

INDIE AUTHOR MAGAZINE

Issue 47

ORNA ROSS

On Becoming an *ALLi*

Glass Half Hopeful

Hopepunk, Grimdark Balance
Each Other in the Speculative
Fiction Space

ALLi Exclusive:

Email Marketing Tips
Every Author Can Use

Mindset:

When Words Feel Like
Work

10 TIPS FOR
Growing a Newsletter
that Connects

From Inbox to Income
Guest Author Russell Nohelty Shares
How to Monetize Your Newsletter



Automate Your Business

Buy Back 10 Hours

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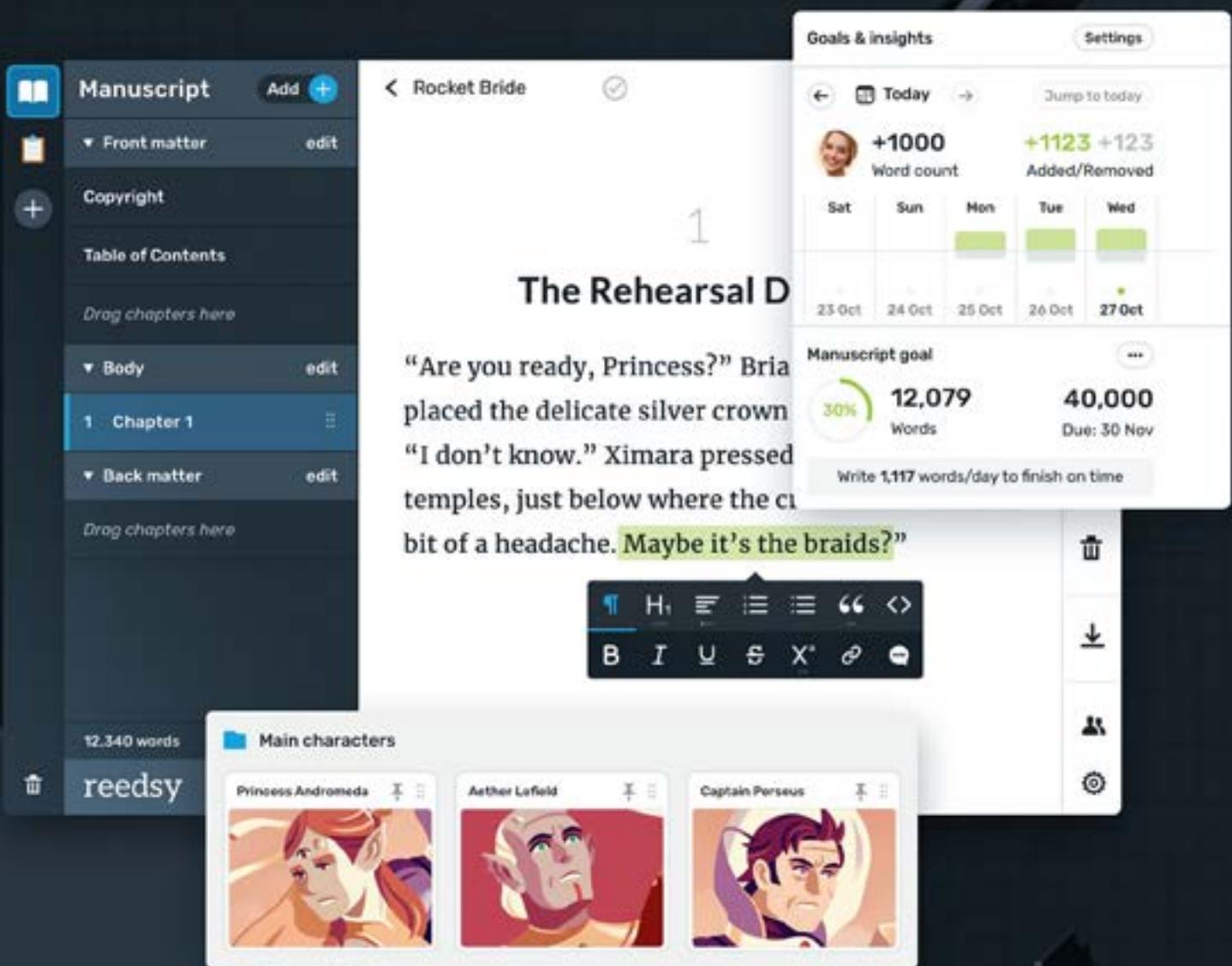


A large, stylized 'R' logo is partially visible on the left side of the page.

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Every writer needs a Studio

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& typeset your book



The image shows a screenshot of the Reedsy Studio software interface. On the left, a sidebar titled 'Manuscript' shows a table of contents with 'Chapter 1' selected. The main workspace displays the first chapter of a manuscript titled 'Rocket Bride' with the heading 'The Rehearsal D'. The text in the chapter discusses a princess and a crown. A floating 'Goals & insights' panel shows a word count goal of 12,079 words due by 30 Nov. At the bottom, a 'Main characters' panel lists 'Princess Andromeda', 'Aether Lofield', and 'Captain Perseus' with their respective portraits.

Manuscript

Front matter

Copyright

Table of Contents

Drag chapters here

Body

Chapter 1

Back matter

Drag chapters here

12,340 words

reedsy

Goals & insights

Today

+1000 Word count

+1123 +123 Added/Removed

Sat Sun Mon Tue Wed

23 Oct 24 Oct 25 Oct 26 Oct 27 Oct

Manuscript goal

12,079 Words

40,000 Due: 30 Nov

Write 1,117 words/day to finish on time

Main characters

Princess Andromeda

Aether Lofield

Captain Perseus

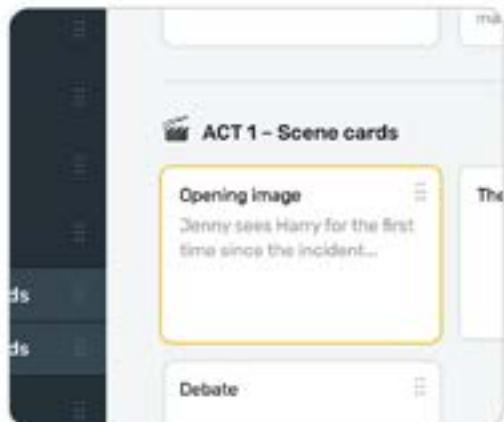
WRITE

Make yourself at home

The clean interface, chapter sidebar, and simple formatting controls make Studio feel instantly familiar.

A Good Title

built this tool to let writers focus on telling their stories. Write in a beautiful, focused environment and export a professionally typeset book when you're done.



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REVISE

Work in sync

Stop sending files back and forth – keep your draft in one place and collaborate in real time with your co-author, editor, or proofreader.

JOHN
Down the Rabbit hole

MARY
Alice was *beginning* to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the



EXPORT

Distribution ready

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useful information



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“

I've been a guest speaker at numerous Honors and Masters programs across North America, but the one at Western is, by far, the most remarkable, relevant, and impactful. I loved what I was seeing so much, I had to apply to it in order to further enhance my more than thirty years of book industry experience. ”

— Mark Leslie Lefebvre, MA 2024



- Learn vital skills to succeed as an indie author or publisher: editing, design, distribution, marketing, advertising, copyright, and contracts.
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Now in its sixth year, the Western Publishing MA program has produced 53 books as class projects. Current and past students have published nearly 500 titles of their own.

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“I learned more from Western’s publishing program in one week than I learned in five years of trying to figure it out on my own. **”**

— Jared Nelson, MA 2025

Kevin J. Anderson and **Allyson Longueira** co-teach Western’s Publishing program. An extremely successful hybrid author, Kevin brings more than 40 years of experience in the publishing industry in books, comics, graphic novels, TV, and film. Allyson brings more than 20 years of experience in traditional and indie publishing in nonfiction and fiction and has won awards for her writing, editing, and design skills. **Gwyneth Gibby** and **Marie Whittaker** round out the program with their extensive experience in the indie publishing industry.



Learn more at western.edu/program/publishing/





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NOVELISTS,
POETS AND
NON-FICTION
AUTHORS

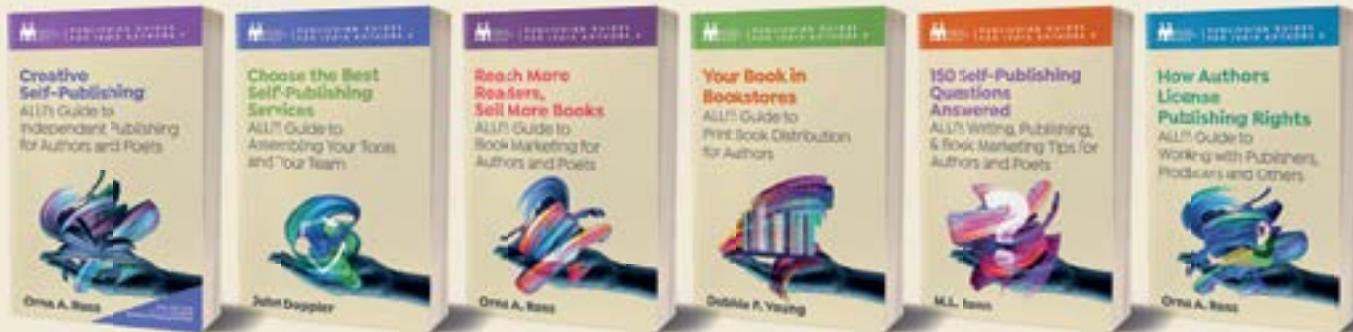
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Beth Duke

See hundreds more testimonials at:
AllianceIndependentAuthors.org/testimonials



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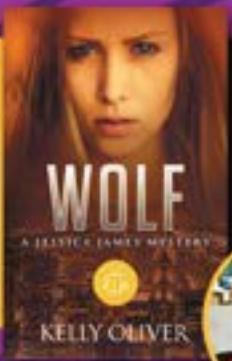
Katie Cross, katiecrossbooks.com

Daily Rituals



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Phoebe Garnsworthy, phoebegarnsworthy.com



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Kelly Oliver, kellyoliverbooks.com



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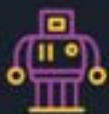
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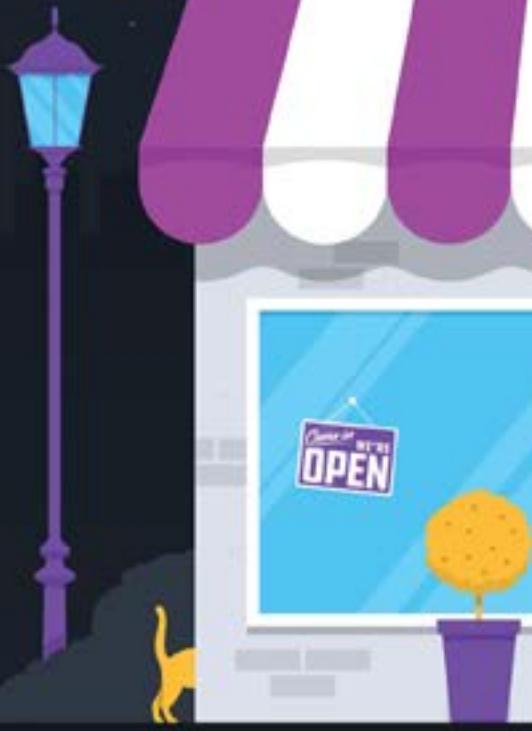
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From the EDITOR IN CHIEF

Honoré Corder writes in this month's Mindset piece, "I've erased the idea that being a professional writer means lounging in coffee shops, wearing cool glasses, and having profound thoughts." I haven't discarded the coffee shops entirely, but I will agree there are tasks in every author's career that feel like work.

For me, email marketing is one of those tasks.

Recently, I've had a bad habit of putting off writing my newsletter until the night before I need to send it, and I've struggled nearly every month—like Plodding Plotter in this month's letter to Indie Annie—with deciding what to write. I have a small mailing list, and there have been months when I've wondered whether it's wasted effort.

At this stage of my career, I know my newsletter alone will not radically shift my business. But when I catch myself complaining about it or considering skipping it during busier months, I try to think like a reader.

I've subscribed to several of my favorite authors' newsletters, and as a reader, I jump at them every time they appear in my inbox. I'm sure each of us can think of an author whose grocery lists we would read if they published them, and newsletters give us a chance to peek in at their lives and read something new they've written. As authors, newsletters are an opportunity for us to connect with our most devoted fans directly—to have one-on-one conversations, learn what they want from our books, and share about our creative process with people who will, sometimes, literally pay to hear about it.

This month, we're focusing on all these aspects of email marketing because, even if it feels like work, it's a sign of how many readers our work has impacted. The next time you're stuck for ideas or worried people won't care about what you're writing, consider what you'd want to read from your favorite author, and write that—because to someone in your mailing list, I guarantee you, you are theirs.

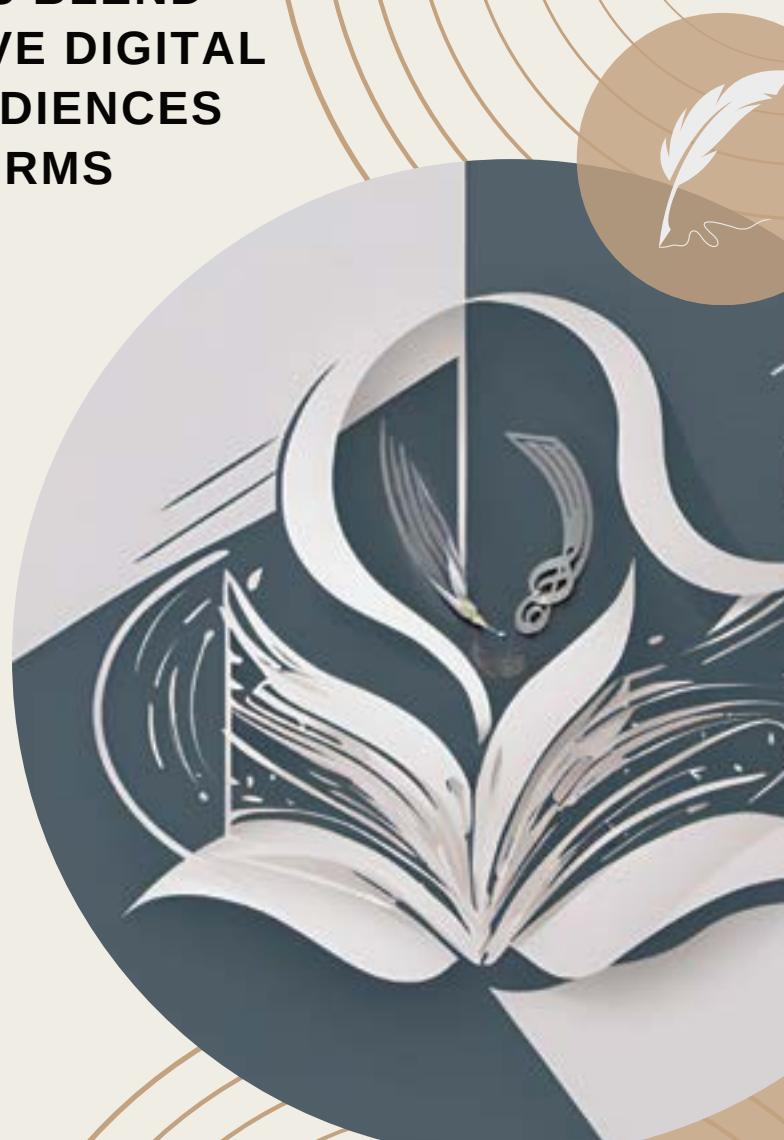
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ALLI EXCLUSIVE

Email Marketing Tips Every Author Can Use

Email marketing is an invaluable tool for authors, helping you connect directly with readers, build a loyal audience, and boost book sales. But some authors are uncomfortable asking people to sign up for a newsletter, concerned that it will fall into the trap of being too sales-y. This concern evaporates when you consider the true purpose of an email list: to have a way to stay in touch with your fans on a platform you control, as opposed to, for example, social media sites, and to let them know about content that will interest them.

Recognizing that the benefits of that connection work both ways helps pave the way to a healthy attitude toward email marketing. As Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi) member Diane Vallere says, “If you think you’re annoying your audience, then you’re not sharing the right content. It should feel like a conversation between friends.”

Successful email marketing depends on a well-managed email list, and the best practices to employ depend on the maturity of your author business.

FOR EXPERIENCED AUTHORS:

Optimizing and Segmenting for Maximum Impact

As an experienced author, your focus shifts from growing your subscriber base to maintaining engagement while converting subscribers into repeat buyers.

1

Practice Good List Hygiene:

Focus on the quality, not the quantity, of your list by regularly removing inactive subscribers. A smaller, more engaged list improves your open and click-through rates, which positively impacts deliverability. And since many email marketing services charge based on the size of your list, removing inactive subscribers can reduce costs.

2

Segment Your List:

By this stage, your email list may consist of a wide range of readers. Some may be die-hard fans who have read everything you've written, and others may have only just discovered your work. Use segmentation to send more targeted emails to different groups. For example, send special offerings to your most enthusiastic fans or target notifications about in-person events to fans living in that area.

3

Analyze Your Data:

Tap into the analytics provided by your email marketing service. Understanding which emails resonate most with your subscribers will enable you to refine your approach to reach your business goals.

For experienced authors, optimizing your email list will enable you to use it more productively and reap maximum marketing benefits. Read what ALLi has to say about maintaining your list in this article:

<https://selfpublishingadvice.org/email-marketing-for-authors-part3-maintenance.>

Building Your List

When you're just starting out, your priority should be building a subscriber base of readers who are genuinely interested in your work.

1

Understand Your Target Audience:

Your approach to building your list depends on a clear idea of the type of reader you want to attract. The tone of your emails might be more formal if you want to reach academics interested in the topic of your nonfiction book but more informal if you want to reach whale readers of Romance

2

Create a Reader Magnet:

A free short story or an exclusive sneak peek of an upcoming book can serve as a "magnet" to entice potential subscribers to join your list. Make sure your reader magnet aligns with your genre and will appeal to your identified target audience; you don't want to offer a Sweet Romance short story if your main content is Epic Fantasy. Similarly, don't feel limited to only text-based magnets; a hand-drawn map of your fantasy world may be a fantastic magnet for the readers you want to attract.

3

Leverage Social Media:

Promote your email sign-up form across your social media channels, highlighting the value to the subscriber instead of the value to yourself.

4

Include a Call-to-Action (CTA):

You want your emails to drive action, so ensure each email has a clear CTA that aligns with your goals. It's generally a good idea to limit your CTAs to one per email; for example, don't ask your readers to preorder an upcoming book and to leave a review for a past book in the same email.

5

Reflect Your Professionalism:

Every author starts out with a tiny subscriber base, but make sure you approach your email marketing with the same enthusiasm and care whether you have an audience of a dozen or thousands. And use an email marketing service, such as Mailchimp or ConvertKit, not your personal email account, to provide the best experience for your subscribers.

The goal for beginning authors is to create a foundational list of engaged subscribers based on the value you provide them in your communications. Check out this article from ALLi for more on how to develop your mailing list strategy:

<https://selfpublishingadvice.org/email-marketing-for-authors-part-1.>

FOR EMERGING AUTHORS:

Engaging Your Audience and Building Trust

As an emerging author, you likely already have a small but established email marketing base; as you grow your business, focus on nurturing the relationship with your subscribers and keeping them engaged.

1

Consistency Is Key:

To keep engagement strong, balance frequency with quality. A biweekly or monthly update can keep you on subscribers' radar without overwhelming them—or you.

2

Personalized Content:

At this stage, your readers want to hear more, not just about your books but also about you and your writing journey. Personal stories and behind-the-scenes content can strengthen the relationship between you and your audience.

3

Create Engagement Opportunities:

Ask your subscribers questions, seek their input on book titles or cover designs, or solicit ideas for character names. This can make them feel more connected to your work and turn them into your loyal advocates.

The focus at this stage is to build trust and loyalty among your readers by offering them consistent, engaging content, and exclusive insights. ALLi shares advice on how to grow your email list in this article:

<https://selfpublishingadvice.org/email-marketing-for-authors-part2-growth.>

FOR EXPERIENCED AUTHORS:

Optimizing and Segmenting for Maximum Impact

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<https://selfpublishingadvice.org/email-marketing-for-authors-part3-maintenance.>

Compliance at Every Stage

All authors need to stay compliant with email marketing regulations like the European Union's [General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\)](#) and the [US CAN-SPAM Act](#). Always provide a clear way for readers to unsubscribe, be transparent about the types of emails they will receive, and ensure that your data collection methods comply with privacy laws. Your email marketing service should provide information on how to ensure you've adhered to these regulations; the support email marketing services provide to help ensure compliance is another reason to use them rather than your personal email account.

Email marketing can be a powerful tool for indie authors at every stage of their business, from building a list of first-time readers to engaging an established audience and converting them into lifelong fans. By tailoring your approach to your current stage, you can ensure that your email marketing efforts are both effective and sustainable.

You'll find even more information on best practices for email marketing in the email marketing series from the Self-Publishing with ALLi Podcast. Find each topic covered at the following links:

General email marketing tips:

<https://selfpublishingadvice.org/podcast-email-marketing>

More email marketing tips:

<https://selfpublishingadvice.org/podcast-email-marketing-tips>

Offering a reader magnet:

<https://selfpublishingadvice.org/podcast-reader-magnets>

Why email marketing matters:

<https://selfpublishingadvice.org/podcast-email-list>

And you can check out ALLi's publications on this topic, [How to Reach More Readers](#) and [Sell More Books](#), both available for preorder in the ALLi Bookshop at <https://selfpublishingadvice.org/bookshop>.



Matty Dalrymple, ALLi Campaigns Manager

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

10 Tips for

**Growing a
Newsletter
That Connects**





When I first started my newsletter, I was using Mailchimp and had a decent-sized list. On paper, it looked great—hundreds of subscribers! But there was a problem: Most of them weren't opening it. It was like shouting into the void. Then I made the leap to Substack, and though my list is smaller now, the open rate is through the roof.

Newsletters don't just matter for the numbers but also for the engagement they foster. To keep subscribers coming back, I add value to my monthly newsletter: a mix of personal stories, writing tips, and a "poem of the month" feature. Last year, I started recording audio versions of my newsletter and turning them into a companion podcast attached to my newsletter via Substack and uploaded to Spotify. It's been a game-changer for reaching people who prefer listening over reading.

Whether it's adding extra content or companion mediums, reaching new readers with your newsletter—and engaging them—doesn't require much. Read on to discover ten tips for growing a newsletter that truly connects with your readers.

01

Magnetize Your Audience with Free Content.

Want to grow your newsletter? Try offering a lead magnet. A lead magnet is a freebie, such as a short story, a sneak peek at your latest chapters, or a writing guide, that's designed to pull readers in. By giving something valuable away in exchange for readers' emails, you're not asking for a favor; you're offering them content they'll actually want. Make sure the freebie matches your style or genre, so you're attracting the right crowd. When done right, a lead magnet sparks interest, builds trust, and keeps readers coming back for more.

02

Turn Website Visitors into Subscribers.

Your website is your digital storefront. If you use it right, it can bring in subscribers like nobody's business. Try adding promotions for your newsletter, strategically placed where people can't miss them. Imagine a pop-up offering a freebie that appears after someone's been hanging around for a bit, or a banner that flashes the benefits of subscribing, like exclusive updates or sneak peeks. Don't forget to sprinkle sign-up forms throughout key spots: your homepage, blog posts, or even the "About" page. The key? Keep it simple, but be clear about what they'll get in return, whether it's insider content or first dibs on new releases.

03

Engage, Share, and Watch Your List Grow.

Social media is your playground for attracting new subscribers to your newsletter. Share juicy snippets from past newsletters, whether it's insider tips, exciting updates, or behind-the-scenes peeks into your creative process. Use catchy calls-to-action (CTAs) in your posts and stories, like, "Want more? Sign up now!" with a link to your bio or a special landing page, and let them know the subscriber-only content they'll receive if they sign up. The more you engage, the more trust you build, and before you know it, those followers will be clicking that Subscribe button.

04

Make Books Work for Your Newsletter.

Add a CTA in your book encouraging your readers to become loyal subscribers. Throw a sign-up link or QR code in the front or back matter, and invite readers to join with a note like, “Want more? Join my newsletter for behind-the-scenes peeks and bonus material!” Keep the CTA visible but not in your face. Make it feel like a natural part of the book’s flow. If someone’s already hooked on your work, they’ll want to stick around for more.

05

Entice Fans with Exclusive Sneak Peeks.

Your lead magnet shouldn’t be the only piece of exclusive content you share with subscribers. Give your readers a sneak peek into your world, whether it’s juicy behind-the-scenes details about your writing process, deep dives into your characters, or those deleted scenes that never made it to the final cut. When you promise these hidden gems, your subscribers feel like they’re part of an exclusive club, creating a stronger bond with your work. Over time, you’ll turn casual fans into a dedicated, loyal community that’s excited to see what you’ll share next.

06

Turn Events Into Opportunities.

Events like book fairs, conventions, and readings are prime real estate for growing your newsletter. Set up a sign-up sheet or digital form at your table, and sweeten the deal by offering something cool, like a branded bookmark, sticker, or exclusive download link. Meeting readers in person is the perfect chance to give that personal touch. Tell them about the perks, and let them see what they’re missing. When you combine face-to-face connections with an easy sign-up process, you’re building a true fanbase ready to stick around for the long haul.

Pro Tip: Personal appearances are one of my favorite ways to connect with readers and grow my newsletter. At book fairs and events, I set up a table with free, artful bookmarks that have colorful tassels. I never see them left behind on the floor like I used to with plain flyers, which means they make it home with readers and find a permanent spot in their books. I also include a QR code on my merch sign that directs people to my newsletter sign-up page, which has become second nature for people to scan. Beyond the giveaways, I focus on starting genuine conversations. Making a strong, positive impression helps readers remember you, and that connection can lead to book reviews, newsletter sign-ups, and even beta readers.

08

Boost Subscribers with Email Signatures.

Add a sign-up link to your email signature, and throw in a friendly call-to-action like, “Want exclusive updates and freebies? Sign up for my newsletter!” Whether you’re chatting with fans, colleagues, or potential partners, it’s a low-key, effortless way to spread the word. Sure, it’s not flashy, but it adds up over time and can lead to a steady stream of new subscribers.

07

Get Featured, and Expand Your Audience.

Guest posts and interviews can be gems for growing your newsletter. When you write something captivating for a blog or website in your niche, you’re reaching readers who might not have discovered you otherwise. If you’re being interviewed on a podcast or a blog, offering your newsletter can be the perfect follow-up for anyone who wants to stay in the loop. Not only does this expand your audience, but it also builds your credibility. When people see you sharing your knowledge on platforms they trust, they’ll be more inclined to sign up.

Pro Tip: I rely on a snippet app called Text Blaze, which lets me create customized signatures for different parts of my life: editorial services, poetry, and writing. Each one ends with a simple line like, “Subscribe to my free monthly newsletter,” with a link. People I email—clients, collaborators, and readers—often click through, and over the years, it’s added a steady stream of subscribers.

09

Share Your Newsletter with Online Communities.

Joining forums, Facebook Groups, Reddit threads, or niche discussion boards related to your genre can be the perfect opportunity to grow your newsletter and make connections. Don't just post a promotion; that's a sure way to appear spammy. Instead, be the person who shares genuine advice, helpful tips, or thoughtful opinions. When the moment's right, drop a casual mention of your newsletter, offering a freebie or exclusive content that could actually help the group. By showing up, being authentic, and offering value, you'll earn trust and organically watch your list grow.

Pro Tip: Each month, I record a voiceover of my entire newsletter on my phone using a free app called Voice Recorder. I edit the audio in Audacity, which is also free and user friendly. Substack makes it easy to include this voiceover with the newsletter itself, but I also turned these recordings into a standalone podcast. Thanks to Spotify's distribution system, uploading to one platform gets my podcast on several others. It's a simple, low-cost way to repurpose content and reach a whole new audience; plus, it seems more personal, like I'm talking directly to my readers and listeners. This connection keeps people coming back.

10

Narrate Your Newsletter for Broader Reach.

Creating an audio version of your newsletter is a fresh way to reach even more people through a new medium. Many people prefer listening over reading these days, especially during their commute, while working out, or while making dinner. Why not give them what they want?

Promote the audio podcast on social media, targeting followers who might not typically read your newsletter but would love to hear it. You could narrate it yourself to provide a personal touch or use a service to help. Who knows? This could be the game-changer that boosts your engagement and brings in a whole new group of subscribers.



Wendy Van Camp

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

Dear Indie Annie

I get the need for mailing lists, social media, reader groups—but what do I say if I don't have a big release coming up or something exciting to announce? I worry they'll get tired of updates that say, "I'm still writing the next book!"

Plodding Plotter



ear Plotting Plotter,

I want you to consider the special ingredients for a successful relationship. Because, my sweet, that is what all these social media interactions are: loving tokens on the path to a lifelong commitment.

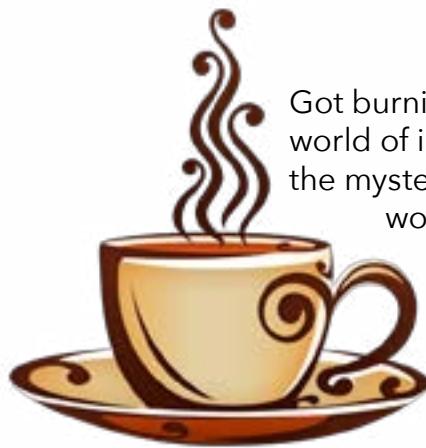
Think of your reader communication like a long-distance friendship. You wouldn't only ring up a dear friend when you've got some massive life announcement, would you? No, you share the little moments—the quirky observations, the tiny victories, and the occasional ridiculous mishap that made you snort your morning tea.

Have you ever watched that quaint show *The Great British Bake Off* (GBBO)? The main reason it's so popular is that viewers feel like they are getting to cozy up to the contestants. I could argue that US culinary shows are all about the competition, and the final result: Winning is all. But the charm of GBBO is the exact opposite. Your

readers aren't just interested in the final, perfectly frosted creation that is your next book; they want to see you measuring flour, cracking eggs, and occasionally setting off the smoke alarm. They're invested in the process, not just the product.

So what might that look like in practice? Perhaps offer a behind-the-scenes peek at your research rabbit holes. Maybe post a snapshot of your writing space that day. Is it pristine or looking like a paper tornado just blew through? Share those character sketches that didn't quite make the final draft. Post the fascinating historical tidbit that sparked your current manuscript.

Social media and mailing lists aren't billboards for your book. They're conversations. Treat them like a cozy café where you're chatting with your most interesting friends. Some days you'll have big news, and some days you'll just be sharing a particularly excellent cup of Darjeeling.



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

Consider creating a few recurring features that give your readers something to anticipate: a monthly “research corner” where you share an intriguing historical detail, a “writer’s soundtrack” post about what you’re listening to while drafting, or an update on “characters who are driving me bonkers this week” that gives a cheeky glimpse into your creative process.

Remember, authenticity trumps perfection every single time. Your readers don’t want a polished press release; they want a real human being who happens to write books. So be that human. Be messy, be curious, be occasionally ridiculous.

Perhaps you could hold a Q&A with your characters. Were you inspired by some photos you took on your last vacation? Did you love or hate the cliffhanger of a popular TV show? The chances are that your audience will be interested in many of the same things you are, so strike

up a conversation about the latest show on Netflix. Talk about your favourite books. Recall funny stories about your trip to the store.

And if you are uncomfortable sharing personal information—or have a pen name—create a persona that shares your stories, news, and musical tastes instead. If you’re comfortable with it, use AI to create imaginary places. Be honest about your process, e.g., “I put my character descriptions into an AI bot, and this is what it produced.” Then ask your readers if they agree. Create quizzes, a Spotify playlist, or even an old-fashioned digital mixtape. You get the idea.

And for the love of all that’s literary, have fun with it. If you’re not enjoying the conversation, neither will your fans.

Happy writing,
Indie Annie





Orna Ross on Becoming an ALLi

THE ALLIANCE OF INDEPENDENT AUTHORS FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR EMPOWERS AUTHORS TO 'BE BRAVER'

The founder and director of the Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi), a global nonprofit organization for authors who self-publish, has called many places home, but Orna Ross truly lives just outside her comfort zone. "If you're not feeling that doubt and calling on your courage, you haven't gone far enough," she says.

Despite how most indie authors may recognize her now, Ross's experience in the author community is not only tied to ALLi; for many years before the organization got its start and into today, Ross has been an author, poet, and publishing professional herself.

Reflecting on her writing journey, the themes of her historical novels, and her work with ALLi, Ross keeps coming back to setting. "To me, place is like another character. I'm hugely interested in how place affects how we are," she says. Wexford, where she grew up, has inspired many of the stories she writes in her fiction and poetry. Her experiences in college in Dublin, and her life in London afterward, helped to form the progressive, liberal ideology that led to her work supporting other authors.

Orna Ross stands beside a tree in a local graveyard, which she visits frequently for inspiration. Although known among authors for her work with the Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi), Ross is also a poet and Historical Fiction novelist herself.

Photo courtesy of Maxine Silver.

Finding Her Place

The award-winning Irish novelist and poet was raised in Wexford, a town in the southeast of Ireland notable for its large writing community and annual literary festival. Despite the great respect for writing this setting inspired, Ross says, "I didn't even think about being a writer because in a way, and this seems impossible now, but I was brought up in a world [in the seventies] where girls did certain things: nursing and teaching. I didn't so much aspire to be a writer. I wanted to be somebody who taught English literature." She earned her bachelor's degree in English literature at University College Dublin and taught at a secondary school in Ireland for a few years before deciding that though she loved teaching, she hated the system. In trying to decide what to do next, Ross trained herself to write while teaching aerobics and taking other odd jobs, intending to someday write a novel.

Later, she received a master's degree in women's studies from her alma mater. She says the experience was "huge for me in terms of understanding that all the things I thought were my issues were actually society's issues. And that was just a brilliant experience, and a lot of this feeds into my work and still does to this day."

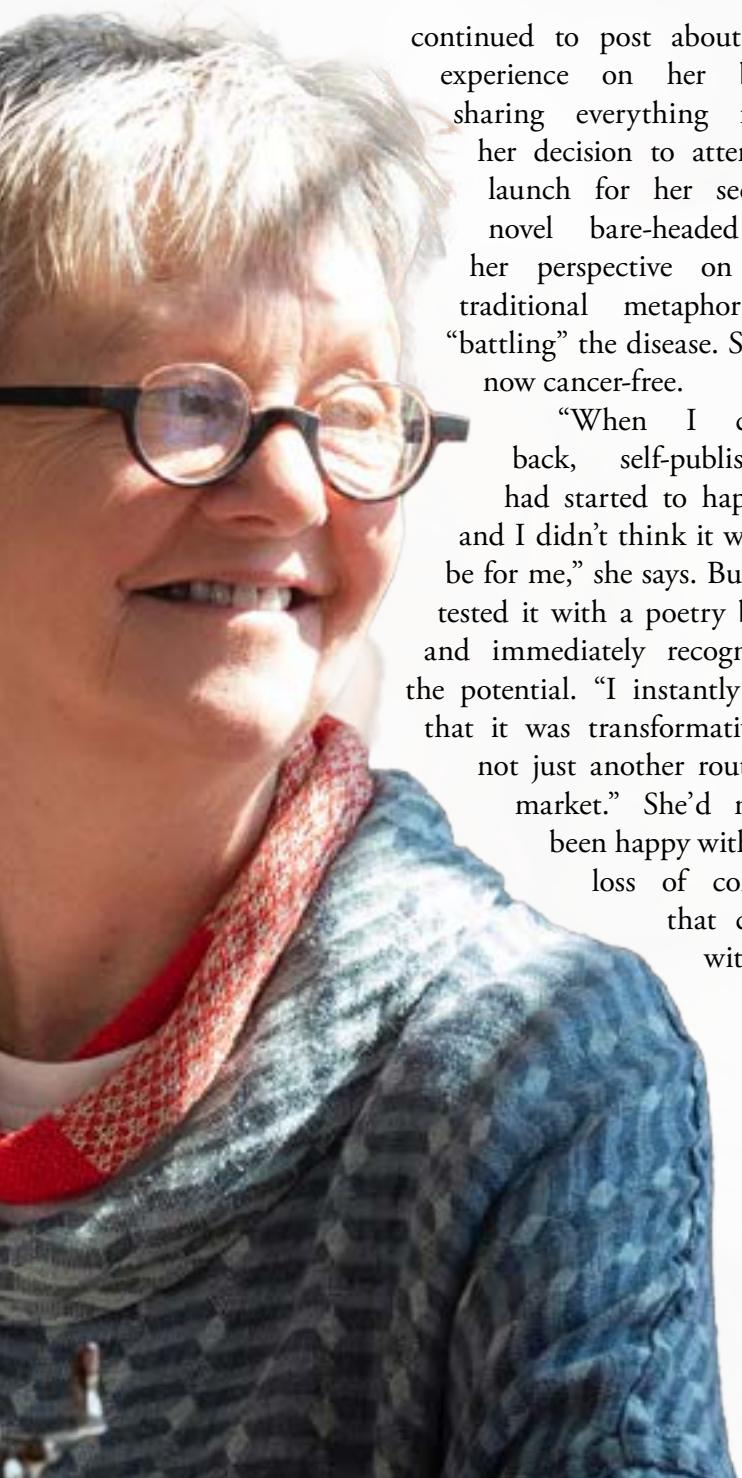
Within a few years, the university hired her as a lecturer. Ross also began working as a freelance journalist, before becoming an editor at a women's magazine. Her first full-length publications were nonfiction works produced through a feminist press in Dublin.

"But what I really wanted to do was to write a novel," she

says. "So again it was: Throw everything out, start again." Her debut novel *Lover's Hollow*, a multi-generational literary history, was published by Penguin Books in 2006, followed by *A Dance in Time* in 2008. The process of finishing the novel, finding an agent, and getting it published led her to a community of other fledgling writers. She "ended up running a writing school in Dublin, and out of that writing school a literary agency grew." Her students were getting offers they weren't prepared to analyze, so she began arguing with publishers on their behalf.

Making a Big Move

Although she loved championing her students' work, Ross wasn't comfortable in the legal role of agent. When she was diagnosed with cancer just as she was planning to expand the agency to San Francisco, she took a hiatus to reassess her priorities. "I stepped back from everything," she says. But she didn't stop writing. Ross



continued to post about her experience on her blog, sharing everything from her decision to attend a launch for her second novel bare-headed to her perspective on the traditional metaphor of “battling” the disease. She is now cancer-free.

“When I came back, self-publishing had started to happen, and I didn’t think it would be for me,” she says. But she tested it with a poetry book and immediately recognized the potential. “I instantly saw that it was transformative—not just another route to market.” She’d never been happy with the loss of control that came with

giving her rights to a traditional publisher. Penguin had not taken her skills, or her interest in the marketing of her book, seriously. So in 2011, with her two-book contract complete, she took back the rights to her novels and, as she says, “put the books out the way I had originally envisaged them [and] within a very short time, I had sold more than they had sold.” Ross considers leaving Penguin the best move of her writing life.

Most of Ross’s Historical Fiction is cross-generational, drawing on the events of turn-of-the-century Ireland and their long-lasting effects on families. She describes her books as exploring “creative expansion and the rebalance of male and female forces.” She’s redeveloping her first novel into a trilogy, with two books, *After the Rising* and *Before the Fall*, already published and the third, *In the Hour*, in progress.

The shift to self-publishing brought her personal motto, “When in doubt, be braver,” into focus. As with any new experience, doubt can disrupt the process, but writers who stop there can get stuck. “If we’re feeling creative doubt, we’re scared with it. That is absolutely 100 percent part of the process,” she explains. “So ‘when in doubt, be brave’ means, ‘Okay, I’m going to overcome my doubts and just do what I planned.’ ‘When in doubt, be braver’ means if I go bigger, I get excited enough to have that wave of positive creative energy that will actually buoy me up. And the doubt won’t win.”

Ross makes this conscious effort to step out of her comfort zone—she calls it “conscious creativity”—to address challenges in both her writing and her business. It’s a process that involves cycling work, rest, and play. In the day-to-day, this means spending her mornings making something, whether that’s writing novels, poetry, or podcast scripts. She dedicates her afternoons to ALLi and anything the business needs. Maintaining spaces for rest and play alongside her work prevents burnout.

Ross’s daily schedule involves creative work in the morning and time for administrative work in the afternoon, either for ALLi or her personal author business. She also makes time to free-write in a café every day, she says.

Photo courtesy of Toby Shaw.

Building a New Foundation

One of the first things Ross did after deciding to become an indie author was begin looking for professional organizations to join. But self-publishing was still a relatively new business, and the type of association she wanted didn't exist. The only solution was to create it herself. So she applied conscious creativity to the problem.

Initially, Ross was hesitant to take on the responsibility for the group when she was just starting to publish her own work. But she took time to consider what it would mean to the field, and ultimately, she decided, "I couldn't not do it because this was the biggest thing that had happened in my field in centuries," she says. "It was going to change everything. I knew it would. And I was very excited about that and the fact that authors could become empowered in a way that they hadn't been before."

She founded ALLi with her husband and co-director Philip Lynch at London Book Fair in 2012. Now, after ten years, ALLi has a global reach with tens of thousands of members. Much of what they do is behind the scenes, supporting the interests of self-published authors. She credits the team of advisors and ambassadors with ALLi's many success stories and is particularly proud of the watchdog desk, she says, "and the work it does in promoting good services and in warning people away from lesser services." Recent articles from the Watchdog blog include "Seven Red Flags in Serialized Fiction Contracts" and "How to Spot and Avoid Phishing Emails."

Of course, the experience has helped Ross, too. Since founding ALLi, Ross says, "I write better books. I'm a better publisher. Everything because of ALLi."



Ross and Philip Lynch, her husband and the co-director of ALLi.

Photo courtesy of Toby Shaw.

It's been exciting for Ross to see the ways independent publishing has evolved over the years. "I think people are really beginning to understand independence as a value, and what it means to be an independent and empowered author," she says. Now the challenge is keeping up with what she calls "a massively morphing industry since we started, and even more so in the last year." In the next ten years, "the role of anyone who cares about creators and authors is helping authors to understand their own power and to understand their own humanity, and the value that that has," she says. "Because we're working in this area that is so creative and so innovative, and the authors within it are the most creative and innovative authors alive today."

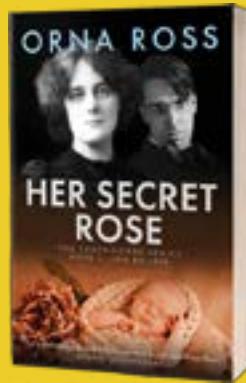
She hopes her own current project will shine a light on the creativity of an author from the past. Maud Gonne, an Irish suffragette, activist, and poet, is best known as W. B. Yeats's muse, but Ross would like to change that. Hoping to get Gonne the honor she deserves, Ross headed a Kickstarter campaign to have a statue erected in Dublin, where it will "foster a debate about the politics of remembrance," according to the campaign details. In support of this effort, Ross has also expanded her historical novel about the couple, *Her Secret Rose*, into a trilogy and developed a companion book of Yeats's poems with Gonne's commentary on them, *A Crowd of Stars*.

For an author of Historical Fiction, the past and present often walk side-by-side. With this project, Ross advocates for representation that will empower modern women by honoring the legacies of those who have come before. It's a fitting endeavor for one whose work has already empowered so many, and it's proof that true allyship is timeless. ■

Jenn Lessmann



Jenn Lessmann is the author of *Unmagical: a Witchy Mystery* and three stories on Kindle Vella. 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. Jenn is currently studying witchcraft and the craft of writing, and giggling internally whenever they intersect. She writes snarky paranormal fantasy for new adults whenever her dog will allow it.



Readers' Choice

Spelling Out How A/B Testing Strategies Can Help You Perfect Your Newsletters, Covers, and More



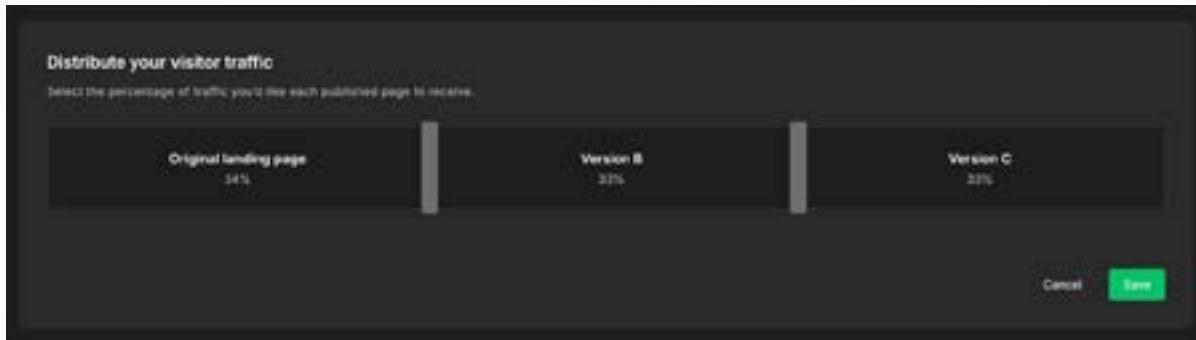


For reaching readers, authors often rely on intuition: Will this subject line grab attention? Will this cover stop a scroll? But guesswork—and gut instincts—can only take you so far.

A/B testing, a method of comparing two options to see which performs better, offers a powerful way to make data-driven decisions. Many author newsletter platforms, such as MailerLite, make it easy to run these tests. Yet there's more to learn beyond the basics: advanced multivariate testing, AI-powered ad optimization through tools like Meta's Advantage+, and even rotating link features from platforms like Switchy. By understanding and applying these strategies, you can refine everything from newsletters to cover designs and beta-reading processes.

What Is A/B Testing?

A/B testing, sometimes called split testing, involves creating two versions of something—say, a newsletter subject line—and sending each version to a random half of your audience. The version that yields better results—higher open or click-through rates, in the case of a newsletter—is considered the better option. Easy-peasy.



This approach is straightforward because you're testing one variable at a time. Think of it as baking an apple pie: If you swap out only the cinnamon for the nutmeg and your pie turns out better, you know the spice made the difference. But if you change the crust, filling, and sugar all at once, you don't know which tweak improved or ruined the pie. A/B tests help authors gain clarity; when readers respond more to version A than version B, you know exactly what caused the shift in results.

Why do some readers respond better to a curious subject line, such as, “You won’t believe this twist!” while others prefer clarity, as in “Your free chapter is here”? Human psychology and behavior drive these differences. Cognitive biases, personal preferences, and habits shape how audiences engage with your content.

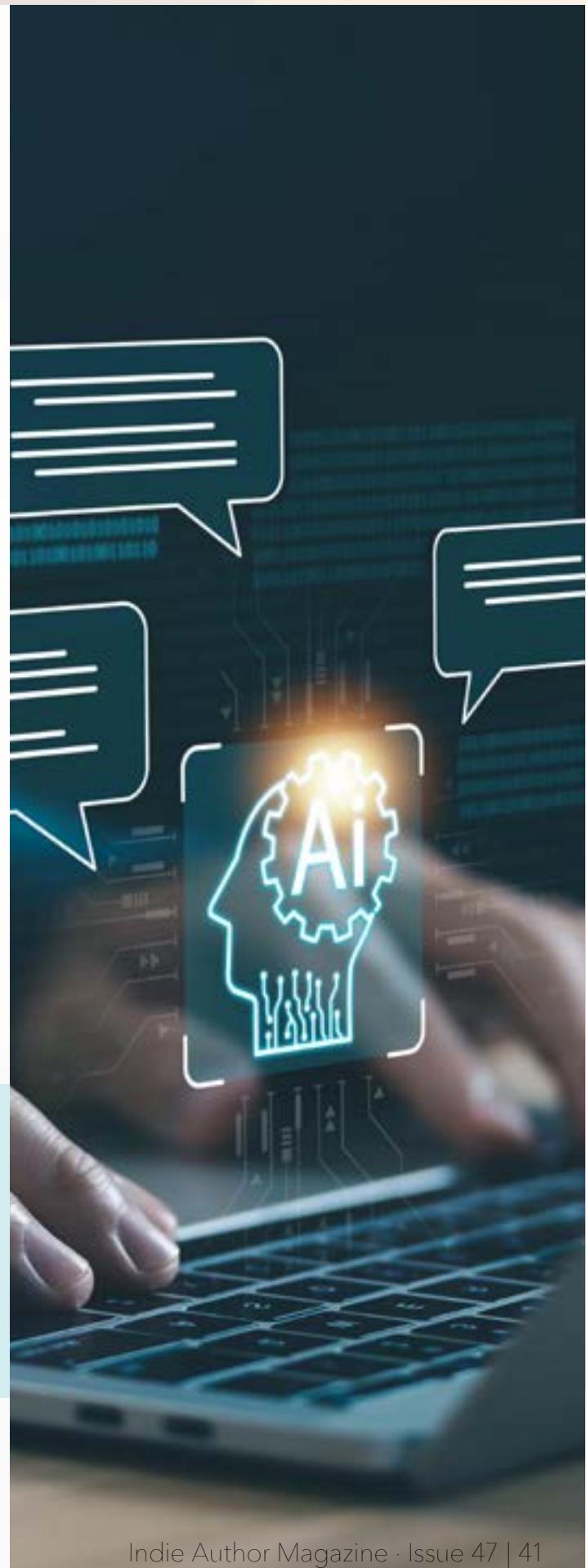
For basic A/B testing, you look for “statistical significance,” confirming your winner truly



outperforms the loser because of the variable tested instead of random chance. Statistical significance means the difference in results—like a 30 percent open rate versus 28 percent—is large enough that we can be confident it's not just random chance. If the sample size is too small or the difference too tiny, we can't be sure one version is actually better.

Once you grasp the basics, you can move to more complex methods, like multivariate testing, which involves testing multiple elements simultaneously—a feature platforms like MailerLite offer. Instead of just comparing two subject lines, you might test two subject lines, two types of content—text-heavy vs. image-heavy, for example—and two call-to-action (CTA) buttons. That's multiple combinations. Sorting through the data to see which combination truly excels can be overwhelming, but AI can quickly identify patterns and interactions between variables, making sense of complex results and speeding up your decision-making process.

Pro Tip: If the term “AI” worries you, consider that this is really just computational analysis of a range of numbers and statistics to find results. In these examples, it acts as a fancy calculator or spreadsheet, helping you analyze lots of data quickly and easily.



Newsletter A/B Testing for Authors

Now that we've uncovered why A/B testing matters, let's consider how each step unfolds in the author sphere to provide the data that will help boost your open rates, clicks, and overall reader engagement.

1

Choose what to test. Start simple—try two subject lines, such as version A: “Your members-only missing chapter is here!” and version B: “Download the missing chapter before Sunday evening when it will disappear forever!” Here we’re testing whether our audience prefers a friendlier subject line that makes them feel like they’re part of the cool kids’ club (A) or a more sales-driven, time-limited hard sell (B).

2

Set clear goals. Are you optimizing for open rates or click-through rates? In other words, is your goal that readers open the email and read, or is there a link to click or another CTA? Decide your goals upfront.

3

Analyze your results. Suppose version A increases open rates by 12 percent. You’ve learned that a curiosity-driven and friendlier subject line resonates with your audience. Next time, try another small tweak. Over time, these incremental improvements add up, giving you a better idea of how to connect with your subscribers and keep them interested.



Enable split testing
Landing page testing is based on unique visitor traffic, not page views.

Split testing pages
Add more page versions and see which version performs best.

Original landing page
Published version: 12 minutes ago
Unpublish

Version B
Published version: a few seconds ago
Unpublish

Version C
Published version: a few seconds ago
Unpublish

Choose the winner Add more versions

Page Version	Published Version	Subscribers	Views	Conversion
Original landing page	12 minutes ago	0	0	0%
Version B	a few seconds ago	0	0	0%
Version C	a few seconds ago	0	0	0%

As you grow more comfortable, also consider leveraging multivariate testing. Test not just subject lines but also sending times, such as morning versus evening, and CTA styles, such as “buy now” versus “read a sample.” The combinations multiply, but so do your insights. Your email service provider’s built-in analytics, possibly coupled with AI-driven tools, can help you parse these complex results and reveal your ideal newsletter strategy based on your audience.

Beyond Newsletters

A/B testing isn't limited to newsletters. You can apply the same principles to all facets of your author platform. Consider testing variables in the following aspects of your business to decide on an option your audience will like best.

Book Covers

Before committing to a cover design, run a quick test. Show two versions to different segments of your audience on social media. Measure engagement—likes, comments, or clicks on a preorder link. By testing covers before finalizing one, you can launch with greater confidence. Just make sure your cover designer is open to testing like this, and get upfront clarity on costs of revisions.

Pro Tip: It's always easier for people to comment about what they don't like. If you'd like better feedback, ask them what they like about the image they chose.



Beta Reading

Thinking of altering a chapter's ending? Split your beta readers into two groups, and present each with a different version. Gather feedback, and see which resonates more. There may not always be a clear winner, but the data you collect can help you make narrative decisions guided by reader response rather than guesswork.

Social Media Ads and Product Descriptions

For those with ads on Meta platforms, Meta now offers Advantage+, an AI-driven ad optimization tool. Instead of manually choosing what to test, Advantage+ does the heavy lifting, mixing and matching creatives, audiences, and placements. It continuously learns which combinations yield the best results and adapts in real time. This is a form of ongoing, automated multivariate testing that can save authors time and energy, helping ensure efficient ad spend.

Rotating Links

Not all testing requires a built-in email or ads feature. With tools like Switchy, you can create short links that rotate traffic among multiple destinations. Let's say you'd like to test different blurbs for the same book. With a static website, you might not have the capability for A/B testing, but you could create two landing pages for the same book. Switchy will rotate the link, taking half your audience to landing page A and the other half to landing page B. After gathering sufficient data, you should know which page performs better. This method is especially useful if you're driving traffic from social media profiles, guest posts, or any environment where you can't easily run a traditional A/B test. As time goes on, you can keep the same link and change or add more destinations.



The screenshot shows a user interface for 'Rotator - AB Testing'. At the top, there's a logo of two arrows forming a circle and the text 'Rotator - AB Testing [\(help\)](#)'. Below this is a table with three rows, each representing a redirection link and its percentage:

Redirection link	Percentage	Actions
https://u.repossible.com/p/one?coupon_1	34	edit trash
https://u.repossible.com/p/one-map?cou	33	edit trash
https://u.repossible.com/p/weekend?cou	33	edit trash

At the bottom of the table, there's a button labeled 'Add a destination' with a cursor pointing towards it.



Alternatives to A/B Testing

Although A/B and multivariate testing are powerful, these methods are not always the best fit. Sometimes you need qualitative feedback to understand why readers prefer one version over another. In these situations, there are other ways to collect information on your audience's preferences. Asking a small group of devoted readers what they think can offer rich insights. Surveys let you tap into your audience's feelings and motivations, going beyond raw metrics to understand their preferences on a deeper level.

Pro Tip: This might sound like a lot of work—it can be! But hop on the phone with a fan for even just ten minutes and ask a few questions, and listen. You'll receive more specific feedback and a deeper connection with your readers by involving them directly in your decision-making process.

A Mindset of Experimentation

Whether you're fine-tuning a newsletter subject line or deciding on a cover design, testing is your secret weapon. By starting with simple A/B tests and gradually exploring multivariate testing with additional tools and strategies, you gain a better understanding of what resonates with your readers.

At the heart of it all is a mindset of experimentation and curiosity. Don't be afraid to test, learn, and iterate. Begin with something small—one subject line, or one CTA. Analyze the results. Refine. Over time, you'll develop a testing toolkit that allows you to make confident, data-driven decisions, helping you connect with readers more effectively and propel your author career to new heights.



Bradley Charbonneau

Bradley Charbonneau wanted to be a writer. Trouble was, he didn't write. A friend was running a "Monthly Experiment" (no coffee for a month, wake up at 5 AM, etc.) and created one where everyone had to write every single day for 30 days. Bradley took the challenge. "Hmm, that wasn't so bad."

Then he kept going. 100 days. 365. 1,000. 2,808 days and 31 books later and he found out it's simple. Not necessarily easy, but simple. #write #every singleday

Stand-Alone and Deliver

**Stand-Alone Template
Builders Put Your Email
Marketing Campaigns
a Step Above the Rest**





Email marketing allows authors to connect with readers, share updates, and promote new releases. A well-crafted email can strengthen a fanbase, encourage book sales, and keep subscribers engaged between launches. But while authors focus on writing compelling content, the visual side of email marketing is often overlooked.

Many rely on email service providers (ESPs), such as Mailchimp, ConvertKit, and ActiveCampaign, to manage their subscriber lists and send newsletters. These platforms handle email distribution, automation, and tracking, but their built-in editors often limit design flexibility. The result? Newsletters made in the platforms can look identical to emails from other users who selected from the same premade templates for their marketing campaigns.

Stand-alone email builders offer a way around this. They function as design platforms rather than sending platforms, giving users greater control over layout, fonts, colors, and branding elements. Authors can explore these platforms to create newsletters that more closely reflect their brand, then import the final design into an ESP to distribute it to their readers.

How a Stand-Alone Email Builder Works

For authors, branding extends beyond book covers and social media. A well-designed email serves as an extension of an author's online presence, reinforcing the look and feel of their books and website.

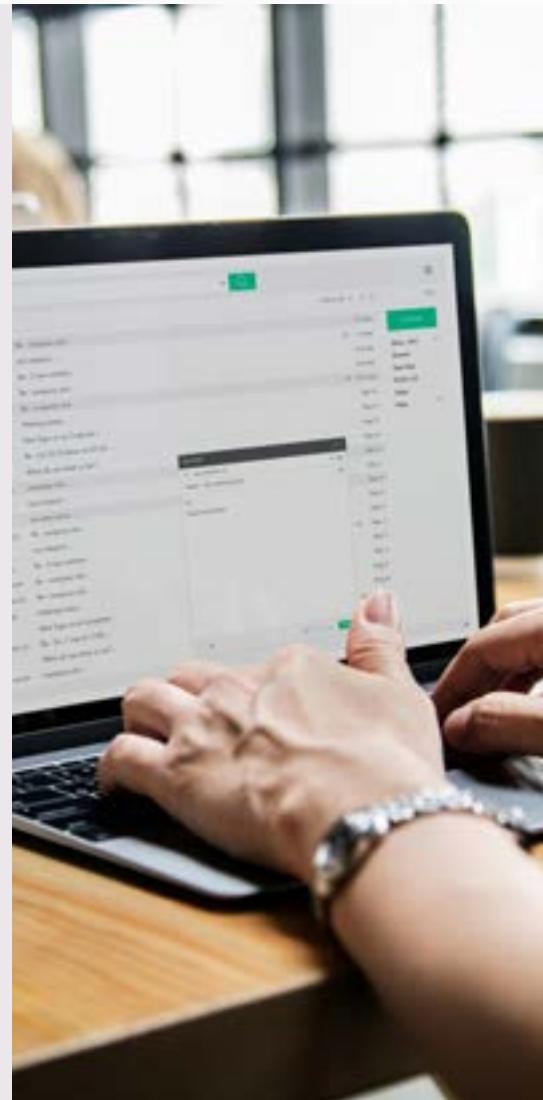
A new author might start by using an ESP's built-in templates, but as their audience grows, they may find a stand-alone builder offers greater flexibility to help them maintain a cohesive brand. For example, an author launching a Fantasy series may want emails that use the same typography and colors as their book covers. A stand-alone builder allows for those adjustments, ensuring every email feels connected to their author brand.

Similarly, authors with multiple series can create different templates for each one, making it easy to tailor newsletters to specific audiences. A Romance series might use soft pastels and elegant fonts while a Thriller series might feature bold colors and high-contrast text. Stand-alone builders provide the tools to create these distinctions without being limited by an ESP's design restrictions.

Stand-alone builders allow users to import final designs into an ESP for distribution. The process may vary depending on the platforms used but generally follows three steps:

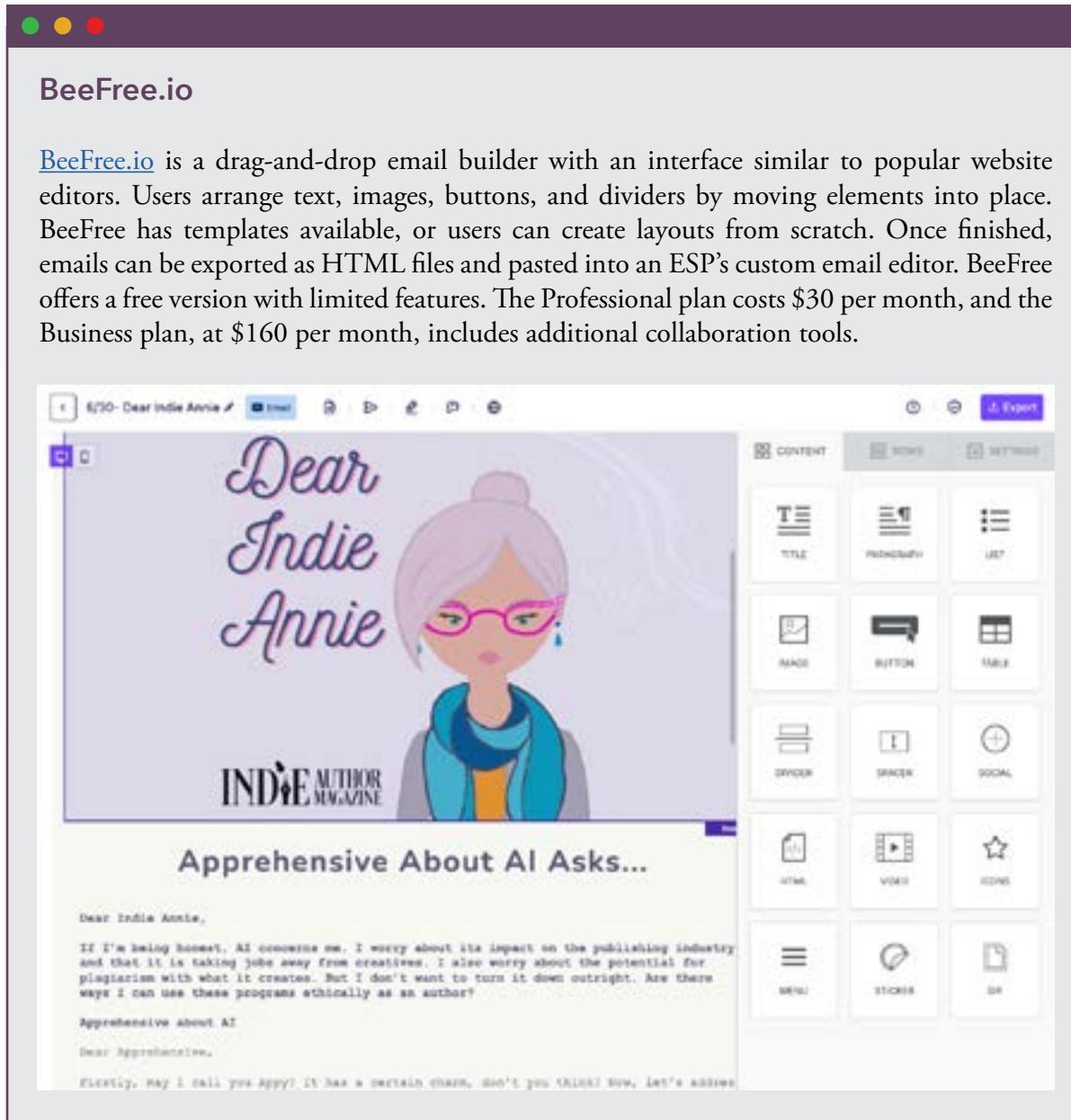
1. Design the email using a drag-and-drop interface or pre-built templates.
2. Export the email as an HTML file, a ZIP file, or a block of raw code.
3. Import the email into an ESP by uploading the file or pasting the HTML into the ESP's custom editor.

The added flexibility of template builders allows authors to build emails that align with their book branding, match the design of their websites, and feel visually distinct from other newsletters. Stand-alone builders can also provide better mobile optimization than some ESPs, ensuring that emails display correctly on all devices.



Choosing the Right Stand-Alone Email Builder

Every email builder offers a different balance of usability and customization. Some prioritize ease of use whereas others provide advanced design tools for users comfortable with tweaking HTML. To choose the ideal option for your business, consider your comfort level with these features, as well as factors like cost and customization options you'd like for your design.



The screenshot shows the BeeFree.io email builder interface. The main workspace displays a template for an email titled "Dear Indie Annie" from "INDIE AUTHOR MAGAZINE". The template features a stylized illustration of a woman with pink hair and glasses. The right side of the interface contains a "CONTENT" panel with a grid of icons representing different elements: Title, Paragraph, List, Image, Button, Table, Divider, Sidebar, Social, File, Video, Icons, Menu, Stories, and QR. The top of the screen shows a toolbar with file icons and a "Save" button, and the title "BeeFree.io".

Canva

Canva is widely used for social media and graphic design, but it also serves as an email-building tool. Unlike traditional email builders, Canva does not generate HTML but allows users to design visually rich email headers, promotional banners, and full layouts that can be inserted into an ESP. This is useful for authors creating book announcement emails, illustrated newsletters, or cover reveals. Canva's free version includes a selection of design tools, and the Pro plan, at \$12.99 per month, unlocks premium templates and customization options.

Stripo

Stripo offers both a drag-and-drop editor and an HTML editor, making it useful for users who want more control over their design. The platform includes interactive elements such as countdown timers for book launches and personalized content blocks that adjust based on the recipient's preferences. Stripo provides a free plan with limited exports, a basic plan at \$15 per month, and a medium plan at \$45 per month that includes team collaboration features.

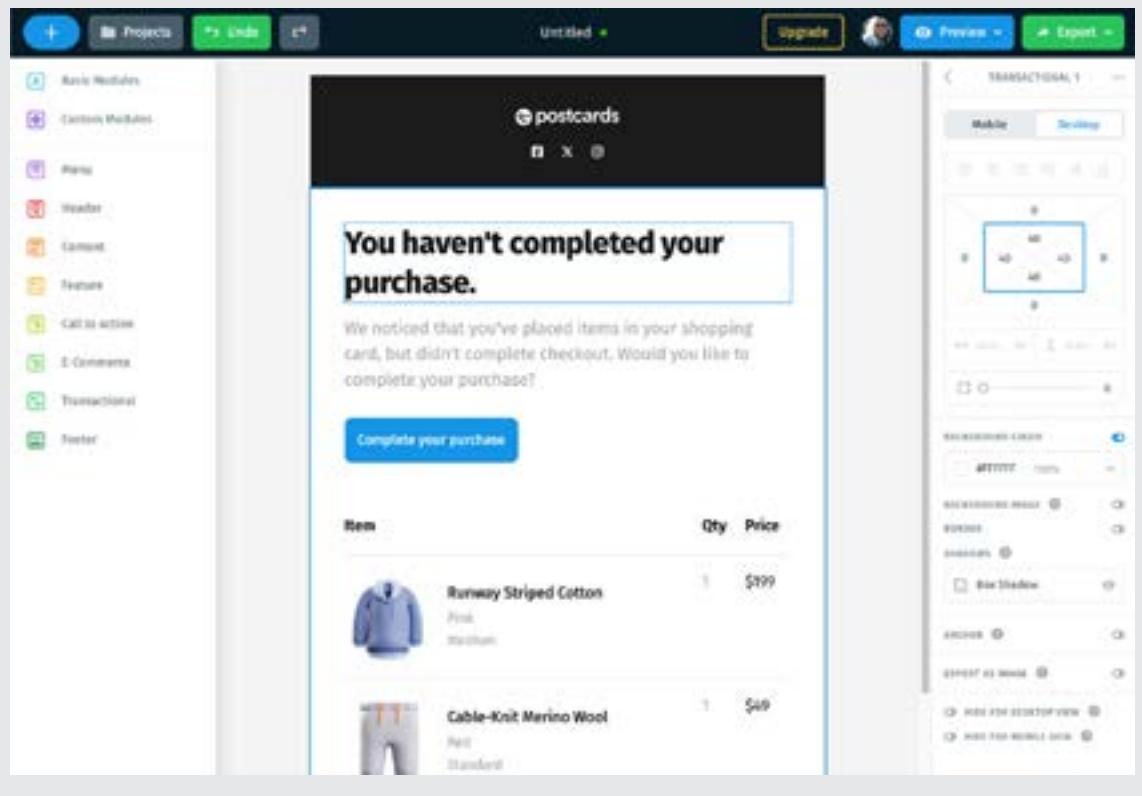
Chamaileon

Chamaileon is designed for teams working on email campaigns collaboratively. The platform allows multiple users to edit an email simultaneously while ensuring version control and brand consistency. This can be useful for authors who work with virtual assistants or marketing teams. Chamaileon's Standard plan costs \$125 per month, and a Premium plan at \$208 per month includes additional collaboration tools, such as the ability to assign user roles and permissions.



Postcards

Postcards by Designmodo takes a modular approach to email design. Instead of starting with a blank canvas, users assemble emails from pre-built sections such as headers, text blocks, and call-to-action buttons. This method makes it easy to create branded templates that can be reused across campaigns. Postcards offers a free plan with limited features; the Pro plan, at \$39 per month or \$396 annually, includes unlimited template projects, exports, and test emails.



Avoiding Common Importing Mistakes

Although email builders can help create a polished email, importing the final design into an ESP can introduce errors if not done carefully. Users should be sure to preview designs for issues such as broken images, altered mobile formats, or code that doesn't translate correctly within the text of the email.

Many ESPs do not store images directly within an email. Instead, they pull them from an external source when the user opens the email. If images used within an email built outside of the program are linked to a temporary location, such as a personal computer or Google Drive, they may not display properly once the email is sent.

To avoid this, take the following steps:

- Upload images to the ESP's media library before sending;
- use a dedicated image hosting service, such as Amazon S3 or Cloudinary; and
- avoid links from personal cloud storage services that may restrict external access.

Testing is also essential. Emails can appear differently depending on the recipient's device and email client. Before sending a campaign, especially if built outside of the ESP that distributes it, users should preview the email in desktop and mobile formats, and use testing tools like Litmus or Email on Acid to check how the email renders in different inboxes. As you review each campaign, ensure all links function correctly and that images load as expected.





Expanding Beyond a Single ESP

A final advantage of stand-alone email builders is platform flexibility. When an email is built inside an ESP's editor, often it is locked into that system. If an author switches ESPs, they may have to start from scratch with new templates in order to match their existing newsletter design. By designing emails separately and importing them, users retain control over their email format and can switch ESPs without losing past work.

For authors looking to create professional, visually distinct emails, stand-alone builders provide a flexible solution without requiring you to shift away from your existing distribution platform. Importing an email into an ESP requires attention to detail, but whether using a simple drag-and-drop tool or a more advanced modular system, these platforms help ensure your email marketing remains as polished and engaging as the books you're promoting.

Chelle Honiker

Chelle Honiker is an advocate for the empowerment of authorpreneurs, recognizing the importance of authors taking charge of both their craft and careers. In response to this need, she has founded a media and training company dedicated to supporting these creative professionals. As the co-founder and publisher of Indie Author Magazine, IndieAuthorTraining, Indie Author Tools, and Direct2Readers.com, Chelle's team of more than 80 writers, editors, trainers, and support staff provides resources and insights that help authors navigate the complexities of self-publishing. Her role as the programming director for Author Nation, an annual conference in Las Vegas, further exemplifies her commitment to fostering a community where authors can grow and succeed. With a career spanning over two decades in executive operations and leadership, Chelle has honed her skills in managing complex projects and delivering impactful training programs. Her experience as a speaker and TEDx Organizer has taken her to many countries, where she has shared her insights with diverse audiences.

Glass Half Hopeful

Hopepunk, Grimsdark Balance Each
Other in the Speculative Fiction Space



When the world is falling down around your characters, how do they react?

Whether you write Fantasy, Post-Apocalypse, or some other offshoot of the Speculative Fiction category, your answer may determine more than the character arc you've created in your story. If your writing encapsulates real-world issues and dystopian elements, their response to the story world could also sort your book into one of two subgenres: Grimdark or Hopepunk.

Grimdark and Hopepunk are often framed as two sides of the same coin—Hopepunk's origins even stem from a suggestion that it be made an opposite to Grimdark. But in practice, the two are more similar than they are different. For authors, Grimdark and Hopepunk are a case of similar worlds but different perspectives, similar tropes but different approaches to them—and understanding those similarities as well as those differences is essential for attracting the right readers to your books.



Grimdark

The concept of Grimdark came about slowly in the Fantasy world, with plenty of stories being shaped by gritty characters and grim worlds before the subgenre existed. [Grimdark Magazine credits George R. R. Martin's Game of Thrones series](#) with launching the popularity in Epic Fantasy of “more realistic” fantasy worlds, after the Sword-and-Sorcery subgenre shifted away from darker stories and toward more lighthearted and uplifting adventures. The name for the subgenre came from the tagline for the tabletop role-playing game *Warhammer 40,000*: “In the grim darkness of the far future, there is only war.”

The tagline that inspired the Grimdark name is also an apt description of the stories it describes. In Grimdark stories, the world is fantastical, but it is also fantastically bleak, and characters are often gritty, violent, and beaten down, blurring the line between right and wrong as they fight to survive. Emily Wenstrom, [in an article for Book Riot](#), sums it up as “dark, broken worlds, with dark, broken characters.”

Although the term is used primarily for Fantasy, there is some debate about whether stories can be Grimdark without involving a fantasy setting. Generally, “the term is not restricted to fantasy but rather can apply to any form of speculative fiction,” according to *Grimdark Magazine*, including Science Fiction, Horror, Historical Fiction, and Dystopian. That said, Grimdark stories are [not entirely hopeless](#); instead, writes Grimdark Magazine author Aaron S. Jones, the subgenre’s darker themes should make each glimmer of hope shine that much brighter.



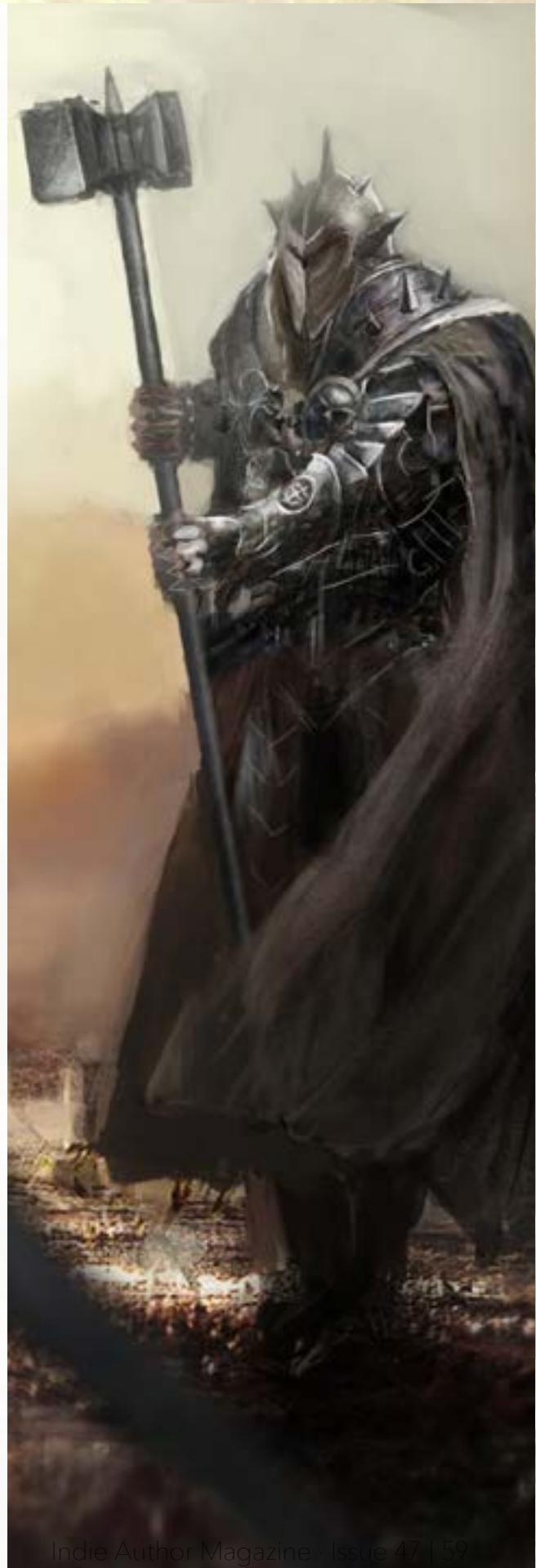
Hopepunk

Where Grimsdark came about after years of genre evolution, the concept of Hopepunk came about from a [two-sentence Tumblr post](#). In July 2017, author Alexandra Rowland wrote, “The opposite of grimsdark is hopepunk. Pass it on.”

More than sixty-one thousand notes later, it has been.

Since her initial post, Rowland’s idea has sometimes been controversial. Some Grimsdark readers argued an opposite subgenre wasn’t necessary and watered down the qualities that made Grimsdark unique; others made comparisons to another subgenre, Noblebright, which focuses on heroism and the belief that good will triumph over evil. After her initial post’s popularity, Rowland explained her concept for Hopepunk further [on her blog](#). Noblebright stories focus on the idea that good will win the fight, she wrote, but Hopepunk stories focus on the fight itself.

Hopepunk stories start in the same kinds of worlds as Grimsdark stories, but they approach survival from a different perspective. Characters are soft and kind when the world around them is not, and they fight for collective change rather than survival, according to a 2018 article on the genre in [Vox](#). In an interview with Rob Hopkins, Rowland posed a different comparison: Hopepunk is not a “glass half full” mentality, nor is it the “glass half empty” mindset of Grimsdark. Rather, stories in this subgenre say, “There’s water in the glass, and that’s important.”



The Choice for Authors

Grimdark and Hopepunk stories both have established audiences and well-known titles to their name: for Grimdark, titles like *The Poppy War* by R. F. Kuang and indie author Richard Nell's Ash and Sand series, and for Hopepunk, Becky Chambers's *A Psalm for the Wild-Built*—as well as Rowland's own novels. When marketing Speculative Fiction, it's up to authors to decide which themes match their story and will engage their readers the most.



Tropes

Still debating which genre is right for you? Grimdark and Hopepunk share plenty of dark tropes, but a few key story elements may shed some light on where your story lies.

1

Apocalyptic Setting:

Even within Fantasy settings, both Grimdark and Hopepunk stories often feature world-ending catastrophes and focus on characters' struggle to survive.

2

Anything that Can Go Wrong Will Go Wrong:

In Grimdark and in Hopepunk, the world is bleak, gritty, and unforgiving. Plans go awry, plots twist in the villain's favor, and characters must deal with an unrelenting set of challenges as their story continues.

3

Corrupt Power:

Often, either the Grimdark or Hopepunk stories are driven by a corrupt individual or ruling class, be they political or mythical. Protagonists in both stories often fall victim to this corruption, and in Hopepunk, must fight against the injustice—it is considered “punk,” after all.

4

Sarcastic Antihero vs. Kind Hero:

Most often, Grimdark stories will feature a sarcastic, abrasive antihero, whose cynicism is because of the world they live in, and Hopepunk protagonists will remain kind and optimistic in spite of the world they face.

5

Survival at a Cost, or Survival Against All Odds:

Grimdark and Hopepunk stories are both, at their core, about survival, but while Grimdark stories emphasize how a character's dark choices allow them to survive, Hopepunk stories focus on survival as an uplifting, inspiring message. Regardless, both stories frame survival as an act of resistance.

6

Always Keep Fighting:

Protagonists in both Hopepunk and Grimdark are tenacious and unwilling to give up the fight. Whether motivated by a will to survive or a chance to help others do the same, when beaten down, they will always try to stand up again.



Nicole Schroeder

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.

From the Stacks

ON WRITING

Stephen King

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As an indie author, you wear many hats—writer, editor, marketer, and publisher. But before all that, you're a storyteller. Stephen King's On Writing offers practical advice and timeless wisdom that will help you hone your craft, overcome creative blocks, and stay focused on the writing process. Plus, as you read, our audio discussion breaks down King's best advice and shows you how to apply it to your own writing and self-publishing career.

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On top of all the other decisions you make as an indie author, keeping on top of cover design trends, what's currently working in terms of promotions, and which formats you want or need for your book to succeed can be pressure you don't need. Gatekeeper Press can help you with a range of publishing services matched to your genre, including editing, illustration, marketing, and cover design. Their team of Author Managers can take the strain of this behind-the-scenes work, leaving you free to get back to writing the words.

WEBINAR: WRITING IS HARD. HOW CAN YOU MAKE IT EASIER?

<https://indieauthortraining.com/webinars/writing-is-hard-how-can-you-make-it-easier>

In this webinar, Chris Wallace, co-founder of WrittenWell.com, took us through this one-stop membership site, set up by four indie authors to help you go from a blank page to promoting your published series. With guides and courses ranging from mindset topics to the analytics and math involved in running profitable ads, discussion forums, and critique groups, you will find everything you need to get started and keep going when the writing gets hard.

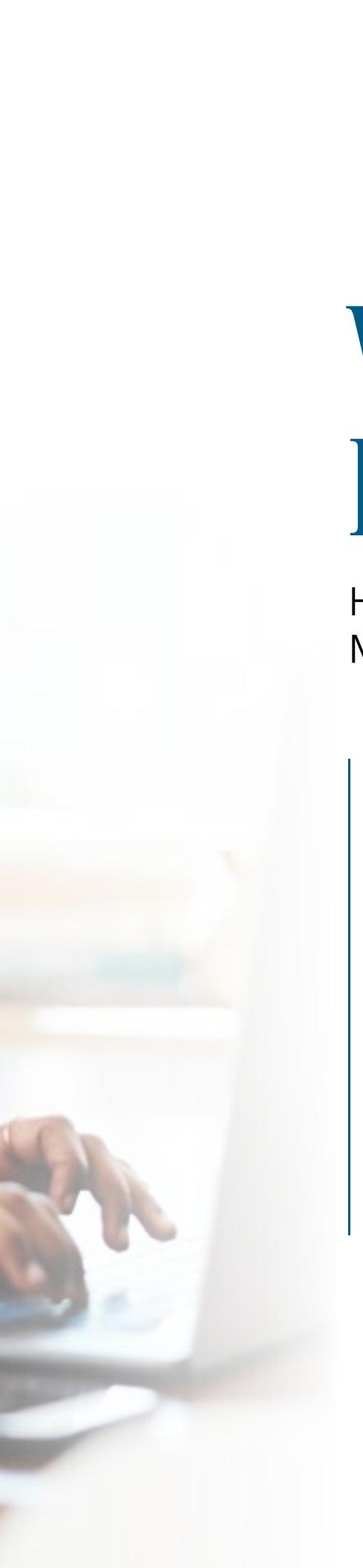
The *Indie Author Magazine* podcast has been refined and focused for bite-size listening, giving you just what you need to know about some of the biggest topics in the industry. Here are the latest episodes you may have missed:

- Beyond Traditional Bookstores:
Crowdfunding and Direct Sales Strategies for Indie Authors
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- From Keywords to Content:
SEO Essentials Every Indie Author Needs to Know
<https://open.spotify.com/episode/3CxLba33pJe9xUw09pOYvR>



When Words Feels Like Work

How Successful Authors Ignore the Muse and Keep Writing Anyway



Sometimes writing feels about as magical as doing your own tax return. It's a challenge to stare at a blank document, waiting for inspiration to strike like lightning, and instead, you get crickets. But you know what? That's completely normal.

Here's the truth not everyone wants to hear: Writing is work. Actual, honest-to-goodness work. To enjoy the spoils of being a successful author, it helps to embrace this reality sooner than later.

I crank out a daily newsletter and to date have written sixty-seven books. Although I love being a professional writer, I've erased the idea that being a professional writer means lounging in coffee shops, wearing cool glasses, and having profound thoughts.

Just me? OK.

The reality involves blinking cursors, deadlines, and editorial calendars. But that's exactly what makes a pro a pro.

Plumbers don't wait for plumbing inspiration to fix a leak. Chefs don't need to feel passionate about Tuesday's soup special. They show up, apply their skills, and get the job done. That's exactly what we must do as writers.

The magic isn't in feeling inspired twenty-four seven; it's in knowing how to produce quality work even when your muse has put their phone on Do Not Disturb. Focus on developing systems, routines, and habits that help you show up at the page day after day. My morning routine includes having a pot of tea ready to drink when I wake up, then doing some mindset work, plus twenty minutes of yoga, before sitting down for an hour of writing. I also have an evening routine to set out my clothes, prep the teapot, and make sure I'm ready for the next day.

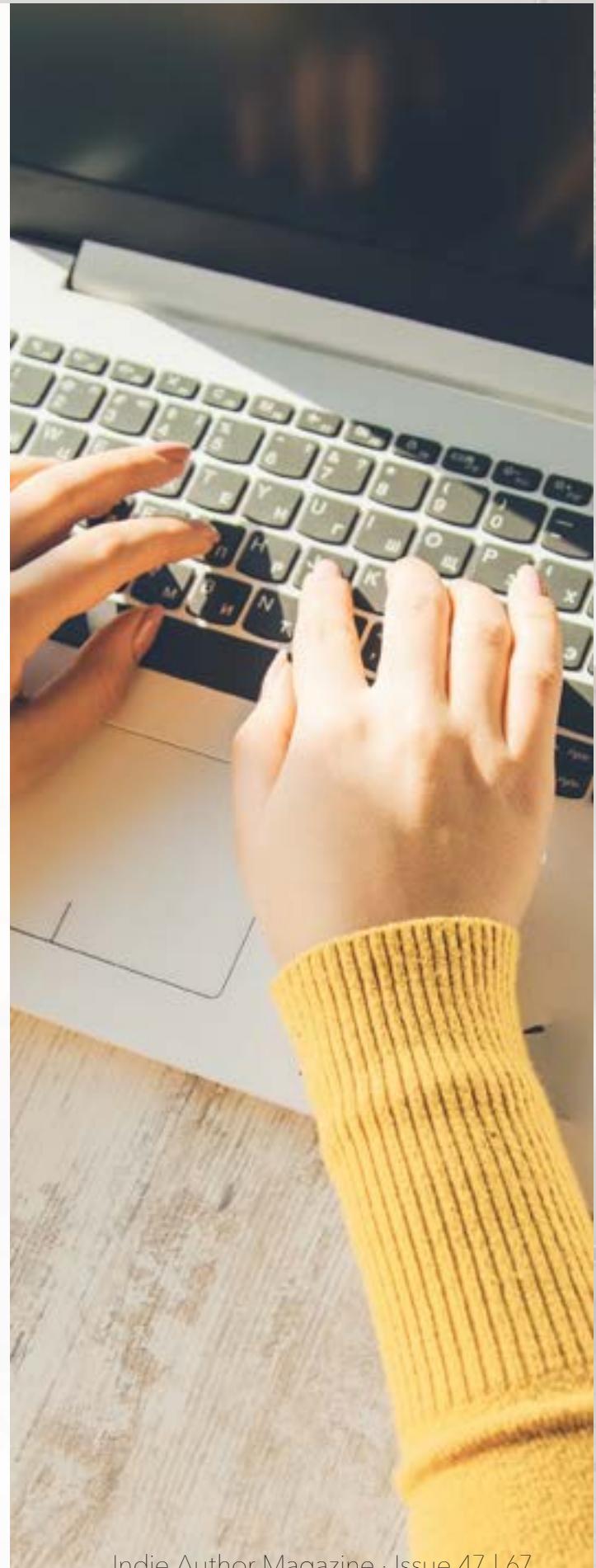


Once you embrace the fact that writing is work, a weight lifts off your shoulders. In fact, the business of writing, including writing, admin work, and marketing, just to name three, must be viewed as necessary. The sooner you embrace your tasks and learn to love them, the better off you'll be. You stop waiting for perfect conditions. You'll stop feeling guilty about not feeling inspired. Instead, you'll sit down, crack your knuckles, and get to it.

Next time writing feels like work, smile, and say, "Well, duh!" Because that's exactly what it is—and that's exactly what makes you a professional. Now, if you'll excuse me, I've got some work to do. Happy writing!



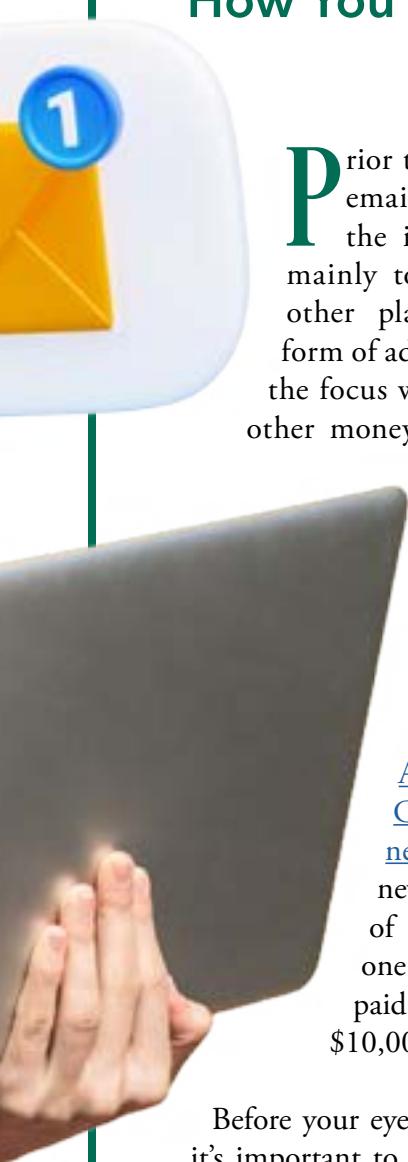
Honoree Corder



From Inbox to Income



As More Indie Authors Earn Money from Their Newsletters, Guest Author Russell Nohelty Shares How You Can Start



Prior to the last couple of years, email marketing existed in the indie publishing industry mainly to promote book sales on other platforms. It was another form of advertisement, which meant the focus was on directing people to other money-earning aspects of your business. But recently, newsletters have gained steam as a way to monetize directly, through platforms like Substack, Ream, Patreon, and even authors' own websites.

[According to Newsletter Circle's 2024 study of 74,000 newsletters](#), the average newsletter sets a yearly price of \$96, which means adding one hundred members to a paid offering could add nearly \$10,000 to your business.

Before your eyes fill up with money signs, it's important to note that subscriptions are the hardest business model to get right, [and you should probably only focus on them after your books are selling](#). People still prefer to pay for a thing they can own outright over a subscription, even if they have to pay more.

That doesn't mean you shouldn't have a paid offering, though. Launching a subscription-based newsletter early and maintaining it in the background of your author business allows you to accumulate paid members over

time until they become a significant part of your business. It took me almost two years to accumulate over one thousand paid members, and though my yearly revenue is a lot lower than I mentioned above, it adds up little by little.

Let's back up for a moment and make sure we understand the terms being used. Email marketing is an umbrella term that breaks down most simply into two categories: mailing lists and newsletters.

Mailing lists are still crucially important, but they only promote your own work or call attention to sales events. Mailing lists don't have much intrinsic value on their own; the value comes from external sources, like buying a book or coming to a signing event.

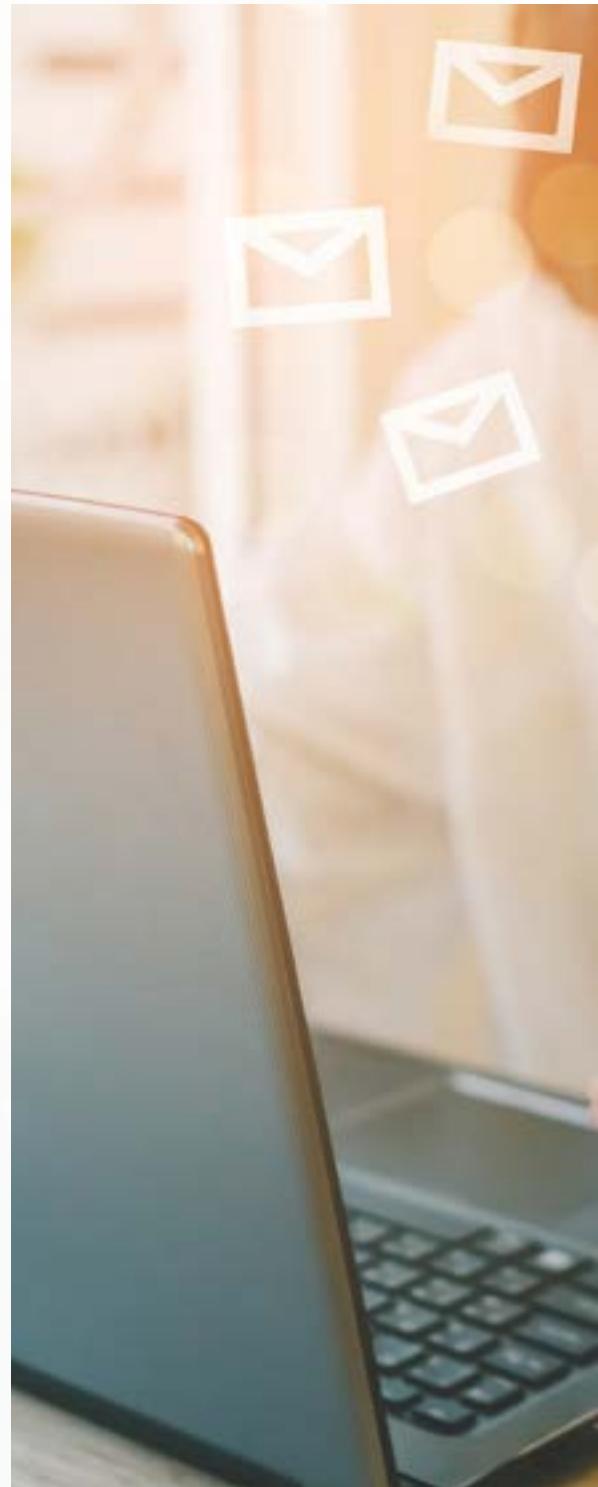
Newsletters, by contrast, provide content directly and therefore have intrinsic value. The easiest way to tell if you're writing something newsletter-worthy is to ask whether somebody could read it by itself, or as part of a serial, and enjoy it on its own.

One of the biggest mistakes authors make in designing their newsletter is treating it like a mailing list, focusing only on promoting other work or inundating subscribers with calls-to-action. Instead, authors would see more benefit by trying to build both products individually. Today, let's help you build the newsletter component of your business, show you where to host your new publication, and explore how you could make money from it.

Hosting Your Newsletter

As newsletters and mailing lists are two separate categories of email marketing, it can be beneficial to host them on different platforms tailored to their purposes. In my business, I keep my mailing list on Kit, which sends out weekly promotions and other launches, while my newsletter is housed on Substack, where I share deep dives into author growth, interviews, and other value-first material. Fewer people want to hear about my promotions than my value-based posts, so this allows people to unsubscribe from one while still hearing about the other.

The nice thing about a newsletter is that, because it already has intrinsic value, you can repost and aggregate your content across the internet. For fiction, places like Royal Road for Fantasy/Sci-Fi authors and Radish for Romance authors are great options. Meanwhile, Medium and LinkedIn are great choices for nonfiction articles. Because this work has value to the reader, they'll be willing to engage with it more. Plus, if you add links to your newsletter, you'll be able to continue building organic subscribers, some of whom will also buy your other offers. Some sites, like Radish and Webtoon, might even pay you for using them, or, like Royal Road, let you connect directly to Patreon, so you can make money even before people get to your newsletter.





Making It Paid

Now that you know where you're hosting your newsletter, let's dive into strategies for making it a revenue driver. The most common way to monetize a newsletter for authors is by adding a paid component to your content, whether that is an archive of your work, new stories, member-exclusive interviews, articles, or something else that entices people to buy from you consistently.

Author [Seanan McGuire](#) basically writes an entire book every month for paid subscribers. One benefit to this model is that once the book is done, you can also sell it on retailers, giving you two bites of the apple. If you add Kickstarter or another presale platform, you can get three bites—and with direct sales, it's all about taking as many bites as you can get. If you are sharing backlist books or material that you're eventually going to publish, you can share it with your audience without expending more effort while still making significant revenue.

Pro Tip: To gain new subscribers, I host membership drives every quarter, where I focus attention on the value I bring to people, just like PBS or NPR do on their networks. Although those platforms have elaborate video and/or audio setups, I deliver mine through a combination of my mailing list and my paid newsletter. I initially ran this exclusively through my mailing list, but eventually I learned that giving people the option to "upgrade to stop getting these promotional emails" was one of the most effective ways to get people to upgrade. I generally run these promotions for one to two weeks, and send two to three emails during that time. Over 60 percent of my paid members come from this method.

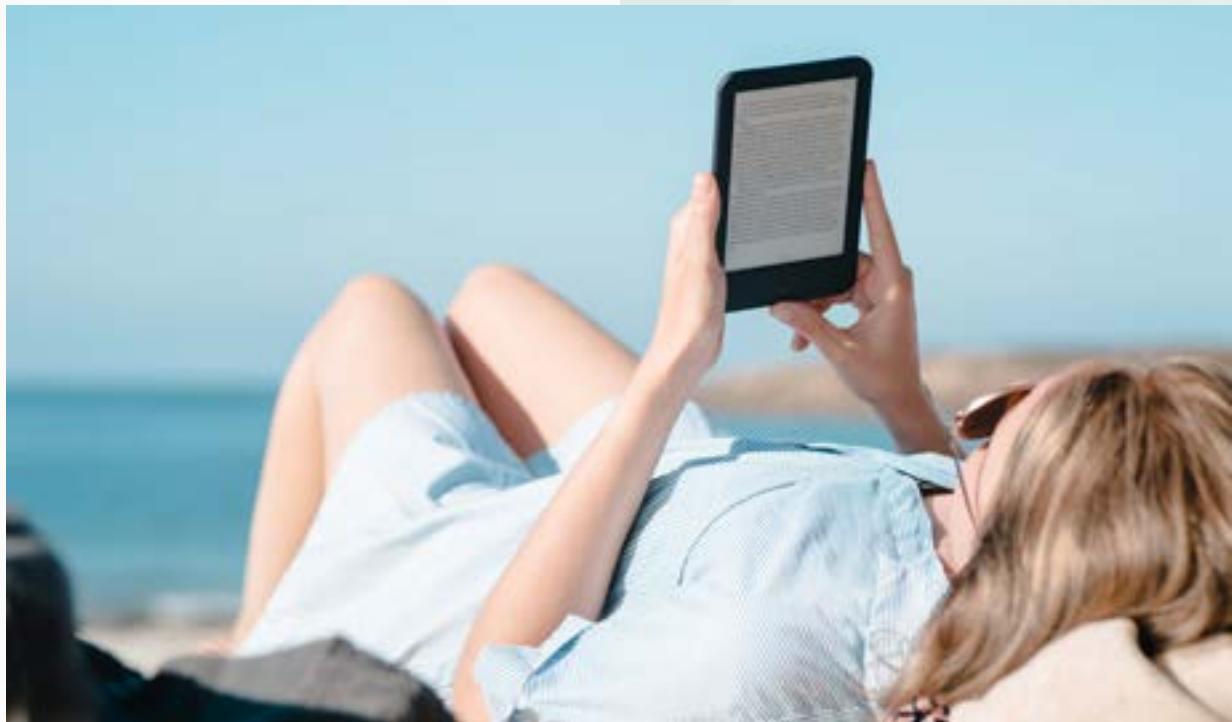
Advertising

There are other ways to earn income from your newsletter without creating a paid subscription option. Platforms like Wellput, Beehiiv, SparkLoop, and ConvertKit offer advertising options you can drop into your newsletter or mailing list to make money. ConvertKit currently only offers programmatic advertising, which means you don't get to control who shows up in your ads with fine detail until you have ten-thousand-plus subscribers, but both Wellput and Beehiiv offer advertising options with more control.

Additionally, if you want to spend the time on it, you could find other authors promoting books who might be interested in advertising in your newsletter, similar to [Today in Books](#) from Book Riot. Prices vary, but consider a price range between \$20 and \$50 per one thousand opens, with a click-through rate on ads of 1 percent to 2 percent.

Pro Tip: Consider including ads for your own books in your newsletter, as well as affiliate links that deliver revenue every time somebody buys from a link you've provided them. Amazon has plenty of information on how to become an affiliate at <https://affiliate-program.amazon.com>, and most other sites that offer affiliate programs have robust resources for how to succeed.

If you find the right partner, you can even explore a deeper integration with your brand. Maybe you're writing a blog post about a sponsor or recording a video about a product. This is usually only an option when you have a larger newsletter or a large social media account. However, if you have access to a tight niche with an engaged audience, you might find success earlier.



Creating Other Rewards

Another avenue for monetizing your newsletter further is to offer multiple tiers with digital and physical rewards, such as a book box. Creating a quarterly book box with your own books or those of other authors in your genre can add significant value to your business. It's possible to charge \$25 to \$50 per month or more for these, even if you only deliver quarterly. Even if you don't want to add book boxes or physical goods, consider a higher priced tier where people get access to you through Q&As or personal chats. Although most people will choose the lower priced options, don't discount those few people who will pay top dollar—they might pay enough to double your revenue or more.

Be forewarned, it's a lot easier to build a sustainable business from a mailing list than a newsletter, and a newsletter often needs to be significantly bigger than a mailing list to work consistently and deliver a lot of value to you

as an author. But as you grow your newsletter, it can be a great funnel into your mailing list. Russell Brunson's Linchpin concept, when dealing with memberships and newsletters, suggests a subscription should undergird your business; it probably won't make a lot of money for several years, but after those years, it could be your biggest money driver and add significant value to your work.

Although I keep them both separate, my newsletter is the main avenue for growth in my business, and those subscribers funnel into my mailing list. Some of them decide to become paid members of my community, but even more buy my books and other products. Building a sustainable business in 2025 and beyond means having as many avenues as possible to exploit and monetize your work. Newsletters are another avenue to explore that can add considerable value to your business over time.



Russell Nohelty

Russell Nohelty (www.russellnohelty.com) is a USA Today bestselling fantasy and non-fiction author who has written dozens of novels and graphic novels including *The Godsverse Chronicles*, *The Obsidian Spindle Saga*, and *Ichabod Jones: Monster Hunter*. He is the publisher of Wannabe Press, co-host of the Kickstart Your Book Sales & Six Figure Author Experiment podcasts, and cofounder of the Writer MBA conference & The Future of Publishing Mastermind. He also co-created the Author Ecosystem archetype system to help authors embrace their natural tendencies to find success. You can find most of his writing at theauthorstack.com. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife and dogs.

PUBLISHERROCKET

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