,
Indie Annie



10 TIPS FOR THREADS

If you have previous experience with X, originally Twitter, Meta’s new text-based social media app for Instagram users, Threads, will feel familiar to you. With similar content-sharing capabilities and a limit of five hundred characters per post, the focus, as the name implies, is creating conversation threads with followers on topics that interest you.

Because it’s connected to Instagram, setting up Threads is incredibly convenient. By downloading the app and transferring your Instagram username, bio, and profile image, you can be ready in less than thirty seconds. All your existing Instagram followers who have joined Threads will automatically become your followers there too.

Pro Tip: Two things to note before you jump on the Threads bandwagon. The first is that if you want to delete your Threads account, you must delete your Instagram profile too. The second is that if you live within the European Union, Threads has yet to be released because of the Digital Markets Act.

As an author, if you prefer to focus on text rather than photos or videos, Threads is the perfect platform for you. Engaging with readers becomes simpler by typing out your thoughts instead of creating visual content. Of course, if visual content is your jam, Threads has you covered as well. No matter how you prefer to connect with your audience, if you’re ready to weave a new social media platform into your marketing strategy, read on to learn our top tips for mastering Threads.

1

CUSTOMIZE YOUR PROFILE

To use Threads, you need an Instagram account, and you can import existing information and followers from your Instagram profile. However, you’ll still need to customize your Threads profile separately.

Add a profile picture and bio that represents you and your author business. Choosing a different profile picture, bio, or link won’t affect your Instagram profile. However, if you change your Threads username, you must also change your Instagram username.

Once you’ve made your profile, you can select certain accounts to follow from your Instagram account, or click “Follow All.” The profiles you follow on Threads won’t impact who you follow on Instagram.

Threads allows you to have different privacy settings from Instagram if needed. All users under sixteen (or eighteen in some countries) will, by default, have a private profile when they join.

2

FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH THE BASICS

The Threads interface resembles X's interface but primarily takes after Instagram. Threads is mobile-only for now, whereas X is available for both mobile and desktop, but one perk to the new platform is that Threads has no ads.

Much like Instagram, Threads has a navigation bar at the bottom of its screen:

- The house icon will take you to your feed.
- The magnifying glass allows you to search for fellow Threads users.
- The pen-and-paper icon allows you to create a new thread.
- The heart in the navigation will show you your activity: who followed you, replied to your thread, or mentioned you in their threads.
- The person icon will direct you to your profile.

Threads doesn't rely on hashtags like Instagram or display trending topics like X. In fact, hashtags don't seem to be prevalent on Threads right now, though that could change.

Accessibility features like screen reader support and AI-generated image descriptions are also available.

3

BUILD A COMMUNITY

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg has stated he wants Threads to be a casual, social atmosphere where users can engage in friendly discussion. However, Threads is still in its infancy, so it's hard to predict what kind of content will thrive on the app in the long run.

As an author, no one knows your audience better than you. Look at the ways they interact with your content on your other social media pages. What do they like? What are they asking for more of?

Threads gives you a place to try new things and give your target audience exactly what they've been asking for. Focus on making your brand more relatable and human since that content seems to do well on the app. Then, make sure you keep the conversation going by responding and interacting with your audience. For ideas, Hootsuite has created a free Threads generator, including some bookish examples.

Pro Tip: Although the platform is new, consistency is still key to social media engagement. Set a daily post target and benefit from an engaged audience who knows when to find fresh content from you.

4

MAKE THREADS A VIP EXPERIENCE

One of the standout features of Threads is its emphasis on a Close Friends list. Threads allows users to create a curated network with whom they can share content exclusively.

To create your Close Friends list, tap the house icon, then tap the menu in the top left corner. Finally, tap "Close Friends," and begin adding or removing names. Use the search bar to find users who aren't on the main list.

No one on your list is notified when adding or removing names, so you can do so totally incognito without fear of backlash. Plus, no one on the list will be able to know who else is on your list, so there are no privacy issues.

Similar to a group chat or text, you can create group messages in the app, but you can only choose from your list of Close Friends.

Pro Tip: Auto Status is a unique and innovative feature in Threads that allows you to share your current status automatically. Whether you're writing your latest manuscript, traveling, or simply enjoying a quiet evening at home, your friends can stay updated on your activities in real time.

5 MAKE YOUR VISION VISUAL

Threads is a visual-centric platform and includes camera and text features that can make your posts more visually engaging. Experiment with the various camera effects, filters, and stickers to break up text, provide context, and enhance overall engagement.

To share photos or videos, select a photo or video from your gallery or take one in the app. While capturing photos or videos, explore Threads's camera effects by tapping the wand icon on the right side of the screen.

Pro Tip: Keep in mind the following limitations for creating a post in the app:

- The aspect ratio for Threads is 9:16.
- The recommended size for images and videos in Threads is 1080 x 1920 pixels. However, you can use images and videos of any size, as long as they meet the aspect ratio requirement.
- The character limit for Threads is five hundred characters per thread.
- You can attach up to ten images or videos to each Thread.
- The maximum length for a video in a thread is five minutes.

6 TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THREAD CUSTOMIZATION

If you want to change your Threads feed so that it only shows posts from accounts that you follow, it's simple to do, though not that intuitive.

Tap the home icon at the bottom of the screen, or the @ icon at the top of the screen. You'll see two tabs: "For You" and "Following." Tapping the home icon or @ symbol again will hide the tabs. To see a chronological feed of posts that are only from accounts that you follow, select "Following." To see a mix of posts from accounts that you follow as well as posts suggested by Threads's algorithms, tap "For You."

When you close the app, it won't remember your last feed selection; you'll automatically start back in the For You feed.

7 JOIN—OR CREATE—DISCUSSIONS

One of Threads's best features is its discussion boards. Engage with the Threads community with the Explore tab. This is where you can discover people with similar interests and join public conversations. Tap on a post to view it and leave comments or reactions.

If you don't see any discussions that interest you, why not start your own? You can create discussions on almost any topic, from reader-focused discussion boards to discussions pertaining to the publishing industry.

Remember, the goal is to foster meaningful connections, so don't be afraid to dive deep into your passions.

8 CREATE POLLS

Creating polls is another great way for users on Threads to engage with one another. Polls allow users to ask their followers questions directly. For authors, they also offer a simple way to promote engagement among readers and include them in the writing process. Try asking questions like: Which cover do you prefer? Which book should I write next? What should I name the hero in my series?

9

EXPLORE THE INTEGRATION WITH INSTAGRAM

Threads is tightly integrated with Instagram, so you can easily share Threads posts on your Instagram Story. You can also see your Close Friends list from Instagram in Threads. This makes it more convenient to stay connected with your reader network on both platforms.

To add your post, or any public thread, to your Instagram Story, click the paper airplane at the bottom of the thread, select “Add to Story,” and Instagram will launch automatically. From there, you can edit the post or share it directly with your followers.

If your Instagram is strictly for business purposes, try using Threads to show the messy behind-the-scenes that not everyone gets to see on Instagram. The best part is that your posts on Instagram can reference what you’re posting on Threads, so you can show up for both groups and grow your following on both platforms.

Pro Tip: If you want to confirm someone is who they say they are, head to their Instagram profile and click the Threads link below their username. This will take you directly to their Threads profile. Verified accounts on Instagram will retain the blue checkmark next to their usernames on Threads.

10

TRACK YOUR PROGRESS WITH PERFORMANCE METRICS

Threads is not just a simple messaging app; it is a tool that can help you grow your author business. Analyze performance metrics to see what’s working and track your engagement and audience growth. Basic insights, such as likes and replies, can be accessed through the app, but consider utilizing third-party analytics programs if you’re looking for more in-depth feedback.

Threads offers authors and the publishing industry an array of opportunities. The platform provides a fresh and dynamic space for authentic self-expression and meaningful connections, empowering users to engage in positive, productive discussions while amplifying their online presence. If nothing else, Threads is an opportunity to show a different side of yourself to your readers, both new and emerging. ■

Tanya Nellestein



Tanya Nellestein

Tanya Nellestein is an avid reader, experience enthusiast, outstanding car vocalist, and Queen of fancy dress. In her spare time she is also a bestselling and award-winning author and journalist with a penchant for bloodthirsty battles and steamy romance. From Vikings to present day, Tanya writes page-turning, gut-churning stories with a romantic angle that always includes good sex and a happily ever after - eventually. Her debut novel, *The Valkyrie’s Viking* recently hit Amazon’s best seller list and her sixth novel, *This Side of Fate*, was the 2022 winner of the Romance Writers of Australia Sapphire Award for Best Unpublished Romance Manuscript. In 2021, Tanya won the Romance Writers of Australia Romance in Media Award. Tanya lives on the outskirts of Sydney, Australia amidst a cavalcade of never ending disasters, both natural and those of her own making.



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Finding Pockets of Inspiration

HOW KEVIN TUMLINSON PAVED HIS PATH UP THE MOUNTAIN

If you had to write your first book in a large spiral notebook with a taped-together cover to become an author, would you?

That's how Kevin Tumlinson, an accomplished Thriller and Speculative Fiction writer, began his publishing journey in 2008. On an average Tuesday evening, I had the pleasure of meeting with Kevin to talk about his career as an author, podcaster, and director of marketing and public relations at Draft-2Digital. Our conversation, however, was far from average.

Kevin's story is both inspirational and relatable to a lot of writers now. He started with a spiral notebook, and his desires bloomed to become a diverse portfolio of over seventy titles, multiple traditional deals, and ventures in the author sphere with Draft-2Digital. Today, he makes room for it all among regular cross-country travel in his RV with his wife, where he seeks new and interesting places and people—all of which feeds back into his work by inspiring his own writing.

Our conversation was a series of statements made and promises kept—of understanding his

humble beginnings, which have since led to his roles in the author community as the host of the highly listened-to *Wordslinger* podcast and the marketing director of Draft2Digital, and to traditional publishing deals alongside his self-published work. Kevin says he meets new people and writes books because people are looking for something, they are burdened, and the world is heavy. Speculative Fiction makes sense for him, he says, as he's curious about the world and himself. He places an emphasis on meaningful relationships in business and in his personal life, always learning, inspiring others, and looking for history to uncover.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Kevin, like a lot of us, began writing young and never stopped. Passions, when unfettered, become a part of who we are, and Kevin is no exception. Publishing his first novel was a rough experience, he says. It was a traditional deal in which he felt like he didn't have representation, and after all of his trav-

eling and marketing expenses, he only saw 3 percent returns. Eventually, he decided to pay back his advance and regained the rights to the story. Admittedly, he thought his career in writing was over until he discovered CreateSpace and later Smashwords. His spark of inspiration grew into a raging inferno, and Kevin saw a way forward, which he attributed to his discipline as a writer. He began focusing on writing more books and feeding readers what they craved—in his case, Archaeological Thrillers inspired in theme by the locations he visited.

Kevin focuses a lot on personal freedoms as a writer. He writes for the reader and for himself in a way that resonates with the reader. He says early in his career, he'd respond to every comment and email, but as his business grew, he discovered he could write personable, relatable content to reach his fan base en masse. With time, he says he began to shift his perspective from churning out novels to enriching himself and others through different mediums, such as his Substack and now through Draft2Digital.





Today, Kevin travels the country in an RV with his wife, finding pockets of historical inspiration from the places he visits. He says when he writes, he imagines a ghost or an echo of a person in his mind, his ideal reader, and writes with respect to the reader and the craft. He credits some of his inspiration to a 2012 commencement speech by author Neil Gaiman, who said that a career is a mountain, and everything we do should be about moving up the mountain.

And what is Kevin's mountain?

"My goal is to be a full-time, independent, wealthy, and successful writer of good works and good stories, inspiring others and supporting myself and my family through my words," he says.

Kevin notes that motivation wasn't all it took to reach the top of his mountain. He says his first million words were practice—he had to learn to write well. He often journaled, writing about gratitude, affirmation, biblical studies, and philosophy. Journaling helped with expressing his heart and the things in his head, and he's made it a part of his daily routine, he says. He was adamant in his beliefs that writers express themselves from the heart,

and writing outside of genre fiction has shaped his expression of his unique voice on the page.

INSPIRING OTHERS

Kevin was loaded with wisdom about expressing himself and letting his personality show on the page to better connect with readers. However, he was quick to let me know that writing for him was a calling—and he'd continue to do it even if he didn't make another dollar from his stories. This all being said, Kevin is also involved in the writing community at large, where his sole intent is to continuously grow the offerings of Draft2Digital and create an even playing field for other independent authors.

Draft2Digital is one of the world's largest distributors of books, connecting authors to major retailers such as Amazon and Barnes & Noble, and Kevin is the director of marketing and public relations for the company. Kevin's start with Draft2Digital came from his friendship with fellow Thriller author Nick Thacker. Nick was not only an author coach for Kevin but the reason he switched from writing Sci-Fi to Thrillers, Kevin says. After



Nick dared him to try the genre on a live podcast, Kevin held up his end of the deal and never looked back. Kevin credits his friendship with Nick as yet another catalyst for his writing career.

Both through his work with Draft2Digital and as an author himself, Kevin has seen how the author community has evolved over the years, and he believes authors need to know there are people out there on the same path—and that he is there to help them. One effort he's spearheaded is his weekly podcast, *The Wordslinger*. On the show, he connects with other writers in the community, sharing thoughts, ideas, and stories related to publishing. “We are all trying to build something to help authors accomplish their dream, no matter what form that takes,” he says. “Authors are not alone.”

INFORM, INSPIRE, EDUCATE, ENTERTAIN

Given Draft2Digital's position in the author ecosystem, I wanted to know what else the company was working on. Kevin didn't disappoint. He says Draft2Digital is rolling out the integrations between Smashwords—another online distributor of e-books, one of the largest available—and the recent acquisition of selfpubbookcovers.com—a resource for authors looking for affordable premade book covers. This all seemed to feed Draft2Digital's larger mission, which is one Kevin says he himself shares: to make it easier for authors to write and distribute their stories.

Nearing the end of the conversation, I felt like I had known Kevin for many years. His position in the

author sphere seemed to be that of a guiding wizard, there to help me see it up my individual mountain. I asked Kevin if he'd share his mission statement, the mantra he uses to keep going even when it's tough and the words won't flow. "My mission is to inform and inspire, educate and entertain in the service of God and humanity," he answered.

Kevin and I ended the conversation with a few thoughts about what the future looks like for him. He says he's no longer in production, pumping out books at a break-neck pace—he says he can remember spending a day writing for eighteen hours to the tune of sixty thousand words.

His plan now is to continue to travel, meeting new and interesting people and finding the gems in all the places he goes. He's entered a new era in his author career, and now he spends his time writing for himself, gaining faithful readers and an audience for life. He's discovered people who are forgiving of his mistakes and supportive of his dream, who encourage him and are positive. He recalled when a reader asked for prayers so that his wife could make it through surgery, and he admits that until that point, he'd lost sight of those he was talking to: real people who need his stories.

Kevin isn't a book machine; he's an author, authentic, and a man dedicated to a mission we can all stand behind. ■

David Viergutz

All images © Kirsty Hamilton Photography



David Viergutz

David Viergutz is a disabled Army Veteran, Law Enforcement Veteran, husband and proud father. He is an author of stories from every flavor of horror and dark fiction. One day, David's wife sat him down and gave him the confidence to start putting his imagination on paper. From then on out his creativity has no longer been stifled by self-doubt and he continues to write with a smile on his face in a dark, candle-lit room.

An Inside Look at Formatting Software Options

Independent authors wear many hats: author, editor, cover designer, blurb writer, and more. Among all those responsibilities, however, one self-publishing task that often gets funneled to the back of the queue is the formatting of the book's interior. While not as top-of-mind as the book cover or blurb, interior formatting is a crucial element that must look professional if an author is going to be taken seriously by the public.

"Typography is important to establish professionalism and legibility," says Ziad Ezzat, the owner of Feral Creative Colony, who has worked in typography, art, and graphic design for over three decades. "People may not realize they're judging what they read based on typography, but a book that's poorly laid out can deliver a terrible experience for the reader—and make the reader think the author is bad, when really it's the typography that's bad."

In the last decade, over a dozen options have come on the market for authors to lay out the interiors of their own books in both electronic and print versions. This is an overview of many of those options—and the right option for you and your author career might be on this list.

PURPOSE-BUILT SOFTWARE

Two pieces of software, **Vellum** (\$249) and **Atticus** (\$147), are built specifically for self-published authors to format book interiors. Both include tools for creating pre-populated sections common in many books: a copyright page, back matter, chapter headings, and so forth.

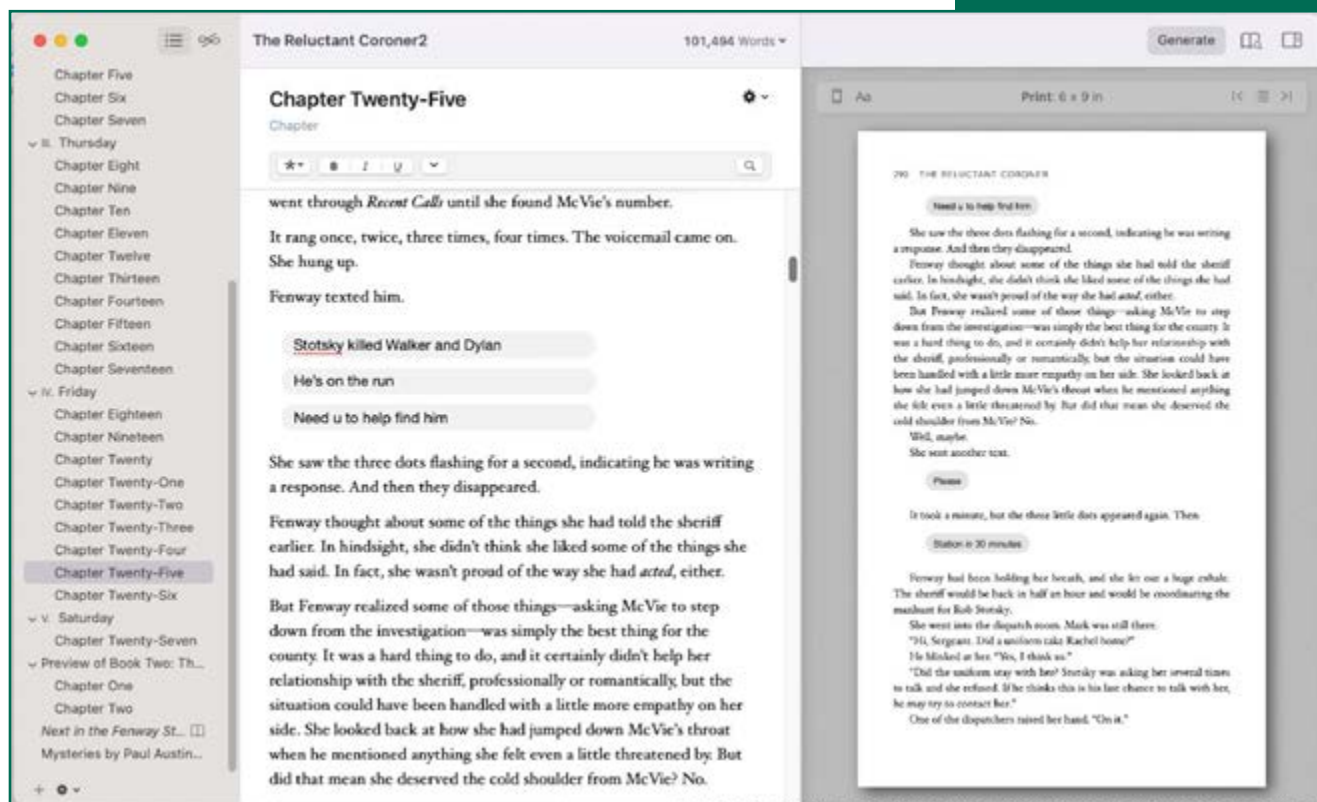
Vellum was an early entrant in this space, released a decade ago, and is available only for the Mac operating system. Of those interviewed, it was used by more authors than any other tool.

“It was an investment,” says Ki Brightly, who, along with co-author M.D. Gregory, has published more than fifty LGBTQ+ Romance novels. “My writing partner bought a Mac specifically for Vellum. It has the best options, is the easiest to use, and saves us so much time over everything else we tried. It was a pain in the neck, but it was worth it.”

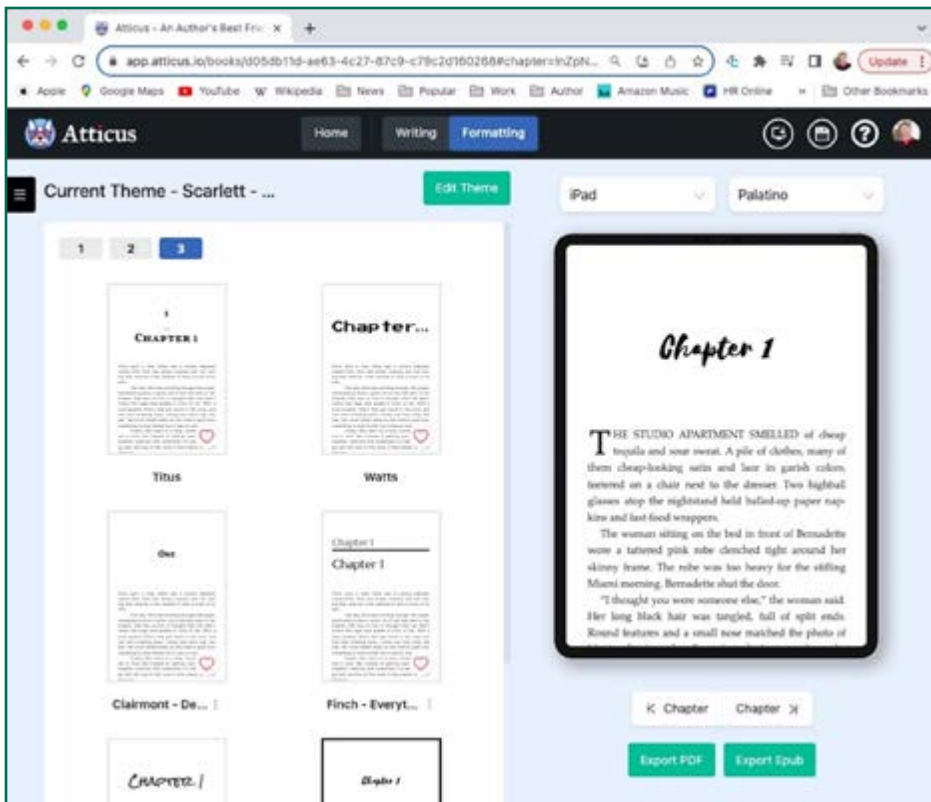
“Vellum is idiot-proof, and that’s what I needed,” says T.M. Baumgartner, a Speculative Fiction author.

Mystery, Sci-Fi, and Romance author Chris Ward agreed. “I used to format with Microsoft Word—what a nightmare that was,” he says. “Once I used Vellum, I never looked back.”

Vellum continues to add features. One of its recent releases introduced text message formatting, as well as additional overall styles and new fonts.



Vellum is a popular internal layout program, adding support for text message formatting in a recent release.



Dave Chesson's Atticus program is cross-platform with creative themes and popular layouts for print and EPUB.

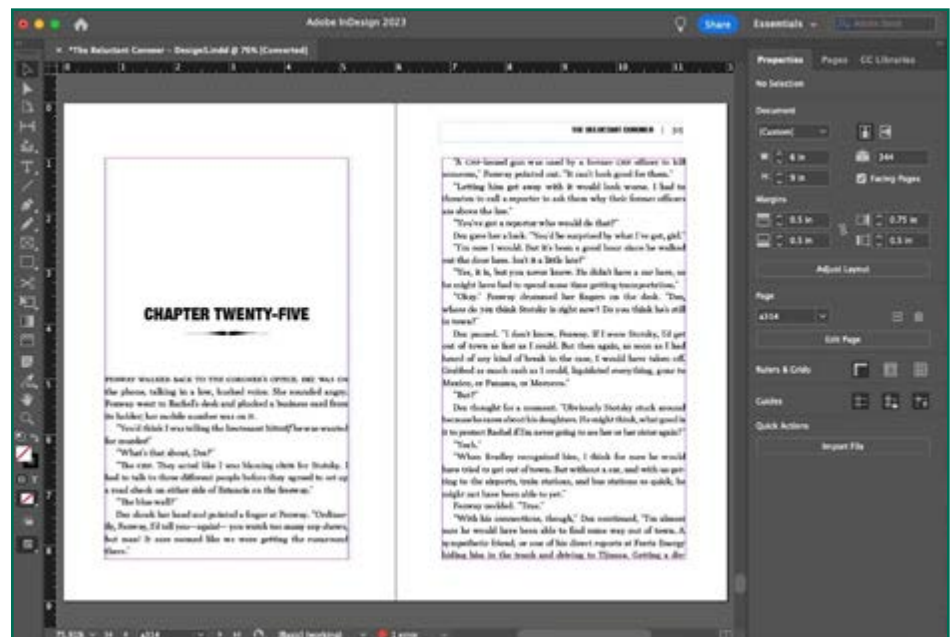
Dave Chesson, who runs the popular Kindlepreneur website and founded Publisher Rocket, released Atticus over a year ago. Unlike Vellum, Atticus is cross-platform. "I'd heard great things about Vellum, but as a PC user, I chose Atticus," says memoirist B.J. Glassel. "It gave me great results and was easy to use."

Both Vellum and Atticus provide options for PDF and EPUB exports. The options for layout and fonts are limited in both programs, but many common page layout choices are automated. "What used to take me five days in a page layout program took twenty minutes," Baumgartner says.

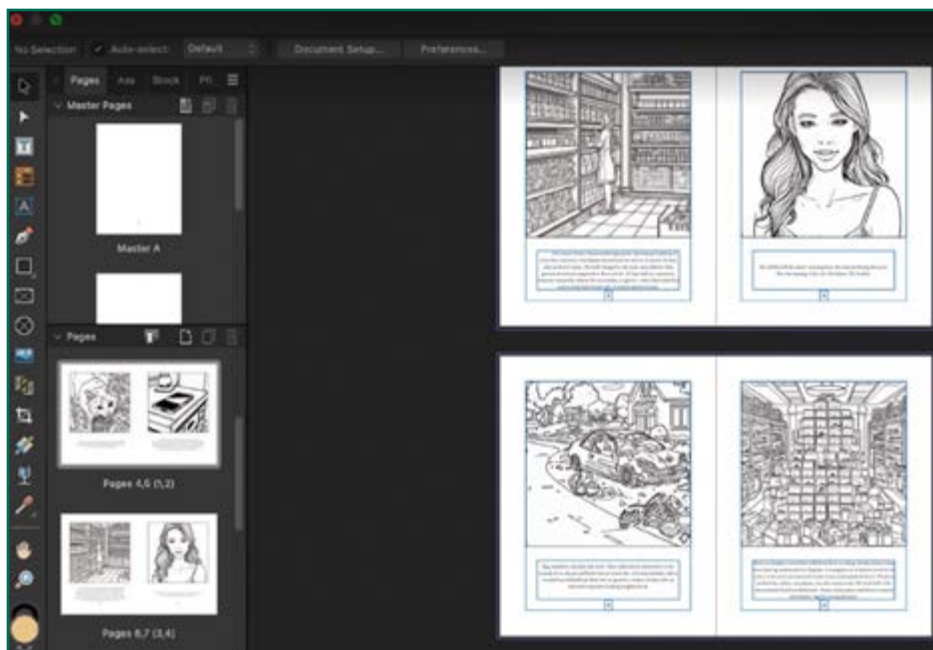
PAGE LAYOUT SOFTWARE

Before the advent of software built specifically for book layout, some authors chose page layout software tools. **Adobe InDesign** (\$21 per month; subscription only) and **Affinity Publisher** (\$70; one-time purchase) are two page layout programs that still have footholds with independent authors.

Creating page layouts for manuscripts is not automated in either program, so adjusting a project's page flow can be a time-consuming process. However, these programs provide the most flexibility and control for authors.



Adobe InDesign provides unlimited control but has a steep learning curve.



Affinity Publisher provides InDesign-like control for a cheaper price.

Adobe InDesign is the priciest of all the software in this article and has a steep learning curve. Affinity Publisher has much of the same functionality as InDesign for a fraction of the price. Both programs offer export to EPUB format as well. Many authors who use InDesign have a background in graphic design or publishing, so InDesign is already an arrow in their quiver.

WRITING SOFTWARE

Software like **Microsoft Word** and **Scrivener** were never meant to be page layout programs. However, both programs can create EPUBs and export PDFs for print use. For some authors, the ability to use their existing writing software to create e-books and print books is worth the hassle of wrangling the programs.

“I keep a Microsoft Word template specifically for publication of my books,” says Elizabeth Hurley, a Romance author who writes Science Fiction and Mysteries under pen names. “When I’m ready to publish, I drop the text in. All gutters, margins, headers, and page numbers are all in place. All my fiction titles are the same size, so I don’t have to reinvent the wheel.”

“Scrivener creates a beautiful, clean EPUB,” says Jamie Thornton, an author of YA Dystopian novels. “I was surprised it worked so well, and I use it for all my novels now.”

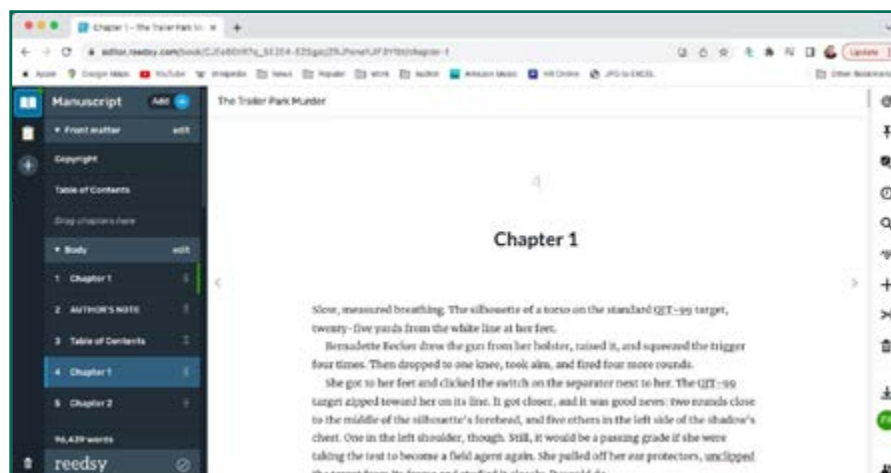
FREE TOOLS FROM AUTHOR-FOCUSED WEBSITES

Draft2Digital and **Reedsy** offer many tools and services for authors, including free online interior book design.

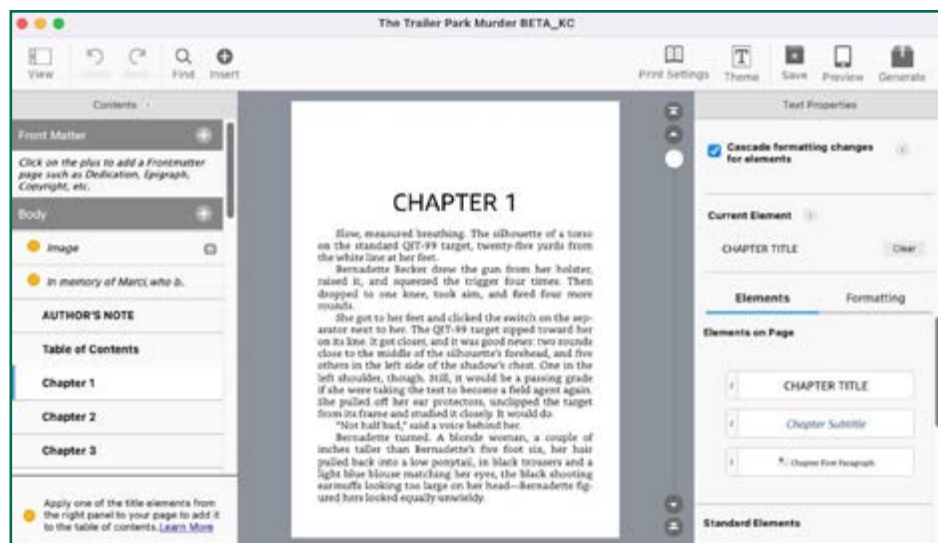
In the **Draft2Digital** book creator tool, the author uploads a Microsoft Word file, and the site spits out both EPUB and print layouts. The tool has genre-specific layouts and chapter graphics as well. However, the Draft2Digital tool is persnickety—the Word file must be formatted properly. There are no opportunities to “fix” the manuscript after it’s been imported; authors will have to reformat the Word document, usually by applying different paragraph styles and cleaning up spacing and paragraph issues, before the resulting file is professional enough to publish.

The **Reedsy Book Editor** allows the author to write directly in the tool. Like Atticus, the tool is cross-platform and based inside the browser.

Although it doesn't have as many options for formatting, fonts, or styles as Vellum, Atticus, or Draft2Digital, it is both simple to use and purpose-built for authors—and unlike Vellum and Atticus, it's free.



Reedsy's book editing tool is cross-platform.



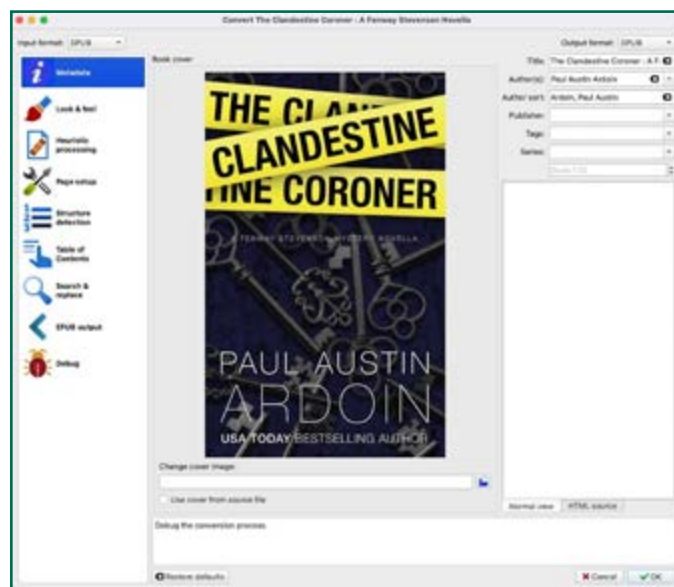
The Kindle Create tool is free and only creates files that can be uploaded to Amazon's KDP system.

For authors who are exclusive to Amazon, the **Kindle Create** application for Windows and Mac, also free, provides a specific formatting experience. There are few options, but the resulting file is easy to upload to Amazon and publish. Kindle Create also provides limited print options, and the resulting KPF file has a print book package in it as well as the e-book package. Both the print and e-book files are only uploadable on the KDP website, not on other storefronts.

E-BOOK-ONLY OPTIONS

Calibre (free) is a cross-platform tool that exports electronic book files, like EPUB. Although its built-in formatting tools are basic, authors who know HTML can customize the look and feel of the documents. Other e-book-only tools like **Jutoh** and **Sigil** (both free) have even more control and power but require more knowledge of HTML programming in order to export well-formatted files.

“One caveat,” says Baumgartner regarding free EPUB creation tools, “is that if you distribute to Kobo, you must be sure your EPUB works there.” Baumgartner has seen KEPUB files, Kobo’s special flavor of EPUB, render poorly on Kobo e-readers.



Calibre is a free tool that exclusively creates EPUBs and other e-book files.

HIRING A PROFESSIONAL

Many authors hire someone to format the interior of the books for them. Thriller author D.F. Hart likes the way Vellum formats book interiors. “But I have a PC, not a Mac,” Hart says, so hiring someone who has a Mac—and Vellum—is her preferred method.

Some contractors who format using Vellum will charge \$50 to \$200; others who use Adobe InDesign, especially if the author has specific requests that Vellum doesn’t support, can charge \$300 or more to design the interior of a book.

WHICH APPROACH IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

In stark contrast to the dawn of self-publishing, indie authors now have many options for book interiors. Choose the option best suited for your budget, your skill levels, and the time you can spend on these design tasks, and you’ll get a professional, good-looking book interior that’s right for you. ■

Paul Austin Ardoin



Paul Austin Ardoin

Paul Austin Ardoin is the USA TODAY bestselling indie author of *The Fenway Stevenson Mysteries* and *The Woodhead & Becker Mysteries*. He holds a B.A. in creative writing from the University of California, Santa Barbara and an M.B.A. in marketing from the University of Phoenix. His book *Zero to Four Figures: Making \$1,000 a Month with Self-Published Fiction* is scheduled for publication in June 2023.

TECHNOLOGY

From Bookshelf to Bookstore

EXPLORING LULU.COM'S FOUR MAJOR MARKETING AVENUES

In the intricate tapestry of self-publishing, indie authors are constantly searching for ways to better control their income and their relationship with their readers. Lulu.com stands out not merely as another publishing platform but as a comprehensive solution to the dilemma. The platform supports a myriad of projects, from print books to photo books, comic books, magazines, yearbooks, calendars, and e-books. But it also offers authors four distinct distribution avenues tailored to various facets of the publishing journey: a dedicated online bookstore, the Lulu Direct platform, expansive retail distribution, and innovative crowdfunding possibilities.

After creating an account on Lulu.com, you can begin crafting your first project. Then, select one of the four methods to distribute your work to eager readers. Let's delve deeper into each of these.

Select a Goal

Start by telling us what you plan to do with your Book. From printing your own copies to selling around the world or on your own website, we've got you covered!

Publish Your Book
Publish your Book to use any or all of our retail options to sell your Book.

Lulu Bookstore
Sell your Book on the Lulu Bookstore.

Lulu Direct
Sell your Book on your website or ecommerce store.

Global Distribution ⓘ
Sell your Book through 40,000+ global retailers using Lulu's distribution service. Please note that a title page, copyright page, and ISBN are required.

Print Your Book
Upload your Book files to your account and purchase copies.

LULU'S RETAIL BOOKSTORE: BRIDGING INDIE AUTHORS AND GLOBAL READERS

Lulu.com promotes itself as the largest indie bookseller of those currently in the market, forging a space where authors can connect with an international audience. Its platform accommodates multiple currencies, simplifying transactions for readers worldwide. Amid the expansive retail landscape, the platform carves out a niche that aims to cater specifically to the indie author community, amplifying reach while fostering the vital author-reader bond.


LULU DIRECT: FACILITATING DIRECT SALES FOR INDIE AUTHORS

By integrating with popular e-commerce platforms like Shopify and WooCommerce, Lulu Direct—an extension of Lulu.com—streamlines selling books directly from an author's personal website. This bypasses the need for third-party retailers, potentially offering higher profit margins.

In this scenario, the author lists products they want to sell on their website, and Lulu fulfills the orders transparently. The platform acts as a drop shipper, handling the print-on-demand and shipping duties and leaving the sale in the hands of the author.

Authors must set up their websites to ensure they follow security protocols for credit card collection and privacy policies, as well as tax collection and shipping rates. For more in-depth information on how to create a WooCommerce store, see *Indie Author Magazine's* previous reporting on direct sales from September 2021, or explore Author Tech Summit's Direct Sales course at <https://authortechsummit.com>.

The processes connecting WooCommerce and Shopify are similar, though if you want to connect a Shopify store, you can visit <https://authortechsummit.com> for a video walk-through. To connect a WoCommerce store, first, navigate to the Lulu homepage and locate the My Stores option in the navigation menu. Click the "Connect A Store" button.


Woo
COMMERCE

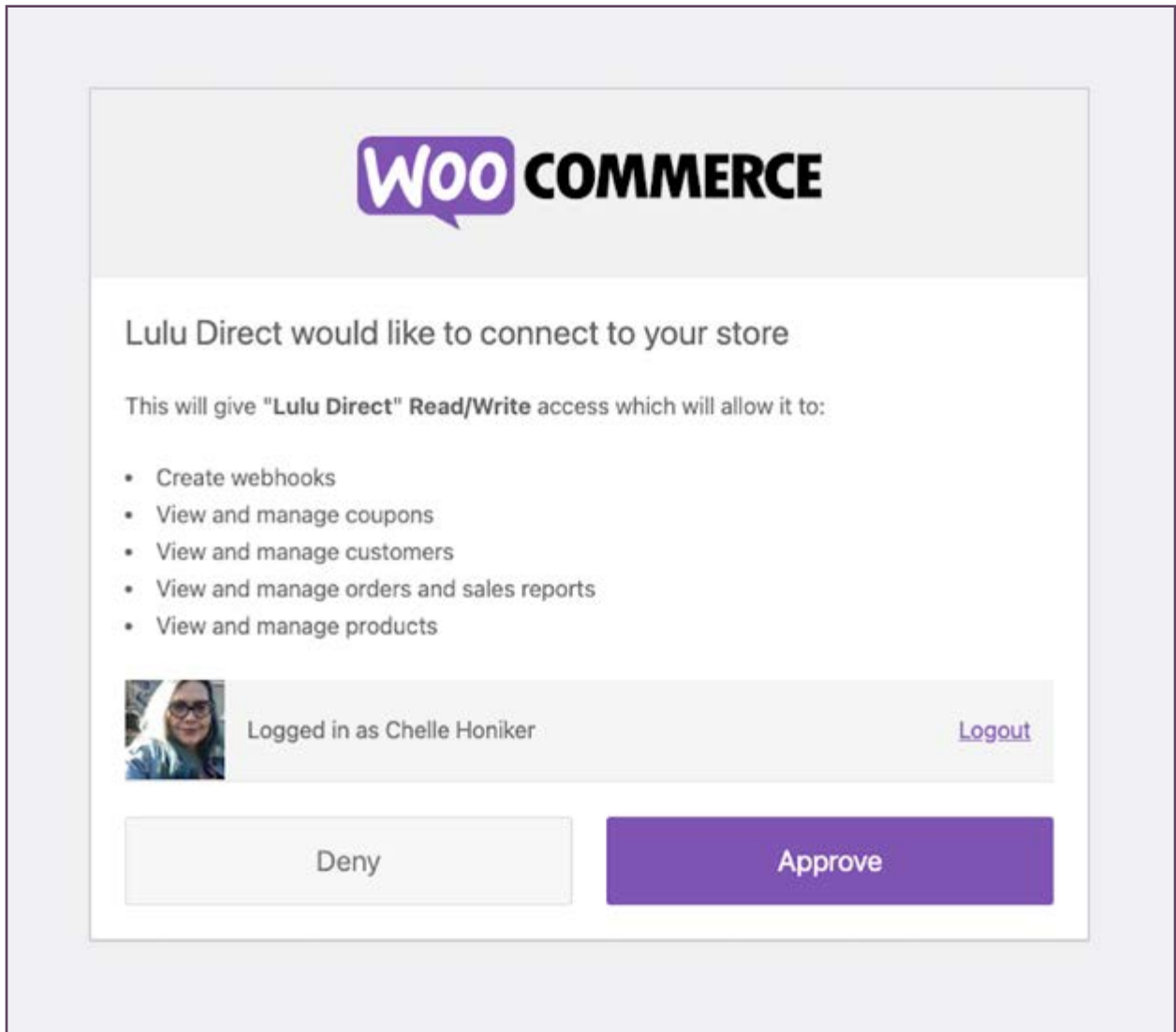
Store URL
Please enter the full [WooCommerce domain name](#) (e.g. <https://www.example.com>). Be sure to include prefixes such as

Requirements
Please ensure your WooCommerce store is accessible [by following these requirements](#).

[Click here to enter API Keys manually](#)

By connecting your store to Lulu Direct, you agree to the Lulu Direct [Terms & Conditions](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).

Input your store URL. Remember to use the HTTPS protocol, as Lulu Direct doesn't support HTTP connections. Once done, hit the "Connect to WooCommerce" button, and approve the connection.



Pro Tip: Before cementing the connection, ensure your WooCommerce store has permalinks enabled. This can help prevent potential connectivity issues when integrating with Lulu Direct.

Once your site is connected, Lulu gives you a helpful checklist to complete to be sure you're ready for website sales to process.



THE BILLING SYSTEM

Lulu Direct operates on a unique drop-shipping model, streamlining the sales process for indie authors. Once an order is placed on an author's WooCommerce or Shopify website, the author collects payment directly from the customer. Subsequently, Lulu Direct processes the order using the author's stored credit card and shipping details. While the customer pays the author, the author's payment details on Lulu Direct are billed for the printing and shipping costs. This system allows authors to manage customer payments and fulfill orders efficiently, while Lulu Direct handles the backend logistics.

Pro Tip: Create a custom packing slip for your store with your return shipping address and any refund/return policies. Because Lulu acts as a drop shipper, your customer will only have your contact information. If they wish to return their item, they'll send it directly to you for processing, whether it's a refund or replacement. You can also craft a personal message to be included with each order on the packing slip.

There are a few other things to keep in mind when using Lulu Direct's store for sales through your website.

Production Delay

Every order is subject to a production delay, which provides authors the flexibility to make last-minute tweaks or even cancel the order. This is a safeguard against hasty decisions or inadvertent errors, and Lulu Direct permits you to adjust this window up to twenty-four hours based on your comfort level.

Automatic Order Approval

If you're confident about your orders and wish to expedite the production process, you can enable automatic order approval, allowing orders to proceed to production after the production delay, without the need for manual oversight.

Automatic Payments

If automatic payments are enabled, Lulu Direct will handle the financial aspect of fulfilling an order. Following the production delay, the platform can use your saved payment method to cover printing and shipping expenses.

Shipping

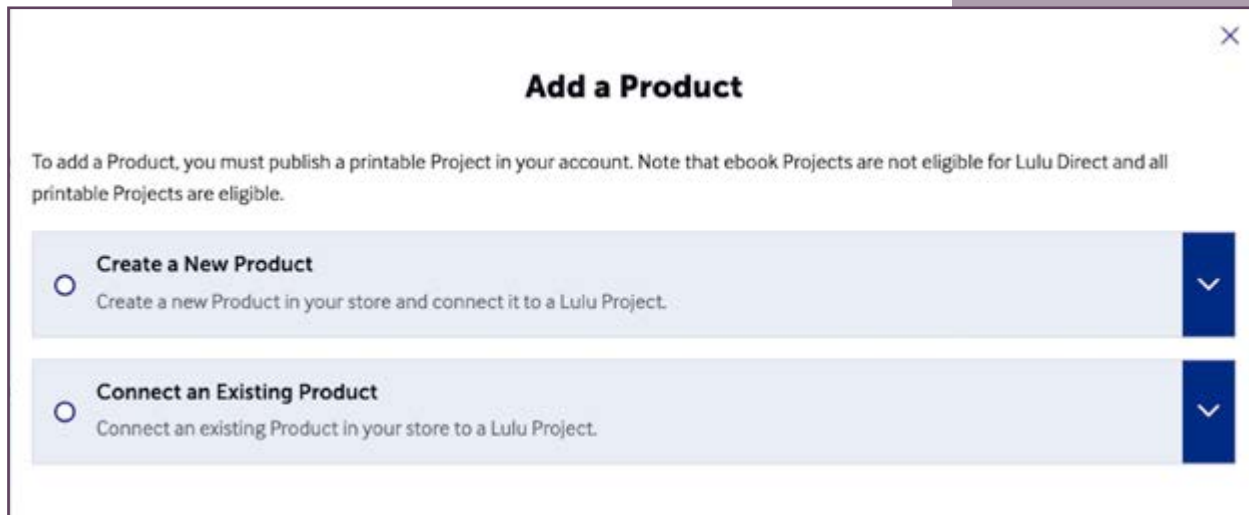
Lulu Direct prioritizes both cost effectiveness and traceability. When a customer chooses a shipping method, the platform auto-selects the most economical trackable option available. However, if the author has specific preferences or needs, the platform allows for manual adjustments on the Order Details page before the order payment is processed.

To get a clearer picture of the shipping costs and options, Lulu Direct offers a pricing calculator for estimated rates on its website.

Once you've completed the steps to complete your contact and billing information, you can create a product for sale on your website. Note that the site differentiates a "project"—what you're selling: print book, photo book, comic book, magazine, yearbook, calendar, or e-book—and a "product," a listing on your website for sale.

CREATING A PRODUCT

Once you have your projects prepared in Lulu and have set up your store details, you can create a product. When you click on “Add a Product,” you have two choices: Create a New Product or Connect an Existing Product.



Creating a new product uses the basics of your project and attempts to create a new product in your WooCommerce store on your website. This method should be the most simple, but some users report that varying WordPress security settings can make this glitchy and produce errors without a clear direction to resolve them.

The more reliable method is to connect an existing product by first creating a WooCommerce product on your website and then connecting it to Lulu.

Pro Tip: Keep the product listing on your website simple to start. The bridge between your website and Lulu will time out if your description is over two hundred fifty words. Connect the product with the project, then revise the product on your website with the full blurb and sales copy you want your customers to see.

RETAIL DISTRIBUTION: CENTRALIZING SALES AND DISTRIBUTION

Along with Lulu’s own bookstore, the platform offers an integrated global distribution service, linking

authors to various online and physical retailers and allowing them to oversee all sales and revenue from a single dashboard.

When compared to managing sales via platforms like Amazon's KDP or Ingram Spark, Lulu's approach is streamlined. Instead of juggling between platforms, everything is centralized.

For those considering Lulu's distribution, keep in mind the following:

- **Submission and Approval:** Authors start their project and select the Global Distribution option, and must provide essential details like an ISBN.
- **Fees:** For print editions, authors must order, review, and approve a proof copy. E-books have a one-time distribution fee, which varies.
- **Guides:** Lulu offers detailed guidelines to aid authors. The Global Distribution Guide and the Eligible Products Guide provide insights into the requirements and eligible product types for global distribution.

CROWDFUNDING WITH KICKSTARTER VIA LULU

Crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter offer an avenue for authors to fund publishing projects, whether it's their first book or a special edition. When leveraging Kickstarter, authors set a funding

goal and craft a campaign page with details about the book and reasons readers should support it. Various rewards at different funding levels can reward backers. Once the project attains its funding goal, authors receive the funds, which can be allocated to editorial services, cover design, and printing copies for backers.

For those who achieve their funding goals in a crowdfunding campaign, Lulu can simplify the process of fulfilling bulk orders for backers. After publishing the book on Lulu at no cost, authors can employ the Order Import tool to upload a CSV file containing backers' order and shipping details. Lulu then takes on the responsibility of printing and drop-shipping the orders to backers globally.

SUMMING UP LULU'S VERSATILITY

The journey of self-publishing is intricate, with multiple paths to traverse. Platforms like Lulu.com present indie authors with a comprehensive toolkit catering to various facets of this journey. From retailing on Lulu's dedicated bookstore to facilitating direct sales through Lulu Direct, ensuring expansive retail distribution, or leveraging the power of crowdfunding, Lulu endeavors to be a holistic solution for indie authors. As the publishing landscape continually evolves, being equipped with the right tools and knowledge can make all the difference, and Lulu.com stands as a potent ally in this endeavor. ■

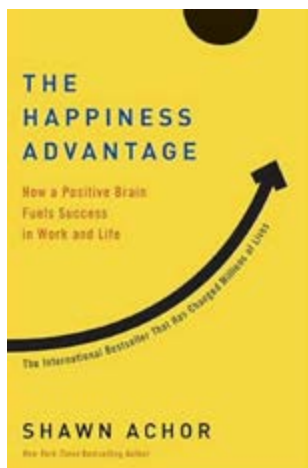
Chelle Honiker



Chelle Honiker

As publisher of Indie Author Magazine, Chelle brings over two decades of executive operations and leadership experience. She's a grounded digital nomad currently hunkered down near her adult daughters in Texas, but can't wait until the world opens back up and she can take her empty nest back on the road. It's said she could run a small country with just the contents of her ever-present backpack. She'd rather not put it to the test.

From the Stacks



The Happiness Advantage

<https://books2read.com/u/bPeERd>

Achor shatters the conventional belief that success is a prerequisite for happiness, showing indie authors that happiness is the catalyst for achieving their literary dreams. Drawing from extensive research and his own experiences, he illustrates how a positive mindset can elevate creativity, productivity, and overall author satisfaction.

The Happiness Advantage equips authors with actionable strategies, offering practical exercises and habits to infuse joy into their writing journey. From transforming how they approach writer's block to enhancing their social connections and resilience, Achor's wisdom is a boon for those navigating the challenging waters of self-publishing.

This book is a must-read for independent authors looking to unlock their true potential and find fulfillment in their literary pursuits. With *The Happiness Advantage* in hand, self-published authors can rewrite their success story with optimism, resilience, and the power of positivity.

ScribeCount

<https://scribecount.com>

ScribeCount is a comprehensive tool for authors to monitor their sales across various platforms. It offers a fourteen-day trial for users to explore its features before committing. The service caters to all authors, irrespective of their publishing platform, and provides a user-friendly interface via a browser extension without requiring passwords. It aggregates sales data, including KENP data, book ranks, reviews, prices, and geographical sales data. Users can control data flow by logging out or disabling platform connections, ensuring data privacy and security. The service is designed with an understanding of authors' needs for a safe, easy-to-use sales tracking solution.

ScribeCount
NUMBERS FROM YOUR WORDS



Ines Johnson is Having a Breakdown

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/ines-johnson-is-having-a-breakdown/id1670022728>

The Breakdown is a podcast hosted by television producer turned Romance author Ines Johnson. In each episode, join Ines as she breaks television episodes, movies, and/or an aspect of the indie publishing market—mainly for her own edification, but maybe other authors could find some use in her nerding out over story structure and market analysis.

Free Followers to Engaged Superfans

HOW AUTHORS CAN USE REAM TO BUILD A SUBSCRIPTION BUSINESS

As indie authors increasingly move toward wide distribution and direct sales, subscription services may offer a way to expand marketing opportunities beyond ads and newsletters, as well as build a predictable source of revenue. Anne Janzer, author of *Subscription Marketing: Strategies for Nurturing Customers in a World of Churn*, explains, “Traditional marketing strategies focus on leading people to the initial sale. Subscription businesses shift their focus from the point of sale to the long-term, ongoing customer relationship. The subscriber remains a prospect, deserving ongoing engagement and nurturing.”

Platforms like Patreon, Substack, Ko-fi, and Buy Me a Coffee offer creators a channel for collecting donations and allowing fans to support their process. Although Patreon is probably the best known and most established membership service with over three million monthly active patrons, some authors find the platform challenging for readers. Substack is a popular alternative among writers and journalists because of its focus on newsletters. Rose Greaves compared Substack and Patreon for *The Digital Merchant*. And Ko-fi and Buy Me Coffee both allow one-off donations in addition to subscriptions and memberships, so they tend to be used as digital tip jars rather than an author’s home base.

The newest subscription platform, however, is one designed specifically for fiction authors. Ream founders say they are “creating a home where storytellers rule the world,” according to its website. The platform combines an e-reader app, a reader group, and a mailing list for authors looking to build a community of superfans. At first glance, Ream has a lot in common with its predecessors, but early adopters have been more impressed by the differences.

WHAT IS REAM?

Ream is a subscription platform for authors that “allows writers to build communities around their stories and charge a monthly fee that rewards your readers with early access to your stories, bonus content, access to new stories and your backlist, and even perks like signed books and merchandise,” according to the platform’s FAQs.

Like Patreon and other subscription services, Ream allows authors to create an exclusive community, collect emails, and offer multiple tiers for subscriptions. Unlike its competitors, Ream also provides a social e-reader, the option to schedule chapters, secure email delivery of content, and a way to publish a backlist library linked to exclusive tiers or open to free followers.

Ream was originally developed for Steamy Romance author Emilia Rose by her husband, Sean Patnode. After leaving Patreon over censorship of her work, Rose and Patnode partnered with their friend Michael Evans to bring Ream to a wider author community. Patnode spent a year programming and engineering the Ream platform and now runs it full time. In addition to his role as CEO, Evans is an author of Sci-Fi Thrillers and is a student at Harvard. Rose, Chief Author of Ream, is now a six-figure author from subscriptions with over thirty million story reads.

Ream went live in beta in January 2023 and launched to the public in May. In June, Rose and Evans started a podcast, *Subscriptions for Authors*, which provides educational resources, interviews, and troubleshooting for authors who want to start subscription businesses on any platform. Since

then, two thousand, five hundred authors have set up Ream accounts, and the Subscriptions for Authors Facebook Group has grown to over 3.9 thousand members, as of the writing of this article. The platform currently serves almost thirty thousand readers.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Authors who create an account on Ream can do so via the website or an app. There are no expectations of exclusivity and no limitations on genre, although 60 percent to 70 percent of members are Romance authors, in part due to the draw of Rose’s personal experience and in part because of the proportionate share of Romance in publishing in general.

Ream collects 10 percent of all revenue plus payment processing fees, as determined by credit card companies and issuing banks—usually 2.9% + \$0.30. As with other subscription platforms, there are no additional charges to get started. Authors may set pricing at any level for as many membership tiers as they choose.

According to Rose, currently, the average author on Ream “is making over \$100 a month on our platform, and we have about two hundred fifty authors who are being paid out consistently every month.” The total income across the platform is approaching \$600,000 per year. Since authors set their own tiers, there is significant variation in income and number of subscribers, but the average revenue per reader per month is about \$9.04.

When subscribers join your mailing list as either a free follower or a member of a paid tier, you get access to data that includes their emails, names, and subscription history. The Ream team is also planning to offer additional analytics, such as page reads.

So far, discoverability is limited to direct-to-reader connections. Authors should expect to bring in their own readers via their newsletters, social media, and other existing followers. Ream does have a search-by-author function, which it intends to expand to genre and trope in the coming months, but browsing is not available.

Additional upcoming features include audio-book support and hosted bookstores where

authors will be able to sell directly through their Ream pages.

Resources

The website provides an extensive collection of support documents, a Help Center chat widget, and links to resources from the *Subscriptions for Authors* podcast. The Facebook Group is served by a moderation team, but Evans and Rose frequently answer questions themselves. They are planning to expand their educational opportunities with a *Subscriptions for Authors* conference in the coming year.

Best Practices for Subscriptions

Creating meaningful tiers and choosing which benefits to offer can be overwhelming. Some authors provide physical prizes, like bookmarks, postcards, pins, and other swag. Others may offer personal access through virtual parties or Zoom meetings. According to Rose, all of those are great ideas that readers love, but ultimately “the people who are doing early access or exclusive content do the best.”

Readers subscribe because they love your stories, so it makes sense to build your subscription tiers around what attracted them in the first place. Starting with early access allows authors to start from scratch and build up to offering more, if they so choose. Early access and exclusive content also flow organically into a wider business plan when incorporated into the writing process for new releases.

Some of the most successful subscription models find authors pairing an exclusive subscription platform, like Ream, with one for serialized stories, like Kindle Vella or Wattpad. By offering early access or exclusive content related to stories they publish for free on Wattpad, for example, authors are able to draw new readers from the larger platform.

AUTHOR EXPERIENCES

Steamy Romance author Reece Barden, Romance and Family Saga author Elana Johnson, Cozy Mystery/Romance author Tamara Lush, Horror author and *Indie Author Magazine* contributing

writer David Viergutz, and Forbidden Romance author K Webster shared some of their personal experiences since joining Ream.

What led you to joining Ream?

Elana Johnson: “I’ve wanted to do something with subscriptions for years now. I’ve read the books. I’ve gone to the classes. I’ve buddied up with people making thousands of dollars from their subscriptions.

“And I’ve never felt like I had something to offer to the readers of my genre. I feel like I’m pretty dialed into who my ideal reader is, and who the readers are already in my body of work. And a subscription never came together for me.

“But when Ream launched, I decided to set it up. It was so fast and easy, I had my page built from scratch to done in less than three hours. I launched it, and well... It didn’t go so well until I stumbled onto what my readers really want.”

What features do you like best?

David Viergutz: “Ream gives me total control. I know who my customers are, and I can reach them directly, which has been a major shift in my business focus.”

Tara Lush: “I love being able to tailor content to different subscriber levels. Also, the free followers is a game changer for me; it’s similar to a newsletter but more conversational, more personal. I love sending my followers weekly updates!”

What challenges have you faced with the new platform?

Reece Barden: “It’s not a challenge with the platform itself, but some readers are never going to want to read books on an app or website and hate getting chapters weekly instead of all at once. And that’s completely okay. It’s the equivalent of some people watching episodes of their favorite TV series week by week, and others waiting until the season is over and binge-watching the entire thing. Or some people only read paperbacks and hate the idea of an [e-reader]. It’s down to personal preference and won’t appeal to everyone.

“This is not meant to be an ‘instead of’ but an ‘as well as.’ It merely offers an alternative reading experi-

ence and a way of building deeper connections with your fans.”

How do you see Ream fitting into your overall business plan?

Tara Lush: “I see Ream as a place for my superfans, the people who can’t get enough of my work and who want to read everything I write, as I write it. I’m also highly motivated by writing and releasing in installments, so this is perfect for my workflow. I write a chapter, post it on Ream. Later, when the book is finished, I do a deeper edit and a copy edit, then publish!”

David Viergutz: “Ream is now part of my monthly income. I allot time to the content there, which consists of short stories, polls, audio-shorts and serialized novels. My core readership enjoys the extra attention, and they get to support me even further. It was an untapped source of income.”

What advice do you have for writers thinking about joining Ream?

K Webster: “I think it would be helpful for them to know that the platform is built by other authors who are looking for the same thing: an easy-to-use platform to connect with their readers. Having patience is key. Michael and the Ream team have

our backs and are always bending over backwards to make things run smoothly for us. I’m very pleased with the support and the direction Ream is going.”

And does that advice vary depending on genre, backlog, or experience?

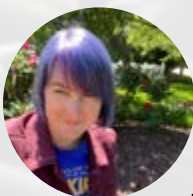
Elana Johnson: “Of course it does! I don’t write sexy romance. I do not have NSFW art, swag, or scenes to share with readers.

“Truly, I think you need to know your own limits of what you can realistically provide for readers, and you need to identify something unique and special about your books, world, or characters that will have them signing up without you pushing or asking them to.

“Because, in the end, it’s about story. It’s about characters and stories that readers want to immerse themselves in. You have to find that, create that, for them, and they’ll come.”

For authors with active mailing lists or engaged social media followers, starting a subscriptions business might be a logical next step in taking control of your revenue. Ream offers a platform that combines the membership services of Patreon with reader-friendly features, as long as you are prepared to lead them there. ■

Jenn Lessmann



Jenn Lessmann

Jenn Lessmann is the author of three stories published on Amazon’s Kindle Vella, two unpublished novels, and a blog that tests Pinterest hacks in the real world (where supplies are sometimes limited, and all projects are overseen by children with digital attention spans). A former barista, stage manager, and high school English teacher with advanced degrees from impressive colleges, she continues to drink excessive amounts of caffeine, stay up later than is absolutely necessary, and read three or four books at a time. She loves lists and the rule of three. Irony too. Jenn is currently studying witchcraft and the craft of writing, and giggling internally whenever they intersect. She writes snarky (not spicy) paranormal fantasy for new adults whenever her dog will allow it.

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DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

Time for Show and Tell

REEXAMINING THE GOLDEN RULE OF FICTION

As authors, the adage to “show, not tell” has been etched into our minds by well-meaning teachers from grade school to university. It’s for good reason. Showing detail rather than explaining things outright invites the reader to step into your story world and experience a character’s actions and emotions firsthand.

When you tell the story as a narrative shortcut without showing detail, the summarized events pull the reader back from the book’s world. But is telling the story as bad as writing guides make it out to be?

When used properly, telling can smooth the narrative flow and maintain your story’s pacing. The challenge is finding the perfect equilibrium between show and tell to enhance your novel.

SHOW, CONNECT, CAPTIVATE

Showing in writing allows readers to interpret your story on their own. By using sensory descriptions to highlight settings or characters, you can help the reader feel like they are part of the story, which can make reading it feel like an immersive experience. Give readers an idea of the sights, sounds, scents, and tastes of your world. Study the nuances of your locations, and note historical facts or interesting aspects that can make things seem real.

Bestselling author Diana Gabaldon recommends using at least three senses in any scene. If you highlight what the character sees and hears, then pick taste, scent, or touch to complement your details.

Showing the tension or conflict in a scene through actions and character dialogue can create a sense of drama and suspense. Show the way muscles move in the thrust of a punch. Describe the physical sensations of anger or heartbreak as your character experiences them. This allows your reader to feel right along with the character and can be one of the most powerful ways to “show” in your writing.

TELL, SIMPLIFY, PROPEL

Some frown upon excessive narrative telling in your story. But if you look at the books you love, you will discover many passages where it can be used to beneficial effect.

There is an efficiency in telling. You can convey simple facts via narrative, saving time and preventing long passages of description. It can be useful for summarizing events that are not crucial to the plot and help maintain a story’s momentum.

Incorporate your narrator’s inner monologue to your story, and you can tell a character’s internal thoughts and backstory without bogging down the reader. When talking about the history of a location, narrative telling can speed up the pace and convey important character information.

Telling can also be used to transition between scenes or time periods, which helps avoid jarring shifts in the reader’s perception. Far from being a technique to avoid, telling can be a powerful writing tool in any author’s arsenal.

DUAL DANCE, SINGULAR IMPACT

Both showing and telling have their benefits. The trick is to learn the art of balancing the two techniques into a graceful tango.

As you write, ask yourself the following questions to guide you:

Do I want readers to actively experience and visualize this, or is it background information?

Is this a key aspect of character development that requires a more immersive approach?

Does the pacing of the story demand a quicker transition than showing would allow?

Are there subplots or secondary characters where telling would maintain focus on the main storyline?

Are there scenes where showing would contribute to the richness of the world-building?

What do I want the reader to remember most from this scene, and which approach serves that purpose better?

Showing slows the story but also imparts a richness that readers crave. Telling speeds up the pace of your tale and helps when you don't want to overwhelm the reader with too much sensory detail. Give the reader only what they need to further your story and avoid repetition. Oppositely, if you write a narrative without substance, you risk the reader finding your work too shallow.

Striking the right balance in your writing is more an art than a science. Above all, you want to hold your reader's interest so they keep the pages of your book open. The dogma of "show, don't tell" is not always the best advice; instead, learning how to utilize both styles of writing effectively will shape you into a well-rounded, professional author. ■

Wendy Van Camp



Wendy Van Camp

Wendy Van Camp is the Poet Laureate for the City of Anaheim, California. Her work is influenced by cutting edge technology, astronomy, and daydreams. A graduate of the Ad Astra Speculative Fiction Workshop, Wendy is a nominated finalist for the Elgin Award, for the Pushcart Prize, and for a Dwarf Stars Award. Her poems, stories, and articles have appeared in: "Starlight Scifaiku Review", "The Junction", "Quantum Visions", and other literary journals. She is the poet and illustrator of "The Planets: a scifaiku poetry collection" and editor of the annual anthology "Eccentric Orbits: An Anthology of Science Fiction Poetry". Find her at <https://wendyvancamp.com>

PROSPERITY

Inner Beauty

When it comes to the formatting and design of your books, there doesn't seem to be a clear path to ensuring readers' expectations are met. It makes sense that readers would want an easy, bump-free read. Yet without a clear guide, it's easy to miss little details that make a big difference. If your readers encounter a poorly formatted book, no matter how well written it might be, they are liable to close it without finishing the read.

That would be such a bummer!

Investing time and capital into your formatting may seem frivolous, but it can allow you to reap the rewards for many years, or even decades, to come. Allow me to share some benefits of taking the long-term view.

Clean formatting makes an impression. Quality makes an impression. What impression is that, you might ask? It's the impression that your work is superior and that what you are offering is outstanding.

This column is about prosperity and how to make an abundant living as a writer. The layout of your books must be as good, or perhaps even better, than the bestselling books in your genre. We all know the benefits of a quality cover. I believe the benefits of excellent formatting factor into the mix just as much—or more. Readers might forgive a muddy cover, yet a book that's visually hard to read could get tossed back. Your story won't be able to hook readers if no one can read it.

It's the little touches that make a big difference—and an impression. Here are a few simple steps you can take to ensure your book's layout hits the mark:

- Your layout must present a clean, easy read. If you're writing nonfiction, bold headings with a larger font will call attention to points you want to make, and putting special quotes or ideas in shaded boxes can ensure your points hit home.
- Choose a font and font size that's popular in your genre, but don't be afraid to mix and match fonts to create a unique look.

- Include a black and white mirror image of your cover as the first page of your book. It's a nice touch that says "professionally published."
- Finally, put your best headshot on your About the Author page. Readers love connecting with their favorite authors, so it will help if they know what you look like!

Clean formatting isn't just nice to have. If you want your readers to clamber to read your books, providing an experience that includes a neat, crisp layout is something that can elevate your book. Fiction or nonfiction, a beautiful book is one that's cherished, held onto, and collected. And while great formatting can require an investment of time to gain clarity on what your genre's readers expect, I stand by my belief that it only takes a little more time to enhance your books in a way that will allow a solid return on your investment. No matter your budget, you absolutely can create a book that is first class!

A final note: For authors on a budget who can't afford custom formatting or the cost of formatting software, you can still create respectable results with Word or Scrivener. For less than a couple hundred dollars, you can ensure your books are beautifully designed with a bit of customization, adding simple touches that make a huge difference. Then, once you've begun to make a healthy profit, you may want to elevate your book's formatting to the next level and test the impact a beautiful book has on your book sales and your brand. I promise you will love it and never look back.

Happy writing! ■

Honorée Corder



Honorée Corder

Honorée Corder is the author of more than fifty books, an empire builder, and encourager of writers. When she's not writing, she's spoiling her dog and two cats, eating something fabulous her husband made on the grill, working out, or reading. She hopes this article made a positive impact on your life, and if it did, you'll reach out to her via HonoreeCorder.com.

WELLNESS

Give Your Brain a Break

HOW TO BALANCE LIFE AND WORK AS A CREATIVE

We often think of work-life balance as an aim to keep work separate from our personal time. But as writers, our stories are almost always on our minds. For us, the traditional work-life balance might not exist; instead, aiming to separate our creative time and non-creative time may help us better transition between these two states.

MENTAL FATIGUE: MORE THAN WRITER'S BLOCK

Our brains are a cluster of neurons and synapses constantly firing in a whirlwind of activity—and that is when we're just existing. A 2022 study in the *Journal of Current Biology* revealed that just as lactic acid builds up in our muscles after exercise, the brain can build up excess levels of glutamate in the prefrontal cortex. This area of the brain controls decision-making and cognition. With overuse, we

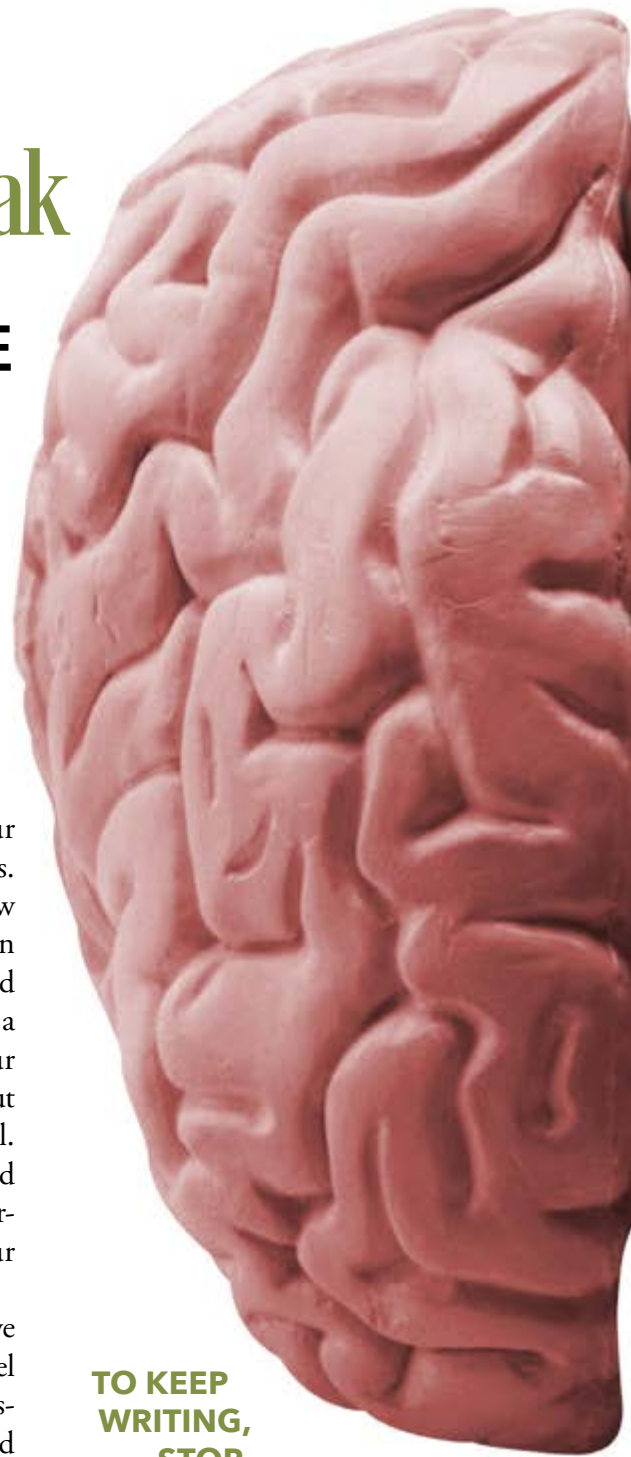
experience brain fatigue. To simplify the medical jargon, when the brain is overworked, it will slow down until it can recover.

Brain fatigue affects our decision-making processes. When our minds are in a flow state, we are biologically driven by the rewards of dopamine and other feel-good chemicals. In a nutshell, we feel good, and our story is flowing effortlessly. But at some point, we tend to stall. Our rewards have run out, and our prefrontal cortex is overwhelmed with glutamate. Our body requires rest.

During this slowdown, we may stop thinking clearly and feel our brain lag from mental exhaustion. It is only through sleep and other meditative experiences that the brain clears up. This is why writing first thing in the morning is so effective for many writers—and why providing ourselves a regular break from creativity can be so important.

**TO KEEP
WRITING,
STOP
WRITING**

As writers, being in overdrive can do several things to stop our progress: we can end up stuck in the muddy middle of a story or a thought, find ourselves





jumping from project to project, or run into a wall that goes on for days. It can impact our interaction with the outside world as well—our families, friends, and co-workers can feel our mental absence or our grumpiness. But if, as the study states, our thinking brains are overworked, how can we help them recover?

Much of the advice we receive from the collective writing world says to take a walk, exercise, and do things to support other facets of our existence. In moments of transition, we are advised to seek activities to boost our creative spark: reading in our genre, watching YouTube videos on other authors' success, exercising or taking walks as we think through our book's troubles. These are all good for our creativity and for shifting our minds around the matters at hand. But none of these give our mind its needed rest. To recover, we need to truly turn off and allow the neurons and synapses to quiet.

SIMPLIFY FOR SUCCESS

Many writers use tools and timers to give themselves a

five-minute break every twenty minutes. However, for a more productive mind, a shift into a non-thinking state for fifteen minutes every ninety minutes would be even more beneficial. This could be a dance party to music you save for this moment—just not the same music that you use for writing. It could be mindlessly stretching, or petting the cat while only letting your mind contemplate the softness of their fur. Try taking your dog for a walk with nothing but the breeze and falling leaves in mind. If you hike mountains while you dictate, make sure that you stop when your mind needs a break, and smell the roses, so to speak. Find a boulder and take in the smell of the pines until your mind reconnects with your story.

Whatever you do to give yourself a break, focus only on that moment. When we are present with an activity that is relished for its simplicity, our minds relax. You'll soon find yourself ready to get back to writing with a recharged brain and a refreshed system. ■

Heather Clement Davis



Heather Clement Davis

Heather Clement Davis has twenty-six years' experience in museums, archaeology, art, counseling, art therapy, creative writing, and nonprofit management. She holds enough graduate work to make a Ph.D. cry as her neurodivergent brain is hooked on learning everything. She's currently a masters candidate in Arts Management. Her paintings and pottery are in galleries and collections worldwide and her poetry and her nonfiction and fiction has found its way to literary journals around the U.S. When not writing or making art, Heather can be found playing Catan or watching Star Trek with her family.

CORNER THE MARKET:

No Ads Budget? No Problem

LOW-COST ALTERNATIVES TO PAID ADVERTISING

Ifocus a lot on paid advertising because that is where the real money is to be made. Paid advertising is highly scalable, so you can grow your income with it, especially on Facebook. But for those starting out, the question is often, “What can I do for free?”

It’s a good question to ask.

The answer is that you can do a lot without spending more than a handful of dollars a month. Let’s break it down into two categories: newsletter swaps and group promotions.

NEWSLETTER SWAPS

Obviously, you need to set up your own newsletter before you can do this, but assuming you have that in order, finding authors in your genre is easy. Their audience will be attracted to your books, and you can run a promotion using a Kindle Countdown Deal or whatever method you wish to entice them to click “Buy.”

I reach out to authors I have never met simply because they are in my “Also Bought” section on Amazon. It is rare for anyone to refuse to do some kind of cross-promotion because we all want to sell books.

Now, you might be thinking that you only have 157 subscribers, and surely no one will want to bother with you. You are right, but we all start somewhere, and I have featured people on my newsletter years ago knowing they were getting the best part of the deal, only to see them overtake me the following year.

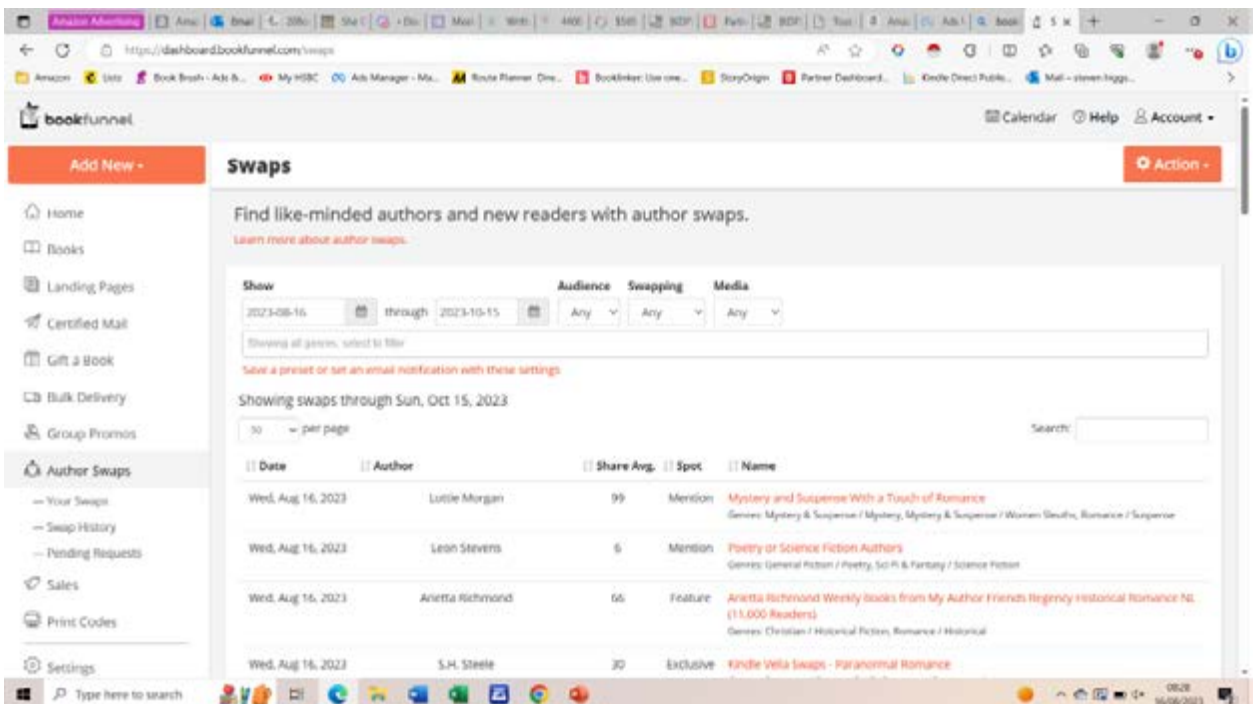
There are groups on Facebook dedicated to specific genres, and most of them will have a weekly or monthly swap thread where you can connect with other authors.

20Books Cozy & Mystery Authors was a Facebook Group I frequented for newsletter swap opportunities when I started to write Cozy Mystery.



If you're looking to go a step further, join a few author support services. Book-Funnel and StoryOrigin are two that I use. You should not expect to make a ton of sales through newsletter swaps, but every time you find a new reader, you have the chance to keep them for life.

If using BookFunnel, refine your search for newsletter swaps by genre to find authors whose audiences will align with your own.



GROUP PROMOTIONS

You probably picked up that author support sites such as BookFunnel and StoryOrigin are not free, but they are cheap. Expect to pay less than \$20 a month for each. I believe sites such as these are worth having as you grow your readership, and group promotions are a big reason why.

The screenshot shows the StoryOrigin website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'StoryOrigin' on the left and 'Preferred Deals', 'Tutorials', 'Pricing', and 'Login' on the right. The main heading is 'Group Promo Opportunities'. Below this is a 'Filters' section with the following fields: 'Must include ("and")' with a dropdown set to 'Cozy M', 'Exclude Any ("or")' with a dropdown set to 'Sci', 'Type' with a dropdown set to 'Giveaway', and 'Starts on or after' with a date picker. There are 'Clear' and 'Subscribe' buttons. Below the filters is a table of promotions:

Title	Organizer	Type	Start Date	End Date	Tags
Fall Into Cozy Fantasy	Selina J. Eckert	Give	Aug 28, 2023	Oct 7, 2023	Cozy, Fantasy
Furred & Feathered Stories with fanfics	Melissa Gunn	Give	Aug 31, 2023	Sep 30, 2023	Urban Fantasy, Young Adult, Fantasy, Cozy, Magical Realism
Detect a Great Deal	Yvonna Black	Give	Sep 1, 2023	Oct 1, 2023	Magic, Mystery, Cozy, Detective, Paranormal
Cozy Mystery Giveaway	Heather Mullaly	Giveaway	Sep 1, 2023	Oct 1, 2023	Amateur Sleuth, Cozy, Mystery, Young Adult

StoryOrigin's group promotion page also allows you to filter search results by genre.

So what are they?

Let's say twenty authors sign up to join the promotion, and each has an average of two thousand subscribers. Your book will be exposed to a potential audience of forty thousand readers who are all interested in your genre. That's quite a few, right?

There are different types of promotions. Some aim at building your newsletter subscriptions by offering the readers a free book in exchange for their email address. Others focus on sales or target readers in Kindle Unlimited. You can even promote your audiobooks for a handful of dollars a month.



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Steve Higgs



Steve Higgs

High school Valedictorian enlists in the Marine Corps under a guaranteed tank contract. An inauspicious start that was quickly superseded by excelling in language study.


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