

INDIE AUTHOR MAGAZINE



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BETAS & ARCS

**Piracy Prevention
Programs for Your ARC's
Maiden Voyage**

**Hacked: How Amazon
Responded to a Viral
Trend that Harmed
Indie Authors**

**Saying More with Less:
The Subtle Art of Ad Copy**

**Sharing Is Caring: Document
Sharing Tips and Best Platforms
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Securely**

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Featured Author:**

**Joanna
Penn**

**A Roadmap to Story
Revision: Developmental
Editors or Beta Readers?**

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FROM THE EDITOR IN CHIEF

Once you've written "The End," how do you prepare for your manuscript to go in front of new eyes?

By "new eyes," I mean those of your editor, beta readers, or ARC team—that special selection of people who get to see your "book" before it's truly a book. Putting your published book out into the world is a whole different level of courage, but that doesn't mean sharing the just-finished story feels any less nerve-wracking.

Here, I've been on both sides of the table. I remember the feeling of sending my first manuscript to my beta team ... and the all-caps text I sent to a friend afterward. And as an editor, I've seen it all, from emails warning me about the scenes they think read awkwardly to authors who want to apologize for every mistake I find.

Still, for all the time we spend worrying about how our story will be received, perhaps we're ignoring a more important aspect of letting our manuscripts fly the nest. There are plenty of times the publishing process asks us to trust others with the work we've pored over for countless hours, and as *IAM's* Tiffany Robinson points out in her feature this month, it can be easy to overlook the security of your draft once it's in others' hands. You likely backed up your work-in-progress as you wrote it; if not, this month's 10 Tips piece might offer an idea for an easy—and free—way to start. But have you preserved a master file separate from the one you send to others? Did you remind your beta team not to share snippets of your work without permission? Are you distributing ARCs securely, so only your selected readers can access them?

We like to think the team we work with will treat our book with the care it deserves, and as preciously as some of our readers will once it's in their hands. But maybe it's time we all take a moment to do the same.

Your words are valuable; in this editor's opinion, that's worth protecting.



Nicole Schroeder
Editor in Chief
Indie Author Magazine

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A Literary Dichotomy:

There are those who write as a cerebral exercise, and then there are those authors who make money. Here's an axiom that you should apply to all facets of life. People don't like getting talked down to.

Simple words don't have to be conveyed simply. Words are the prism through which we deliver stories that explode in a starburst of color and emotion in our readers' minds.

I once tested with an IQ of 153. I went to law school and didn't find it that hard. I graduated summa cum laude. Yet I don't have to tell people how smart I am because I'm not. Smart people don't make the mistakes that I've made.

Every story has a theme, and every story delivers a part of the author to the reader. Whether it's philosophy, religion, leadership, governance, or—my personal favorite—how much I detest bureaucrats, my ideas about the world always find their way into my books, but subtly so. Will readers know the seeds that I've planted? Maybe. Maybe not.

Are you using a thesaurus to make yourself sound more intelligent? I recommend you don't. Use the words you know to tell the story you are compelled to tell, but do it in a way that leaves the readers thinking. Making them think doesn't require fifty-cent words and a dictionary.

Look at it another way. If readers don't read your story, have you accomplished what you set out to do? One study suggested the largest population of book buyers reads at the eighth-grade level. If you're writing fancier than that, then you are losing your appeal to the greatest

Simple Words, Not Simple Stories

number of readers. How many people actually read *The Silmarillion*? If you have, kudos! Did you enjoy it?

I write books that people can read quickly. But I hide Easter eggs within the story and share my thoughts on what a better world looks like, no matter whether I'm writing about Earth or somewhere else. Subtle but impactful. I've sold over a million books written at, according to AutoCrit, a 6.3 grade level. I was shooting for eighth grade. My average is 1.3 syllables per word. Like I said, my books read fast.

I don't need to bend the reader's mind, but I do want them thinking after they've finished. Every one of my characters acts with a purpose that makes sense to them. There's no wanton violence for action's sake. Everything is purpose driven and built upon relatable characters. We're all one bad event away from turning into a villain. What would push any of us over the edge?

Simple words. Complex subjects. Complex characters whose actions speak louder than their intentions. One step away from ignominy.

Don't get caught up in the debate between literary fiction and everyone else. Remember, no one likes to be talked down to. Write books that people want to read, and if you want to make money in this business, write for the greatest population of book buyers. You don't have to surrender any of your ideals. Your challenge is to use the right words to convey the emotions in a way that best resonates with the most readers. ■

Craig Martelle

Dear Indie Annie,

I've hired personal assistants (PAs) and virtual assistants (VAs) in the past with varying degrees of horrible experiences. But I know myself, and I keep burning myself out trying to wear all the hats. I could put out more books a year if I didn't have to do the things that slow me down the most. Where do you find PAs? How much money and time is too much (or not enough) for one? And once you have a PA/VA, what do you ask them to do?

Perplexed about PAs

DEAR PERPLEXED,

I know what you mean. One just can't get the staff these days.

I'm joking; obviously one can. But that cliché runs as true today as in any Victorian melodrama. In my experience, a good team takes time to build, and often we expect the “help” to come to us fully formed and ready to hit the ground running. What an awful phrase!

Another adage that sadly rings true is that you get what you pay for. The nub of your question lies there, in my humble opinion. The question is not “What should I pay that person?” but “How much is that person's time worth to me?”

When people start out, they waste a lot of money—that they often haven't even earned yet—on PAs, VAs, fancy websites, and courses that suck away their investment and offer little in return. They are then burnt by the experience and wary of investing in someone else's time again. They were finding solutions before identifying what needed to be solved.

There are many author services out there touting how they can support you with X, Y, or Z offerings, and it's easy to believe you need all of it, exactly as described. However, what they offer may not be what you need, at least not at this point in your career.

So, my lovely little Perplexed, the best place to start is to sit with your process for a while and draw up a clear specification of work. You may realize there is a lot on offer you don't need or are happy to manage yourself.

For example, your PA or VA may do book tours, a service whereby they convince book bloggers and vloggers to review and promote your latest release. In some genres, such a service would be amazing; in others, a waste of money, time, and effort. The same with building your presence on social media.

Are the platforms they know best really the ones where your audience hangs out? If you haven't done the prework on what you need, then it is easy to be dazzled by a package that, in reality, won't serve you at all.

Does your prospective PA/VA understand your audience? A good PA with a shared passion for your genre and established links could be worth their weight in gold. But that is just one factor to consider. Your PA



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may advertise themselves as the Romance Queen, for example, but that is not enough to gauge how effective they will be for your Romance titles. Part of your prework is to write a list of questions for them to answer, just as in any job interview process.

How many clients do they currently have? Can you ask for references? This request should be a no-brainer, to be honest, but it would amaze you how many shy author types feel it is inappropriate to ask.

How many hours a week are they available to work? Ten, twenty, thirty? I may only need the PA to work for me for two hours a week interacting on TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, but if that same PA has ten other clients all wanting the same two hours, and they can only work three hours a day, Monday to Friday, when are they going to fit me in? In reality, they are already overextended. Adding me to their client list will mean they need to find an extra five hours a week, and that may not be possible. Efficiency and effectiveness will slide.

I know, I know, asking such questions may feel intrusive; however, in my experience, I would rather pay someone a decent hourly rate that allows them to use their skills and expertise with a smaller number of carefully selected clients than fight for attention from someone struggling not only to meet deadlines and expectations but also make ends meet.

Which takes me full circle to my earlier question: how much is that person's time worth to me? Again, this is all about doing your homework. How much time do you spend on those administrative tasks versus how many words could you write in that time? At the beginning of your career, it's hard to attach a value to those words, but dear Perplexed, I hear from your question that you are already making some money from the sales of your

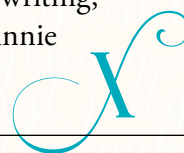
books. You must have a sense of how much your words are worth.

Paying another person to do those tasks frees you up to earn more money. Does your budget allow you to honor that saving at a respectable hourly rate for your PA? At first, it may be hard to see how, for argument's sake, \$30 an hour is a fair exchange if you can't identify that you can then earn \$50 an hour. But if and when you can, the math is much easier. Until then, you may have to take a deep breath and trust this investment will be worth it in the long run.

And to ensure that it is worth it, you have to do yet more homework. Ask fellow author friends if they have any recommendations. Look behind the flashy headlines and check that the PA/VA can deliver and has delivered on their promises before. Ensure those promises are what you actually need, and don't be swayed by the shiny stuff you don't need. Remember, you are the client. A good PA/VA will be adaptable to your business needs. Be clear about what exactly you are buying in terms of their time. Detail this as much as possible in a mutually agreeable contract that you both sign. Have regular meetings to update and check on progress. And remember, building a profitable working relationship takes time and investment on both sides. Manage your expectations, provide time for training and development, and carefully monitor progress. If things start going awry, deal with it straight away.

You're the boss! You need to act like one. Set standards, give clear instructions, and provide positive feedback, and both of you can grow together.

Happy writing,
Indie Annie



10 TIPS FOR GOOGLE WORKSPACE

Unlock a world of creativity and communication with the integrated tools of Google Workspace. Once a free platform for writers on a budget and not thought to be useful, Google’s ecosystem has matured. More and more writers are turning to it as their platform of choice.

Anywhere you need to go, Google is there with you, seamless across platforms and devices. Although the platform is useful for writing on the go, it can also be an asset in your home office. In this ten tips article, *IAM* wants to give you ideas on how to use the tools Google offers from an author’s point of view.

1

KEEP YOUR WORD PROCESSOR IN THE CLOUD

The Google Docs word processor is powerful in function, automatically saves your words in the cloud, and gives you access to your files at a moment’s notice, making it a perfect place to write essays, articles, and poetry. Google Docs is always there in your browser for a quick idea or to place research materials. During travel, you have all you need at any location. Even without a data signal, if you’ve marked the file as “Available Offline”—found in settings on Google Chrome or on the Google Docs app for mobile devices—you can work offline and sync your prose later.

2

START WITH A BLUEPRINT FOR ORGANIZED CREATIVITY

When starting a new project, a blank page can often stall you. Use the outline feature in Google Docs to your advantage. Find it by clicking on the list icon in the upper lefthand corner of your screen. Write a summary of your idea at the top. To create the outline, write the titles of each section of your work on the document page. Highlight each section’s title, and click on the “Styles” box in the ribbon. Select a “heading” designation for each of the titles. As you do, each title will pop up in the outline section.

Pro Tip: When using the outline feature, click to jump to that part of the document. For longer projects, this can be a real time-saver.

3 TELL IT LIKE IT IS For authors who prefer to dictate rather than type their novels, Docs has a free, built-in dictation function via Chrome browsers. All you need is a microphone for your computer. To use it, go to “Tools” in the ribbon, then select “Voice Typing.” You’ll see a red microphone button appear. Click the red button and start speaking. To stop the dictation, click the red button again. You can also use your keyboard at the same time and vary your input into the document with a mixture of typing and voice. This can be a useful tool for drafting fiction—sometimes it is easier to access those deep ideas if you talk about them first.

4 CUSTOMIZE DOCS TO WORK FOR YOU You can customize Google Docs with third-party apps known as “add-ons.” You can find them under “Extensions” with “Get add-ons.” There are hundreds in Google Marketplace. Some are free to use, and others require a fee or a subscription. Using add-ons, you can make your Docs experience a reflection of your personal writing needs.

Here are a few popular add-ons for writing:

- **Table of Contents:** Scans your document for headings and subheadings. It will create an index you can use to jump to any part of your document.
- **Highlighter:** Highlight your text!
- **Text Cleaner:** Toggle between different modes to remove excess white space, tabs, or line breaks.
- **Docs to Markdown:** Converts a Google Doc to simple, readable Markdown or HTML.

Pro Tip: As a novelist, poet, and essayist, these are a few more of my favorite add-ons:

- **EasyBib Bibliography Creator:** For essay and academic writing, a bibliography tool is indisputable. This one covers many styles, including MLA, APA, and Chicago. (Available for free!)
- **OneLook Thesaurus:** This thesaurus has six functions to help you find that perfect word. It also provides links to definitions and usage examples. (Available for free!)
- **ProWritingAid:** ProWritingAid pairs with MS Word and Scrivener and actively checks your grammar on social media. It also integrates with Google Docs seamlessly via this add-on. (Requires subscription.)
- **Speakd:** If you plan to produce audiobooks, having this add-on read your prose first will be of great help in preparing your book for a narrator. (Available for free!)

5 DIGITIZE YOUR NOTEBOOK

Most authors carry a small notebook to jot down ideas. Sometimes those ideas get buried in the pages or outright lost when a notebook goes missing. With Google Keep, you can save your ideas in the cloud, making your thoughts easy to access.

Start your idea in Keep, and later move it to Docs to refine it further. You can create notes by typing or speaking via your mobile device to create a narrative note or bulleted list. Keep can add images from your camera roll, hold clickable links, and more. Each note's title automatically formats to stand out from the rest of the note.

Pro Tip: Google Keep could be a replacement or supplement for your little notebook.

I pin a note to the top of Keep where I add my ideas on the go. Thanks to the pin, it is always easy to find. Since Keep can turn an image into a note, if you prefer to keep your paper notebook, you can snapshot the pages and add them to your digital system for better storage and organization or as a backup in case things go missing.

6 UNLOCK THE SECRETS OF GEOGRAPHY

For the novelist, Google Maps and Earth can be excellent research tools. Using Maps, map out the distances between the points of your story for accuracy, verify the spelling of street names, or plan a route for your character to take in real time. If you want to see distant locations but don't have the budget to travel there yourself, Earth is useful. Zoom in on almost any point of the planet and see the location at eye level. Note what trees grow there, what the buildings look like, and more. Great descriptions start with accurate details, and both Earth and Maps put these in the palm of your hand.

7 ORGANIZE YOUR DATA

Submitting short stories and poetry requires organization. Keep track of where you've sent a piece or the markets you are interested in using a Google Sheets spreadsheet, a free program integrated into the Google ecosystem. Create your own, or search for examples online, like the Submission Tracker Template created by author Matt Bell and published on his website: <https://mattbell.com>.

8

MAKE SENSE OF ALL YOUR BITS AND BYTES

Google Drive is the backbone of the entire Google platform of tools. It is where you can organize your projects and create folders for your short stories, poetry, and novels. One of the easiest ways to organize projects is to create an overall “Writing” folder and separate subfolders for novels, short stories, poetry, or essays. Separate your projects into the categories where they fit best. This should make it easier to find them later.

If you have documents you use as reference materials, you may use the star marker to make it easier to find them later. Drive also allows you to color-code your folders.

Remember to organize as you go. If you leave your Docs, spreadsheets, or photos scattered at random in your Drive, eventually you will encounter chaos.

Pro Tip: I also create a designated folder for public readings in Drive. I prepare excerpts of my novels or group shorter work for easier reading on my smartphone. These are copies of my regular writing, never the original, and include reading notes I’ve added for myself. This allows me to always have my entire reading catalog available. Having my work all in one folder on Drive makes it easier to decide what to read at an event.

9

TRANSCEND LINGUISTIC BORDERS

It’s always advisable to have a human translator translate your work for print, but using Google Translate can help with researching foreign terms or adding phrases in other languages to give your characters flair. Translate accesses up to eighty-five languages. Its accuracy across different languages varies, though the program’s overall accuracy averages to about 82.5 percent, according to a 2021 study published by Springer Nature that looked at Translate’s accuracy in certain hospital settings.

10

TRACK YOUR SCHEDULES, COMMITMENTS, AND DREAMS

As an author, you can build a calendar to schedule writing days and deadlines and to book marketing dates or appearances. Calendar is a powerful tool for creating an efficient workflow and keeping you on track with your publisher or on a self-imposed schedule as an independent author. You can also create calendars to share with coworkers to keep your writing associates on track.

Google has become an indispensable companion in our daily lives. With its relatively seamless integration across devices and platforms and its wide variety of tools and programs, it has simplified tasks and opened new realms of knowledge and possibilities for authors. ■

Wendy Van Camp

Building a Creative Career: A Q&A with Joanna Penn

Award-nominated author, podcaster, and creative entrepreneur Joanna Penn is a force to be reckoned with in the world of writing and publishing. Writing under the name J. F. Penn, she's a *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of Thrillers, Dark Fantasy, and Crime. Her popular ARKANE Action-Adventure Thrillers, Brooke & Daniel Psychological Thrillers, and Mapwalker Fantasy Adventures have earned her legions of fans. Beyond that, she's a nonfiction author and writing coach, helping other authors grow their businesses to the same level of success. "I kind of think of myself as a sort of crash-test dummy for the indie author community," Joanna says. "I'll just give it a go, and then we'll see what happens, and hopefully other people can learn from that."

Joanna is also the host of the award-winning podcast, *The Creative Penn*. With new episodes airing every Monday, the show features interviews and insights on creativity, publishing options, book marketing, and creative entrepreneurship. The podcast has garnered over 8.4 million downloads across 228 countries since its launch in 2009.

As Joanna's latest nonfiction book, *Pilgrimage: Lessons Learned From Solo Walking Three Ancient Ways*, wraps up its launch and as she prepares for the release of her stand-alone Dark Fantasy/Horror

novel, *Catacomb*, IAM sat down with Joanna to discuss her journey as a creative entrepreneur and how she feels about emerging technologies.

The following responses have been edited for length and clarity.

In your career, you've been a fiction and nonfiction author; a public speaker; an entrepreneur; and, possibly most recognizably, the face of *The Creative Penn*. Tell us how you started down this path.

Well, back in 2007, I turned thirty. And as we all do when we hit a milestone birthday, I was like, "What the hell am I doing with my life?" I was working as a business consultant at the time, and I was highly paid—like six figures. But I was just miserable. So I started to try and figure out what I wanted to do with my life. I've always been a reader, so I started reading all the books on career change and thus wrote my first book, which was called *How to Enjoy Your Job or Find a New One*—which I later rewrote under the title *Career Change*. That introduced me to writing, and then I looked at the publishing industry. I discovered it would take a couple of years to get an agent or



to get a publisher, and I thought there must be an easier way. Plus, I was a businesswoman. And I thought, “Well, I want to leave my job. So how do I make this a career?”

That was in late 2007, when the iPhone was launched and when the Kindle was launched, and so it was precisely the right time to decide to move into self-publishing. I self-published in early 2008 and did a print run back in the day. Print-on-demand was not a thing, you know. Smashwords was the main way to get into places, and then later the international Kindle allowed international authors to publish, and that was off to the races. So 2008, I first published. In 2009, I started *The Creative Penn* podcast—so it has been going a very long time now. In 2011, I wrote my first novel, and I started to make enough money to leave my job. In 2015, I made more money than I had in my job and have done ever since.

I’ve been doing this now for fifteen years, but I’m still writing and publishing. I have around forty books now across various brands. And I love what I do.

In what genres do you write other than self-help?

As Joanna Pen, I write self-help, authorship, and entrepreneurship. And then, as J. F. Penn, I write Action-Adventure Thrillers, Dark Fantasy, Crime, Horror, and now travel memoir. I have a bit of a popcorn brain. I always want to be doing different things and writing in different genres. I know some people can stick to just one thing, but I can’t.

The advice I give to many people, if you want to sell a lot of books, is to write a series in a genre. But equally, if you want a long-term career, then you have to allow your creativity and your muse to some-

times suggest books that perhaps might not make business sense but that you really want to write, like my pilgrimage book. I mean, seriously, it’s a book about solo midlife walking pilgrimages, which doesn’t fit any of my existing brands or audiences. But it’s actually doing quite well anyway, because a lot of people want to walk the Camino de Santiago, and that’s one of the walks I did.

I understand you were formerly in IT. How did your background help you as a writer and as an entrepreneur?

I think the term IT can mean many things to many people. But I have degrees in theology and also psychology. So I don’t come from a technical background, but then my first job was implementing software.

Like many people, when you leave university, you need to pay your debts and you need to make a living. And I went into consulting, and then I just learned the systems and ended up specializing in implementing accounts payable software, even though I’m not an accountant and I didn’t have any financial background. It’s kind of crazy, but many of us with day jobs end up taking steps that ten years later, we’re like, “How on Earth did I get here?” And so that’s what happened to me. But in terms of how it helped, it forced me into learning about business. It was also a project-based job, where I would go into a company, I would implement a system, and we would have a deadline date. Everything had to be done by that date. So having that project approach was very helpful.

I also learned about computer systems and not being scared of them, and I think this is something that a lot of authors need to do. Essentially, you have to just play. You have to understand that doing a

course or anything like that is no replacement for actually getting on whatever system you're trying to do, whether it's uploading your book to KDP or doing a Facebook Ad for the first time or trying AI writing software. These are things that you have to try, and then you'll figure it out.

Also, know how fast technology changes. I did that job for thirteen years, and much of what I implemented disappeared because technology changes every year. Everything I did disappeared. Something new came along, and something new came along, so that's another thing we need to keep in mind—technology moves on, and things that we did a decade ago, or in my case fifteen years ago when I started, have moved on, and we have to keep updating our skills as time goes by.

You have so many proverbial irons in the fire, and you do a number of in-person and virtual events. How do you balance your business life? Your time management system must be phenomenal.

I have a couple of things. The first is a sort of broad plan, which is that mornings are creative time and afternoons are marketing time or business time. We're recording this in my afternoon, and I do my podcast interviews in the afternoon. I do accounting stuff and business stuff and ads and blah, blah, blah in the afternoon. In the morning, I create whatever is new in the world.

This sort of morning and afternoon split is something I've done since the beginning. Back when I started writing seriously, I got up at 5 a.m. and I wrote before work. Then I came home from work, and in the evening I learned. I did courses. I built my business. I started my podcast, and I did that from 2006 or 2007 to 2011. Even if you only

have half an hour, you can still do it even if you're working a full-time job.

But also I only work on one project at a time. There are some authors who can work on multiple projects, multiple books. But I can't, so I pick whatever book I'm working on, and then I will work that through to the point of completion. And then I will start the next project.

How are you using artificial intelligence in your writing?

Obviously, all of us authors use AI. If you publish on Amazon, if you use Grammarly or ProWritingAid, if you use Google, if you use Facebook, if you use TikTok or Twitter or any of these things—we're all using it. But what's really changed in the last six months is the rise of generative AI, and that's going to be inside things like Microsoft Word very soon.

Tools like Sudowrite, for example, are great for expanding your use of sensory description. You can use ChatGPT, for example, to help you write sales descriptions and to write ad copy. Grammarly and ProWritingAid now have generative text within them to help you edit your words in a much more effective fashion. So there are absolutely tons of tools that we can be playing with as authors. It's just a case of deciding what you want to use and playing with them to see what works for you and your process.

I've built a business for the last fifteen years

Want to read more from IAM's featured author interview with Joanna Penn? Read the extended Q&A online!
<https://writelink.to/penn>

on the back of the technologies launched in 2007 and 2008, so I see myself now kind of relaunching my career on the back of the technologies that are going to take us into the next wave of our success as an industry. I'm determined to be on the vanguard of this, as I was on the vanguard of self-publishing and also podcasting in the early days—before it was even called podcasting, really.

Is there anything else you'd like *Indie Author Magazine* readers to know?

Every year I would say this, but it really is the best time to be an author and a creator. We mentioned the AI stuff earlier, but I feel like we are at the beginning of another flowering, as we were fifteen years ago, which kind of kick-started a whole generation of indie authors. This is the next wave. And I'm pretty excited to be part of that. ■

Gayle Leeson



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Exploring Flights of Foundry, A Virtual Sci-Fi Convention

On April 14, I moved my favorite houseplant to the edge of my desk and clamped my backdrop behind my office chair, adjusting my lights and setting up my webcam. I was not the only one. Writers, podcasters, and artists across the world were doing the same, preparing to appear at the annual online Science-Fiction convention Flights of Foundry from the comfort of their homes.

I am a Science-Fiction and Historical Fiction author and a Speculative poet. I have spoken regularly at Science-Fiction conventions all over the United States for many years about writing craft, podcasting, and anthology editing, as well as about being a working artist or about fandoms. As an author, I find conventions are a great way to find an audience and gain exposure for your books, though they're equally helpful for bloggers, podcasters, and artists—and the genre-specific events are hard to beat.

When the pandemic hit in 2020, all in-person events immediately stopped. Like most of the authors I know, my world came to a screeching halt. We did our best to remain safe and figure out what to do next. A few months later, most conventions

experimented with virtual alternatives, and I learned how to do a Zoom meeting.

This is when I discovered Flights of Foundry, or Flights, an online Science-Fiction convention sponsored by an organization called DreamFoundry, a 501(c)3 non-profit that works to support creative professionals pursuing careers in the speculative arts. The annual three-day event showcases high-quality speakers and panels on a multitude of topics. This year was their fourth year. Flights isn't a conference tailored only to authors; beyond writing tracks, they also offer tracks related to science, podcasting, costuming, Speculative poetry, and other genre-related topics. Every sort of panel and event you might expect to find at an in-person Science-Fiction convention is represented, including author readings, artist demos, and Speculative performances.

Flights has always been online, never in-person, and organizers build the event's schedule on a world timeline. It is not American-centric but truly international in scope. Panels take place around the clock, encompassing all time zones, and panelists and audience members hop into the system during times that work for them.

THIS YEAR'S FLIGHTS OF FOUNDRY

The Guests of Honor for the 2023 convention included a diverse selection of authors, artists, and Sci-Fi creators:

- Solomon Robert Nui Enos, a Native Hawaiian artist, illustrator, and visionary
- Helen Gould, a writer, editor, sensitivity consultant, speaker, Twitch streamer, and part of Rusty Quill Ltd.
- Shelvi Garg, aka The Dancing Bookworm, who gives a glimpse into her life through her vlogs
- Sloane Hong, an illustrator, comic artist, and tattooer from Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa, New Zealand
- Xueting C. Ni, who was born in Guangzhou, during China's reopening to the West. She is currently translating and editing a collection of contemporary Chinese Horror fiction and lives just outside London with her partner.
- Sarah Gailey, a Hugo Award-winning and bestselling author of Speculative fiction, short stories, and essays

The Guests of Honor are featured, but there are dozens of program participants at Flights, each speaking or moderating panels on a myriad of topics. All panels are recorded and live streamed to the website. The program later uploads selected panels to DreamFoundry's YouTube channel for public viewing.

Via Webex, the program also hosted non-live-streamed conferences where authors could hold private readings of their work. Attendees could also gather and hold conversations, similar to how you would chat with others in the hallway at an in-person convention.

BEING A PANELIST AT FLIGHTS OF FOUNDRY

I frequently teach Speculative poetry workshops at conventions across the country. This year, I taught

my generative workshop, "Prompts To Poetry," at Flights. With the Webex conference rooms, I could not only hear my students but also chat with them in real time. My class was filled to the audience limit, and I had returning students.

I also did an artist demo from my home studio. I have been a line-art artist on the convention circuit for twenty years, but I changed up things for 2023 and held up my watercolor notebooks, paints, and tools instead. I even got to speak about my hobby of urban sketching.

As a poet laureate, I also spoke on Speculative poetry panels, as well as about being an anthology editor, and I moderated a fun panel about writing fan fiction. Speaking on the formal panels, which were recorded and live streamed, was a little more complex. As a panelist, once you found your way into the virtual room via the link they sent beforehand, however, it was all quite simple. Flights assigns a volunteer to take care of all technical needs.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE

Participants register for the event at the group's website, <https://flights-of-foundry.org>. You are welcome to attend for free, but organizers do request a donation to help keep the program going. Registration begins several months before the event begins and remains open throughout the event. The website hosts the program guide, which is accessible once you create a login, and lists the panelists and their biographies, as well as information about the artists and vendors who are selling their wares at the event. On the website, you can watch most panels and main events via Webex live stream.

There is more to the event than a simple website, however. The backbone of the action is on the DreamFoundry Discord server. The server is up year round and is a place for writers and artists to stay in touch when the convention is over. During the event, the DreamFoundry server expands with new channels related to the Flights of Foundry convention. Each live-streamed "room" has a corresponding

channel on the Discord server, allowing people who are watching to chat with one another and ask questions of the panelists. Attendees can also join Webex rooms as audience members during panel sessions. After a panel, it is customary for panelists to pop into the designated Discord channel to greet the audience and answer further questions.

In addition, DreamFoundry sets channels for vendors to post about their wares and for artists to showcase their paintings. They create a popular channel for people to show off their pets and then offer the photos as part of a panel later in the convention. Once the event is over, DreamFoundry will remove these special channels from public view, allowing the server to offer a clean slate each year for the next event.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Flights of Foundry is a high-quality convention offering several program tracks of benefit to authors of the Science-Fiction genre, from writing craft to marketing, as well as a chance to listen in on the words of your fellow published authors. It is a convention you can attend from the comfort of your own home without the high cost of travel or paying a high fee to register. It truly puts a convention within reach of anyone with access to a computer, tablet, or smartphone.

Next year, Flights of Foundry will take place September 27–29. Those interested in attending can join the DreamFoundry Discord channel for updates, or check in with the group’s website in late spring 2024 at <https://flights-of-foundry.org>. ■

Wendy Van Camp

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Sun, Sand, and Getting Schooled

THE 2023 IBPA PUBLISHING UNIVERSITY CONFERENCE IN REVIEW



Eryka Parker on day one of the 2023's IBPA Publishing University

All photos credited to Eryka Parker

The Independent Book Publisher Association (IBPA), which recently celebrated its fortieth anniversary, chose a resort and spa nestled on beautiful Coronado Island, located just across the bay from downtown San Diego, as the landscape for its 2023 Publishing University conference. With catered meals, complimentary drinks, and first-class hospitality, the resort was the perfect location for an already memorable event.

Thrilled about attending the conference for the very first time as a new IBPA member, I registered as an author-publisher to learn valuable industry information, as well as to network and learn directly from industry experts. I hoped the experience would provide access to resources, tools, and content geared toward independent publishers.

The conference delivered in more ways than I anticipated.

Not only were emerging industry trends and best practices presented, but the overall themes of the conference also showcased IBPA's commitment to support publishers at all status levels. Attendees ranged in experience from having just started a publishing company to having published books for over fifty years. There was also a central theme at the event of supporting publishers representing marginalized communities.

Independent publishers' conferences provide access to valuable insight on trends and best practices and, often, clarity for authors and publishers on how to navigate independent publishing more effectively. The IBPA Publishing University 2023



Erlyka Parker and Alexa Biguante of Write, Publish, Sell

CONFERENCE EVENTS

This year's IBPA Publishing University conference took place May 4–6 and featured keynote speeches from a heavyweight roster of publishing trailblazers, along with innovative breakout sessions and ignite talks. On Thursday, attendees who wanted a deeper analysis of specific publishing topics could participate in four half-day pre-conference workshops. The workshop topics covered everything authors would want to know about Amazon, starting the publishing journey, making their publishing programs a business, and solutions for sustainability and leveling up their publishing programs.

I attended the Amazon workshop and found the information about Audible, Kindle Unlimited, Goodreads, and Amazon Ads well worth the investment. Each facilitator demonstrated tips for navigating the publishing, marketing, and advertising processes from a publisher's perspective. They covered how to build a viable online platform, how to create A+ Content on author pages, Amazon store creation, affiliate programs, and must-have details for book listings.

The objectivity of the facilitators regarding the pros and cons of Amazon programs and features

Scholarship helped cover conference registration fees for some individuals who needed assistance with growing their publishing programs. The base cost of the conference was \$495 for IBPA members and \$595 for non-members. Add-ons such as access to pre-conference events, private networking events, and the book awards ceremony ranged from \$60 to \$95 extra.

WHAT IS IBPA?

In 1983, fifteen Southern California indie publishers founded the Publishers Association of Southern California (PASCAL) to assist independent publishers with national marketing initiatives. In 2008, the organization was renamed the Independent Book Publishers Association, or IBPA. Today, IBPA offers low-cost cooperative marketing programs for small indie publishing companies by providing access to education, community, and high-valued publishing resources.



BIPOC Publisher table at the Small Group Breakfast

The Future is Independent panel, from left: Rebekah "Bex" Borucki, IBPA CEO Andrea Fleck-Nisbet, Arthur A. Levine



gave us the option to decide which features best fit our current budget, needs, and expectations. Afterward, during the Literature and Libations networking event, there was an air of familiarity in the crowd and a happiness to meet one another. The energy was positive and upbeat, and the people I met were friendly, approachable professionals who were eager to learn about my company, my goals, and how they could help me reach them.

Friday, the first official day of the conference, offered guests the chance to attend an optional private networking breakfast. I met with the BIPOC and Marginalized Communities of Color in Publishing group, and during our casual discussion, we shared our visions for our publishing companies, our books, and our marketing strategies for market penetration and growth. We shared tips for setting up a vendor table, the best types of vending events to target, and how powerful it can be to partner with other small publishers to build audiences.

After attending a first-timer's orientation and enjoying a catered lunch, we were welcomed by IBPA's new CEO, Andrea Fleck-Nisbet, and listened to a panel discussion with Rebekah "Bex" Borucki, of Row House Publishing, and Arthur A. Levine, of Levine Querido and formerly of the Arthur A. Levine Books Scholastic imprint. They each touched on the value of equality and inclusivity of diverse writers in responsible publishing. This was followed by breakout sessions for publishers at all levels of experience and prescheduled one-on-ones with publishing experts to ask specific questions.

Panel discussion topics ranged from diversity and anti-racism in publishing, and obstacles facing marginalized publishing professionals, to the future of AI in publishing. IBPA provided recordings of all sessions to conference registrants after the event.

Industry professionals representing IngramSpark and IBPA, along with many other publishing and distribution organizations, were also accessible to answer questions and offer personal support throughout the conference.

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

In addition to the takeaways from the experience as a whole, each day of the event involved memorable moments for attendees to carry home with them. On Friday evening, I attended an optional dinner



Eryka and Rebekah "Bex" Borucki

for the thirty-fifth annual IBPA Benjamin Franklin Awards Ceremony. Publishers and their authors were celebrated by the entire ballroom as organizers announced and distributed book awards in several categories. One of my favorite moments was watching each publisher accept an award and give a speech on the inspiration behind the book and the author's journey.



Saturday morning was the Legends of Black Independent Publishing panel, moderated by Troy Johnson (African American Literature Book Club), which showcased the powerful stories of W. Paul Coates (Black Classic Press and BCP Digital Printing), Dr. Haki Madhubuti (Third World Press Foundation), Kassahun Checole (Africa World Press and Red Sea Press), Wade Hudson (Just Us Books), and Cheryl Hudson (Just Us Books). This legendary group of Black publishers shared stories of encountering blatant opposition, exclusion, and adversity during their journeys toward building successful publishing houses. The group’s backstories spanned decades, and showcased how their challenges spurred their determination to create platforms for the stories of the African diaspora, as well as to diversify the publishing landscape and give back to their communities. This powerful event was the most talked about by attendees by far, with common takeaways being the importance of community and a respect for the courage and diligence it took this group to persevere and remain fully committed to their purpose.

The panel also featured a surprise guest: Walter Mosley, who worked with Coates to publish one of his novels and has written for the popular television series *The Last Days of Ptolemy Grey*, among others. Mosley shared a few words with the audience and received a standing ovation from the crowd.

Last but not least, at the close of the event, IBPA announced the launch of a program for independent publishers from marginalized communities called the “Innovative Voices Program.” The program



Author Walter Mosley

will aim to provide a solid means for publishers from marginalized communities to gain the access, knowledge, and tools needed to succeed in ways that they haven’t been able to or allowed to in the past. According to the IBPA website, the first group of five publishers will begin the yearlong program on August 1, 2023, and graduate at the end of July 2024. To learn more about eligibility requirements and to apply for the program, visit <https://ibpa-online.org/page/InnovativeVoicesProgram/>. The application deadline is June 30, 2023.

The announcement was a satisfying end to a dynamic conference. I left with valuable new industry contacts, a to-do list for improvements to my publishing and author platforms, and renewed motivation after watching indie authors win awards and gain recognition by heavyweights in the industry.

Publishing University is a lively, information- and inspiration-packed event for authors and independent publishing houses looking for opportunities to connect with other publishers, gain access to major distributors and service providers, and keep on top of what’s new in the ever-changing publishing landscape.

Dates for future events have not yet been announced, but those interested can watch for updates via IBPA’s website, <https://publishinguniversity.org>, or the group’s newsletter. ■

Eryka Parker




Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Amazon pre-conference workshop



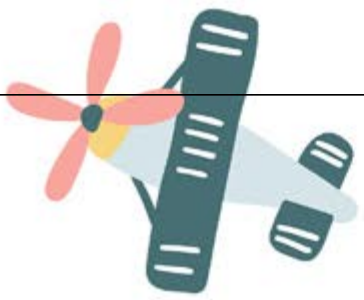
A Roadmap to Story Revision

DEVELOPMENTAL EDITOR OR BETA READERS—WHICH PATH IS RIGHT FOR YOUR STORY?



After several months or even years of research, interviews, and mastering the art of adept wordsmithery, you've finally finished your manuscript. You have cleared the skillful craft and creation hurdles and now face the challenge of polishing your masterpiece and introducing it to the world. This final editing and revision process looks different for many writers, as it involves various levels of review, critique, and feedback implementation. There are many options to consider, and you may wonder who you should involve in your review process. What qualifications and experience should you look for, and how familiar should they be with your topic and industry?

Independent authors frequently consult beta readers and developmental editors when attempting to identify major issues with their manuscript, and even with the similar roles they can play, many have strong reasons for including one or both parties in their manuscript evaluation process. So what's the difference between the two, and which will benefit your manuscript most? Two independent authors with different answers to the question shared their journeys revising their manuscripts and explained the reasons for their preferences.



DEVELOPMENTAL EDITORS VS. BETA READERS

Also known as substantive editing, developmental editing provides detailed feedback on the substance of a written piece. After a writer completes the first or second draft of their project, a developmental editor provides critiques on components such as theme, organization of ideas, plot, and characters. The editor takes the reader's expectations into account and ensures the project has a logical flow, a pronounced theme, consistency, and reader satisfaction. They provide a professional intensive analysis and expert guidance on how to create the best possible version of the project.

Getting a professional opinion on a project that is set for publication provides valuable insight and direction. Writers at all skill levels can benefit from an editor's critiques, guidance, and determination whether their project is on the right track. However, developmental editing comes at a time and financial cost. Writers with a tight budget or deadline should consider the steps involved in the developmental editing process to ensure it fits their needs and expectations.

On the other hand, a well-read beta reader can provide a new perspective on a written project different from that of an editor's. Assembling a team of beta readers who will provide feedback on potential inconsistencies, underdeveloped areas, or other disjointed issues with a manuscript can



make a substantial difference in modifying a manuscript to reach its highest potential. Although most beta readers aren't professionals in the editing and publishing industry, a qualified beta reader can be a great addition to your review team. A beta reader will provide honest feedback on a project, is familiar with the genre or topic, has the capacity to complete the project promptly, and is willing to provide a reader's perspective of the manuscript without being compensated.

Inviting around twelve to thirty beta readers to review a project is a great way to provide a useful consensus on manuscript issues, wrote Smashwords founder Mark Coker in a 2016 article for *Publishers Weekly* (<https://publishersweekly.com>). Keep in mind that only a portion of invited readers will finish the manuscript, and even fewer will provide in-depth feedback on the project. As the goal is to discover a theme among the responses and qualify whether feedback is relevant, the larger the beta reader pool, the better.

But can a beta reader's feedback compare to that of a developmental editor? A qualified beta reader can identify what works and what doesn't work with a manuscript's theme, character, or plot, but they won't necessarily be able to provide solutions for major issues in the way a developmental editor would.

USA Today and *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author Abby L. Vandiver is a hybrid author. When publishing independently, Vandiver, who also writes





as Abby Collette and Cade Bentley, prefers using a team of at least five well-read beta readers as opposed to hiring a developmental editor. “Developmental editing is an expense that self-published authors may never recoup over their career,” she says. In lieu of using a developmental editor, Vandiver says, “I feel that a writer should take craft classes to hone their skills.”

Beta readers have been an integral part of Vandiver’s revision process from the beginning. The author advocates building a strong team of beta readers by interacting on Goodreads, Facebook, and in other social media groups to build relationships with peer writers. “In order to publish my best work, I know that it needs to be critiqued,” she says. “I utilize common themes among my beta readers’ feedback to decide on which revisions to make. If it makes sense, I change it.”

Author Stony Rhodes promotes the use of developmental editors in the writing process but believes writers don’t fully understand their value. “I didn’t quite understand developmental editing when I began my writing journey,” she says. “I later learned that they assist in the process of crafting great stories

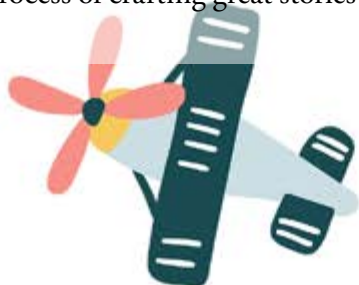
that resonate with readers. I believe researching the results that developmental editors have gotten for their writers is helpful when determining whether their services apply to your current needs.”


Rhodes, a number one Amazon bestselling Romance series author, also says she uses ten to twenty beta readers to learn more about the reader experience. “I want to know firsthand how the story makes them feel and what elements they wish I would have included in the story. It also helps to get an outside perspective on a project that I’m so close to.”

WHAT TO CONSIDER

To maximize the value of your revision process, first consider what will be the most beneficial type of feedback for your current needs. If you prefer receiving guidance, tools, and resources, consider seeking the assistance of a developmental editor, who can identify opportunities for improvement and suggest a viable implementation plan.

If you’re more interested in learning about how your book will be received by your target audience



An illustration of a winding road with a yellow dashed center line. A blue car is at the top left, a green car is in the middle right, and a yellow car is at the bottom right. There are various green plants and bushes along the road. A light blue cloud-like shape is in the background.

and what your readers will experience, beta readers are more than qualified to provide feedback that will create an inside track to this information.

Here are some other aspects of the decision to consider:

Cost

Developmental editing often requires a financial investment; the market average is \$0.07–\$0.08 per word. Beta readers typically do not charge for their services.

Training

Although a certification is not required, developmental editors should be experienced, with a catalog of writers whom they have helped achieve favorable results. Client accomplishments to look for include positive editorial and consumer reviews and book awards. Beta readers should be avid readers, preferably on your topic or in your genre.

Feedback

Most developmental editors provide an in-depth editorial letter featuring several pages of detailed feedback and recommended changes to your book.

Most beta readers provide only brief comments based on their opinions on the plot, characters, or dialogue in the manuscript. They don't normally give recommendations for project improvement, and their feedback can be subjective, Rhodes says, "versus [the] more objective feedback from a developmental editor, who is being paid to read and evaluate the project."

Remember that neither opting for developmental editing nor using a beta reader team needs to be mutually exclusive. Many indie authors, myself included, have successfully combined each service to help paint a full picture of their project's impact and determine a plan for implementing feedback. If using both, keep in mind that beta reader services are typically used after the developmental editing process to gain a clear reader's perspective on the project. The main goal is to identify your needs as a writer, the impact you want to make on your readers, and the optimal plan to revise and publish a book that will properly represent your ideas, core beliefs, and theme. ■

Eryka Parker

Piracy Prevention Programs for Your ARC's Maiden Voyage

There's no feeling quite like the elation of delivering your manuscript to someone excited to read it. You've poured hours, months, and sometimes years into your work, and now it's ready for the eyes of your beta, advanced reader copy (ARC), or review crew. Unfortunately, plenty of authors also understand the dread and disappointment of finding their published books pirated or shared without their knowledge or consent—and the situation can be even more painful when the story is unpublished.

There's a saying, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Consider this article your ounce. Unauthorized copying of digital content will always exist; it's nearly impossible to eliminate entirely, including with unpublished manuscripts. However, you can take steps to minimize the risk of this happening. With the proper programs, plus additional measures to secure your story before you share it, you can ensure your manuscript stays protected until you hit Publish.

DECIDE ON PRECAUTIONS BEFORE SHARING

Understanding potential risks when sharing digital manuscripts as ARCs or with beta readers or editors is essential. These individuals may not have the

same security measures as traditional publishers, so it's critical to take additional precautions to protect your work, like those listed below.

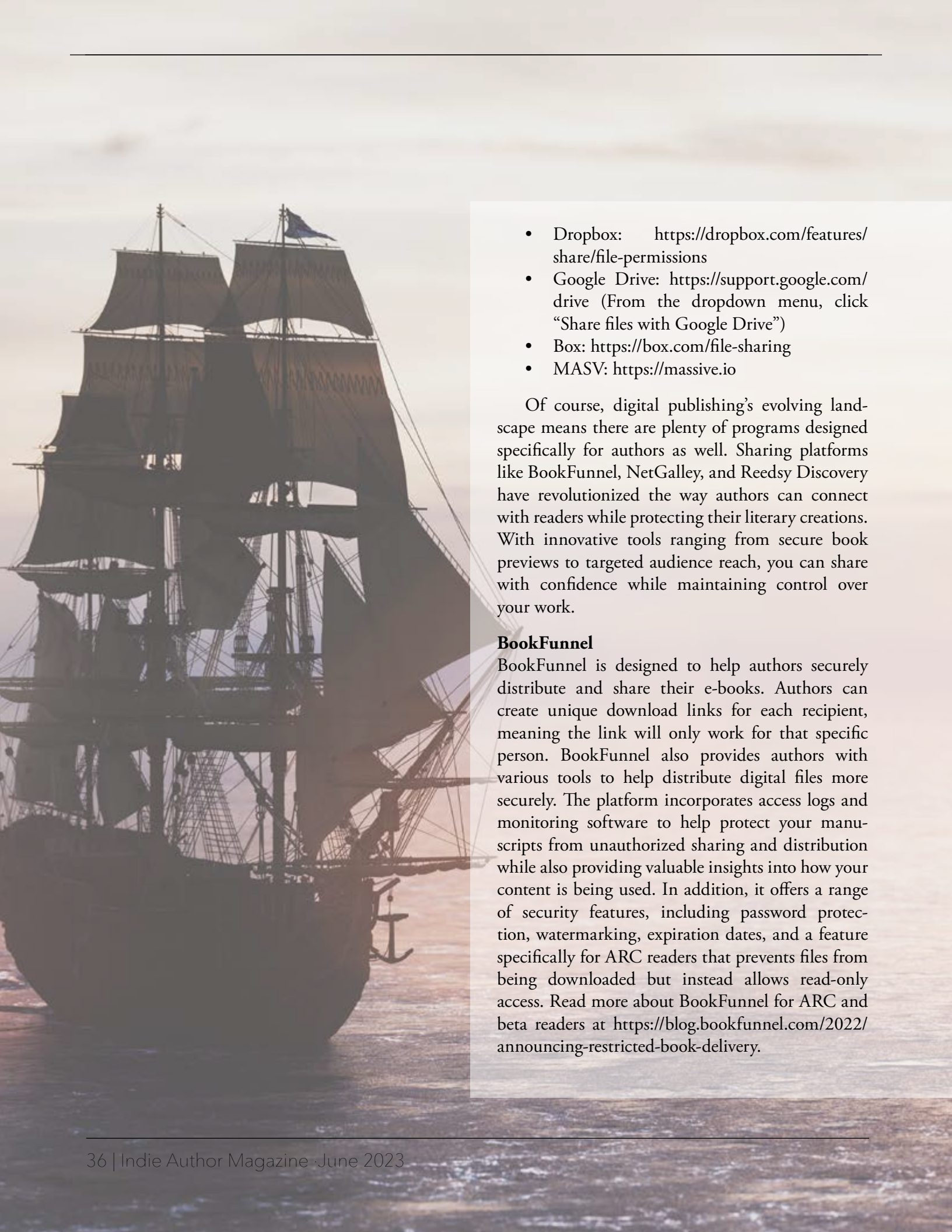
- **Use encryption:** Ensure your manuscript is encrypted using a robust encryption algorithm, such as AES-256. This will prevent unauthorized access to your manuscript. Most platforms employ some type of encryption, but you can also purchase more robust protection using systems like VeraCrypt or BitLocker.
- **Password-protect your manuscript:** Password-protect your manuscript to ensure only authorized individuals can access it. Use strong passwords that are difficult to guess, and change them frequently. Visit Adobe's Help Center to learn how to protect and compress PDF documents, or check out this article from *WIRED*, which has excellent information on password protections: <https://wired.com/story/how-to-password-protect-any-file/>.
- **Consider Using DRM:** Digital rights management (DRM) can help prevent unauthorized copying and distribution of your manuscript. Many platforms offer built-in DRM protection. However, although DRM can effectively prevent unauthorized sharing and distribution of digital content, there are always ways determined individuals can circumvent DRM protections. Additionally, DRM can limit the ability of legitimate users to access and use digital content in the ways they want. Ultimately, weigh your decision to use DRM against its potential drawbacks.
- **Non-disclosure agreements (NDAs):** Use NDAs, pre-signed terms of use, or similar agreements and contracts to ensure that individuals accessing your manuscript understand the importance of keeping it confidential. NDAs can also provide legal protection in case of a breach.
- **Watermarking:** Use watermarks to identify your manuscript and deter unauthorized

sharing. Watermarks can include your name, the date, and other identifying information. Static watermarks can be added manually on almost any platform. If using MS Word, go to the "Design" tab and select "Watermark." Choose a pre-configured watermark, like DRAFT, CONFIDENTIAL, or DO NOT COPY. For a custom picture or logo, or a custom text watermark, click on the "Custom watermark" option under the same menu. Dynamic watermarks are a step above standard watermarks and can digitally "point the finger" at the individual who had access to your work before it was shared. These are usually purchased through services like Dropbox's DocSend.

- **Monitor access:** Use file-sharing programs that provide access logs, so you can keep track of who has accessed your manuscript and when. This is also a great way to see who's fulfilling their reading commitments.
- **Educate readers:** Include a copyright notice or message in your manuscript stating that it is protected by copyright law and should not be shared without permission. You can also remind readers of this when you share the manuscript with them. ARC readers may share portions of your book out of excitement without understanding the intent that your work remain confidential until published.

COMMON FILE-SHARING PLATFORMS

In addition to access logs and monitoring software, file-sharing platforms like Dropbox, Google Drive, Box, and MASV offer a range of other security features, such as password protection, expiration dates, and restricted access permissions. It's essential to consider your options and choose a platform that meets your security needs. For specific details about these platforms, read *IAM's* Technology feature on document sharing tips and programs on page 40, or visit the following websites:



- Dropbox: <https://dropbox.com/features/share/file-permissions>
- Google Drive: <https://support.google.com/drive> (From the dropdown menu, click “Share files with Google Drive”)
- Box: <https://box.com/file-sharing>
- MASV: <https://massive.io>

Of course, digital publishing’s evolving landscape means there are plenty of programs designed specifically for authors as well. Sharing platforms like BookFunnel, NetGalley, and Reedsy Discovery have revolutionized the way authors can connect with readers while protecting their literary creations. With innovative tools ranging from secure book previews to targeted audience reach, you can share with confidence while maintaining control over your work.

BookFunnel

BookFunnel is designed to help authors securely distribute and share their e-books. Authors can create unique download links for each recipient, meaning the link will only work for that specific person. BookFunnel also provides authors with various tools to help distribute digital files more securely. The platform incorporates access logs and monitoring software to help protect your manuscripts from unauthorized sharing and distribution while also providing valuable insights into how your content is being used. In addition, it offers a range of security features, including password protection, watermarking, expiration dates, and a feature specifically for ARC readers that prevents files from being downloaded but instead allows read-only access. Read more about BookFunnel for ARC and beta readers at <https://blog.bookfunnel.com/2022/announcing-restricted-book-delivery>.

NetGalley

NetGalley is a popular digital service used by publishers and authors to distribute ARCs and digital review copies to readers, reviewers, booksellers, librarians, and other industry professionals before the book is published. This platform provides logs to help authors track requests and access to their books, as well as DRM protection to prevent unauthorized sharing.

NetGalley helps authors monitor access and track the usage of their manuscripts in three ways:

1. The option to set specific access parameters for ARCs, such as expiration dates or limits on the number of times a file can be downloaded
2. Detailed user activity tracking, including the number of times a file has been downloaded, who downloaded it, and when
3. Reporting tools to track engagement, download activity, and feedback from readers and reviewers

Find out more at <https://www.netgalley.com/tour>.

Reedsy Discovery

Reedsy Discovery allows authors to submit unpublished or newly published books for review by a community of book reviewers and readers. The platform aims to help authors gain exposure and visibility and connect readers with new and exciting books. Several features ensure the secure and controlled sharing of manuscripts, including

1. **File sharing:** Authors can upload their manuscripts directly to the Reedsy Discovery platform. It is then made available to reviewers and readers in a secure and controlled manner.
2. **Access controls:** Authors can set specific access controls for their manuscripts, such as limiting

the number of reviewers who can access the manuscript or setting an expiration date.

3. **User activity tracking:** The platform provides detailed user activity tracking, including information on who has accessed the manuscript and when.
4. **Reporting tools:** Reedsy Discovery offers a reporting tool that allows authors to track engagement and feedback from reviewers and readers.

The platform also offers DRM protection and watermarking to help prevent unauthorized sharing. Read more about Reedsy Discovery at: <https://reedsy.com/discovery/blog/launching-your-book-on-reedsy-discovery>.

Each file-sharing platform has unique features and pricing structures, so it's crucial to research and compare them before choosing one that best suits your needs.

WHAT TO DO IF IT HAPPENS TO YOU

Unauthorized copying of digital content is an unfortunate reality that cannot be completely eliminated, but it's important to remember you have the power to mitigate the risks involved, even with unpublished manuscripts. If you find yourself dealing with the unauthorized sharing of your manuscript, it can be a frustrating and upsetting experience. Still, the most important thing will be to remain calm. Take a deep breath and commit to a systematic approach to addressing the issue.

If someone shares your unpublished work without permission, here are some steps you can take:



1. Identify the source of the unauthorized sharing. This can be done through internet searches or anti-piracy software that scans the web for copies of your work. Once you have identified the source, take screenshots or save URLs to document the infringement.
2. Depending on the situation, you may want to contact the individual who shared your work and ask them to remove it. Should the infringement occur on a platform such as a social media site or file-sharing service, you can report the violation to the platform's copyright infringement team. Many platforms have policies and procedures for addressing copyright infringement, so it is recommended you follow that platform's specific process.
3. If initial efforts to remove the unauthorized sharing are unsuccessful, you may want to consider legal options. This can include sending a cease-and-desist letter, filing a Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) takedown notice, or pursuing a lawsuit. However, weighing the potential costs and benefits of pursuing legal action is necessary, as it can be lengthy and expensive.
4. Discovering that your work has been pirated or shared without your permission can be emotionally distressing. Remember to take care of yourself and seek support from friends, family, and professional resources if needed. It is also important not to let unauthorized sharing discourage you from continuing to pursue your writing career. ■

Tiffany Robinson

PLANNING TRAVEL TO A CONFERENCE?

Use miles.



Explore ways to make the
most of your award miles.

[Writelink.to/unitedair](https://writelink.to/unitedair)



Sharing Is Caring

DOCUMENT SHARING TIPS AND BEST PLATFORMS FOR DELIVERING YOUR MANUSCRIPT SECURELY

Whether it's your alpha or beta readers, your advance review copy (ARC) readers, or your editor, there are plenty of situations in which authors need to share their work with others before it's published. Doing so securely and easily can be daunting, especially if the person you need to share with uses a different program than you do. Luckily, no matter which operating system or word-processing apps you use to create your manuscript, there's a way to deliver it to your collaborators.

Pro Tip: Before you share, Derek Haines, of the blog Just Publishing Advice, recommends practicing good file management with your manuscript. This means always having backups, never sending your master file, and considering adding password protection to your file. For more of Haines's tips on how to be a good file manager, read his blog article "Protect Your Manuscript By Being A Good File Manager." And for an explanation of how to password protect any file, check out this June 2022 article from *WIRED*: <https://wired.com/story/how-to-password-protect-any-file>.

WHEN YOU NEED DIRECT FEEDBACK

For sharing with editors/betas and getting feedback:

If your manuscript is still a work-in-progress, but you're ready to get some fresh eyes on it, you need a way to truly share the document. These options give you varying levels of control over how much your collaborators can do, from simply viewing or leaving comments to making edits and other changes as you work on the document simultaneously. All of them are free.

Google Docs: Google Docs is pretty much the standard for collaborative writing. It's easy to manage access and collaborate on a document in real time. Just be careful how many readers you allow into a Doc at once, as some betas and editors prefer a clean draft to avoid having their comments colored by others' opinions. You may need to create separate documents if you have concerns about readers influencing one another.

MS Word and OneDrive: Word is among the most popular options among professional editors because of the track changes function. Writers can easily email the document, or use Microsoft OneDrive to share it in much the same way they do in Google Docs.

Reedsy Book Editor: Reedsy's Book Editor (<https://reedsy.com/write-a-book>) is a free web-based app that allows you to write and format your book all in one place, and there are plenty of tutorials to guide you through it so that you can export an EPUB or PDF to share with whomever you like. However, further collaboration through Reedsy is more challenging. The app is set up to allow you to track changes and read comments from a professional editor, but currently that function is only accessible to editors hired through Reedsy. Multi-user collaboration is an upcoming feature, but a representative from the platform was not able to provide an exact date for when it will go live.

For tracking feedback from beta readers:

If you have concerns about managing your beta readers' feedback, there are a few options for apps that will handle most of the admin work for you. The software in any of these programs will allow you to share your work securely, track who's reading and how much, and save your feedback all in one place. The services are free to readers and have tiered pricing for authors.

Heybeta: \$7 a month for two pen names and twenty-five readers, or \$14 a month for up to ten pen names and one hundred readers per book. Both plans allow unlimited books. Visit <https://heybeta.com/>.

BetaReader.io: A free account limits you to one manuscript and three readers, or you can upgrade to \$9.99 per month for unlimited manuscripts and readers. Visit <https://betareader.io>, or read a review of the site by Amelia D. Hay, host of *The Authorpreneur Podcast*, here: <https://authorpreneurpodcast.com/bts041>.

BetaBooks: BetaBooks offers pricing plans at three levels: the free plan allows for one book and three readers; \$14.99 a month allows for unlimited books and twenty readers per book; and \$34.99 a month allows for unlimited books and unlimited readers, plus additional collaborative tools. Visit <https://betabooks.co>, or read Jamie Fairleigh’s review of the site from 2021 at JamiFairleigh.com.

For a writing community experience:

Online writing groups like Scribophile and Critique Circle allow authors to read one another’s work and provide critical feedback. On both sites, you earn points that can be used to post your own writing by reading and critiquing the posts of other authors first. For more about these options, see Kari Holloway’s June 2020 blog post on the craft blog Writing Without Drama, “Critique Groups Away From FB.”

Pro Tip: When working with beta readers, author Lisa Jansen recommends doing your due diligence, since no method of sharing your work can completely protect you. “If someone wants to steal your idea, they still can. I have a record of all communication with my beta readers so I can prove that I shared my work with them,” she writes on her blog. Jansen also likes to “have at least a little bit of a conversation with them, learn a bit about them, check out their Facebook profile, website or other information and just get a bit of a feeling for the person.”

WHEN YOU EXPECT INDIRECT OR NO FEEDBACK

The following options make sending your work to a larger number of individual readers quick and easy. These methods could work for betas as well, but they’re designed to deliver your work to someone who might not need to communicate directly with you. When you send your manuscript to ARC readers or reviewers, for example, they read it on their own and then (hopefully) publish their reviews, so there’s no need for document-sharing functions.

For cloud sharing and storage:

The simplest way to get your work to someone else is to save it as a PDF or EPUB file and upload it to a cloud storage service like Dropbox or Adobe Document Cloud. You can even use Google Drive or OneDrive for this, since users can download from the cloud in a variety of formats, though larger files may have slower sync times. Ol James compared a few of these services for the literary journal *Letter Review*: <https://letterreview.com/5-places-writers-store-work/>.

Dropbox: Dropbox has six levels of pricing, but most authors will use the Plus plan for \$9.99 a month, or the Professional plan for \$16.58 a month. The Professional plan adds account recovery, sharing controls, file locking, and large file delivery up to 100 GB, with 3 TB of storage. The Plus plan is limited to 2 GB transfers and 2 TB of storage. With either plan, Dropbox's Transfer service allows you to deliver to anyone by copying a link or sending an email, regardless of whether the recipient has a plan with them.

Adobe Document Cloud: Adobe is mostly built around PDF sharing and offers a few ways to convert document files from one format to another. The standard plan costs \$12.99 per month, and the Pro plan is \$19.99 per month. Like Dropbox, Adobe does not require recipients to have an account. Users can share links to synced files, folders, or documents, which anyone with the link can comment on or download. If you'd like to collaborate on a document while it's in the cloud, both users will need an Adobe ID, though collaborators may use a free account to do so. Permissions at this level are similar to Google Drive.

Pro Tip: If you're looking for a way to transfer your document securely without storing anything online, another option is ToffeeShare.com. The free peer-to-peer sharing service has no file size limits and encrypts your data so that only you and the receiver can access it.

For ARC delivery:

When you're ready to share your ARCs, there are several websites designed to help you through the delivery process at varying costs and levels of services. Although pricier, NetGalley is able to supply readers—typically librarians, booksellers, educators, and other professional reviewers because of the platform's membership approval process—while StoryOrigin and BookFunnel depend on readers signing up for promos and newsletter swaps. Dave Chesson, of *Kindlepreneur* (<https://kindlepreneur.com/>), included a breakdown of some of NetGalley's other competitors in his review in December 2022.

NetGalley: NetGalley's six-month promotional packages, priced at \$450 and \$849, eliminate many indie authors, but the Victory Editing NetGalley Co-op might be a solution. By joining a group of authors who buy into one of the packages together, authors can share the cost. This group offers yearly (\$450) or monthly (\$50) buy-ins.

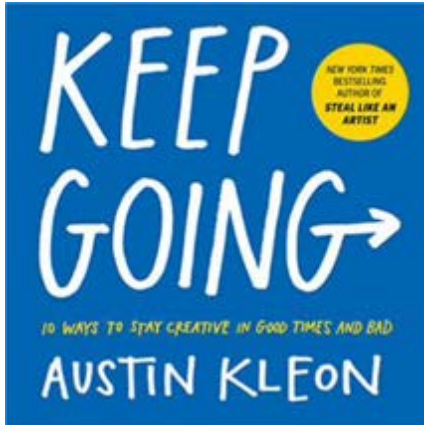
StoryOrigin: At \$10 per month or \$100 a year, StoryOrigin's standard plan gives you unlimited file delivery, as well as access to marketing tools like newsletter swaps and group promos. You can also receive comments from beta readers. If all you need is file delivery and email service integration, the program's basic plan is free.

BookFunnel: BookFunnel offers annual price points at \$20, \$100, and \$250, and markets their services as “essential tools for indie authors.” The platform is similar to StoryOrigin, especially at the mid level, but if you're only using them to deliver your book to readers, Story Origin's free basic plan offers more than what you'll get for \$20 at BookFunnel.

Once you've identified why you want to share your work, and what you hope to gain from your collaboration, you'll have plenty of options for securely delivering your manuscript to readers. Choose the platform that best fits your needs and budget, and put your work safely in readers' hands. ■

Jenn Lessmann

From the Stacks



Keep Going: 10 Ways to Stay Creative in Good Times and Bad (Austin Kleon)

This is a guide for individuals seeking to remain creative, focused, and authentic. This work, building on Kleon's previous bestsellers *Steal Like an Artist* and *Show Your Work!*, provides ten simple rules for maintaining creativity and self-identity throughout life.

Kleon argues that the creative life is not a linear journey but a loop. He emphasizes the importance of establishing a daily routine, as the present day is the only one that truly matters. The book encourages readers to disconnect from external distractions and connect with themselves, sometimes even suggesting to switch into "airplane mode." It also highlights the significance of getting outdoors and taking walks.

<https://books2read.com/u/b6WVjJ>

REAM

Ream is an innovative platform specifically designed for fiction authors, akin to Patreon or Ko-fi. It provides a space for authors to connect with their readers and monetize their stories through subscriptions. It offers a social e-reader that works across various devices, enabling fans to communicate and connect while enjoying stories.

Ream provides helpful tools such as a publishing scheduler and community management tools that save authors significant time each month in operating their subscription. It also offers a Facebook-Group-like community for delivering updates to readers and automatic email updates to keep readers engaged.

<https://reamstories.com/create>



Ines Johnson Breakdown

Ines Johnson, a television producer turned Romance author, hosts the "Breakdown" podcast, an exploration of the art of storytelling and the ins and outs of the indie publishing market. Johnson dissects the construction of narratives in television episodes and films, examining the techniques that shape these stories.

Simultaneously, she delves into the indie publishing market, identifying trends and analyzing their implications. While the podcast serves as a platform for Johnson's own understanding, it offers a wealth of insights that could be invaluable to other authors. "Breakdown" is a thoughtful and thorough examination of narrative structure and market dynamics, offering listeners the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the craft of storytelling and the intricacies of independent publishing.

<https://ineswrites.com/breakdown/>



Hacked


A YEAR AFTER TIKTOK USERS EXPLOITED AMAZON'S E-BOOK RETURNS POLICY, WHAT'S BEEN DONE TO PROTECT INDIE AUTHORS?

In June of last year, a TikTok trend that showed viewers a “life hack” for getting free books from Amazon caused a major stir in the indie author world. The impact and response were equally quick, with indie authors reeling against the trend, but not before a flood of returns that cost authors significantly. A year later, we’re revisiting the timeline of events to give you the full scope of what happened, how it happened, and what was done in the aftermath to keep it from happening again.

THE TREND

TikTok, a viral social media app known for its short-form content and impressive algorithm, quickly became another tool in the indie author toolbox upon its inception in 2016. Able to quickly attune delivery of the user’s desired content based on their viewing history and other factors, the app also became a way to spread information, tips, and advice.

In March 2022, a video went viral on the platform showing readers how shoppers could purchase and return books by exploiting a loophole in Amazon’s e-book returns policy. It worked like this: readers would select a book they wished to read and purchase it through Amazon. They would then read the book as quickly as possible and utilize Amazon’s return policy to return the book before the seven-day window for returns closed. Afterward, the reader would return the book and recoup its cost.



The “hack” went viral, sparking a firestorm of returns on the platform from readers looking to save money or, according to NPR, hoping to take a dig at the retail giant and founder Jeff Bezos. Instead, the move subsequently deducted the royalties from authors’ accounts, despite the book—a product—being consumed. Authors whose books were returned were forced to pay delivery fees for the returned e-books, and for some who experienced a large number of returns, Amazon imposed additional penalties, including account reviews.

The window for returns did not apply to Amazon’s Kindle Unlimited program, which allows subscribers to check out books enrolled in the program and pays authors based on the number of pages read.

THE RESPONSE

Indie authors, known for their ability to adapt to a rapidly changing landscape, responded to the trend quickly, reaching out to readers via social media and urging them to stop the practice, equating it to theft—to sometimes mixed responses from readers. Many also utilized organizations of collective voices to approach Amazon with their concerns.

Not too long after the viral trend video, user Reah Foxx launched a petition on Change.org, which amassed nearly 80,000 signatures encouraging Amazon to amend the policy.

“There has been a huge upswing in author’s ebooks being returned to Amazon AFTER they have been read,” Foxx wrote in the petition. “As a


reader this is VERY upsetting. ... Authors are not being paid accurately for their art. Please, Amazon change your policy!” According to Foxx, one author had received returns in the single digits in the two months prior to the trend yet experienced triple-digit returns of their books in March, after the trend went viral.

Largely, Amazon was receptive to conversations about the policy, and in September 2022, the Authors Guild and Society of Authors reported they were in discussions with the company regarding the e-book return policy. “Yesterday, Amazon informed us of its plans to change its ebook return policy to restrict automatic returns to purchases where no more than 10 percent of the book has been read,” the Authors Guild reported. “The planned change will go into effect by the end of the year. Any customer who wishes to return an ebook after reading more than 10 percent will need to send in a customer service request, which will be reviewed by a representative to ensure that the return request is genuine and complies with Amazon’s policies against abuse.”

Amazon agreed to roll out a new policy in favor of authors’ pleas before the end of the year but missed the deadline. In January 2023, Amazon announced to the Authors Guild that the new policy would be implemented before the end of the month.

CHANGE

Almost one year after the original TikTok video went viral, on February 1, 2023, as reported by the Authors Guild, Amazon officially updated its



returns policy. Under the new policy, customers “may not be eligible for a refund if a book has been partially read or if we detect account abuse.”

Amazon also added a notice to the Kindle Orders page stating that “the self-service refund option may not be available” to users with a high rate of returns.

The new policy protects indie authors from the effects of the trend by creating checks and balances within Amazon’s economic system to ensure readers and authors alike are treated fairly. With this new policy, readers can still return books purchased accidentally and under other specific circumstances, but authors are no longer subject to the waves of returns they experienced at the height of the trend. The experience was a collaborative effort among authors, author organizations, and Amazon, and it became a test case for the unity among the indie author community and the distributors who they partner with to sell their books.

MOVING FORWARD

This new policy only applies to Amazon; other major distributors within the e-book sphere have separate return policies and requirements. Barnes & Noble is stricter about digital content purchased on their platform. The company’s return policy reads: “Magazines, newspapers, used books and shipping fees are not returnable or exchangeable. Digital content, including eBooks, audiobooks, digital magazines and newspapers, Access Codes,

gift cards, and shrink-wrapped items that have been opened, are not returnable.”

Whether this policy was implemented before or after the viral trend and Amazon’s amendments to their own policy is unclear.

Google Play’s policy on returning e-books mirrors Amazon’s old policy, and Apple’s policy requires users submit a refund request for review by the company in order to be considered eligible.

Whether these companies plan to roll out changes of their own is unclear, but it is important to note that, as Amazon is the largest distributor amongst them, the change to the policy was widely impactful.

Authors should regularly take steps to ensure they’re making the best decisions for their business regarding returns, the first of which is to ensure their book is a quality product. Changes in return policy are not meant to mitigate customer dissatisfaction but to prevent the exploitation of internal policies. The second thing authors should consider is how they distribute their books. Authors using distributors have to work within the policies and procedures outlined in the terms and agreements, but for many, Amazon’s eventual response to the trend was an uplifting example of how distributors can be willing to sit down at the table and reexamine policies to benefit not only themselves but those relying on their platform for their author businesses as well. ■

David Viergutz



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Oh, Brother

WRITING REALISTIC STORIES ABOUT SIBLINGS

The author Leo Tolstoy famously wrote in his book *Anna Karenina*, “All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.”

I would change this to add that, whether happy or unhappy, all children are unique in their own way—but for children who grow up in the same family, their relationships with one another might not be so distinctive. Despite how some stories may make it seem, siblings have more complex and varied relationships than meet the eye. These interactions often have a direct effect on each person’s personality and motivations throughout life. But even authors who grew up as only children can write sibling relationships realistically, as long as they keep a few things in mind.

Research has shown that birth order influences the ways children act and perceive their place in life, as well as how parents react to them, according to *Parents Magazine*. Many parents note they were stricter with their first child than with their siblings. A first-born child in a family will often be an overachiever, while the youngest is more likely to be a free spirit.



Middle children, according to *Parents*, are people pleasers and peacemakers. Status in life, whether rich or poor, affects the ways children develop and thrive. Knowledgeable authors will consider the birth order as they develop characters and their characteristics.

Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* can serve as a prime example of how such research can play into fictional stories. Alcott's book, which she based on her real-life sibling relationships and experiences, seemingly matched each sister's role and personality to their age and position in the family. The oldest, Meg, was the motherly type while her next sister, Jo, was the tomboy. Beth was the people pleaser, while Amy, the youngest among the four, was an artist who wanted wealth and fame. Alcott showed how birth order worked in this family, but she was also remarkably prescient for the studies done centuries later.

I once knew someone who was the oldest of eight children and had to help care for her younger siblings. As an adult, she says she felt deprived of her childhood. Only children, on the other hand, grow up with a separate perception of the world from those in larger families, as they do not have to share their parents or their toys. They may like their "only" status, or they may be lonely and seek companionship with friends, extended relatives, or pets.

I was the oldest of five children: three boys and two girls. Two of my brothers were twins. Cryptophasia, or "twin speak," is a real thing; they had their own way of communication, and many studies over the years have observed other twin pairings inventing their own secret languages during development. Children in families are often bound to one another with invisible ties as well, and





though they might fight among themselves, when confronted by others, they often unite against this threat. (They definitely band together when no one will admit to being part of the sword fight that broke their mother's lamp!)

Gender can also play a role in how siblings interact with one another. Research of the role a sibling's gender may play on someone's personality is solidly mixed—some studies have found that girls growing up with only brothers behave more “typically feminine” and boys with only sisters are more “typically masculine,” but other studies have found the exact opposite to be true. As you write sibling relationships, don't fall into outdated stereotypes, such as the girl who's athletic and tomboyish after growing up only with brothers; today every child in a family may be on a sports team, regardless of their own gender or their siblings'.

Finally, today's authors need to confront the reality of high divorce rates and consider the blended family as a norm. Some families may have a single parent or are parented by grandparents, and others may grow up with two parents of the same gender or in households with family dynamics unique to that of a nuclear family. Modern authors should ask questions and be able to represent these realities in a tale through the perceptions of the youth they describe.

Sibling dynamics, as with any friendship or family relationship, vary and are rarely one-size-fits-all. Although they'll always share some relatable traits with other sibling groups, they also need to be shown as unique as the individuals who make them up. Once you've considered all the above, all that's left to do is write! ■

Sharon Kay Dooley

The Prospective Power of Your Advance Reader Team

There are several schools of thought when it comes to engaging advance readers.

Some authors don't like to share their books in advance of publication for fear of losing out on book sales. Some authors use a limited number of advance readers solely to catch mistakes and ensure story arcs hit the mark. Others provide ARCs to anyone and everyone, with the hope their book will gain traction "auto-magically."

I think the first group misses out. They don't see the big picture, which includes something simple yet profound: the number one way a reader learns about a book is through personal recommendation. If no one reads a book, who will recommend it?

The second group does a little better because, at least with some eyes on their book, they are catching errors, getting "just in time" feedback, and starting the recommendation engine. Yet I feel like those authors are still skipping important marketing steps that can inform their longer-term sales.

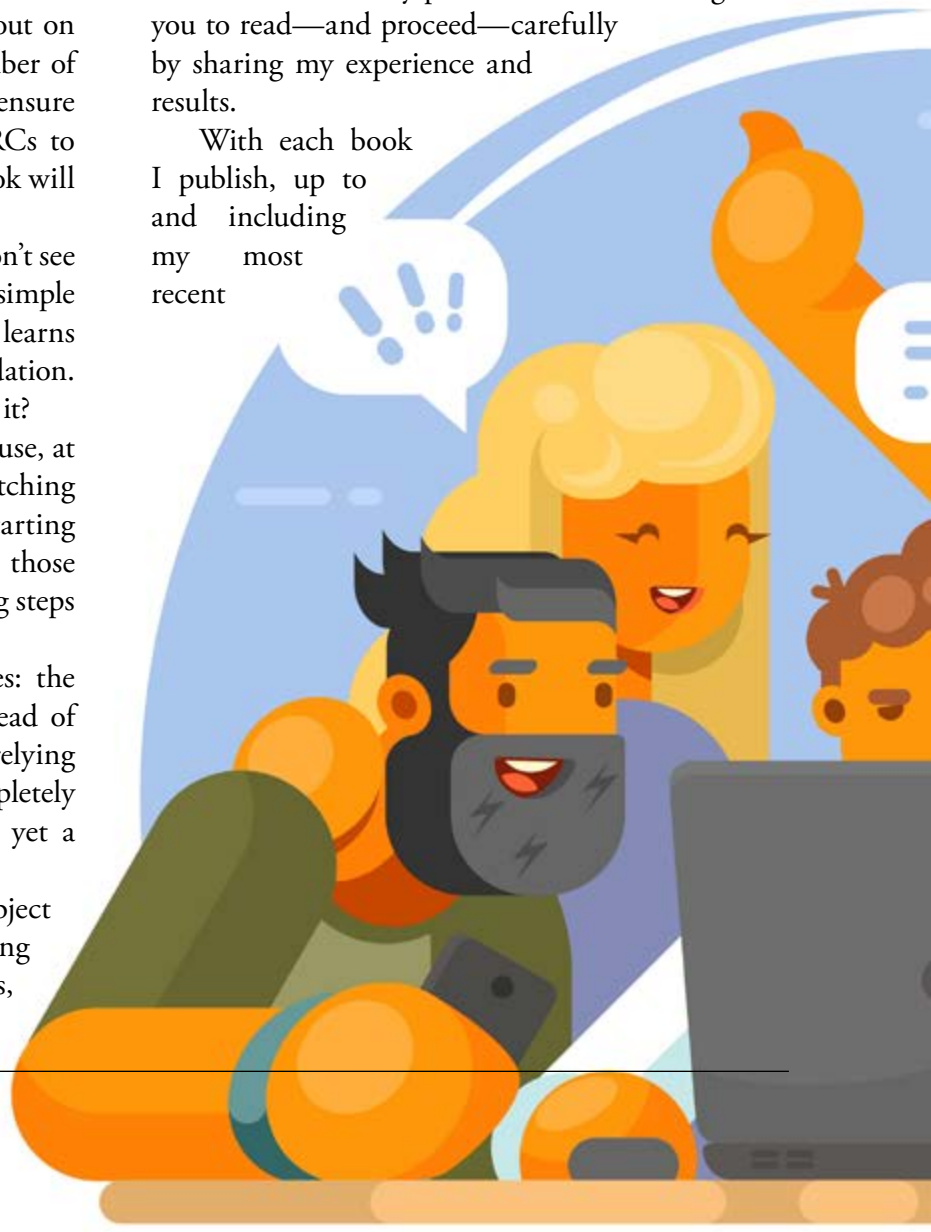
The final group is making two mistakes: the first, telling everyone about their book instead of just their target audience, and the second, relying on a strategy that, as a stand-alone, is completely ineffective. Hope, by itself, isn't a strategy, yet a fantastic strategic plan without it is just sad.

I'm thrilled to be writing on this subject because I know beyond a doubt that, by engaging a carefully selected group of advance readers, your book can find the traction authors with

big ad budgets and even bigger email lists can only dream about.

Before I share my process, let me encourage you to read—and proceed—carefully by sharing my experience and results.

With each book I publish, up to and including my most recent



release, I have decreased my ad spend and increased the level of secrecy around it, talking about the book only with its ideal readers. It might surprise you that each book sells better than the one before it, even with fewer readers on my advance team each time. True, we might attribute this to continual releases, but it doesn't change the fact that even if you have a tiny platform, almost no social media, and only a budding email list, you can gain traction for your book by intentionally, purposefully, and (almost) secretly engaging your advance reader team.

So how does it work? Here is my four-step process:

1. I identify the absolutely perfect reader for my book to create my book's Ideal Reader Profile. I consider twenty-five to one hundred qualities and characteristics they may have, including age, gender, and profession, as well as the other books like my book they would most likely have read.

2. I ask only people who fit that profile

to be advance readers for my book. Those who say yes join my advance reader team (ART). My base goal is sixty people—which means about fifteen reviewers, as about 25 percent of the people who join your team will actually read and review, in my experience—with a stretch goal of double that.

3. I engage with my ART in the weeks leading up to my launch by
 - sharing a free copy of the book via BookFunnel,
 - providing bonuses and prizes to the first fifteen people who buy and review the book (making the review “verified”), and
 - communicating with them so they know how important they are to me and my book.
4. Keep quiet! Don't talk to anyone outside of this group about your book before its official release. Truthfully, anyone who isn't an ideal reader doesn't need to know about your book anyway—at least, not immediately.

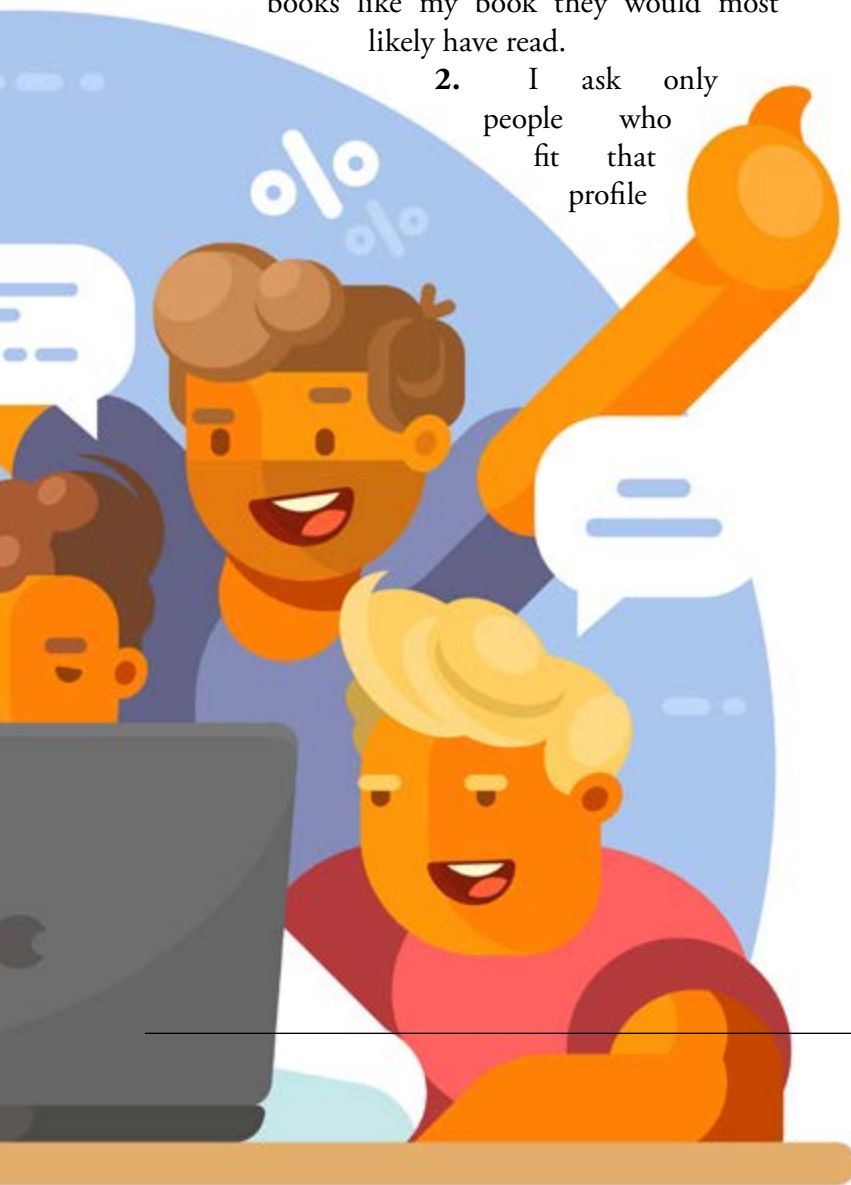
When you engage with your advance readers, and they review your book, it engages the online retailers' algorithms in a way almost nothing else can. With more verified reviews, online retailers will recommend your book for free to the people they think are most likely to buy and review the book. The kicker is you can't buy these recommendations—all you can do is engage the algorithms. But when you do, the rest happens almost as if by magic.

Kind of cool, right?

Advance readers can be critical to your book's short-term success, and having a successful book launch is fun and profitable. Most importantly, that short-term success is a gateway to your business's long-term prosperity.

Here's to you and your book's success! ■

Honorée Corder

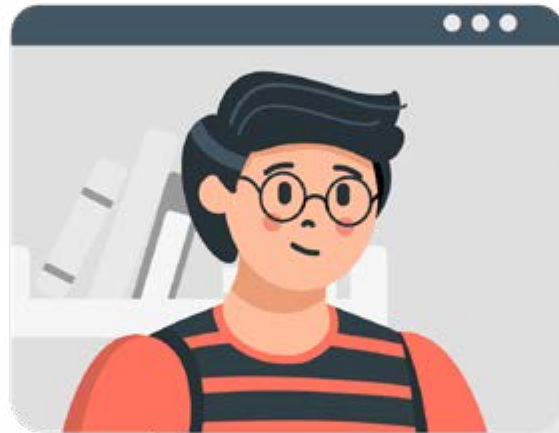


Solo Act

IN A SOMETIMES LONELY CAREER, INDIE AUTHORS FIND CREATIVE WAYS TO CONNECT

As writers, our path is primarily a solo endeavor. Some authors have an easier time combating loneliness, but others find it difficult to get past the isolation hump. When the need for companionship strikes, online writing sprints and smaller in-person writing retreats can be a great alternative to larger conferences that may be overwhelming for creatives.

Many authors identify as introverts and have already established a plethora of coping mechanisms in order to keep loneliness at bay. It's not a bad thing—an essay by Jacob Friedman, published in the University of Maryland's *Interpolations*, notes the often-overlooked superpower an introvert might bring to a project. The theory is that introverts are predisposed to be comfortable alone, and in this post-COVID world, binge-watching a favorite TV show with a four-legged companion, video-chatting with friends, or taking a walk in the park may be plenty of external stimulation for such people.



Even so, our extroverted colleagues may find the task much more difficult. And if you are such a writer, you may benefit from some helpful tips and tricks to combat the loneliness monster.

At last year's 20Books Vegas conference, several authors offered examples of how they strategize against loneliness in their daily lives. Elaine Bateman, Urban Fantasy author, says Zoom sprints with other authors can be an easy loneliness combatant, and when that doesn't work, she says writing at a local café can be just the trick to cure her doldrums.

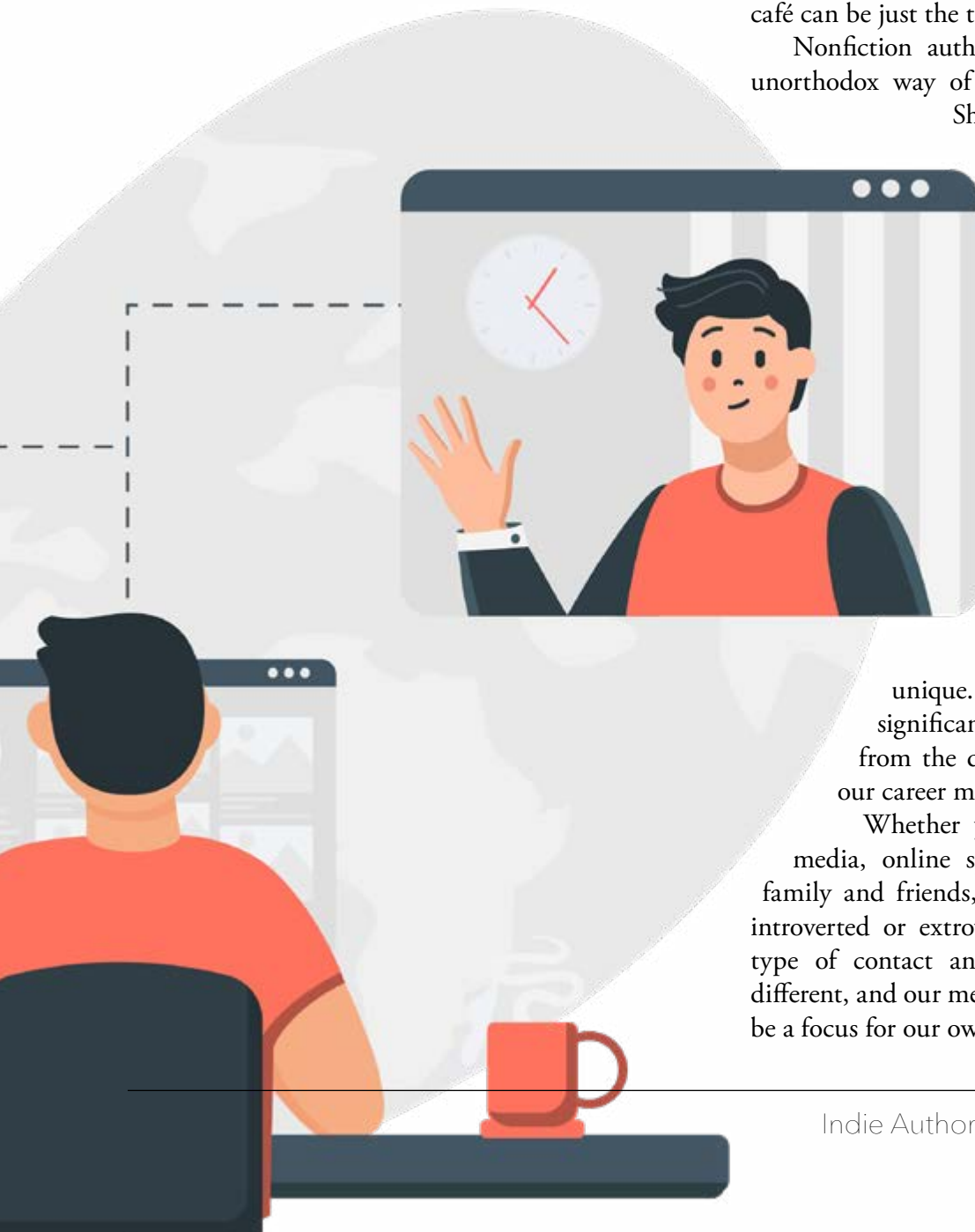
Nonfiction author Alycea Snyder has a more unorthodox way of bonding with fellow authors.

She says she and several local writers hold quarterly in-person "burning parties" where they burn rejection letters, abandoned manuscripts, and other things that didn't work for them. The group considers it a celebration of "getting it done," moving past what didn't work and onto what does.

Jim Slater, a Historical Fiction writer, reports his characters keep him company, along with his wife, Joanie, and their rescue pup, Delila. Slater's story isn't unique. Several writers noted spouses or significant others as their source of relief from the dark cloud of isolation those in our career may face.

Whether you turn to fur babies, social media, online sprints, in-person meet-ups, or family and friends, one thing is certain: whether introverted or extroverted, all humans need some type of contact and interaction. Writers are no different, and our mental and emotional health must be a focus for our own well-being. ■

Terry Wells-Brown



Saying More with Less

THE SUBTLE ART OF AD COPY

Copy



Steve Higgs
Sponsored · 🌐



When a typo lands an out of work private investigator a supernatural case, he has no choice other than to take itsee more



<https://www.amazon.com/dp/b...>
'The storyline for these books is amazing!'

Shop now

As we've explored the ins and outs of making Facebook Ads work for you, I've explained how to set up ads that will reach the highest number of interested readers and how to choose images that will grab their attention as they scroll. This time, we need to examine the copy and headline. Figure 1 comes from an ad I have run in the past for a Mystery novel.

Headline



Figure 1

The copy section is also called the primary text of an ad. In Facebook Ads, you have 120 characters, give or take, to get your point across. You must be choosy with your words—long words will force a new line and steal space you might need. You have even fewer characters for the headline—there’s room for about fifty across the two lines of text you’re allotted. In that limited space, you need to say something that will grab those eyeballs and make your audience want to know more.

As we’ve discussed before, your image will stop people scrolling through their feed. But the copy in your ad will make them click to leave Facebook and go to your product page.

So how do you get the copy and headline right? I typically break it down into three parts:

1. I ask a question they need to know the answer to,
2. I tell them just a little about the book, and
3. I tell them why they are going to want to read it.

If I were to write a tough-guy Thriller and aim my ad at Lee Child fans on Facebook, I might write something like: “Remember when you discovered Jack Reacher? Well, there’s a new guy in town, and he’s bigger, meaner, and someone just got in his way.”

For Janet Evanovich, I might write: “Fans of Stephanie Plum are tearing these books off the shelves! They say it’s like Grandma Mazur got her own series!”

To do this effectively, you need to know the target audience well enough to know what might hook the readers. In these examples, I have given the reader a reason to buy by telling them, “If you like that, you’re gonna love this.”

(You could, of course, say precisely that, but I’ve never found it to work.)

Ending the copy with an ellipsis is a tactic I sometimes employ as well; you can see it in Figure 1. I break off the sentence at a point that leaves my audience hanging and where they must click “See more...” to read the rest of the ad copy. Here are two examples:

1. When a typo lands an out-of-work private investigator a supernatural case, he has no choice other than to take it ... He is about to have a really bad week.
2. She let a serial killer go. She did it on purpose, but this rising star of the FBI had a reason. The only question is ... whether she’ll be able to justify it when all the dust has settled.

What else should you put in the “Primary Text” section? Well, you can add almost anything you want, but here is what I add:

- A bit more about the book
- The title (or people will just ask what it is)
- A couple of quotes from reviews
- A final call-to-action advising them to click the “Shop Now” button
- Links to the paperback and/or audiobook
- An invite to join your Facebook group

Like everything else, you should experiment to see what works. Too much detail in your ad and people will not read it. Too little and they will fail to understand what the ad is for and wander off.

Finally, you need a headline. This bold text at the bottom of your ad gives you another chance to catch people’s attention. Remind them that your book is like the books they like. Remind them it is a great Fantasy, Romance, or Mystery. Hit them with a reason to stop scrolling and pay attention. Here are some examples:

“I couldn’t sleep until I knew the ending. 10 stars!”

“The cutest cozy mystery book I have ever read!”

“The funniest fantasy books since Terry Pratchett!”

Writing hooky copy is a skill in itself. I got better over time, and you will too. There are also plenty of books out there to help improve this vital skill. Good luck with it! ■

Steve Higgs

In This Issue

Executive Team

Chelle Honiker, Publisher



As the publisher of Indie Author Magazine, Chelle Honiker brings nearly three decades of startup, technology, training, and executive leadership experience to the role. She's a serial entrepreneur,

founding and selling multiple successful companies including a training development company, travel agency, website design and hosting firm, a digital marketing consultancy, and a wedding planning firm. She's organized and curated multiple TEDx events and hired to assist other nonprofit organizations as a fractional executive, including The Travel Institute and The Freelance Association.

As a writer, speaker, and trainer she believes in the power of words and their ability to heal, inspire, incite, and motivate. Her greatest inspiration is her daughters, Kelsea and Cathryn, who tolerate her tendency to run away from home to play with her friends around the world for months at a time. It's said she could run a small country with just the contents of her backpack.

Alice Briggs, Creative Director



As the creative director of Indie Author Magazine, Alice Briggs utilizes her more than three decades of artistic exploration and expression, business startup adventures, and leadership skills. A serial

entrepreneur, she has started several successful businesses. She brings her experience in creative direction, magazine layout and design, and graphic design in and outside of the indie author community to her role.

With a masters of science in Occupational Therapy, she has a broad skill set and uses it to assist others in achieving their desired goals. As a writer, teacher, healer, and artist, she loves to see people accomplish all they desire. She's excited to see how IAM will encourage many authors to succeed in whatever way they choose. She hopes to meet many of you in various places around the world once her passport is back in use.

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.

Monthly Columnists

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.

Craig Martelle



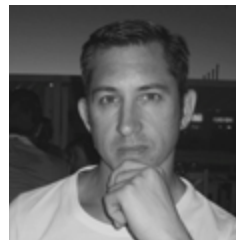
High school Valedictorian enlists in the Marine Corps under a guaranteed tank contract. An inauspicious start that was quickly superseded by excelling in language study. Contract waived, a year at the Defense Language Institute to learn Russian and off

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.

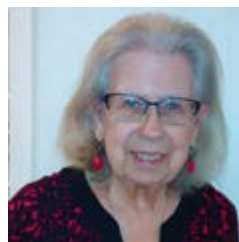
Steve Higgs



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.

Writers

Sharon Dooley



"Sharon Kay Dooley is a semi-retired Registered Nurse who has been a writer since her high school days. Sharon loves word games, Wordle, and puzzles. She has always been a reader and reads everything except horror and most Sci-fi. Currently, she is writing a series of children's books and an environmentally based cozy mystery series.

Since she lives in MD near the nation's capital, she keeps an eye on politics and the Washington Football Team-The Commanders.

She includes among her special favorites her two children, and her grandchildren. Other likes are cooking, drinking excellent coffee, eating chocolate desserts, and walks with her rescue dog."

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 atten-

tion 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.

Eryka Parker



Eryka Parker is a book coach, an award-winning developmental editor, and writing instructor. As a women's contemporary author under the pen name Zariah L. Banks, she creates emotional

intimacy novels that prove that everyone deserves to feel seen, appreciated, and loved. She lives in Northeast Ohio with her husband and two children and is currently working on her third novel.

Tiffany Robinson



Tiffany Robinson writes contemporary romance under two different pen names because she loves the happily-ever-after. She's also a freelance content writer, writing coach, and online educator.

She and her husband have been running their own business since 2010 and have two young boys who keep them on their toes. Prior to marriage, children, and an online career, Tiffany was employed in the field of Exercise Science and Injury Rehabilitation. That experience taught her that communication styles are as wide and varied as East is to West (East and West never touch...), and that makes it a beautiful thing when common ground and common interests are found. Outside of writing, running a business, and momming,

her hobbies include cooking and running. She knows it's weird, but everybody's got their thing.

Gayle Trent



Gayle Leeson is a USA TODAY best-selling, award-winning author who writes multiple cozy mystery series and a portal fantasy series under the pen name G. Leeson. Gayle has also

written as Amanda Lee (the embroidery mystery series) and as Gayle Trent. Visit her online at gayleleeson.com.

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://wendyvan-camp.com>

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.

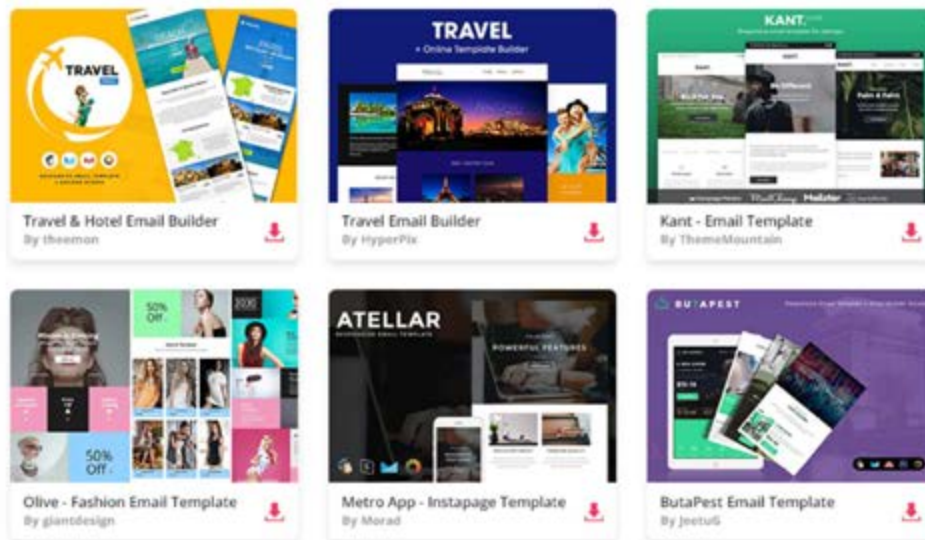
Terry Wells-Brown



Terry Wells-Brown lives in the lush California Zinfandel wine country with the love of her life; Don, and their two rescue pups; Jake and Buster. Terry is the author of the romantic suspense series

Women of Wine Country, the contemporary fantasy series Earth Magic, and the international collaboration; Sisters of Sin. She is also the feature writer for Best Version Media community magazine; Woodbridge and West Lodi. Besides reading and writing, she devotes her time to her family, tribe, and her small community. During Halloween, Terry enjoys dancing as one of the Witches of Wine Country, and a couple of months later trades in the pointy hat for a red dress where she can be found impersonating Mrs. Claus.

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