

A close-up portrait of a Black woman with short, dark, curly hair, smiling and looking down. She is wearing a black top and has a small gold stud in her lower lip. A tattoo is visible on her upper chest.

Volume 3 • Issue 5 • May 2023

# NOV AUTHOR MAGAZINE

This Issue's  
Featured Author:

**CHRISHAUN  
KELLER-HANNA**

Promo Newsletters for  
the Marketing Novice

Fight the Promo FOMO

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# PROMO SITES

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## ON THE COVER

- 18 Another Way of Going Wide
- 24 Promo Newsletters for the Marketing Novice
- 28 Fight the Promo FOMO
- 38 Let Your Work Take Center Stage with Author Readings
- 44 Writing Outside the Law with the Vigilante Justice Subgenre
- 48 The Art of Successful Ads

## REGULAR COLUMNS

- 12 Dear Indie Annie
- 14 10 Tips for: BookTube
- 43 From the Stacks

## THE WRITE LIFE

- 10 Martelle's Motivation
  - The Paradox of Perfection
- 46 Prosperity
  - Prosperity Starts with Promotion
- 48 Mindset
  - Bringing Children and Books into the World
- 48 Corner the Market
  - The Art of Successful Ads: The Role Images Should Play in Your Facebook Ads

## TYPEWRITER TALES

- 8 From the Editor in Chief
- 54 In This Issue

---

**18**

**ANOTHER WAY OF  
GOING WIDE**

Chrishaun Keller-Hanna on World-  
Building, Monsters, and Merch

**32**

**PIXEL PERFECT**

How These Nearly Invisible Data  
Collection Tools Can Boost Your  
Author Business

**24**

**PROMO NEWSLETTERS  
FOR THE MARKETING  
NOVICE**

Guest Author Paul Austin Ardoin  
Explains How You Can Find Success

**38**

**LET YOUR WORK  
TAKE CENTER STAGE  
WITH AUTHOR  
READINGS**

**28**

**FIGHT THE PROMO FOMO**

Promo Newsletter Options for Every  
Indie Author

**44**

**WRITING OUTSIDE  
THE LAW WITH THE  
VIGILANTE JUSTICE  
SUBGENRE**





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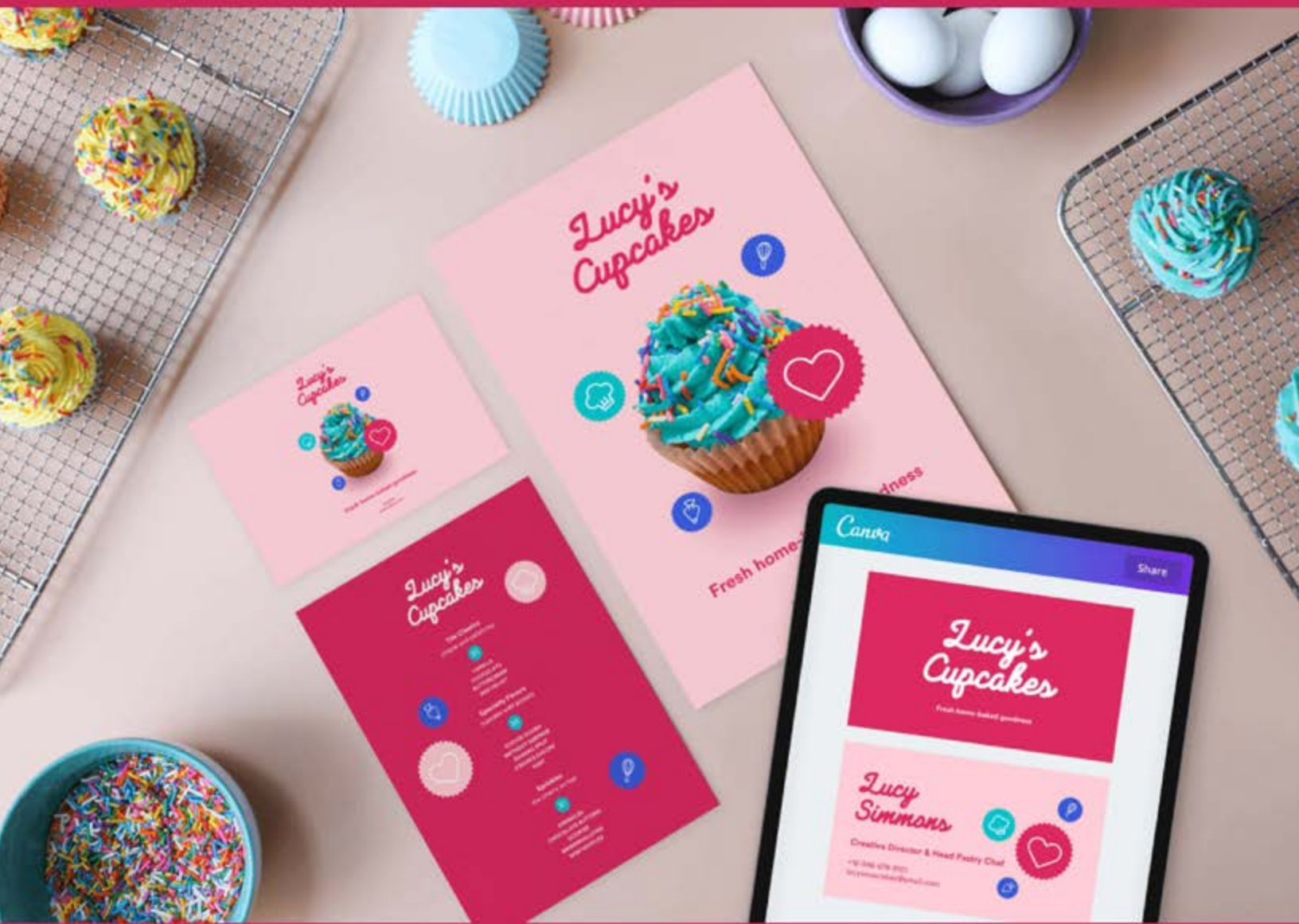
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# FROM THE EDITOR IN CHIEF

Ever since I started my author Instagram account, the app has been one of my biggest time sucks. A lot of it stems from the fact that I can—almost—justify the time I spend there as being productive. Watching other authors' Reels and scrolling through aesthetic Bookstagram photos counts as research, right?

But the app does offer a chance at a new perspective from time to time. Just the other day, amid videos that joked about the difficult, sometimes painful feeling of trying to promote your book, another author I follow posted her own message about marketing. The discomfort and hesitation that comes with hyping up our own work seems like an almost universal feeling. We may worry about annoying people, fall victim to impostor syndrome, or just feel lost among all the options and advice thrown our way. The author I follow admitted she doesn't enjoy the marketing stage either. But it's a stage to celebrate, she said. When you were writing that first draft, in the throes of wrestling with a plot that didn't make sense or fighting against yourself to get words on the page, you were dreaming of getting here. And as you work on that next book, you'll catch yourself dreaming of it again.

Promotion is undoubtedly hard work, but it's a milestone not every author, and certainly not every story, will reach. In these pages, you'll find a lot about promotional newsletters: an in-depth comparison of a few options, plus a collection of tips and advice about using them effectively from guest author Paul Austin Ardoin. There are other ways you may share your book with readers too—finding a local audience through an author reading, or targeting ads to people who visit your site with the help of a small but mighty analytics tool. No matter how you end up promoting your books, celebrate it. It's a sign that you crossed the finished line, and it's the step of the process that turns your passion into a career.



Nicole Schroeder  
Editor in Chief  
*Indie Author Magazine*





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# The Paradox of Perfection

I've given this presentation a few times because it's important for authors to stay grounded. When we start writing, the only person we have to compare ourselves against is our favorite authors—those people who have been writing for a while with a team of people making sure the stories are great.

We loved those stories, so we attempt to hold ourselves to that standard because it is laudable. Why would we aspire to be anything less than our best?

And therein lies the logical fallacy. Until you practice and work at getting better, you will not be your best. Imagine if you couldn't improve at something. How horrible would that world be? "The best I can be is long past." A dreadful existence indeed.

Free yourself from seeing your peak performance as the only standard. Seek to embrace the constructive standard of getting better with each new word. Improve as you go. But once again, here's the fallacy. If it's only you giving yourself feedback, you won't improve. You need external feedback. You need strangers, readers of your genre. They will give you the best feedback, even if only through nebulous reviews.

You're not a horrible human being because your story didn't resonate as well as you think it should

have. Why would you think that? Yet many people do, as if a bad review is a testament to their quality as a person. It just means the story didn't resonate with that one or those few readers, or it means they have some work to do. Do the work. Get better. Go back and rework that first story once you understand, once you've practiced and studied and practiced some more.

Perfection is a will-o'-the-wisp, a light dancing across the swamp of infinity. You can never reach it. It will remain elusive. But unlike the bog fairies, you don't have to be perfect; you only have to be perfect for your readership. The readers will decide, but you'll never give yourself a chance if you don't put your work out there for strangers to judge.

And maybe that's the paradox. Everyone wants to be a successful author, but no one wants to be judged and found wanting.

That's not what the readers are doing. They're providing critical input to a professional author. When we stop improving, we stop being the best we can be. The idea of perfection is the barrier that blocks our way to success. ■

Craig Martelle



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# Dear Indie Annie,

***I'm a new author about to publish my first book. I'm so excited, but I'm also a little overwhelmed! What advice do you have for someone in my shoes?***

Fresh-Faced in Franklin

**AH, WELCOME, MY DEAR FRESH-FACED,**

I just want to mush your cute little cheeks together. I am so proud of you!

Oh, to return to those innocent, carefree days when I was a younger author. Everyone remembers their first time. Gossamer wings beating against the stomach lining, eyes closed, breath taken, you hit the "Publish" button and send forth your carefully crafted baby into the world.

It should be a beautiful moment, but it is one that many of us fear.

There is so much to fear, from zero sales to scathing reviews. Your precious book is now a terrifying reality. Maybe for years you have told friends and family you are writing a novel, and now it is out there for everyone to see. You are no longer a dreamer; you are a doer. You've done it!

And yes, my darling one, it is overwhelming.

But have you planned how you are going to celebrate? Because celebrate you must.

Many people talk about writing a book. Some of them may even have bits of old manuscripts cluttering up their desk drawers or their cloud storage. But few will send queries to literary





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Need help from your favorite Indie Aunt?  
Ask Dear Indie Annie a question at  
[IndieAnnie@indieauthormagazine.com](mailto:IndieAnnie@indieauthormagazine.com)



agents and/or decide to take the plunge and publish for themselves.

Published indie authors are a rare breed because they have decided to go it alone. For those of us who have never had the validation of being traditionally published, this step can be even more daunting. How will you know if your book is any good? Will anyone buy it? Will they read it? And if they do, will they like it, rate it, and tell their friends?

My advice to you, my dear, is not to worry about all that. It is easy, particularly when you read about the business of indie publishing (yes, even in this glorious tome), to become stressed out about all the things you need to do: picking the perfect cover, establishing a social media presence, editing, advertising, building an ARC team, etc. But forget all that for now.

Take a few moments to sit back with the tittle of your choice, and give yourself a huge pat on the back. You deserve it.

How long have you dreamt of writing a book? For many of us, it's a dream we have

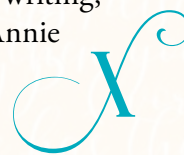
courted since childhood. So wine it, dine it, and show it some love. You wouldn't hook up with your childhood crush after thirty-plus years of longing only to sneak a quick kiss behind the toilets, would you? That would be deeply unsatisfying.

On the day of your release, make some special plans. Go to the spa, watch a game, or book a table at your favorite restaurant. If money is an issue, go for a walk, visit friends, or dig out your best party clothes and dance around your kitchen with wild abandon.

Whatever you choose to do, make sure it is something so compelling it helps you forget how frightened you are. Mark the day on your calendar, and have fun!

You are a superstar. Don't forget it!

Happy writing,  
Indie Annie



# 10 TIPS FOR BOOKTUBE

The social media platform with the biggest potential for 2023—and the foreseeable future—is YouTube, according to marketing guru Adam Erhart. It's the second most visited platform in the world, and over the past three years, YouTube's partner program has paid out \$30 billion to content creators.

BookTube is a thriving subset of YouTube channels that discuss all things bookish. Thousands of online creators, or BookTubers, share videos about books they love, literacy, fandom, and every passion for reading imaginable.

As an author, there is boundless potential within BookTube to not only promote your own books but champion those of fellow indie authors as well. We've scoured the internet and compiled ten tips for anyone contemplating jumping down the rabbit hole that is BookTube.



## DEFINE YOUR GOAL

Put all that time and energy you've spent defining your purpose as an author, figuring out your brand, and developing a vision for your business to good use by applying it to your BookTube channel. As with all other aspects of your author business, make a plan and set your goals. Be clear on your end goal. Do you want to sell your books, raise your profile, or satisfy your need to be in front of a camera?

BookTubers make videos about everything bookish, from their favorite authors and series to their most beloved book covers. What's your niche going to be? If you're a Romance author, devoting space in your content to political memoirs is probably not useful. Keep your content sweet if you write sweet. If you're the Queen of Smut, invest in a red backdrop.

If your end goal was to make your fortune as a BookTuber, say this listicle comes with a caveat: The vast majority of us will never make money doing it. But that doesn't mean it's not worth doing. Establishing an accessible platform for readers to find and share your work and brand is always a win.

**Pro Tip:** Reedsy has compiled a list of more than one hundred BookTube channels at <https://blog.reedsy.com/booktube-channels>. Watch everything from book hauls to book reviews and recommendations for ideas and inspiration.



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## 2 GIVE THE VIEWERS WHAT THEY WANT

You know your readers, so make sure you are giving them a taste of what they love within your genre or niche, as well as a good balance of the content people are searching for that will entice and entertain a new audience. Here's a quick overview of the types of content audiences are watching on BookTube: book hauls; book un-hauls of the books they didn't love; sped-up reading sessions; shopping trips for this month's reading; unboxing a subscription package, which can be lots of fun, especially if one of your books is in there; exploring other people's reading rooms or libraries; reading a book out loud; reviews; bookshelf reorganizing; trope-specific videos; genre-specific videos; challenge videos; new release lists; discussions of new "book boyfriends" (as if anyone could ever replace Mr. Darcy!); and the list goes on.

**Pro Tip:** The YouTube algorithm loves numbered lists like the "top ten Crime Fiction novels" or "ten kick-ass heroines." Don't make every video a list, but put them out occasionally.

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## 3 MAKE USE OF EQUIPMENT YOU ALREADY OWN

Who doesn't have a smartphone? That's all the equipment you need to get started on BookTube. Film directly on your phone and use whatever editing software you are comfortable with. If you've made TikToks, Instagram Reels, or YouTube Shorts, you already know the basics. Choose a comfortable spot, block all unnecessary sound, turn your ring light to gorgeous, and do your thing. Spending a little time preparing for each video is always helpful. Develop a script that you can refer to if your brain freezes once the red light starts flashing.

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## 4 KEEP AN EYE ON THE LENGTH OF YOUR VIDEOS

Thanks to BookTok and the attention spans of most people shrinking daily, BookTube is moving to shorter, easily digestible content in contrast with the hour-long vlogs and three-hour live shows people used to publish. The goal is to have your videos watched all the way through—it touches the algorithm in just the right spot! If you can reliably record and edit together a ten- to twenty-minute video every time, and post new videos once or twice per week, you'll see bigger and more steady growth on your channel.

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## 5

### MASTER THE ALGORITHM

Basic marketing principles apply to all platforms, especially if you want to tickle the mighty overlord of all social media, the algorithm:

- **Make your audience feel something.** Refer to tip 1 for inspiration.
- **Post consistently.** Figure out what that looks like for you. Is it weekly? Fortnightly? Going more than a week without posting is probably not advisable, but something is better than nothing, and you can always try to batch-create content if it works better with your schedule.
- **Hashtags make the social media world go round.** Do some research and find out which ones are trending. Unlike metadata, such as video titles and descriptions, YouTube tags aren't visible to viewers. Because tags are hidden, it will require some work from your side to discover which tags your competitors are using.
- **Use search engine optimization**, or SEO, in your video titles to make sure people can find them.
- **Make a good thumbnail** for each video.
- **Give it time.** Overnight sensations are a myth, even in the world of social media.

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## 6

### BUILD YOUR AUDIENCE

Talk to BookTubers on Twitter and build your own community. Let your friends know about the channel you're starting. Use your channel to follow other BookTubers who share your interests. Find BookTubers who are new, like you are, and connect to help each other grow. Respond to comments on your videos. Be yourself, always.

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## 7

### MAKE NEW FRIENDS

Starting a BookTube channel doesn't need to be a solitary venture. As authors, we know a lot of other authors. When you're planning your BookTube channel, think about the people who would make great guests. Authors, editors, reviewers, cover designers, subscription box or online bookstore owners, and readers are all great guests and make for great content. They are also good for cross-promotional opportunities. Think of it as newsletter swaps on overdrive!

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## 8

### PROMOTE, PROMOTE, PROMOTE

Speaking of newsletter swaps, be sure to promote your BookTube channel on all your existing platforms and anywhere else you might be: book fairs, multi-author signings, launches. Have a link or QR code at the ready to direct new fans to your channel. Why not film the event and give people another reason to check your channel out? Few of us are immune to the draw of fifteen seconds of fame, especially if it involves a favorite or newly discovered author.

**Pro Tip:** Definitely promote your own books on your channel; however, be sure to balance that with other reading recommendations and content. Unless you're publishing a new book every week, your audience will need some variety, even if your debut is the greatest book ever written. The trick is to get other BookTubers to talk about your book for you.

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## 9

### BE YOURSELF

Don't compare yourself to other BookTubers, authors, or creators. It's a basic rule for getting through life, and it certainly applies in the world of BookTube. Put your time and energy into creating content you are proud of rather than trying to emulate someone who might have more subscribers, views, or comments. You do you, boo. No one else can.

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## 10

### DON'T FEED THE TROLLS

Like any social media platform, BookTube is not without its drama and controversy. It's been the epicenter for ongoing conversations around consumerism in book buying, online bullying, and diversity, racism, and lack of representation in literature and in the YouTube community. Have a plan for how to deal with this, especially if you unwittingly become a target. The people who talk you off a ledge when you get a bad review, when your book sales are down for the month, or when impostor syndrome is rampaging through your self-esteem are the people whose feedback and advice matter most, not the social media trolls.

Getting into BookTube doesn't mean you should abandon all other social media platforms. In fact, it could—and should—provide you with a plethora of content for all your social and marketing channels. Short vertical videos, like Reels and Shorts, are great for reaching your audience on any platform. Recording content on your phone will allow you to edit and package it to suit all these sites, from long-form content on BookTube to fifteen-, thirty-, or forty-five-second grabs on Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Twitter, and so on.

**Pro Tip:** AI software, such as Munch (<https://getmunch.com>) and Lately (<https://lately.ai>), can take your long-form video and scroll through to find the best clips to use on other platforms, which is a great time-saver.

If you're looking for a social media platform to conquer, BookTube might just be the next mountain to climb. ■

Tanya Nellestein

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# Another Way of Going Wide

## CHRISHAUN KELLER-HANNA ON WORLD-BUILDING, MONSTERS, AND MERCH

Chrishaun Keller-Hanna wants you to know you are a success as a writer. “We are artists that use words as our medium,” she says. “We become writers the moment we say we are, and we must be the ones that determine when we have succeeded.”

For Chrishaun, that moment was the first time she hit “Publish” on her writing. Now, as an award-winning journalist, teacher, and fiction author, she has published over thirty titles, but if you get the chance to talk with her, the books might be the last thing you learn about. Aside from her author business, she’s also an editor at Constant Hustle Comics, a consultant for companies and authors interested in Kickstarter, a table-top game designer, a maker of dice, and a regular contributor to *Indie Author Magazine*. This year’s venture will include setting up a blog on Substack and building a Discord server for fans of her work.

Although she started writing at twenty-one, Chrishaun dates her fiction writing career from 2016, when she was forty-three. She’d written short stories, commercial scripts, and gaming modules, and was a mid-list author as a collaborative ghostwriter, but she took some time off from writing fiction to focus on her kids and her tech career. While working as a technical writer and university tutor during





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that break, Chrishaun earned a PhD and became interested in self-publishing. Her research told her that “the infrastructure was there for me to write what I wanted to write and get paid for it,” she says. “So I decided to claw through my fear and do it. I just reached the moment where I had no excuses not to. So I made the choice to write and publish a book.”

It’s a choice she has continued making with each book and new project. “The fear feels like the first time, every time,” she admits. “The difference now is that I’m asking myself what else I can create.”

## WORLD-BUILDING

“To me, the creative life is something you have to build. You have to start to build the skills that you need and build the processes you need in order to make it successful according to what your definition of successful is,” Chrishaun says.

For years, Chrishaun wanted to be a full-time writer, but when she finally became one, she hated

it. Her unexpected dissatisfaction with achieving the lifelong goal of many authors forced her to reevaluate her priorities. She found that her joy came more from creating new worlds than from novelizing their stories. The realization was one of many indications that her writing career would not follow a traditional path, even for an indie author. Although she is friends with some six-figure authors and was the keynote speaker at the 2018 20Books Vegas conference, her goals are different.

Chrishaun ascribes some of the variance to her own neurodiversity. She follows a cycling keto lifestyle as part of her protocol for autism and is a self-described “stone cold introvert.” But ultimately, she says that authors need to self-assess and clearly understand their own skills: “what you’re good at and what you’re not good at, and what you’ll want to continue doing and what you hate doing,” she says. “Concentrate your creative focus on the things you love.”

In Chrishaun’s case, that means working with coauthors and exploring associated side projects like gaming and maker crafts. She created the Shaman States of America fictional universe in 2017. The collection now includes eighteen full novels and eleven short stories written with six coauthors. “I wanted a sandbox in which I could explore different genres, different voices, different experiences,” Chrishaun says. “That’s how much money I want to have: enough to fund the next dream.”

To get there, she started with a universe built around the concept that 2 percent of the world’s population could see monsters. In North America, this caused a political fracturing into several Shaman States ruled by powerful hunters. The main characters of each series have dedicated their lives to protecting NPCs in their local regions. In video games, the acronym typically refers to Non-Player Characters, but in the world Chrishaun has created, she’s repurposed it to refer to “Non-Powered Citizens.”

With the world’s magic-system and rules largely inspired by tabletop roleplaying games (TTRPGs), Chrishaun’s coauthors, who live in the regions they





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write about, create hunting teams and tell the stories of their adventures. “Having an entire country of monster hunters lends itself to a lot of stories to tell across genres,” she says.

This kind of collaboration helps Chrishaun align her creative work with the way she prefers to work and live. Now she builds her writing process into a modular project model. “Every project has a component that I can also sell, at least two pieces of merch, and a component or process that is offered for free to other creatives.” This model gives each project a beginning and end, and it allows her to explore other creative ventures when she doesn’t feel like writing, without feeling like she’s wasting time or procrastinating.

“One of my greatest keys to success is listening to my body and mind and caring for both,” she says. “That meant taking time off, switching to comics and then game design, making dice, and figuring out Kickstarter.”



*Photo credit: Kady Dunlap*

## MONSTERS

Making the choice to prioritize her interests over potential income hasn’t always been easy. She says, “Money is not always a motivator. When we talk about wanting to pursue creative endeavors, there are a lot of folks who come from [a point of view] that you have to make money to be valuable to society. You don’t need them in your head too.”

It’s hard to keep those negative voices out. Chrishaun admits, “It’s disappointing sometimes that I’m very niche and very small.” But, she says, “Keeping it niche and small keeps it interesting to me. It allows me to do a lot of things.”

She says it’s easy to get caught up in the hustle and competition of publishing, but it can help to bring yourself back to why you got into this business. “My purpose within the indie pub community is to spend





copious amounts of time, resources, and money investigating and sharing how introverted and neurodivergent artists are making real money without killing themselves.”

In pursuit of that purpose, Chrishaun is always exploring, following her gut, and pushing through. She says that she collects skills like Pokémon and sometimes surprises herself with what she finds.

In 2018, for example, as the popularity of the Shaman States world grew with readers, Chrishaun discovered her books on pirate sites. Although she says she understands why people use these sites, she was justifiably frustrated. In response, however, she found a way to turn it into another point of growth for her business. “You can still give them ways that they would want to support you,” she says. The answer she found was to merchandise.

## MERCH

Chrishaun had already been thinking about what her characters might do when they were not hunting, but by the time she started to merchandise her work in 2019, building out where these people might hang out and what they might do for fun led to even more ideas.

“A lot of people think of their book as one point in time, but there are millions of people existing in the same space as these characters, and they’re doing

a million different things. Why not explore what they’re doing?” she asks.

She started by researching manufacturers for enamel pins. Now she sells pins and stickers through her online store, Caramel Sugarevil, sometimes including a link via QR code to a short story from her universe.

Chrishaun set up her first Kickstarter in 2019 as part of a class she was taking. Using the campaign to learn Kickstarter, she took the opportunity to explore a new genre, Cozy Mystery, within her Shaman States universe and to test out new products, like soap and wax melts, that aligned with the story. Her next Kickstarters included custom flash drives loaded with her e-books and short stories, as well as postcards, bookplates, and digital wallpapers.

She’s taken inspiration from the indie game-making community and some of her other hobbies, she says. “When I find something that works for me, I’ll bring it over to the indie book space.”

Two years ago, she got a 3D printer as a birthday gift. After some experimenting, making figures for the game version of her expanding universe, she realized she could use it to make the masters for dice



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molds. Over the course of the year, she put together skills she'd used for other projects and taught herself how to make dice.

Eventually, the dice she creates will be part of the gameplay for a TTRPG based on the Shaman States universe. Grinning, Chrishaun says, "I want to be able to play with my coauthors, playing their characters in their slice of the Shaman States universe."

Chrishaun's newest interest is in maps. Working with artists and cartographers to develop interactive maps of the Shaman States, she hopes to run her website as both a shop and an alternate reality game, or ARG. As she refines her game mechanics, Chrishaun is planning Kickstarters and getting ready to publish the systems reference documents that explain the guidelines for playing in her world. She intends to launch the game in 2025.

"It always goes back to doing wild and wacky things because I enjoy them, because they relate in some way, and putting that out there and talking about it," Chrishaun says.

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Despite having three successful Kickstarters behind her and *USA Today* best-selling author status, Chrishaun says that being able to talk about her work has sometimes been a challenge. "So the question becomes, how [can] introverts and neurodivergents like myself do those sorts of things? The most consistent way I've been able to do it has been showing the process of me making it."

While she's had success with ads, she'd rather put her energy into doing the things she loves and sharing them with the people who love them too. "I want those people to come to me for all their monster-hunting needs. So I go to places and talk about my stuff in places where those people are," she says of following her interests into Facebook groups and posting on Instagram. "I'm doing things that I'm confident in. I'm having fun with them, and I'm

talking about things that I love talking about. In the end, that's all that marketing is."

Chrishaun's passion for her work drives her success as an author and creator. "This career is defined only by me and those that like my work," she says. She hopes other authors will recognize their own successes and ignore the naysayers.

"I wish writers were more confident in writing what they really, really want to write, regardless of whether or not it sells, because those ideas, once out, can be applied to things that, while they may not sell in this community, may sell in another," she says. "Or your launch approach might not do well on Amazon but might do really well on Kickstarter. Just being more open to taking more risks and having a bit more fun—it's hard, but it's worth it." ■

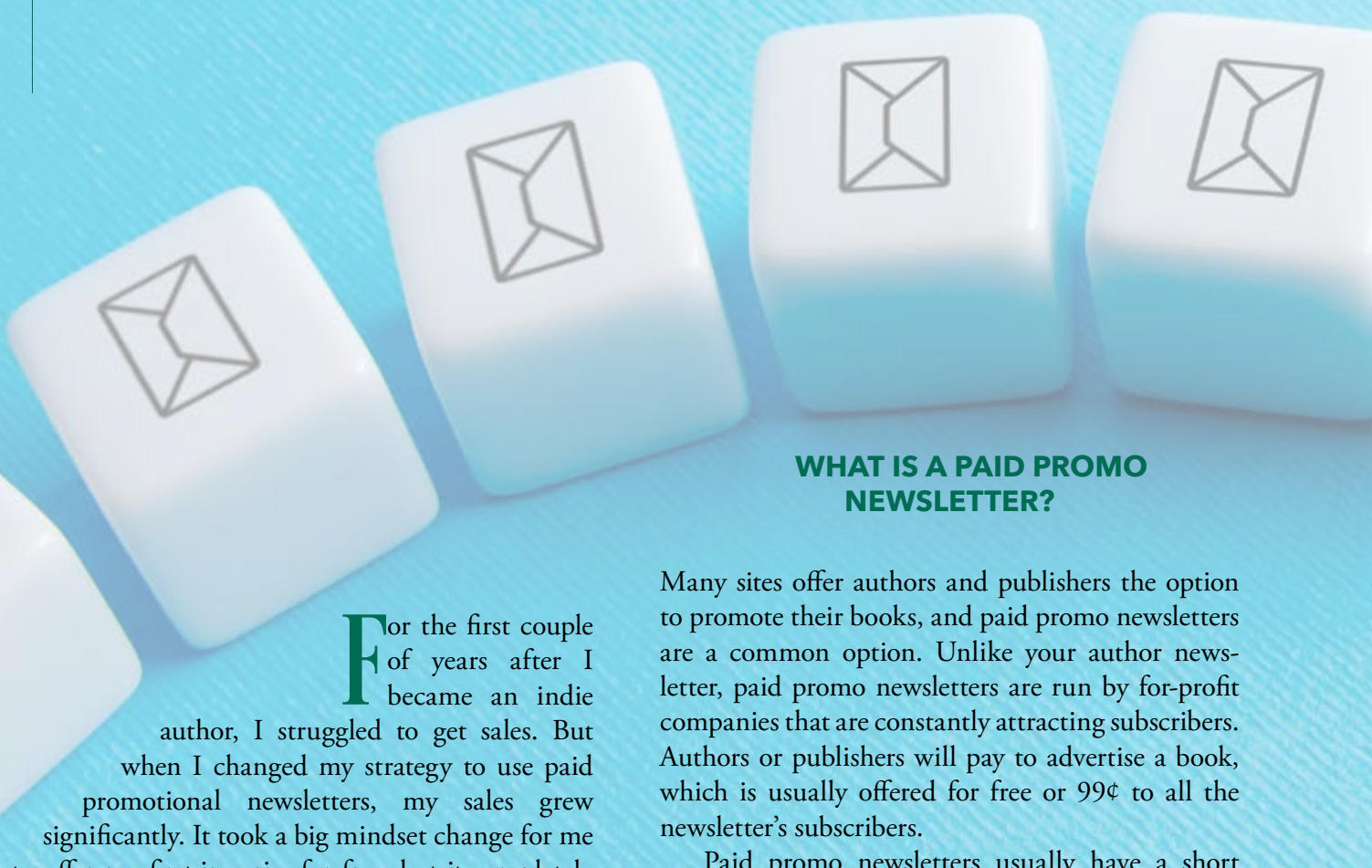
Jenn Lessmann





# Promo Newsletters for the Marketing Novice

**GUEST AUTHOR PAUL AUSTIN ARDOIN EXPLAINS HOW YOU CAN FIND SUCCESS**



## WHAT IS A PAID PROMO NEWSLETTER?

For the first couple of years after I became an indie author, I struggled to get sales. But when I changed my strategy to use paid promotional newsletters, my sales grew significantly. It took a big mindset change for me to offer my first-in-series for free, but it completely changed the trajectory of my author career.

Many sites offer authors and publishers the option to promote their books, and paid promo newsletters are a common option. Unlike your author newsletter, paid promo newsletters are run by for-profit companies that are constantly attracting subscribers. Authors or publishers will pay to advertise a book, which is usually offered for free or 99¢ to all the newsletter's subscribers.

Paid promo newsletters usually have a short intro, then list all the free or cheap book offers—



often three to seven books, but sometimes just one, and sometimes a dozen or more. Many newsletters allow subscribers to choose to receive books only from the genres they want to see, so readers who like Sci-Fi won't get Romance novels, for example. While some companies run newsletters built to achieve other author goals, such as subscribers to an author's mailing list, almost all focus on getting subscribers to download free books or purchase inexpensive books.

Some sites, like Snicks List (<https://snickslist.com>), Indies Today (<https://indiestoday.com>), and FreeBook Tips (<https://freebooktips.com>), offer to promote your books at no cost. They will list your book on their website, promote to their Facebook group or Twitter feed, or push to a forum—but never a newsletter. They often have stringent requirements for their listings and don't guarantee placement. They will often

attempt to upsell to social media channels or newsletters. I have never seen a bump in my sales when using these free websites—personally, I believe this is a case of “you get what you pay for.”

### WHAT SHOULD YOU PROMOTE?

Promo newsletters are more effective at getting subscribers to download free books than at selling books. For best results, promote a novel-length book that is a good, effective entry point to the rest of a series or a significant portion of your catalog.

Book marketing experts often call this a “free first-in-series” (FFIS), even if the book isn't the first book in a series. I prefer the term “entry point novel.” Some effective newsletters to promote entry point novels include Freebooksy (<https://freebooksy.com>), The Fussy Librarian (<https://thefussylibrarian.com>), Ereader News Today (<https://ereadernewstoday.com>), and Robin Reads (<https://robinreads.com>). I regularly use thirty different promo newsletters, so you have options available. Expect to pay between \$25 to \$100 per promotion.

You may have a short story or novella as a “reader magnet” and may be tempted to use it for your promoted book. However, most paid promo newsletters have length requirements, with

150 pages as a common minimum. Subscribers expect novels, not short stories, and meeting reader expectations is crucial to your success as an indie author. Shorter works are usually better suited to getting subscribers to your newsletter.

### HOW DOES THIS BOOST MY SALES?

Promo newsletters generally promote books that are free or nearly free, so authors won't likely see much revenue from those downloads alone. Instead, authors make money from promo newsletters on read-through—readers buying their other books after finishing the promoted freebie. Make sure your entry point novel points to the next book in



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your series or catalog; immediately following the last paragraph of your entry point novel, put a link to the next book you want readers to buy. Many e-readers push viewers to a review or sales page after the last page, so including a link right after the last paragraph—not the last page—will get readers to buy your next book.

The more books you have in your series or catalog, the more money you can make on read-through. The average read-through from a free entry point novel to a book 2 in the same series is usually 3 percent to 5 percent, but the average read-through from book 2 to book 3 is about two-thirds, and from book 3 to the rest of the series is often 90 percent or higher. If you have a twenty-book series instead of a trilogy, you make more money on every entry point novel download. This is the essence of the “FFIS strategy.”

### UNSURE HOW TO MAKE AN FFIS BOOK?

If you’re enrolled in KDP Select—often referred to as “being in KU,”—you’ll have the opportunity to make your book free for a few days each ninety-day period. If you’re a wide author, simply make the book free on non-Amazon platforms, then ask Amazon to price-match. You can find instructions on how to do this in social media groups for wide authors, like Wide for the Win, or in wide authors’ blog posts.

### PROMOTING BOOKS AT 99¢ OR MORE

Even promoting a low-cost book will almost never make its money back on the promoted book itself; selling a book at 99¢ nets you about 34¢ in royalties. Often, authors make money on read-through, just like on an FFIS.

There is one exception: You can make your money back by promoting a collection of your books for 99¢—the first three novels

in a longer series, for example. This is often called a box set, though Amazon doesn’t let you use that term. The philosophy in this case is the same as promoting a single entry point novel, just on a larger scale. When I ran a promo for my first three-novel box set, I made a decent profit on the box set alone. More importantly, sales skyrocketed for the second three-book collection in that series—books 4, 5, and 6—which sold for \$9.99.

Your ninety-nine-cent book buyers are more likely to buy the next book in the series than an FFIS; you can expect 10 percent to 30 percent of ninety-nine-cent buyers to get the next book. Robin Reads, The Fussy Librarian, eReaderIQ (<https://ereaderiq.com>), Bargain Booksy, and Ereader News Today are some newsletters that do well promoting ninety-nine-cent books.

### TRACKING YOUR PROMOS

Especially when starting out, it’s important to understand where you can effectively spend money. Although no promo newsletters provide sales data, you can get a good idea of your downloads and sales in each store’s reporting dashboard or with a tool like ScribeCount. See how many downloads or sales you received the day of the promo and the day after; this will show the effective promos—and the failures.

“Cost per download” is an effective way to determine the value of a promo. If a promo costs you \$100, resulting in one thousand downloads, your cost per download is \$0.10.

If you track your book 2 and book 3 sales over the next thirty days, you’ll get a rough idea of how much money each



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promo is making you. For example, in the \$100 promo example:

- Entry point novel (book 1): One thousand downloads
- Book 2: Fifty purchases at \$4.99 (5 percent read-through with a royalty of \$3.50 each, or \$175)
- Book 3: Thirty purchases at \$4.99 (\$105)
- Book 4: Twenty-five purchases at \$4.99 (\$87.50)

Your one thousand downloads have resulted in sales of \$367.50. So each download makes you about \$0.37. Since you paid \$0.10 per download, you've made almost three times the return on your investment.

multiple promos simultaneously until you've experimented with each newsletter individually.

## HOW OFTEN SHOULD YOU RUN PAID PROMOS?

Repeating promos to the same book leads to a decreasing number of downloads. For this reason, I don't repeat promos more than once every six months. The Fussy Librarian is the exception: I run their promo every sixty days and see a consistent number of downloads. The Fussy Librarian touts their ability to attract new subscribers consistently, so this may be why. Your experience will vary. Some newsletters that work well for others will not work for you, and vice versa. Some newsletters will have consistent results for you, while others will drop off dramatically with your second promo.



## STACKING YOUR PROMOS

Some experts suggest you stack your promos—in other words, run promos on multiple sites on the same day, or on consecutive days. This can juice the book retailers' algorithms, making your book more visible to buyers in their online store, which will sell more books. However, if you stack your promos and run a \$30 promo, a \$50 promo, and a \$100 promo on the same day (or within a day of each other), you can't separate the data to tell which promo made a profit or loss. When you're starting out with promo newsletters, knowing where to spend your money is crucial to continued success, so it's best to avoid running

## PROMO NEWSLETTERS: PART OF AN EFFECTIVE BOOK-MARKETING STRATEGY

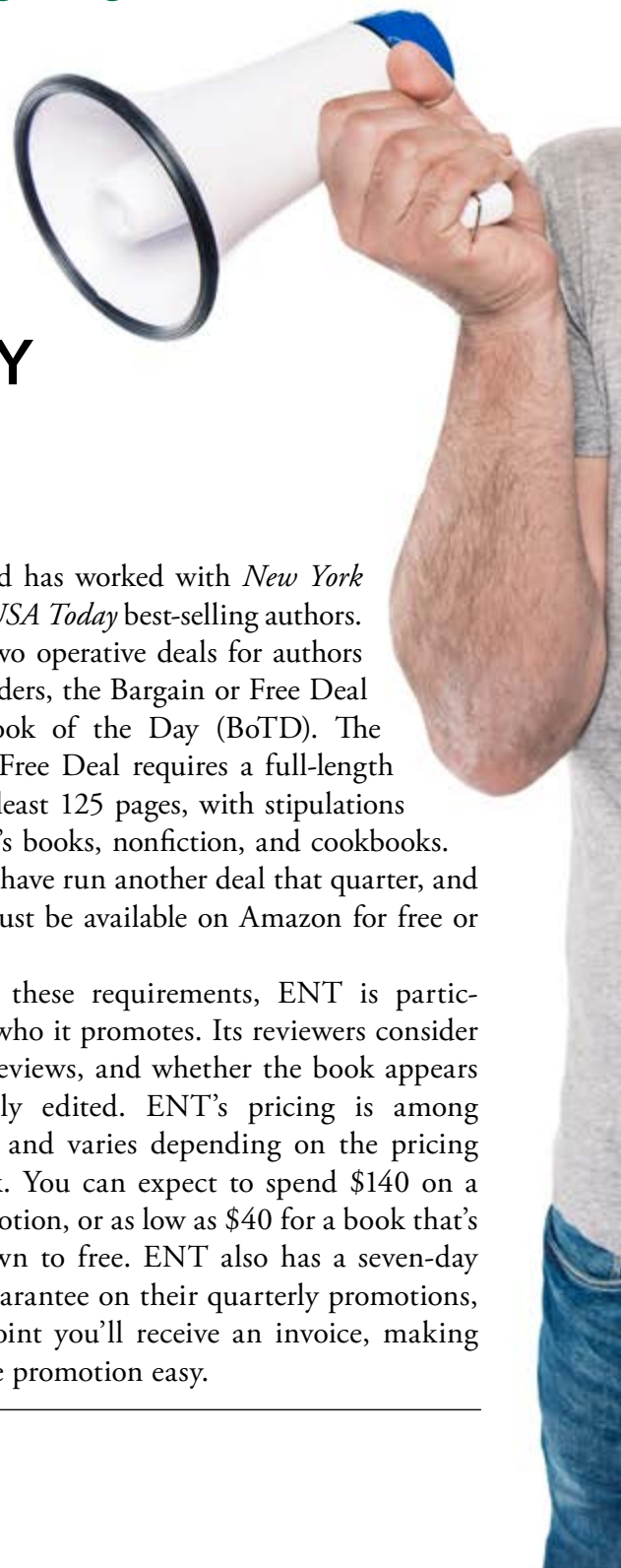
Although it's important to understand best practices, your author journey will be unique. Many authors have found that an FFIS strategy with paid promo newsletters works for them; others have found success with ninety-nine-cent promos. Above all, do what works for you and your business. ■

Paul Austin Ardoin



# Fight the Promo FOMO

## PROMO NEWSLETTER OPTIONS FOR EVERY INDIE AUTHOR



Authors have long sought ways to send their work to the masses. Pay-per-click ads, social media, direct sales events—there are a multitude of options, all with unique purposes.

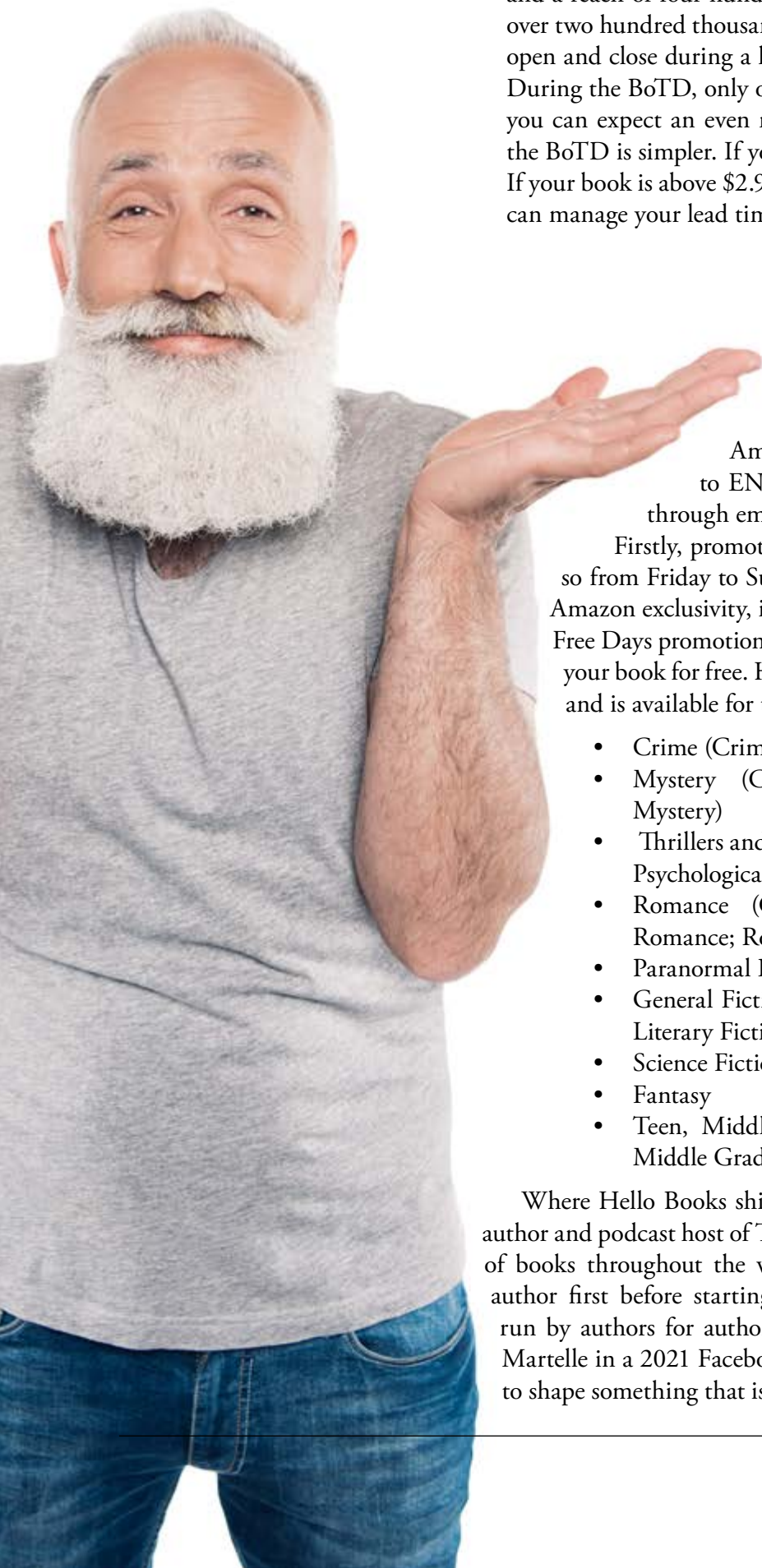
The longstanding king of reaching readers has been through email, where one email blast can send your book to the top of the charts or drive thousands of downloads. Luckily, if you don't have an email list, there are services out there with established lists—referred to sometimes as promo newsletters—all with specialized subgenres, requirements, and varying price points. No matter what your strategy, we're here to introduce you, in no particular order, to a few newsletter promo sites that boast to put your book in front of thousands of readers, so you can decide where these might fit in your author business.

### EREADER NEWS TODAY

In business since 2010, Ereader News Today (ENT) states it is the oldest e-book newsletter in the

industry and has worked with *New York Times* and *USA Today* best-selling authors. ENT has two operative deals for authors to reach readers, the Bargain or Free Deal and the Book of the Day (BoTD). The Bargain or Free Deal requires a full-length novel of at least 125 pages, with stipulations for children's books, nonfiction, and cookbooks. You cannot have run another deal that quarter, and the book must be available on Amazon for free or for \$0.99.

Beyond these requirements, ENT is particular about who it promotes. Its reviewers consider the cover, reviews, and whether the book appears professionally edited. ENT's pricing is among the highest and varies depending on the pricing of the book. You can expect to spend \$140 on a \$2.99 promotion, or as low as \$40 for a book that's marked down to free. ENT also has a seven-day response guarantee on their quarterly promotions, at which point you'll receive an invoice, making booking the promotion easy.



ENT's BoTD is the site's flagship deal with quarterly availability and a reach of four hundred seventy-five thousand Facebook fans and over two hundred thousand email subscribers. Submissions for the deal open and close during a limited time frame, and slots sell out quickly. During the BoTD, only one book from each genre will be chosen, and you can expect an even more competitive vetting process. Pricing on the BoTD is simpler. If your book is \$2.99 or below, the BoTD is \$60. If your book is above \$2.99, the deal is \$150. Consider the BoTD if you can manage your lead times on your promotions far in advance.

## HELLO BOOKS

As a new service by an old pro, Hello Books is a book promotion tool in development by indie pioneer Mark Dawson for Amazon-exclusive titles. Hello Books is similar to ENT in the way it operates and reaches readers through email, but it has a few separate requirements.

Firstly, promotions are only run on free books and must be so from Friday to Sunday of your promotional period. Given the Amazon exclusivity, it is worth mentioning you can use your KDP Free Days promotional tool from your Amazon dashboard to price your book for free. Hello Books has a straightforward price of \$40 and is available for the following genres:

- Crime (Crime Fiction)
- Mystery (Cozy Mysteries; Historical Mysteries; Mystery)
- Thrillers and Action (Thrillers; Action and Adventure; Psychological Thrillers)
- Romance (Contemporary Romance; New Adult Romance; Romantic Suspense; Historical Romance)
- Paranormal Romance
- General Fiction (Historical Fiction; Women's Fiction; Literary Fiction; Christian Fiction)
- Science Fiction
- Fantasy
- Teen, Middle Grade, and Young Adult (Children's Middle Grade; Young Adult)

Where Hello Books shines is in its backing. Mark Dawson, Thriller author and podcast host of The Self Publishing Formula, has sold millions of books throughout the world across multiple languages. He was an author first before starting Hello Books, and "because the project is run by authors for authors," wrote 20BooksTo50K® co-founder Craig Martelle in a 2021 Facebook post, "we believe that we are in a position to shape something that is particularly effective and appropriate for us."



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Martelle is a shareholder in the project alongside Dawson and other established authors.

### WHY GIVE A BOOK AWAY FOR FREE?

Like any product, books must conform to the buyer's expectations yet circumvent the know-like-trust barrier. Readers are customers, and as customers, they may be wary of an author they've never heard of; they risk disappointment if they don't find what they're looking for in a book. By marking a book down as free, the author removes the financial risk from the reader and makes it more likely they will give a new author a try. If the book stands out to them, it is more likely they will move on to read additional stories by that same author. This concept is no different from the sample bite offered at many chains and stores.







## BOOKRAID

BookRaid offers a novel approach to book promotions in which authors and publishers only pay for the clicks on their book. Each promotion will spend a maximum of \$60, even if the value of your clicks—determined by the price of the book being promoted—is higher. What this means for the author is a potential value with BookRaid's model to earn more than what you pay for the promotion.

Where this offer is enticing is in the concept of only paying per click, similar to that of Amazon Ads or Facebook Ads. Authors' books are placed in an email blast and must be discounted by 50 percent or more or made free.

Again, this promotion requires Amazon availability and has stipulations regarding lengths: a minimum of 120 pages for fiction, eighty pages for nonfiction, fifty pages for cookbooks, and twenty pages for children's books. BookRaid also notes it does not accept books written by artificial intelligence tools.

Pricing a BookRaid promotion differs from most lump-sum email blasts. Here is how the cost breaks down:

- Free book promotions cost \$0.15 per click.
- Ninety-nine-cent promotions cost \$0.20 per click.
- \$2.99 promotions cost \$0.60 per click.

- Minimum charge is \$1. Not enough clicks to make \$1? It's free!
- Maximum charge is \$60 no matter the category or sale price.

BookRaid notes that 100 percent of income generated by the site returns to the growth of the readership of forty-thousand-plus; the developers of the site aren't paid.

## MORE OPTIONS

Whether you're pushing a new launch, reviving an old series, or trying to gain exposure to new readers, including a promotional site or tool that meets your budget, book, and strategy remains of utmost importance, and we can't possibly list all the available services here. If you're interested in learning more, Dave Chesson with *Kindlepreneur* has a list of more than one hundred free and paid services (<https://kindlepreneur.com/list-sites-promote-free-amazon-books>). His article explains how promotional websites work, which he's tested, and how to calculate how valuable the promotion was based on how much you spent.

David Gaughran, who also keeps a pulse on all things indie, has a similar list of his best book promotion sites (<https://davidgaughran.com/best-promo-sites-books>).

Authors should always consider strategy and goals for getting their books in front of new readers, and these websites and tools are not a one-size-fits-all solution. We encourage you to dig into the details by considering who your ideal reader is, what they're looking for, and how your book appears to them. ■

David Viergutz

# Pixel Perfect

## HOW THESE NEARLY INVISIBLE DATA COLLECTION TOOLS CAN BOOST YOUR AUTHOR BUSINESS

In today's digital age, authors have many tools to increase book sales and reach their target audiences. One of the most effective ways to do this is using pixel tags. That's right—those colorful little squares on your screen can do a lot more than you may think.

Although most simply make up part of larger images, the type of pixel we're talking about is a small transparent image containing snippets of code installed on your website, email, or social media pages to track user behavior. The pixel, more accurately known as a tracking pixel, pixel tag, or web beacon, is loaded when a user visits the website or social media page or opens an email. Information about the user's activity, such as the pages they visit or whether they open the email, is sent back to the website's server. Pixels are commonly used to track website analytics, measure ad campaign performance, and personalize content.

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## PIXELS ARE EVERYWHERE

Pixel data is invaluable for marketing and advertising, as it helps you understand your audience and tailor your ad campaigns on platforms like Facebook and Amazon. Pixels are integral to many modern technologies and applications; you might be using them without realizing it. Social media platforms use pixels to track user behavior and gather data for advertising. The snippets of code embedded in the pixels of images and videos you view collect information about your activity. When you feel like somebody's watching you, they are—figuratively. Your activity, preferences, likes, and dislikes are being tracked, so businesses can serve you highly targeted ads.

One of the primary benefits of using pixels on your own site is audience targeting. You can create custom audiences for ad campaigns based on pixel data from user behavior on your website. By narrowing your advertising efforts to a specific audience, you can increase the effectiveness of your campaigns and potentially drive more book sales. You can also identify trends and adjust your advertising campaigns by analyzing the data they collect, such as which pages on your website generate the most traffic.

Retargeting is another useful feature; with pixels, you can retarget users who interact with you by tracking user behavior on your website and social media platforms. Ever wonder why you see an ad over and over once you've searched for something or visited a website? The websites are using the data collected from your visit. Data suggests that it takes seven or more "touches" to turn a prospect into a buyer. This can help you stay top-of-mind with potential readers and increase the likelihood that they will eventually make a purchase.

Lastly, pixel tags can help you see which advertising campaigns are most effective at driving conversions by tracking book sales and newsletter sign-ups. This lets you make data-driven decisions about future marketing efforts and optimize your advertising budget.



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## MAKE PIXELS WORK FOR YOU

As an author, understanding pixel use can be beneficial in several ways.

- **Understanding your audience:** Using pixels, you can track how visitors interact with your website, what pages they visit, and what actions they take. This can give you valuable insights and help you understand their interests and behavior.
- **Building your audience:** Using pixel data, you can create custom audiences and target advertising campaigns based on people who have visited your website or engaged with your content. The Amazon Advertising Pixel can track user behavior and gather data about how prospects interact with your Amazon product pages and those of authors similar to you. This data can be used to optimize ad delivery to readers who are more likely to convert.
- **Improving ad performance:** By tracking pixel data, you can analyze the performance of your advertising campaigns and make data-driven decisions to improve their effectiveness.
- **Retargeting:** Using retargeting campaigns, you can show ads to people who have previously visited your website, encouraging them to engage further with your content or purchase your book.

By tracking user behavior and using this data to inform your marketing efforts, you can create more effective campaigns and ultimately reach more readers.

## INTEGRATE PIXEL TAGS WITH PLATFORMS YOU ALREADY USE

If you have a website, you can integrate pixels today. Most platforms have detailed instructions on how to set up their pixel tags on your website. Follow those, and you're on your way to data city. Below are the links to popular platforms' instruction pages.

- For Facebook and Instagram: Visit <https://www.facebook.com/business/help> and search for "Meta Pixel Installation" and "Meta Pixel Helper."

- For TikTok: Visit <https://ads.tiktok.com/help/article/get-started-pixel>.
- For LinkedIn: Visit <https://business.linkedin.com/marketing-solutions/insight-tag>.
- For Twitter: In the Twitter Ads Help Center, search for “Conversion tracking for websites.”
- For Google: Visit <https://support.google.com> and search “Use the Google tag for Google Ads conversion tracking” and “Set up Analytics for a website and/or app.”
- For Amazon: Visit <https://advertising.amazon.com> and search “Measure ad performance with advertising analytics” and “Advertising solutions for books.”

Additionally, almost every platform will have an instruction page, discoverable by searching the platform’s name and the words “pixel tag.”

## HOW TO ACCESS PIXEL DATA

Accessing pixels typically involves embedding a tracking code on your website or landing page. Here are the basic steps to access pixels.

- Choose the platform that is most appropriate for your marketing goals. Meta (Facebook), Google ads, Amazon, TikTok, and Instagram all use pixel tags, as do several other popular sites. Choose those that align with your marketing goals.
- Create a business account and follow their instructions to set up your campaign.
- Once you’ve set up your campaign, the advertising platform will provide you with a tracking code to add to your website or landing page. Meta will allow you to set up a pixel tag to track data without running ads. To do this, go to its help page, <https://facebook.com/business/help>, and search “How to create a Meta Pixel in Business Manager.”
- Copy and paste the tracking code into the header or footer of your website or landing

page. This code will generate a pixel that tracks user behavior on your site, such as page views, clicks, and conversions.

- Once you’ve set the tracking code, monitor the performance of your campaigns and make adjustments based on the data collected. This will help you optimize campaigns for better results.

It’s important to note that accessing pixels for marketing requires compliance with privacy laws, such as General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in Europe and California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA), as well as ethical marketing practices. Review the policies and guidelines of your chosen advertising platform, and comply with applicable laws and regulations.

## ACCESSING PIXEL TAGS’ INFORMATION

The information pixels collect is typically accessible through the provider’s dashboard or reporting interface. To access pixel data, you must set up the pixel tracking code on your website and correctly configure the pixel provider’s settings. Once the pixel is active, it may take some time for data to accumulate, so be patient and check back periodically for new data. Reviewing pixel data regularly and using it to optimize your marketing campaigns and website performance is important. Use the links above to learn more about each platform’s report access.

## WHEN TO MAKE ADJUSTMENTS

In a few instances, you might need to adjust the data pixels collect for your business, such as when you experience:

- A change in business goals: If you’ve changed your business goals or marketing strategy, you may need to adjust the data pixels collect. For example, if you are now targeting a different audience or promoting

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a different book or series, you may need to update your pixel events or create new custom conversions to track the actions relevant to your new goals.

- **Changes to your website:** If you make significant changes, such as redesigning your website, adding or removing pages, or changing your website structure, you may need to update your pixel code to ensure it is still tracking the correct information.
- **Tracking errors:** If your pixel is not tracking certain events or is providing inaccurate data, you may need to troubleshoot the issue and adjust your pixel code to ensure it functions correctly.
- **Changes to data privacy regulations:** If you want to access more information on this topic, <https://oag.ca.gov/privacy/ccpa> and <https://gdpr.eu/what-is-gdpr/> are both good resources.

It's a good practice to review and adjust your pixel tag's settings regularly to ensure it collects accurate and relevant data for your business goals.

## THE COST OF PIXEL TRACKING

The cost of using a pixel on your website will depend on the pixel provider you choose and the features you require. Here are some factors that can affect the cost.

- Different pixel providers have different pricing models. For example, Facebook Pixel and Twitter Pixel are free whereas Google Analytics offers free and paid versions.
- Some pixel providers charge based on your website's visitors. You may need to upgrade your pixel plan to accommodate more traffic as it grows.

- Some pixel providers offer advanced features like real-time analytics, advanced targeting options, and customer segmentation. These features may come at an additional cost.
- If you need to integrate your pixel with other marketing tools, such as marketing automation software or email marketing platforms, there may be additional costs associated with those integrations.

It's important to note that while most ad platforms provide free pixel tags, there may still be costs associated with pixel tracking, such as the time and resources required to set up and maintain the pixel on your website.

## UTILIZING PIXEL INFORMATION EFFECTIVELY

You need a website to use pixel tags since the code must be installed on a site to track user behavior. Having a website provides a more comprehensive understanding of user behavior, as you can track users as they navigate through different pages on your site. A website also provides a "home base" that you own, so no matter what any platform does, your readers always know where to find you.

Overall, pixel tags can be powerful tools for authors who want to increase book sales and connect with readers. By targeting specific audiences, retargeting users who have interacted with your website in the past, optimizing your campaigns based on data, and tracking conversions, you can make more informed decisions about your marketing efforts and increase your chances of success as an author. ■

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)



# Let Your Work Take Center Stage with Author Readings

Promoting your books can take any number of forms as you explore all the options available to readers. But if you're looking for a way to attract a local audience to your story or meet readers at an in-person event, one option is to do an author reading. You get to read an excerpt of your book the way you intended it to be heard, and if you do it right, you'll leave the audience dying to read the rest.


Author reading opportunities, including genre-specific ones, are easy to find if you know where to look. But before you step up to the mic, let's explore how you can make the most of reading events. And if stage fright is holding you back, don't worry—we've got tips to help build your confidence before the big day.

## SETTING UP AUTHOR READINGS

Some signings, conferences, and workshops allow time for author readings, but choose events that feel right for you. If you're nervous about speaking in front of a crowd, start with a smaller audience or venue, then ease your way into larger events as you feel comfortable.

Try searching for open mic nights or cabaret-style events that are open to all. You can often find these in your area by looking through the local newspaper or online listings. Check if your local government has any groups or events to support the creative industries. Sites like Meetup.com may also have groups you can join that organize events for local creatives, or you can organize your own event at a local bookstore or library.





You could even take it online with a live reading on Facebook or YouTube, directly to your own audience. Be aware that you're going to have to market your event, whatever you choose to do. You can

spread the word using your newsletter and social media, but you may also need to use more local marketing, such as contacting the local newspaper and advertising around the area to bring in an audience.

As you search, it can be helpful to find genre-specific readings, so every audience member is a potential new reader for you. Ask other authors in your genre, and visit genre-specific groups on Facebook for ideas. Some conferences are also genre-specific and may allow readings. Talk to the organizer about guidelines for your reading. Ask about any content restrictions that may be in place related to violence, swearing, or heat level in your novel, so you can choose something appropriate for your audience.

Check how long you've got for your reading, and stick to it. Plan your excerpt ahead of time, and practice with a stopwatch if you've been given a set amount of time. Find out if you're allowed to sell your books or any merchandise at the event. It isn't a deal breaker if you can't; instead, print bookmarks or cards with a QR code and link straight to your Amazon page or web store that you can hand out.

## WHAT TO FEATURE

When choosing what to read, think about which books you want to sell at the event and which

excerpt will have the most impact on the audience.

## WHICH BOOK DO YOU WANT TO PROMOTE?

What you choose to read depends on where you are with your book launches. Do you have a book coming out around the time of your reading that you want to promote? Should you read from the previous book in the series to whet readers' appetites? Do you want to promote a book from your backlist? Consider your upcoming releases, the time of year, or the theme of your event and whether you have writing that will fit.

## CHOOSE YOUR BEST SECTION TO READ

It doesn't matter where in the book your passage takes place as long as what you're reading is entertaining, with enough tension and conflict in it to grab your audience. You want them to want more and buy the book.

You'll usually be able to give a short introduction before the timer starts on your reading to introduce your story and what's taking place as your excerpt begins.

## AVOID SPOILERS

You can read from anywhere in the book, but try to choose a section that doesn't include any spoilers. You don't want to give away too much of the plot.

## PICK A GOOD ENDING

You want to intrigue your audience and leave them wanting more, so choose a great line to finish on, or end with a cliffhanger, so people have to know what happens next. You want them to buy the book, and this is the best way to make that happen.

**Pro Tip:** Rather than read from a book that's already out, consider testing material you're working on to see your audience's reaction. Want to know if your funny lines are funny, or if your words hit the audience in the feels? Here's the trick: Practice what



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you're reading beforehand until it's almost second nature. Then, as you're reading, note your audience's reactions. You might also decide to improvise a line or add in a great idea that came up on the fly as you read. Don't be afraid to try new things if you have the confidence for it.

### SCARING AWAY STAGE FRIGHT

Especially for your first reading, don't pick a complicated passage with multiple characters and deep emotions to perform. Choose an excerpt without difficult words you may trip over or potentially sensitive language, like steamy scenes or cursing.

If you're planning to do a lot of readings and speaking engagements, then it may be worth the time to take a course or two to improve your speaking voice. Working on your voice will give you a confidence boost and give you additional practice at public speaking outside of the events. Some people can open a book at any point and read from it with confidence without any practice. But if that's not you, don't be shy about practicing. You'll feel more nervous if you're underprepared.

While no one expects you to be flawless in front of the microphone, you can still learn some tricks from the professionals to help as well. Listen to an audiobook to see how professional narrators adjust their voices to portray different characters and convey different emotions. You know best what your characters feel in a given moment; let yourself feel those emotions too, and they'll come across in your voice as you read.

**Pro Tip:** If you're reading from a work in progress, you may discover new layers and emotional depth to add to your writing.

If you have the confidence, it's great to glance up at your audience while you're reading and connect with them. If you're new, however, meeting someone's eyes in the audience could put you off completely. If that's the case, look just above the heads of the audience, at the back of the room. No one will be able to tell that you aren't meeting anyone's eyes, and you'll be able to keep your nerves in check.

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## THE DAY OF THE EVENT

When it's time for the big day, before you set off for your event, check that you've got your excerpt in whatever format is most comfortable for you—printed pages, a print copy of your book, on your Kindle, or even on your phone. If you're worried about your voice, take a pack of Vocalzone pastilles, or a similar brand of pastilles meant for performers, with you to soothe your throat. Beyond that, you need yourself, your nerve, and perhaps a bottle of water, though most events will have somewhere you can buy a drink.

About ten minutes before your reading, do simple exercises to relax your body. Roll your shoulders, soften your knees, and massage your cheeks and jaw to warm your face and relax yourself. Any tension in your shoulders, knees, and face can affect your voice, so do what you can to get rid of it. Slow breathing exercises can also help, especially if you breathe from your diaphragm.

When you're about to start reading, make sure you're still relaxed with soft knees. Continue breathing from your diaphragm as you read. You'll have a lot more power and depth to your voice. If your shoulders are moving as you breathe, then you're breathing from too high up. Keep your shoulders down, take a good breath, and project your voice to the back of the room to ensure you're speaking loudly enough for everyone to hear.

You've practiced this—now it's time to enjoy the moment!

### A FEW MORE TIPS:

- Don't rush your reading. If you're nervous, you'll naturally speak faster than usual, so take your time.


- Pauses are never as long as you think they are. Use them to think about what you are saying and how your character feels.
- Give your audience space to react. If you're reading humor and the audience laughs, for example, what you say next could be lost if you continue reading.

## HANDLING THOSE WORDS

If you have trouble with reading certain body parts, swear words, or sexy descriptions in your book, then you'll have to decide whether to read a part of your story without them or practice saying them aloud until they're no longer a problem. Depending on your genre, however, your audience may anticipate something more scandalous. Weigh your audience's expectations as you make your decision.

If you decide on a passage that includes more mature language, remember these words are just words—and hopefully the right words for the story you wanted to tell. Getting comfortable saying them will ensure you can present that part of your story authentically during your event.

In these cases, the best way to desensitize yourself to uncomfortable words or phrases may be simple repetition. Start in a quiet room of your home, and write a list of the words you struggle with the most. Read the words aloud to yourself in a variety of voices and intonations. Don't worry if you get embarrassed or start laughing here. It can be funny, and in some situations, the humor will help. It can also be a unique stress reliever, so have fun. Keep repeating your words until you get comfortable hearing them in your own voice. Next, either sit in front of a mirror and repeat them or ask a friend to listen to you read them, so you get comfortable saying them in front of someone.



Once you're comfortable with the words on their own, practice your whole reading out loud until you're happy with it. If you need to, enlist the help of a friend, so you've had the experience of saying the whole thing to someone else before you face a full audience. Even if your book's excerpt is steam-free, practicing any words or phrases that feel awkward or embarrassing ahead of time can be a great way to prepare for your reading and lessen your nerves.

Performing author readings can give your audience a great idea of what your author voice is like and what they can expect from your books. You can connect with readers on a more personal level, and when it's over, you might even have a few more devoted fans than when you started. ■

Liv Honeywell

### **WHY VOCALZONE PASTILLES AND NOT GENERAL THROAT LOZENGES?**

1. These are specific pastilles for professional actors and singers, designed for the job.
2. General throat lozenges may contain menthol, which can dry your throat—the last thing you want if you're feeling nervous.
3. General throat lozenges may also contain a painkiller of some kind, such as benzocaine, which can numb your throat. If you can't feel your throat and parts of your mouth properly, you won't deliver as good of a reading and may risk damaging your voice if you push yourself too far.



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# From the Stacks



## GET YOUR BOOK SELLING WITH CROSS-PROMOTION

by Monica Leonelle and Russell P. Nohelty

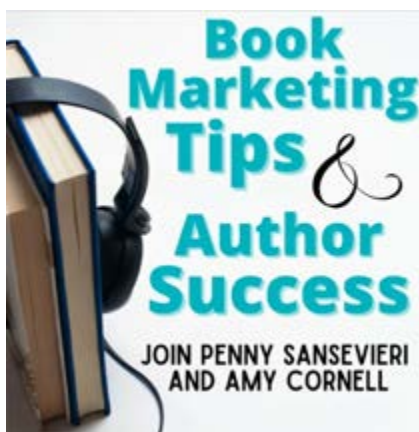
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0968ZXVVK>

In this book you'll discover all the different types of cross-promotion, using boxed sets and anthologies to build your customer base, stacking newsletter promotions, swaps, and social media builders to get better results on your launches, building viral campaigns that help you grow your audience quickly, and how list-aiming boxed sets, Kickstarter campaigns, and other launch-style marketing opportunities work.

## BEST BOOK PROMOTION SITES IN 2023

<https://davidgaughran.com/best-promo-sites-books/>

Check out this comprehensive list of the best book promotion sites tested and curated by David Gaughran.



## BOOK MARKETING TIPS AND AUTHOR SUCCESS

<https://indieauthortools.com/book-marketing-tips-and-author-success/>

Need easy-to-implement book marketing strategies? Join Penny Sansevieri and Amy Cornell on this weekly podcast for new ideas on selling books and growing your platform. The co-hosts are affiliated with Author Marketing Experts, a book promotion company.

# Writing Outside the Law with the Vigilante Justice Subgenre


Gone are the days where evil-doers stalk the night, chasing down helpless victims while the law struggles to keep up. Now, a new hero rises, one not afraid to toe the morally gray line in the name of what is right. Their actions can set up the perfect adventure for readers to dig into. More importantly, they make up a rising subgenre in the Mystery, Thriller, and Suspense category, where the rules are meant to bend.

Called Vigilante Justice, this category of story identifies a well-known trope, the self-appointed bringer of justice, to the central theme of right versus wrong. K-Lytics mastermind Alex Newton, a thought leader and provider of comprehensive Amazon category data, is quick to point out a steady increase in interest in the subgenre, easily identifiable tropes, and near-cliché covers that set this type of story apart.

More specifically, readers have come to expect a story in this subgenre to include a strong male character like Jack Reacher or John Wick, for whom destruction and bodies trail their assault on evil.

What makes Vigilante Justice unique is it is a wildly popular genre without strict by-laws for writing to-market stories. Spies, assassins, kick-ass female warriors, and a multitude of special forces-type characters all fall under the main category of Mystery, Thriller, and Suspense, but what makes them unique to the subgenre is why they do what they do in the face of great trial.

Newton provided a report on Vigilante Justice, annotating a list of descriptive terms searchers in Amazon used to find books of this nature. Some of these terms include “revenge,” “vengeance,” “retaliation,” and “vendetta”—all strong nouns that signal a character’s actions and offer important plot points for writers to consider. Readers latch onto these stories because they’re forced to consider what they might do if the law was inept. A distinction should be made here as well. A morally

A person wearing a dark hoodie and a green beanie is seen from behind, looking out over a city at night. The city features tall apartment buildings and a highway with white lane markings. The sky is dark with some clouds, and the overall lighting is dim, with some light reflecting off the road and buildings.

gray character or anti-hero alone shouldn't land a book in this category. Characters who are morally gray stand outside the dichotomy of good versus evil. They pursue their own ambitions, often driven to do so through the plot of the story. In *John Wick*, it appears John is avenging the death of his dog and theft of his car, when in reality, he targets the system that allowed it to happen. Writers should include the "why" the readers are looking for, so they too can feel connected vicariously to the story while also asking themselves, "What would I do if...?"

Readers have been the major focus of this conversation, especially around their expectations and desires, which raises questions about what authors can get away with in their work without upsetting them too much. What tropes can be subverted, and is there room for experimentation? Fortunately or unfortunately, Newton says, the answer isn't evident. Readers of this genre seem somewhat flexible given the terminology found in the genre and subgenre search terms of the 2022 K-Lytics search term report for Vigilante Justice. In this report, Newton found mentions of "police," "CIA," "military," and "assassin," terms most associated with Action, Spy, and Crime Thrillers.

Consider Jack Reacher, the archetypal vigilante of Lee Child's Jack Reacher series. He's an ex-lawman, wrongfully accused of murder. Reacher's actions, namely punching his way to getting answers, especially when the law isn't doing what it's supposed to, ground him as a vigilante and separate the story even further into the Vigilante Justice subgenre. Later in the series, he and a woman are kidnapped and held for ransom, the stakes are life and death, and only he can make a difference. Again, we revisit what makes the subgenre special, because these short descriptions of the Reacher books show there is a lot of overlap between Vigilante Justice and the classic Thriller story.

The Vigilante Justice subgenre appears primed for new authors to enter the genre to feel confident that if they package their book properly, and hit a few of the tropes, the genre will continue to provide a stable, mainstream home capable of maintaining commercial success. ■

David Viergutz



# Prosperity Starts with Promotion



As much as I love producing a book, it's the promotion of a new book that really gets my juices flowing. And because I know the other columns in this month's magazine are going to dive into the particulars of the different promo sites, I want to share from a different angle.

As I'm sure you already know, there are so many book promotion sites, and most of them are excellent, which means you could spend all day, every day, engaging in new promotions for your book. And if you have the time to do that, that is incredible.

But most likely, you are like most authors in that you're not only juggling your writing responsibilities—the “book business beeswax”—but you also have other personal commitments. Maybe you even have a separate full-time job.

This means you have to determine this aspect of your book marketing much like any other marketing you do: with intention.

My philosophy on book marketing has evolved over the years. I, too, want to do everything because doing everything is fun. But my calendar says, “Nope.” I've had to look at promotion sites through the four filters I use for every book marketing initiative.

1. **Does it fit my personality?** With promo sites, it doesn't really matter whether you're an introvert, extrovert, or ambivert. What does factor in is whether it makes sense to promote on a few sites, several sites, or many sites.
2. **What is your book's job or role?** People sometimes publish nonfiction books to do the heavy lifting of generating new business. They write fiction books to entertain, to take people away from their cares and concerns and transport them to another world. Promo sites are designed differently for different types of books, so you will want to make sure the site you use and your book are in alignment.
3. **What's your time availability?** You might have limited time, which means you may need to go all in on just a few sites. But if you have a few hours a day to dedicate to promotions, experimenting with many sites might be fun.
4. **How much money do you have to spend?** Although there are plenty of free promotion sites, you'll want to keep in mind that just because something is free doesn't mean it will be effective. If it won't move the needle, it doesn't make sense to do it “just in case.” Be sure to define your available funds and only engage in the sites that make sense for your budget.

The more intentional you are in analyzing potential promotional sites for your book against the four filters above, the more likely you will be to identify the ones that will make the most sense and, as a result, make the most impact on your book sales and reader engagement.

Remember to ask your fellow authors for their best recommendations. It's always fun to talk books with my author buddies, and many times, they share some great tips. You'll probably identify some of the best promo sites ever while you're building relationships with your author friends. Happy promoting! ■

Honorée Corder

# Bringing Children and Books into the World

A thought came to me the other night while I was down on my knees. Alas, I was not praying but cleaning out the litter box, and while ten percent of my brain pondered the eternal verity of dust to dust, the other ninety percent was in a fit of frustration after a misunderstanding with my daughter and pondering a marketing opportunity for my books. At that moment, it came to me that the two experiences—bringing books and children into the world—are filled with an alarming number of similarities. There's the excitement that grips you when you first think: "Yes. I can do this!" The dawning realization that the process might take longer than you imagined. The unanticipated discomforts: "Will this heartburn never end?" "How can I make this boring chapter interesting?" The secret shock and horror that no one must ever know you harbor: that your newborn looks like Winston Churchill, or that your cover is not at all what you'd hoped for.

There's the pride, joy, and fear: "Will everyone else recognize how perfect this creation is?" And the occasional hidden doubt: "Is this essence of me that I've struggled to bring into the world truly perfect?" *Please don't let them notice the bad behavior, or the head-hopping in Chapter Three.*

The list of things we never thought of is endless: a diaper overflowing on a friend's sofa, or those red, perforated lines not lining up on the format page. So too are the unforeseen astronomical costs: "A bottle of Tylenol that small costs how much?" "I have to pay for copy-editing by the word?" And then there's the waiting: "Any day now, this child will sleep through the night, right?" "Any day now my sales will take off, won't they?"



But finally they are out in the world. My babies and my books. I look back and see so many times I made the wrong call, made a too-hasty decision, or didn't give more time and attention to a delicate situation. So many times I rushed in like a fool when smart angels were warning me to look at my checklist or spend more time hanging out with my kid. Then I get the rare gift of a full night's sleep, and I fall vulnerable to that most insidious thought: "It wasn't all that bad; I kind of like this child/book. I can do it again."

So I take the plunge, and the sleepless nights begin again. ■

Meg Napier



# Picture-Perfect Ads

## THE ROLE IMAGES SHOULD PLAY IN YOUR FACEBOOK ADS

For some, Facebook advertising can be a hole into which they pour money with little or no return. For others, and I'm one of them, it is the source of a fortune. You have to invest your money to find the things that work. That's scary, but when you find ads that work, that funny little hobby your spouse rolls their eyes at will make their pension fund look like pocket money.

I have spent close to a million dollars on ads over the past couple of years, always netting a high return from my investment. When you get it right, Facebook Ads act like a machine into which you feed a dollar and get two in return. Or three. Or maybe even five.

However, you can't just throw money at it. Getting Facebook Ads right is an art many never learn.

There are two elements that rise above the rest in perfecting the Facebook Ad formula:

1. audience, and
2. image.

In this article, I am going to look at image.

First, let me dispel a myth. I have heard it said and seen it written that one should never use your covers as the images for your ads. This might once have been true, but I often use my covers for ad images. I get text-free

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versions from my cover artist and zoom in or crop them. This ensures the reader is seeing something very similar to what they will find when they arrive on my Amazon product page.

I might not always use the cover for the book being advertised, but if I don't, then it's one from that series instead. Or I'll use something that is not one of my covers but may look similar.

Recently, I tried to advertise a Fantasy Steam-punk Pirate/Tomb Raider series. I tried out a lot of images, including the covers, but the one that got all the clicks was a busty pirate wench. Big surprise, I know.

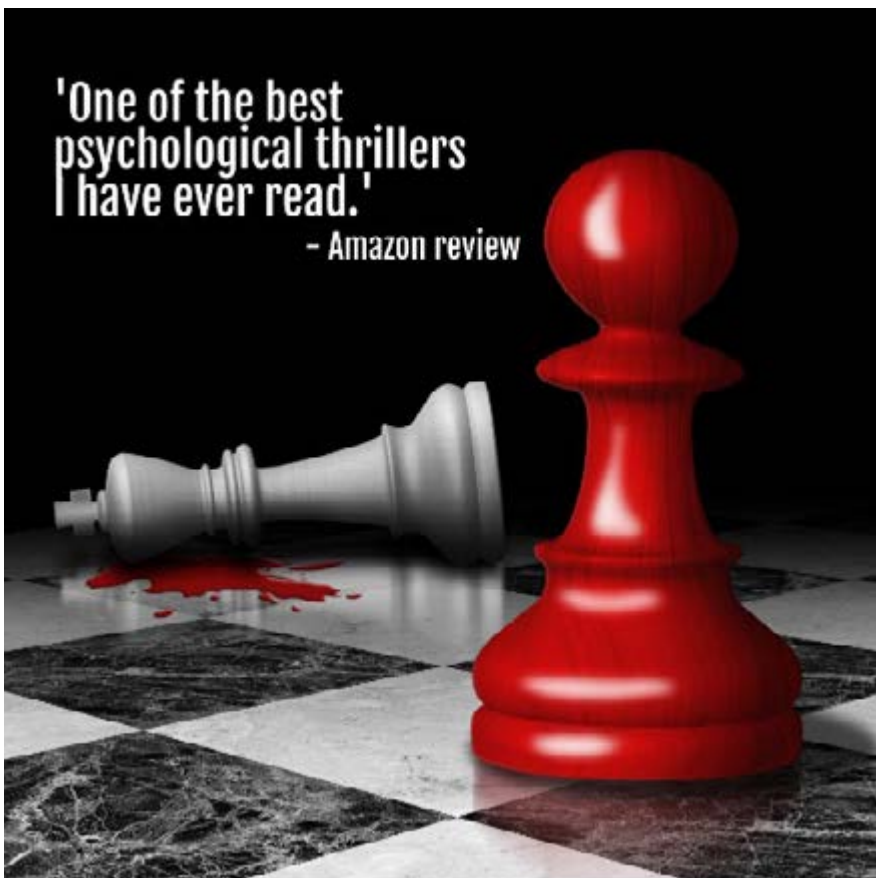
Still, after everyone clicked the image of the lady in question, no one bought the book. Why? Because the image that drew them in had nothing to do with the series.

The image in the advertisement for any series can be anything so long as it is not too far removed from what you are selling and will catch people's eyes. Its sole aim is to stop people scrolling.

Then, by using a caption in the image tailored to your audience, you can tell the people seeing your ad exactly what they are looking at and precisely why they need your book in their lives.

The example at right is from one of my campaigns.

Can there be any doubt this advertisement is for a Psychological Thriller book?



*Figure 1*



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How about in Figure 2?

I aimed this ad at an audience made up of Psychological Thriller authors and layered it with similar genres to raise my chances of finding the people on Facebook most likely to be interested in it. Without the text from Figure 1, the ad in Figure 2 isn't clear on what is being advertised. However, by adding a few lines of text and using the word "read" or "book," the person seeing this ad knows exactly what it is about. By itself, the image sold no books, but adding the caption made it sell dozens of copies a day.



*Figure 2*

If you read the previous article about audiences, you will remember I talked about a super wide audience where I aim at anyone over thirty years old in America who likes to read or owns a Kindle. Images are the trick to mastering such a scattergun approach. Your image, along with the proper caption, tells anyone seeing your ad that you are advertising a book in a specific genre. In the previous example, the captioned image of the two chess pieces, combined with the first line of text and the headline, removes all ambiguity. People with no interest in reading Psychological Thrillers won't click it.

But those who are interested might.

My final point is that you can make an educated guess about what images to use, but only by testing out lots of them will you find the ones that work.

Your takeaway this month should be the need to experiment with different images. Your covers might work, but don't limit yourself to them either. There is just no way to know which image will sell your books until you try a few.

Good luck! ■

Steve Higgs

**PUBLISHER**ROCKET

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**PROFITABLE**  
**KINDLE**  
**KEYWORDS**

Book Marketing Research  
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# In This Issue

## Executive Team

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### 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.



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## Monthly Columnists

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### 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](http://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



When Steve Higgs wrote his debut novel, he was a Captain in the British Army. Now retired from the military, he is having a ball writing mystery stories and crime thrillers and claims to have more than a hundred books forming an unruly queue in his head as they clamour to get out.

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## Writers

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### Paul Austin Ardoin



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

### Liv Honeywell

Liv Honeywell is an erotic romance writer, writing humorous, steamy romance about delicious, hot male dominants and the women who love them. She loves to make people laugh and tickle their funny bones and other places with her words. When she's not writing, she's usually doing something craft-like, reading, baking, and eating the results of said baking.

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## Jenn Lessmann



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

## Meg Napier



Meg Napier knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that love stories form the basis for everything that matters in life. Her hope is to bring joy, excitement, and a sigh of satisfaction to readers everywhere through stories that tell most frequently of second chances--in life, love, and sometimes even at rediscovering a soulmate from a previous life. Email her at [MegNapierAuthor@gmail.com](mailto:MegNapierAuthor@gmail.com) or find her on her website, [MegNapier.com](http://MegNapier.com).

## Tanya Nellestein



Tanya Nellestein is an avid reader, experience enthusiast, outstanding car vocalist, and Queen of fancy dress. In her spare time she is also a best-selling and award-winning author and journalist with a penchant for bloodthirsty battles and steamy romance. From Vikings to present day, Tanya writes page-turning, gut-churning stories with a romantic

angle that always includes good sex and a happily ever after - eventually. Her debut novel, *The Valkyrie's Viking* recently hit Amazon's best seller list and her sixth novel, *This Side of Fate*, was the 2022 winner of the Romance Writers of Australia Sapphire Award for Best Unpublished Romance Manuscript. In 2021, Tanya won the Romance Writers of Australia Romance in Media Award. Tanya lives on the outskirts of Sydney, Australia amidst a cavalcade of never ending disasters, both natural and those of her own making.

## 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.

## 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.

# Ready to level up your indie author career?

Trick question.  
Of course  
you are.



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*Rising Tide*

LIFTS

all

*Ships*

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