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GETTING STARTED WITH SMS MARKETING

BEFORE YOU DIVE INTO DIRECT

Global Sales Taxes Explained

ZAC DIAMANTI

INDIE AUTHOR MAGAZINE

SELL DIRECT WITHOUT AN EXPENSIVE STOREFRONT

📚 Direct2Readers connects indie authors with readers who buy direct. YOU make the sale and keep the customer data!

💡 Smart Book Discovery
Our private AI matches readers to your books—no confusing categories. (*And we don't feed other AI Models!*)

📕 Reach Real Readers
Get discovered by book lovers ready to buy from you.

💸 Low Fees. No Middlemen.
We take less so you earn more.

🚀 Marketing That Moves Books
Influencers, campaigns, and features that drive real sales.

🌐 **Register Now**
Direct2Readers.com

"I joined while having a crisis with Amazon KDP... The Alliance is a beacon of light. I recommend that all indie authors join...
Susan Marshall

"The Alliance is about standing together.
Joanna Penn

"It's the good stuff, all on one place.
Richard Wright

"ALLi has helped me in myriad ways: discounts on services, vetting providers, charting a course to sales success. But more than anything it's a community of friendly, knowledgeable, helpful people."
Beth Duke

See hundreds more testimonials at:
AllianceIndependentAuthors.org/testimonials

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INDIE Author Magazine

INDIE AUTHOR MAGAZINE

HELLO AND WELCOME!

I'm Indie Annie, and I'm thrilled you're reading this gorgeous full-color version of IAM. Did you know that you can also access all the information, education, and inspiration in our app? It's available on both the iOS App Store and Google Play. And for those that prefer to listen to me read articles, you can pop over to Spotify or our website.
Happy Reading! *X*

IndieAuthorMagazine.com

Authorpreneurs in Action

"I love Lulu! They've been a fantastic distributor of my paperbacks and an excellent partner as I dive into direct sales. They integrate so smoothly with my personal Shopify store, and their customer support has been top notch."

Katie Cross, katiecrossbooks.com
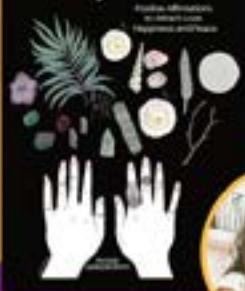
"Having my own store has given me the freedom to look at my creativity as a profitable business and lifelong career."

Phoebe Garnsworthy, phoebegarnsworthy.com
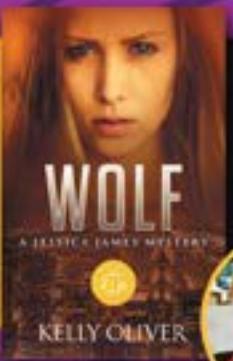
"Lulu has a super handy integration with Shopify. Lulu makes it so easy to sell paperbacks directly to readers."

Kelly Oliver, kellyoliverbooks.com

"My experience with Lulu Direct has been more convenient and simple than I anticipated or thought possible. I simply publish, take a step back and allow the well-oiled machine to run itself. Most grateful!"

Molly McGivern, theactorsalmanac.com

lulu direct

Sell Smarter, Not Harder.

Sell Books from Your Website Using Lulu Direct

Keep 100% of your profit

Retain customer data

Integrate with Shopify, WooCommerce, Zapier, & Custom API

Get paid quickly

No monthly fees

Fully automated white-label fulfillment

Global print network

B Corp Certified

Dropshipping Multiple Orders for a New Book Launch or Crowdfunding Campaign? Use the Lulu Order Import Tool!

We make dropshipping multiple orders at once easier than ever!

☑ Upload your book on Lulu for free

☑ Use the Order Import Tool to upload a file with your customer's order and shipping information

☑ We'll professionally print the orders and drop ship each one to your fans around the world

Get exclusive Publishing & Marketing tips to help you create and sell your books more effectively!

INDIE
AUTHOR MAGAZINE

WHEN WRITING MEANS BUSINESS
IndieAuthorMagazine.com

Design like a Pro for free

EDITOR IN CHIEF

Nicole Schroeder
Editor in Chief

Since our inaugural issue, *Indie Author Magazine*'s slogan, "When Writing Means Business," has shaped our coverage. We've highlighted tech tools, platforms, and strategies to help you expand your earnings and reach new readers, and we've explored every stage of the publishing process to help you grow in this industry.

Of course, no author can grow without focusing on their craft, and one section that appeared in that inaugural issue, Devil in the Details, was designed with craft in mind. In this section, we helped smooth over the pitfalls every author encounters when writing something from the real world. Our Devil in the Details articles have dispelled myths about corsets, asked equestrians common questions about horseback riding, reminded authors to be mindful of wandering body parts in their manuscripts, and more. We've all read a scene that took us out of the story because a character referenced a song that shouldn't exist yet or because a building in a famous city was inexplicably on the wrong street. With this section, we wanted to help authors recognize those potential mistakes and give them the tools they needed to correct them.

This month, however, we've decided to expand that section. Of course, getting the details right in your story is important, but getting them right in your business can be even more so. Whether it's understanding trends in the industry or dissecting the legal requirements you face as a publisher, we want to help authors avoid common mistakes in their work, in both the writing and business sides of the job.

Of course, we'll still be sharing craft-focused articles from time to time—and we'd love to hear your recommendations for topics to cover! Reach out to me at nicole@indieauthormagazine.com to share the snafus authors make that bother you most or the tricky elements that trip you up every time they come up in a scene. Let us know, too, the aspects of managing your writing business that you'd like to understand better. The devil is in the details of every part of independent publishing, and we want to help you get them right.

Nicole Schroeder

4 Steps to Finesse Your Author Mission Statement

The Author Wheel Co-Founder Megan Haskell Shares Her Strategy for Turning Your Author Goals into a Focused Tagline for Your Books

P lenty of authors use taglines for their books and series, summing up in just a few well-crafted words the key themes, tropes, and story elements that readers can expect to find among the pages. But The Author Wheel co-founder Megan Haskell suggests authors should take it a step further and craft taglines for themselves, too. Summarizing your brand, your books, and your writing business is as much a marketing tool to help connect readers with your stories as it is to help you understand the story your books tell about you. In the fourth part of her guest series, Haskell shares how to do both in just four steps.

Remember your purpose and personality.

As an author entrepreneur, whether you're an indie author or are traditionally published, you are a businessperson. Most businesses have a mission statement. Do you?

A mission statement, in its most simplistic form, is a declaration of motive. For writers, it answers the question: Why do you write what you write? Perhaps more importantly, it can help readers decide whether your book appeals to their interests.

Uncovering your author personality and your purpose are key to crafting an author business that meets your personal goals. Now let's put them together into a cohesive mission statement and tagline that will guide your writing journey and connect you with your ideal readers.

Understanding your writing purpose and author personality will lend authenticity to your mission statement. You're not just here to make money; you're here to provide some kind of value to your reader. Are you attempting to entertain, educate, or inspire? Does your writing support your primary business, or are you developing a fanbase around your fiction? Once you have these answers, spend some time brainstorming descriptive adjectives that apply to your work.

Step 2

Identify the story elements that inspire you.

Not every story appeals to every person. We are all unique humans with varying backgrounds and interests. Characters, settings, themes, and tropes can pull us into genres we don't normally read, and they can shove us out of our favorite type of story as well. Certain genres appeal to specific readers—including you.

Understanding the story elements that inspire you might help you better relate to the readers who will love your work. What are your favorite genre tropes? Which of them appear in books you've already written and published, and which do you plan to write in the future?
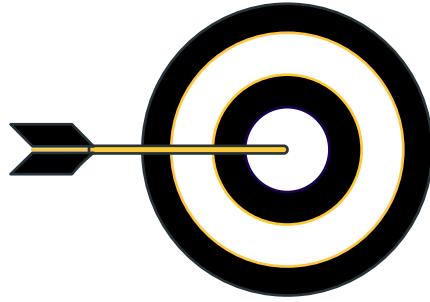
Once again, spend some time brainstorming descriptive words for the elements that appear in your stories. Try to find powerful words with multiple meanings that will hook your target audience.

My business partner Greta Boris uses the tagline "Murders that Hit Home." The phrase "hit home" does double duty: She writes domestic suspense stories that take place in suburban homes and neighborhoods, and these stories have a powerful emotional impact.

> **Understanding the story elements that inspire you might help you better relate to the readers who will love your work.**
> — Megan Haskell,
> The Author Wheel co-founder

...

Step 3

Put it together.

When you're finished brainstorming, craft a mission statement that describes what you write and why. I find it easier to write my mission statement in the first person, at least to start. It helps me connect with readers in a more authentic way. You can think of this as the elevator pitch for your writing career or for a particular pen name, if you write under multiple names.

When crafting your mission statement, include the genre, purpose, tropes, and themes that resonate through your writing. For example, as an author whose purpose is entertainment with themes of identity and belonging, this is my mission statement: "I write action-packed portal fantasy adventures that cross between Earth and other realms. My protagonists are strong women who must face down the monsters that haunt them to understand themselves and their place in the world."

Step 4

Boil it down.

Once you feel good about your mission statement, transform it into a marketable single-sentence author tagline. Skim through the descriptive words from steps 1 and 2. Which are the most powerful or evocative? How can you string them together interestingly?

Keep your author tagline short and pithy but exciting for your target reader. Try variations in length to find a balance between the two.

After I pare down the mission statement I used before, my tagline becomes: "Penning tales of myth, magic, and mayhem, featuring kick-ass heroines and monsters of every size." Use this as your intro when doing an interview or sitting on a panel and as a super short bio on social media. You can also shorten this even further for graphics or other social media, as well as for your author logo.

This can take time and many iterations to develop, and it can change as your back list expands. However, it's time well spent. Defining your mission statement and turning it into a marketable tagline can help you focus your author brand and better connect with the readers who will most enjoy your work. ■

Megan Haskell

Megan Haskell pens tales of myth, magic, and mayhem featuring strong female heroines and monsters of every size. She's the award-winning author of The Sanyare Chronicles fantasy adventure and The Rise of Lilith contemporary fantasy series, and co-founder of The Author Wheel Podcast and courses for writers. With more than fifteen years of writing and publishing experience, her goal is to help you Clarify, Simplify, and Implement your own best path to an author career. Find out more at www.MeganHaskell.com or www.AuthorWheel.com.

ALLi Exclusive:

Direct Sales Pave a Path to Greater Control, Revenue

I n the evolving landscape of independent publishing, direct sales have become an essential strategy for authors who want more control over their work, a larger share of revenue from sales of their books, and a direct connection with their readers. Although direct sales can happen at in-person events like book fairs, this article focuses on the online side of direct sales.

Why Consider Direct Sales?

Major online retailers can help authors reach new readers, especially if authors know how to optimize their algorithms and are willing to pay for ad placement on their stores. But you pay for that benefit not only with ad spend but also by forfeiting a cut of your royalties. Once readers discover your work and become fans, they are often willing to purchase directly from you—especially as platforms like Shopify have normalized this approach. Crowdfunding platforms such as Kickstarter have also shown readers the value of supporting creators directly. Savvy readers now understand the financial benefits to authors of cutting out middlemen and are often eager to support their favorite creators by buying direct.

Direct sales not only allow authors to retain more of their earnings; they also enable faster payouts compared to the thirty- to ninety-day wait typically seen with third-party retailers.

Additionally, direct sales offer the flexibility to set pricing without the constraints of retailer royalty structures. For example, authors can price box sets or premium digital products above Amazon's $9.99 cap for its 70 percent royalty rate. This flexibility opens doors to exclusive deals and targeted promotions that are difficult to achieve on third-party platforms.

Assess Your Offerings

Your direct sales catalog is limited only by your output and your creativity, but ebooks, audiobooks, and print books are among the most popular offerings.

Digital products, such as ebooks and audiobooks, require an initial setup effort, but once this is done, you can make fulfillment of orders relatively hands-off by automating the delivery using services like BookFunnel or StoryOrigin. These platforms also handle technical support, saving you time and hassle.

Physical products, like signed print editions, offer unique opportunities to connect with readers.

"Direct sales for physical products allow me as a seller to offer the kind of service I love to receive as a customer," says the Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi) News Director Dan Holloway. "We can all recall an experience of receiving something that made us think, 'Wow, that person really went the extra mile for me.' It may be a commitment to sustainability demonstrated in the kind of packaging you use—accompanied by an explanation of what you're doing—or it could be including extra gifts like high-quality stickers that spread the word about your work long after your package is opened."

Be sure to factor in the time it will take you to package and ship these products and the scheduling considerations of doing so in a timely manner; if these requirements seem unmanageable, assess the option of paying someone to do it for you.

Also consider how much physical inventory to keep on hand. Having had my entire inventory of print books destroyed in a flood—fortunately, insurance covered that loss—I prefer ordering smaller quantities of books more often rather than placing occasional large orders.

> **Direct sales for physical products allow me as a seller to offer the kind of service I love to receive as a customer.**
>
> *— Dan Holloway, ALLi news director*

Establish Your Online Platform

Promote Your Store

As ALLi member Morgana Best advises, "Why build your empire on rented land? Own and develop your own real estate"—i.e., your own online store. An online home base that you own—your website, not a page on a social media platform—is vital for a professional indie author and often serves as the foundation for direct sales.

Platforms like Wix and Squarespace offer built-in direct sales capabilities, making them excellent starting points. For more advanced needs, consider more robust, sales-focused platforms like Payhip, Gumroad, WooCommerce, or Shopify. These tools can integrate with your website to create a seamless shopping experience. The best choice depends on your technical expertise and budget; for example, Payhip is beginner friendly, and Shopify offers robust functionality but requires more technical know-how.

Driving traffic to your online store requires effective marketing strategies, including search engine optimization (SEO), content marketing, and social media engagement. Without the visibility provided by large retailers, you'll need to work harder to bring readers to your store.

Offering exclusive products can help. For example, consider selling a prequel novella or a workbook that complements your nonfiction titles. These unique offerings can entice readers to visit your store.

Using reputable platforms also reassures shoppers and helps manage aspects like sales tax and data privacy regulations. However, the level of support provided by different direct sales platforms varies; be sure to understand the details before committing.
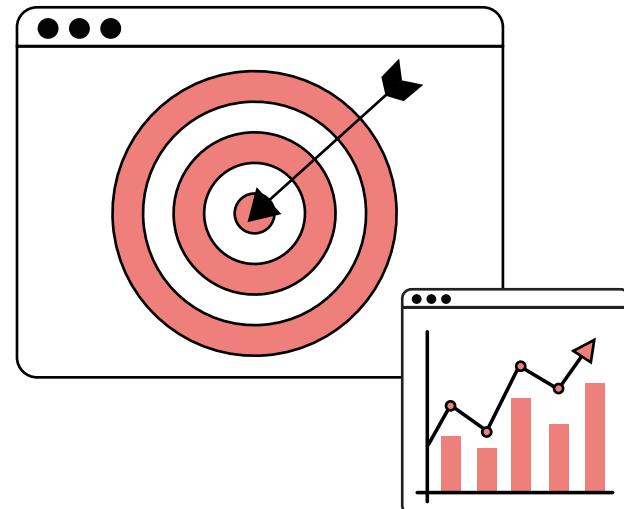
Leverage Reader Data

A key benefit of direct sales is access to buyer data, such as a reader's email address; location, if provided for shipping physical products; purchase history; order value; purchase timing; conversion rate; cart abandonment; and much more.

You can use this data to cement your relationship with your buyers as superfans and tailor your promotional efforts based on their history. Did Joe from Philadelphia buy your first-in-series novel? Follow up with him a week later to offer a special offer on book 2. Will you be at a Philly library talking about the backstory behind your series? Drop Joe a note with an invitation to attend.

This data can also inform your marketing strategies and help you create a sense of community among your readers. Invite them to join an online group related to your topic or genre. Survey this audience—who likely represents some of your biggest fans—on topics that can inform your decisions about your writing and publishing business.
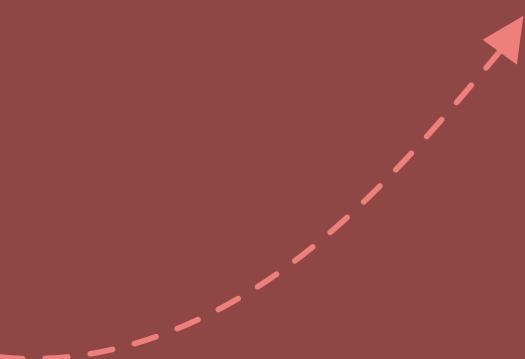
Getting Started with Direct Sales

If the idea of direct sales excites you, start small. "Even if direct sales readers are a fraction of your readership, that fraction will grow bigger over time," says Michael La Ronn, ALLi's outreach manager. "You need not build an expensive storefront; do that later. Merely offering your books for sale direct through a platform like Gumroad or Payhip is a smart starting strategy."

For those who feel overwhelmed, ALLi's crowdfunding advisor, Russell Nohelty, suggests beginning with crowdfunding. "If you're looking into direct sales, I recommend starting with crowdfunding because it's 'direct sales lite,'" Nohelty says. "You own the data, but you don't have to know how to code. Additionally, it's time bound, so if you hate it, the minute the campaign is over, you never have to do it again."

Before you dismiss the option of direct sales, consider the additional benefits it can provide. Direct sales can open up opportunities beyond books. You can sell courses, offer coaching or consulting services, create membership programs, or even recommend affiliate products. The possibilities are as varied as your creativity and your readers' interests.

The Power of a Diversified Model

It's important to note that embracing direct sales doesn't mean abandoning third-party retailers. Platforms like Amazon, Apple, and Kobo provide significant value in reaching new audiences. Direct sales should complement, not replace, these channels.

Direct sales empower indie authors to increase profitability and build closer connections with readers. By thoughtfully integrating direct sales into your business strategy, you can unlock new opportunities while enjoying the benefits of a diversified publishing model.

For more information about direct sales from ALLi, check out these resources:

1. ALLi's Self-Publishing Advice and Inspirations podcast from January 2024 titled "Direct Sales Mindset — The Advantages of Personal Sales, with Joe Solari: Self-Publishing Conference Highlight" explores the benefits direct sales can offer authors and tools and strategies to get started.

2. From ALLi's Self-Publishing News series, Holloway explores the wider impact of direct sales shifts on the growth of the industry with "Self-Publishing News: Is SelfPub3's Emphasis on Direct Reader Relationships the Answer to Stagnating Book Prices?"

3. ALLi's "Ultimate Guide to Selling Print Books Direct from Your Author Website" is available on its website at https://selfpublishingadvice.org/selling-books-on-your-author-website. ■

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

Dear Indie Annie,

Technology seems to get a lot of attention these days. Does an old-time creative novel writer, grinding out a daily output, still have a place in a world of competitive AI? (Because I really don't want some algorithm selecting my words!)

Outpaced by AI

Dear Outpaced by AI,

Listen up, darling, because we're about to have a heart-to-heart about the digital dragon breathing down every writer's neck.

I understand your fears; I truly do. I am old enough to remember drafting ideas in my favorite Moleskine notebook, often at my special corner of the municipal library, and going home to write up my words on a manual typewriter. I stored my research on index cards and scrapbooks overstuffed with newspaper clippings.

But I can't recall the last time I stepped foot inside a library. My words are now backed up automatically on the cloud from my portable electronic drive. And my research is a Google away. Sometimes, shifting away from my old habits was harder than hitting a concrete pillar in a snowstorm. Other times, I embraced technology's advantages, like Lydia Bennett embraced eloping with Captain Wickham. And like it was for sweet Lydia, though the move was considered foolish by many, it turned out just fine.

Now, I know there is not always a wonderful Mr. Darcy on hand to smooth out the bugs. Technology is like that overeager party guest who shows up uninvited, raids the literary buffet, and acts like they own the place. But here's the tea, sweetpea: Creativity will not bow to the restraints of digitalization or those of a mystical mathematical equation. It's a wild, untamed beast that lives in the human heart.

Imagine AI as the flashy new sports car zooming down the literary highway. Sleek? Absolutely. Fast? You betcha. But that's all it's built to do.

Can AI capture the nuanced heartbreak of *Wuthering Heights*? Can it understand the delicate dance of human emotion that transforms simple words into poetry? Darling, please.

Your fear is valid—and entirely misplaced. These algorithms might generate text faster than you can say "plot twist," but they're serving up word salad while you're crafting a five-course literary feast. They're

collecting data; you're collecting souls through your storytelling. You are a master chef in a world of microwave meals. Sure, AI can quickly heat up some generic content, but can it understand the subtle blend of spices that makes a truly memorable dish? Can it feel the passion behind each carefully chosen ingredient? Not a chance.

From Chaucer to Sarah J. Maas, great writers throughout history haven't just survived technological shifts; they've thrived. When typewriters replaced handwritten manuscripts, writers adapted. When computers replaced typewriters, writers evolved. Writers have charted the path from oral traditions to mass publication, and this AI revolution? It's just another chapter in the ongoing story of human creativity.

Here's your battle plan, my literary warrior: Embrace technology as a tool, not a threat. Use AI for research, editing assistance, or brainstorming. But never—and I mean never—let it replace your unique voice. Your experiences, your pain, your joy … these are the secret ingredients no algorithm can replicate.

Remember, darling, algorithms can generate text, but they can't generate truth. They can compile information, but they can't create meaning. They're a paint-by-numbers kit trying to compete with a Picasso.

Your humanity is your superpower. Your ability to transform personal experiences into universal truths? That's magic no machine can manufacture. So stand tall, grip that pen—or keyboard—like the literary warrior you are, and remind yourself that AI might be able to generate a thousand words a minute, but it will never understand the beauty of a single, perfectly crafted sentence that makes a reader's heart stop.

Keep writing, keep feeling, keep creating. The algorithms can wait.

Happy writing,
Indie Annie

10 Tips for
Scrivener
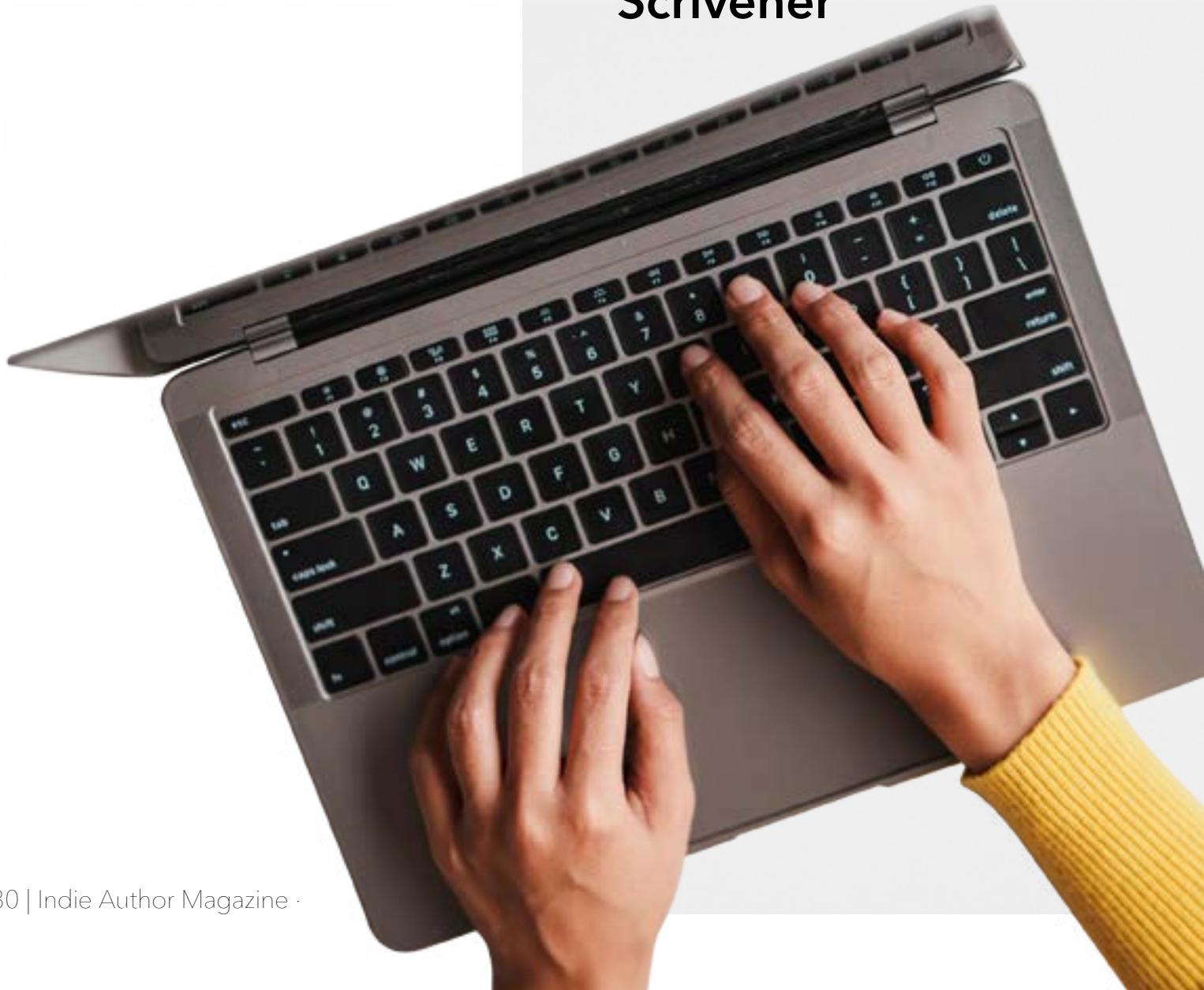
Literature & Latte's writing software, Scrivener, is considered a powerful writing tool and an invaluable asset for many authors who have it in their arsenal. With its vast array of features, some so well hidden they're like Easter eggs, it offers myriad options to fit any author's workflow and style.

Beyond its core functionality, some features are easy to miss, but we've broken down the top tips to help you maximize Scrivener's potential, so you can focus on what matters most: writing your novel.

01

Comments create digital sticky notes.

For those migrating from Microsoft Word, Scrivener's comments feature is a welcome addition. Highlighting a piece of text and clicking on the word bubble icon in the inspector on the right-hand side of the screen will generate a new comment resembling a sticky note in the margin. This feature is perfect for jotting down reminders to your future self, and each includes the date and time it was created for greater organization.

02

Keep your novel organized with a story bible.

Scrivener makes it easy to organize your story details with customizable templates for character profiles, special item descriptions, or world-building notes. You can use premade templates for the characters or locations in your story, or you can create a custom bible. These templates live in the binder on the left-hand side, so you can switch between the two and access them while writing. You can also right-click on the page, select "Open," then select "as Quick Reference" to keep the page open in a separate window. You'll never forget a character's eye color again!
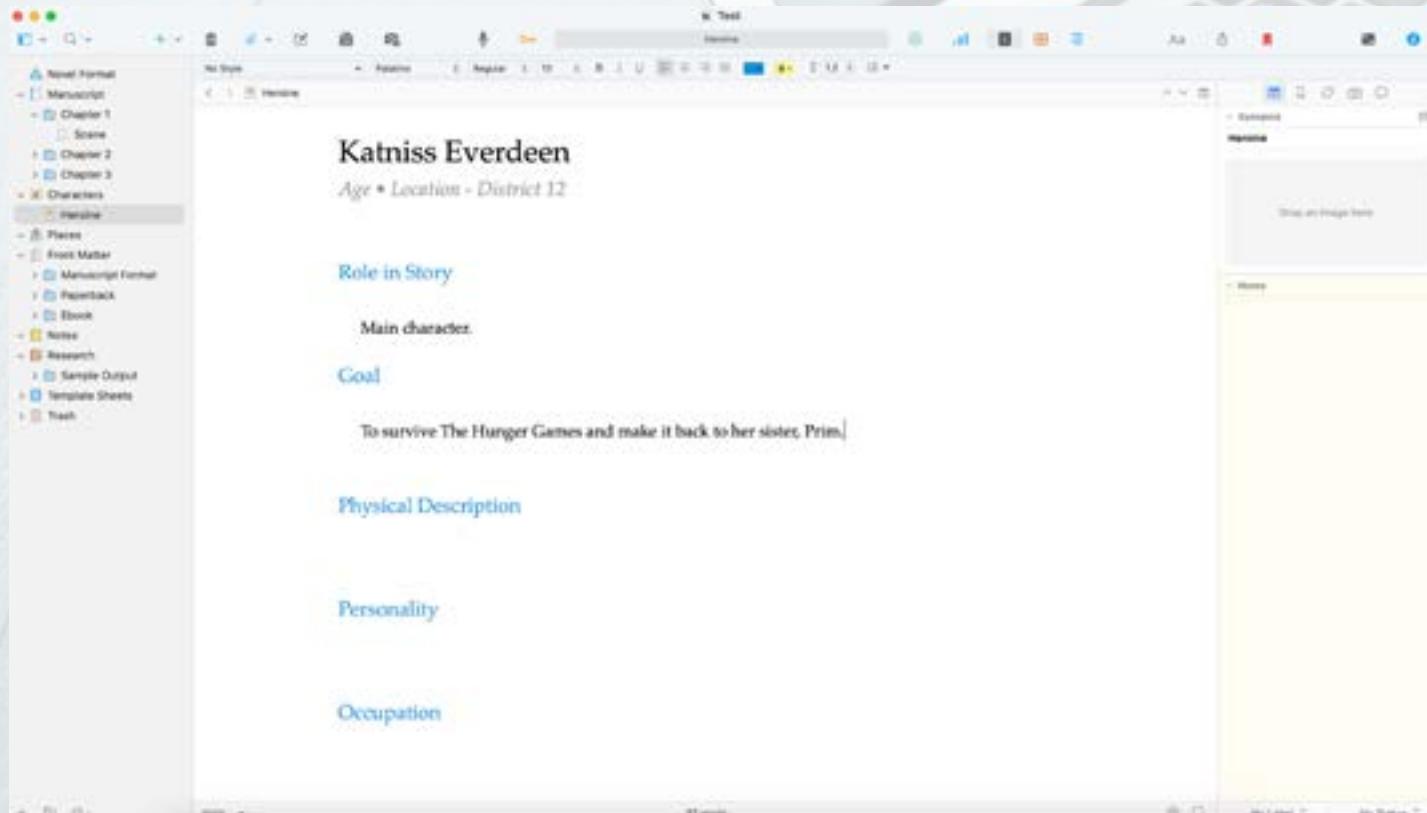
03

Track changes with Revision Mode.

Enter Revision Mode by selecting it from the Format drop-down menu, then selecting a revision level from First to Fifth. Scrivener will automatically color-code your changes to help track updates and rewrites. Similar to Microsoft Word's Track Changes functionality, you can select "Remove All Revisions" or "Remove Current Revision Color" to either accept all changes or only the changes within a selected revision level. The visual clarity offered by Revision Mode allows you to focus on your changes while ensuring you don't touch what's been locked in as final. You can toggle between Revision Mode and normal writing mode seamlessly by selecting "None" in the Revision Mode menu.
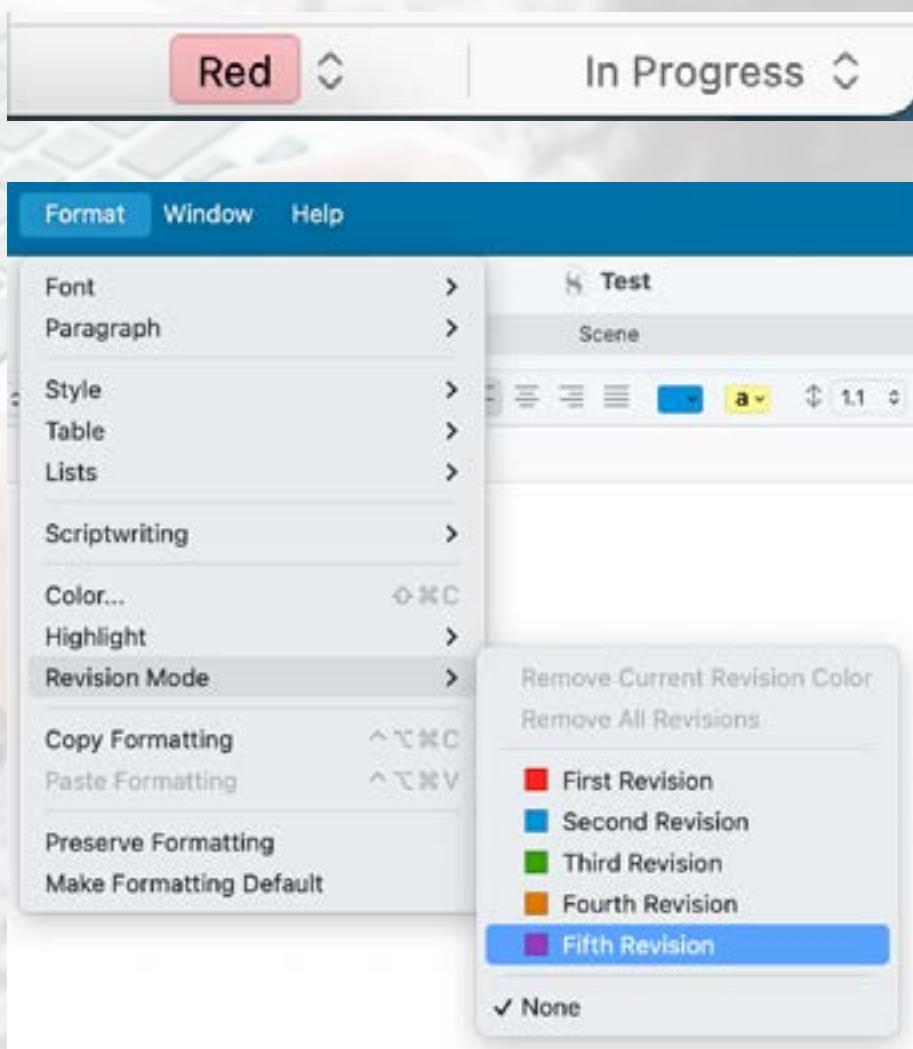
Pro Tip:

Using label tags, which are color based and include red, orange, green, and other options, and status tags, which are text based and include classifications like To Do, In Progress, Revised Draft, and Final Draft, allows you to see at a glance where you stand in your manuscript on a chapter-by-chapter or scene-by-scene basis. Both the label tags and status tags are located in the lower right-hand corner of the screen.

04

Take Snapshots to save drafts and roll back if needed.

The Snapshots feature lets you capture versions of your writing as you go. Before making changes to your current draft, you can take a snapshot of your work, so if you make a mistake or want to revisit an earlier draft, you can compare with or roll back to that version. To take a snapshot, click the camera icon in the toolbar or in the inspector on the right-hand side, or use a keyboard shortcut: Cmd+5 on Mac or Ctrl+5 on Windows.
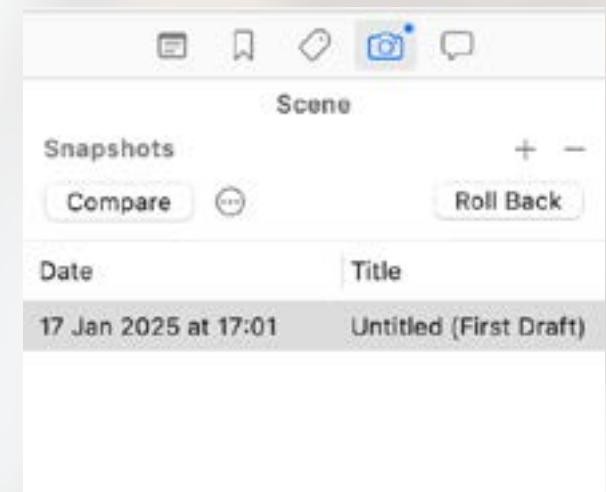
05

Gray out text to focus only on dialogue.

Dialogue Focus is perfect for refining your characters' conversations. With this feature, you can isolate dialogue by graying out everything else in your manuscript. This is a great way to check for flow, consistency, tone, and voice, and it allows you to fine-tune your dialogue and make it feel more natural and engaging. Enter Dialogue Focus by navigating to the drop-down menu and selecting "Edit," scrolling down to "Spelling and Grammar," then selecting "Linguistic Focus." Choose "Direct Speech" from the options.
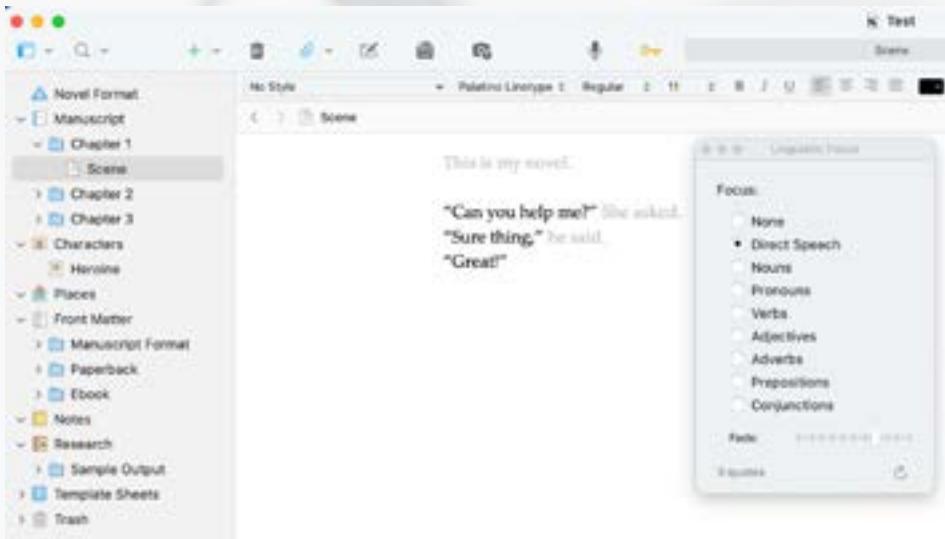
Pro Tip:

Similar to Dialogue Focus, if you'd like to avoid the temptation to edit your previous work as you write, Scrivener's Composition Mode lets you choose to only focus on the previous line, sentence, or paragraph in your document.

06

Use Split Screen to view two documents side by side.

The Split Screen feature in Scrivener helps you multitask like a pro. View two documents side by side or stack them vertically in order to reference your outline while drafting your manuscript or compare different scenes—or even two versions of the same scene. You can also use this feature to tweak a character profile in your story bible while writing. To access the function, click the split screen icon in the upper-right corner of the editor.
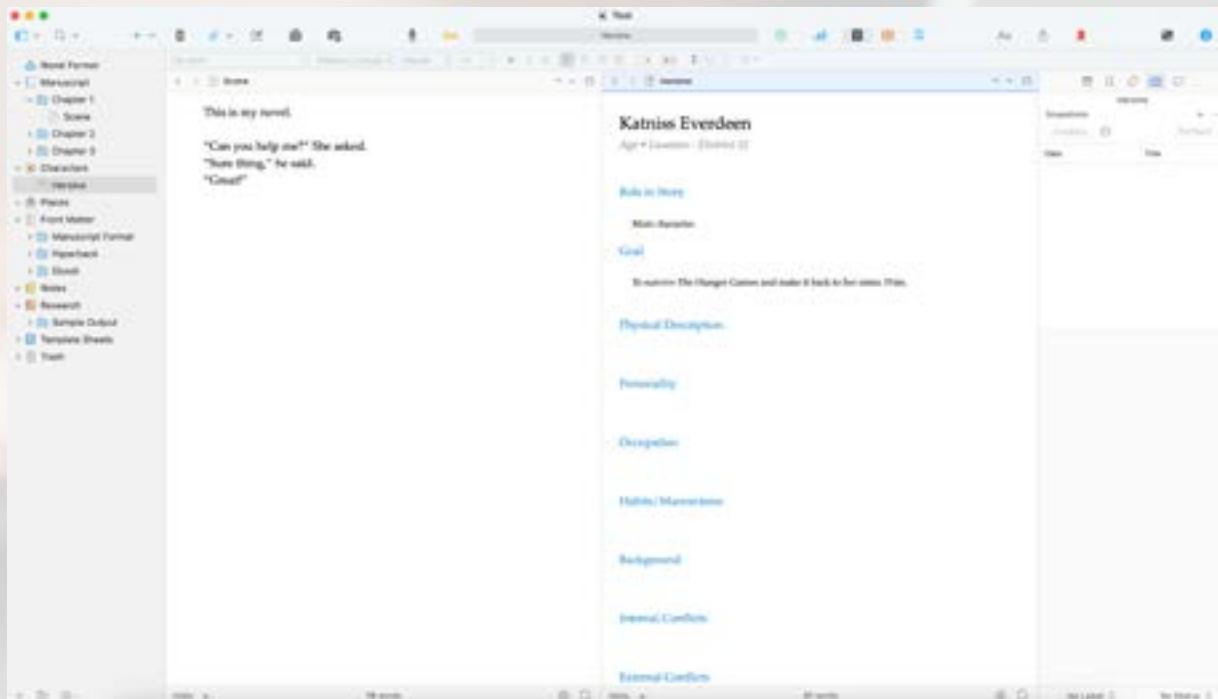
07

Switch between documents with navigation arrows.

Scrivener's navigation feature works in much the same way as your browser's navigation—its backward and forward arrows let you jump between windows and recently viewed documents. Whether you're switching between your manuscript and your outline or between your current scene and various character profiles, the navigation arrows allow you to remain in control of your project without losing your place and without having to hunt through the binder.

08

Customize your workspace.

The main toolbar in Scrivener is fully customizable, letting you tailor your workspace to your needs. To customize your toolbar, right-click anywhere on it, and choose "Customize Toolbar" from the drop-down menu. There, you can choose your favorite items and rearrange them. Add project targets to track your word count goals or project statistics for an overview of your progress. You can also include tools like Compile for quick exporting, Corkboard for helping you visualize your scenes and how they fit in with your story, or Speech Mode to have Scrivener read your book aloud—perfect for catching awkward phrasing or typos.
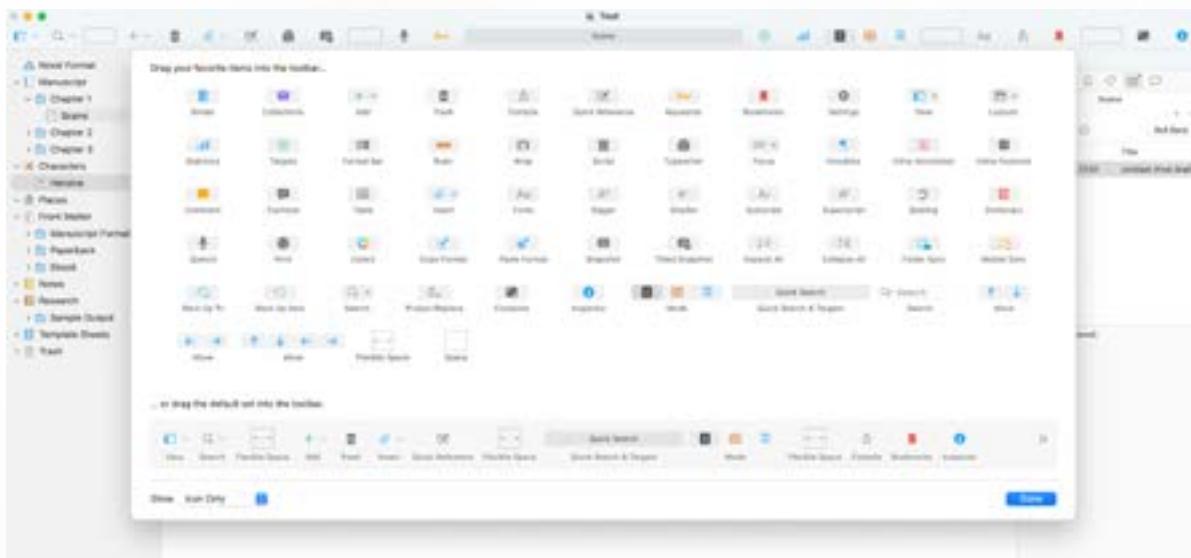
Beyond customizing your workspace to match your personal preferences, Scrivener also lets you save blank projects as templates, allowing you to start a new project with your ideal setup. Customize your toolbar or your binder with folders that include chapters, scenes, and even entire story bibles. You can also set your preferred fonts, colors, and sizes. Once saved as a template, you'll be able to start a new novel with exactly the tools you need to make writing a breeze, without having to go through the setup process every time.
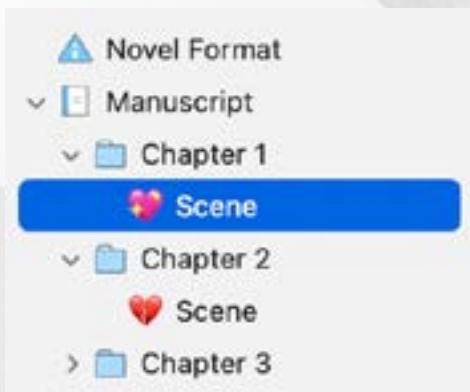
Pro Tip:

You can use emoji as icons for folders, chapters, or scenes. Scrivener has its own built-in icons, but if you'd prefer to use one of the Unicode emoji icons, right-click on the folder or scene, choose "Change Icon," then select "Icon from Text." Assign emoji to represent POV characters, timelines, plots, or key events.

09

Generate character names with the Name Generator.

If you struggle with naming side characters as you draft, Scrivener has a built-in name generator to help spark ideas. To enter the generator, navigate to "Edit" in the drop-down menu, then select "Reference Tools" and "Name Generator." You can choose from region-specific names in common languages and indicate whether you'd like a male, female, or neutral name. You can also ask the generator to attempt alliterations or double-barreled last names.

10

Sync between devices.

If you have the Scrivener mobile app and the desktop version of the software, you can use Dropbox to sync your projects between devices, allowing you to start a chapter on your laptop and finish it on your phone or tablet on the go. Although the sync process isn't automatic, all it requires is the push of a button. I use this functionality regularly, and it means I have my manuscript—notes, character profiles, outline, and all—in my back pocket. The Scrivener app is currently available for iOS only; sorry, Android users!

Beyond its core writing tools, Scrivener includes a variety of lesser-known tools that can help streamline your writing process. Whether it's using Snapshots to save your current drafts, turning on Dialogue Focus to refine your characters' conversations, or customizing your toolbar to suit your needs as an author, its hidden features make it even more versatile than it seems at first glance. Exploring them can help you determine which tools best fit your writing style and workflow, so you can focus on bringing your story to life and into the hands of readers. ■
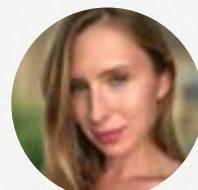
Kasia Lasinska

Kasia Lasinska writes series of fast-paced young adult fantasy and dystopian novels filled with daring quests, action, adventure, magic hidden in unexpected places, and a splash of romance. Kasia likes to tell people she's actually a vampire, given she's a night owl, is usually quite pale, and can't eat garlic. She loves books, travel, a good cup of coffee, and dogs. Keep up to date with Kasia via her website: https://kasialasinska.com

So You've Got Their Address. Now What?

Snail Mail May Be an Old Way to Communicate, But It Offers Authors a New Way to Connect with Readers

In an age of e-commerce and digital marketing, where the speed and accessibility of email blasts and social media posts reign supreme, the allure of a handwritten letter or a beautifully crafted package has become somewhat lost. However, that's not the only thing you can send in the post, and for independent authors selling their books through their own websites, a golden opportunity exists: direct response mail.

Along with offering authors greater royalties and control over distribution, direct mail also provides authors a unique way to connect with readers that goes beyond that of just their email addresses. Most authors gather reader addresses by selling their books directly through their websites, allowing them greater control over their sales and customer relationships.

But what should you do once you have that address list? How do you use it effectively while respecting marketing permissions? Let's dive into the world of direct-response mail marketing and explore strategies to turn those addresses into meaningful reader relationships and increased book sales.

What is Direct Response Mail?

Sending mail directly to people's homes—also called direct response mail, in the world of copywriting—has been a cornerstone of marketing for over a century. In the early twentieth century, mail-order catalogs and sales letters allowed businesses to reach consumers directly. Companies like Sears and Montgomery Ward built empires through direct mail, offering products to customers without a middleman. The strategy was simple: Send a compelling offer, get a response, and track the results to refine future campaigns. For indie authors, direct response mail can take many forms, from printed ads and handwritten letters to postcards and newsletters, offering a more personal and creative way to engage with their audience.

Modern direct response marketing has embraced data-driven insights and enhanced personalization, yet direct mail continues to outperform many digital tactics. Direct mail boasts an average response rate of 4.4 percent, which is thirty-six times greater than that of email marketing, according to Lbox Communications.
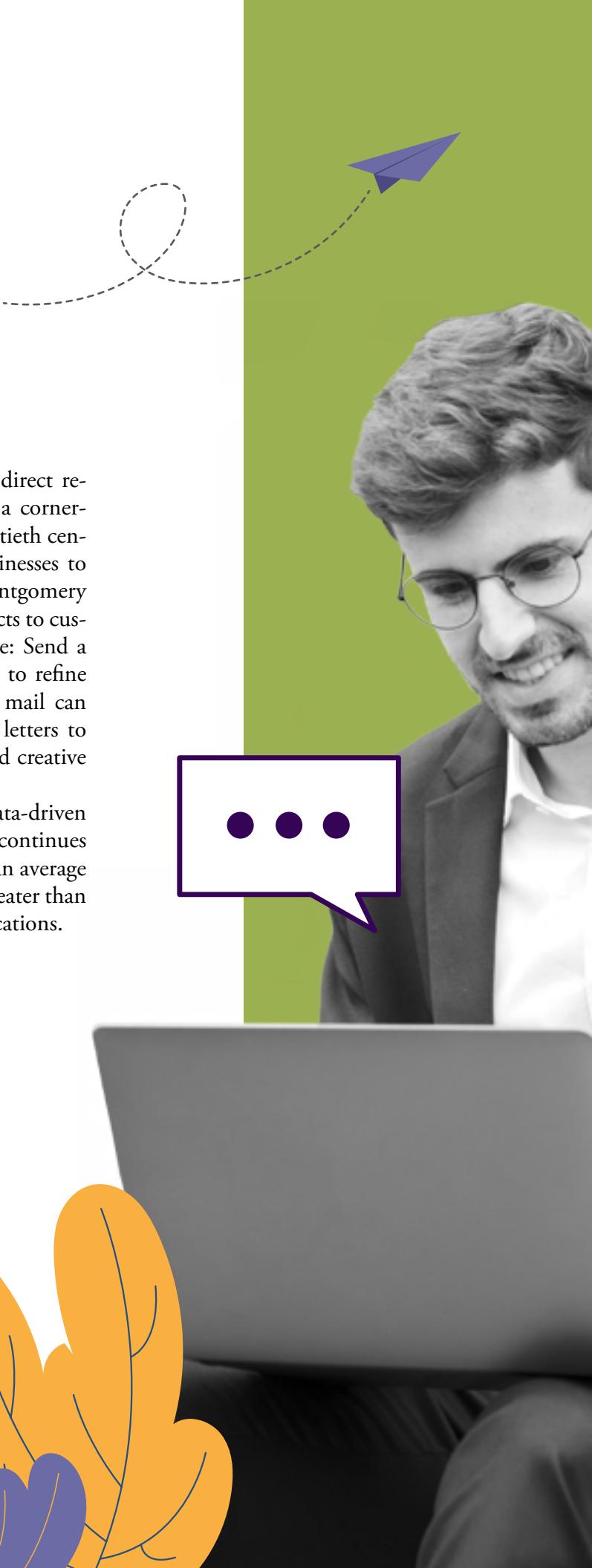
Marketing Permissions: Stay Compliant

Before launching headfirst into any kind of direct mail campaign, you need to make sure you have the proper marketing permissions. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) set strict guidelines for the collection and use of personal data, including mailing addresses.

If you host direct sales on your website and send marketing mail to readers who've purchased from you before, you generally don't need prior consent due to the soft opt-in rule, which allows businesses to contact customers with similar offers to those they've already bought. However, you must provide a clear way for customers to opt out, as required by law. In the US, UK, EU, Canada, and Australia, postal marketing operates on an opt-out basis, meaning you can send mail as long as you have a legitimate interest—such as promoting a new book or special offer.

To comply, make sure your website's privacy policy clearly outlines how you intend to use collected addresses. Additionally, always obtain explicit consent from your readers before sending them physical correspondence. This not only fosters goodwill and trust with your audience but also protects you from potential legal issues. Transparency during the opt-in process will create a sense of partnership and help you build lasting relationships with your readers.

Offers That Convert

There are several ways to collect readers' physical addresses beyond selling through your website. Authors can gather addresses through giveaways, contests, email signups, crowdfunding, collaborations, or in-person events. These methods allow authors to build a mailing list even without a full online store. Once you have a reader's mailing address, the next step is crafting an offer that motivates action. To maximize effectiveness, consider what truly resonates with your audience, and take inspiration from broader markets. Successful offers often leverage exclusivity, personalization, and perceived value. Here are some creative ideas you can adapt.

2 VIP Reader Clubs with Exclusive Perks

Create a subscription-style VIP club, where members receive early access to new releases, but also include high-value perks inspired by other industries. Think about live Q&A sessions, a private podcast for subscribers, or even a yearly virtual meet-and-greet with special guest authors.

1 Bundle Deals with Exclusive Content

Encourage repeat purchases by bundling books together, but go beyond just offering a series set. Add exclusive content, such as a bonus short story, behind-the-scenes notes, or a video message from the author to create a premium package that enhances the perceived value.

4 Handwritten Thank-You Notes with Special Extras

Readers always appreciate a handwritten note, but consider pairing it with something unexpected: a small freebie, a surprise discount code for a reader's next purchase, or an exclusive QR code that unlocks hidden content, like an author's note or secret chapter.

2 Merchandise and Collectibles Inspired by Larger Markets

Limited-edition merchandise, such as art prints or custom bookmarks, is a great start, but consider what works in other industries. Look at successful subscription boxes or fandom-based products—like enamel pins, themed journals, or interactive workbooks—and tailor them to your audience.

5 Contests and Limited-Time Challenges

Tap into gamification strategies by hosting contests or limited-time challenges. For example, send a direct mail letter with a secret code that unlocks a giveaway entry or a special downloadable reward. This approach creates excitement and encourages engagement.
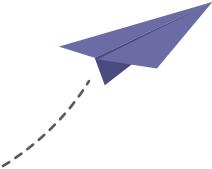
Testing Ideas with Direct Response Mail

One advantage of direct response marketing is its ability to test ideas before committing to large-scale campaigns. Unlike email, which can be ignored or lost in spam filters, physical mail has a tactile presence that demands attention.

As an indie author, you can use direct mail to test various concepts, such as one of the following:

- **New Book Ideas:** Send a teaser or sample chapter and track responses.

- **Merchandise Offerings:** Gauge interest in book-related merchandise, such as bookmarks or signed copies.

- **Reader Engagement Campaigns:** Encourage existing readers to refer new ones in exchange for exclusive content or discounts.

In the same vein, direct mail can also provide actionable insights. By using direct response mail, you can test various marketing messages, formats, and offers to see which resonate the most with your audience. For instance, sending out two different postcards featuring alternative book covers or promotional messages allows you to gauge which approach garners a better response rate.

A/B testing is particularly effective in direct mail campaigns. Consider sending two different postcards, letters, or a small physical sample related to your book. By tracking recipients' responses—whether through their use of unique discount codes, QR codes, or reply cards you've included with the mail—you can determine which ideas resonate best with your audience before scaling up. Also, by segmenting your reader list and sending different offers to each group, you can better inform your marketing strategy moving forward.

What to Expect

Understanding conversion rates is crucial for setting realistic expectations in direct mail campaigns. In email marketing, the percentage of people taking the action you've asked them to take—the response rate—typically achieves an average of around 0.6 percent, but direct mail often sees higher rates, ranging from 2.7 percent to 4.4 percent, according to the 2022 Direct Mail Advertising Global Market Report.

Authors looking to leverage direct mail marketing methods can consider the following strategies:

- **Personalization:** Tailor your messages by using the recipient's name and referencing their previous interactions or purchase history. This approach can significantly boost engagement.

- **Calls to Action (CTAs):** Clearly define the desired action for the recipient, whether it's ordering a book, signing up for an event, or sharing information with a friend. A strong CTA guides the reader toward the next step.

- **Integrated Follow-Up Sequences:** Combining direct mail with digital channels, such as follow-up emails or social media engagement, can reinforce your message. Integrating these strategies has been shown to improve response rates by approximately 30 percent over traditional direct mail alone, according to marketing agency Invesp.

By implementing these tactics, you can create more effective direct mail campaigns that resonate with your audience and drive higher conversion rates.
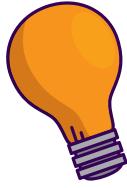
Final Thoughts

For indie authors new to direct mail, studying experts in the field can be invaluable. *The Direct Mail Solution*, written by direct response copywriter Bob Bly, provides actionable insights on crafting effective direct mail campaigns.

Other books on the topic include *Direct Mail Revolution* by Robert W. Bly; *Scientific Advertising* by Claude Hopkins, which dives into direct response principles; and *Cashvertising* by Drew Eric Whitman, which offers a greater understanding of consumer psychology.

Direct response mail is a powerful yet often underutilized tool for indie authors. With the right approach, you can strengthen reader relationships, increase book sales, and test new marketing ideas effectively. By studying direct mail principles, ensuring compliance, and crafting compelling offers, you can turn your postal mailing list into a thriving community of loyal readers.

So now that you have their address, what will you do next? ■

Angela Archer

Having worked as a mental health nurse for many years, Angela combines her love of words with her love of human psychology to work as a copywriter in the UK. She independently published a novella and novel in 2020 and is currently fending off the lure of shiny new novel ideas to complete the second book in her sci-fi series. When she's not tinkering with words, she's usually drinking tea, playing the saxophone (badly), or being mum and wife to her husband and two boys.

Exciting news! 😊
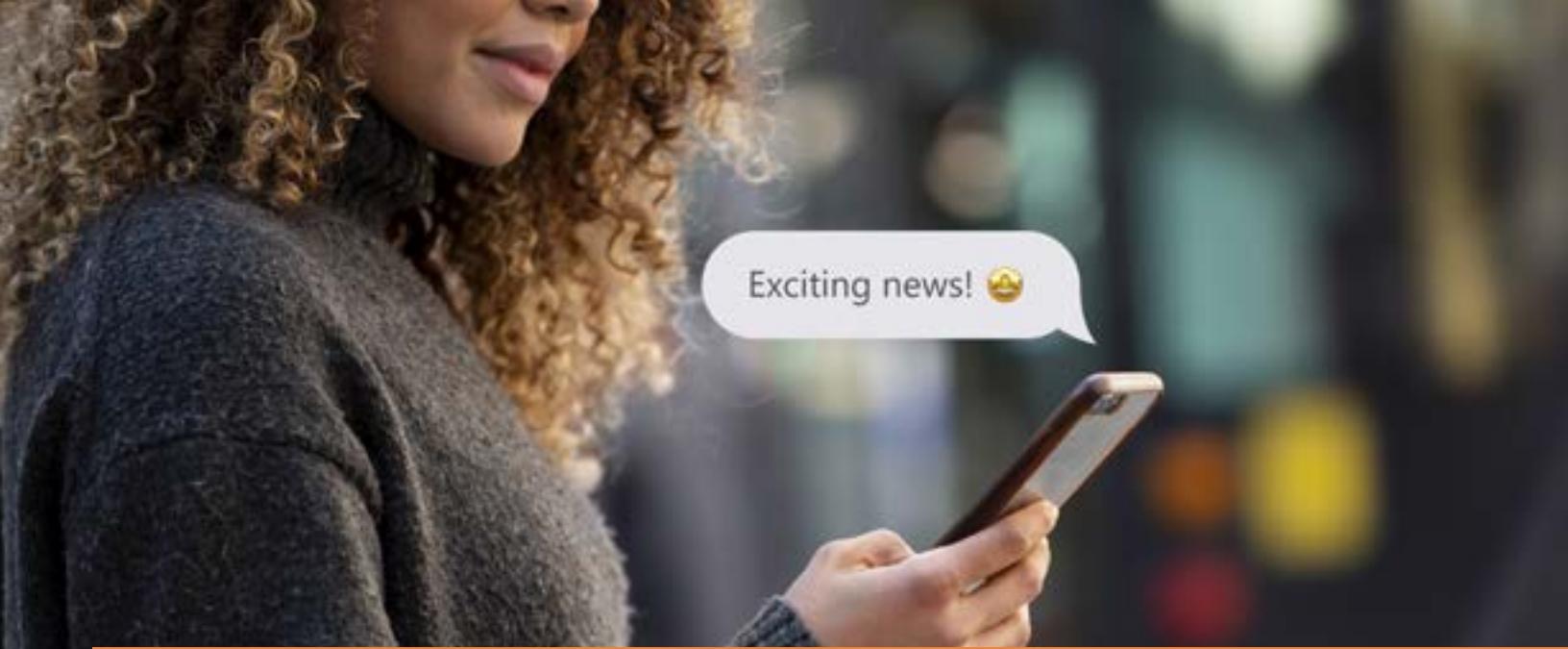
The Author's Guide to SMS Marketing

Guest Author Dana Claire Explains How You Can Engage with Your Readers via Text Message

For authors looking to connect with their audience, marketing often revolves around email campaigns and social media engagement. However, between overflowing inboxes and constantly shifting algorithms, it's easy for messages to get lost in the noise. Employing SMS marketing—sending promotional or engagement-driven text messages directly to your readers—offers a more direct and personal way for authors to communicate with their readers. By leveraging SMS, authors can build stronger relationships, promote book releases, and share exclusive content or special editions without the barriers present in other marketing channels.

In this guide, we'll explore the fundamentals of SMS marketing, how it compares with other promotional tools, and how authors can get started with it to enhance their marketing strategy.

What Is SMS Marketing?

SMS marketing involves sending text messages to an audience that has opted into receiving them. These messages can range from promotional content, such as book release announcements and discounts, to engagement-focused communication, such as event reminders, personalized messages, and exclusive sneak peeks. Unlike email marketing, which often gets buried under hundreds of other emails, SMS message open rates often surpass 90 percent, according to Sender.net, making them one of the most effective ways to ensure readers see important updates.

How Does SMS Marketing Differ from Other Channels?

SMS marketing stands apart from email and social media in several key ways.

Higher Engagement Rates

Data collected on SMS marketing shows that text messages have open rates of around 98 percent, compared with email's average of 20 percent to 30 percent. This means readers are far more likely to see and engage with an SMS message than one sent via email.

Minimal Competition

While email inboxes and social media feeds are cluttered with promotions and ads, SMS inboxes tend to have less competition.

Direct and Personal

Unlike social media, where algorithms determine visibility, SMS messages go straight to the recipient's phone. This directness makes SMS feel more personal and immediate, ensuring readers see your messages—and receive them on time instead of days later.

Quick and Actionable

Like with email and social media marketing, readers can instantly act on an SMS message by clicking a link, responding to a message, or using a discount code, making it an ideal tool for time-sensitive announcements.

How Can Authors Use SMS Marketing?

SMS marketing can be tailored to different author goals, from book launches to community building, but those looking to incorporate the marketing strategy into their business can consider a range of applications to start.

Book Launch Announcements

Authors can use SMS to notify readers about new releases, preorder opportunities, and special edition launches. A short, engaging text with a direct link to purchase can drive conversions quickly.

Example: Exciting news! My latest book, "Title," is officially available! Grab your copy here: [link]

Exclusive Content and Sneak Peeks

Readers love getting insider content. SMS can be used to send early chapter previews, behind-the-scenes updates, or even discount codes to loyal fans.

Example: Get a first look at my upcoming book with an exclusive sneak peek! Read the first chapter here: [link]

Pro Tip:

The number of messages you should send for a campaign or promotion depends on how engaged your audience is and how accustomed they are to receiving SMS marketing from you. When you begin incorporating SMS marketing into your promotions, you do not want to overwhelm your readers, which can lead to high spam reports and unsubscribe rates. We recommend sending one to two reminders after an initial announcement. Send the first reminder a couple of days before an event and another the night before or morning of the event.

Event and Virtual Signing Reminders

Promote live events, book signings, and virtual meet-and-greets through SMS to ensure readers don't miss out. Reminder messages leading up to the event can help increase attendance or even preorder sales.

Example: Join me for a live book signing this Saturday at 3 p.m. EST! RSVP now: [link]

Personalized Engagement

SMS allows for one-on-one interaction, which can be a game changer for reader engagement. Authors can send birthday messages, holiday greetings, or personalized thank-yous to make readers feel valued.

Example: Hey [Name], thank you for your support! I have a little surprise for you—check it out here: [link]

Contests and Giveaways

Running a giveaway via SMS can encourage more readers to opt in and stay engaged. Authors can send a message that allows readers to enter by replying with a keyword.

Example: Win a signed copy of my book! Reply "WIN" to enter the giveaway. Winner announced Friday!

Some SMS platforms enable two-way conversations, allowing readers to reply to messages and engage in real-time discussions. This feature enhances reader interaction by providing a direct line for answering questions about upcoming book launches, events, or order inquiries—especially beneficial for authors selling directly. Offering this level of accessibility can create a more personalized and responsive experience, whether managed by the author or their team.

Getting Started with SMS Marketing

Although SMS marketing offers many advantages, it may not be the perfect fit for every author. Those who prefer indirect interaction with readers or have an audience hesitant about sharing phone numbers may find other marketing avenues more suitable. However, authors who frequently release new books, engage in live events, or have an active reader community may benefit the most.

If SMS marketing sounds like a good fit for your business, here are the basic steps you can take to get started.

1 Choose an SMS Marketing Platform.

Several platforms cater to SMS marketing, including SimpleTexting, Klaviyo, Postscript, and SlickText. When selecting a service, consider features like automation, subscriber segmentation, and pricing plans that fit your needs. If you already have an email marketing platform, you can also explore the platform's website to see if it has this feature; many marketing platforms offer email, SMS, and loyalty options under one company.

2 Build a Subscriber List—Legally.

Just like with email marketing, SMS marketing requires users to opt in before receiving messages. Authors can collect phone numbers through sign-up forms on their website, via social media promotions, or at live events. Be sure to comply with SMS marketing laws, including the Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA) and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), by getting explicit consent before sending messages. Work with your SMS provider during onboarding and training to ensure your marketing efforts comply with these regulations; the platform's experts should be able to provide further education on what is expected.

3 Segment Your Audience.

Not all readers want the same content. Segmenting your audience—such as by genre preference, engagement level, or past purchase behavior—ensures messages are relevant and valuable.

4 **Craft Engaging Messages, and Integrate SMS with Other Marketing Channels.**

SMS marketing works best when used alongside other promotional efforts, complementing email and social media outreach. Although social media is excellent for broad audience engagement and brand awareness, and email allows for in-depth storytelling and detailed announcements, SMS fills the gap by providing immediate, high-priority communication.

To maximize effectiveness, use SMS for time-sensitive updates and direct calls-to-action (CTAs). For example, you can send a text reminder about an upcoming email campaign or use SMS to drive traffic to a social media giveaway. Keep messages short, engaging, and action-driven—since SMS has a 160-character limit, clarity and brevity are essential. Include direct links to your latest email newsletter, a social media post, or a preorder page to create a seamless multichannel marketing experience.

5 **Monitor Performance and Adjust Strategy.**

Tracking metrics like open rates, click-through rates, and response rates can help refine your SMS marketing strategy. Most SMS platforms provide analytics to gauge effectiveness and optimize campaigns.
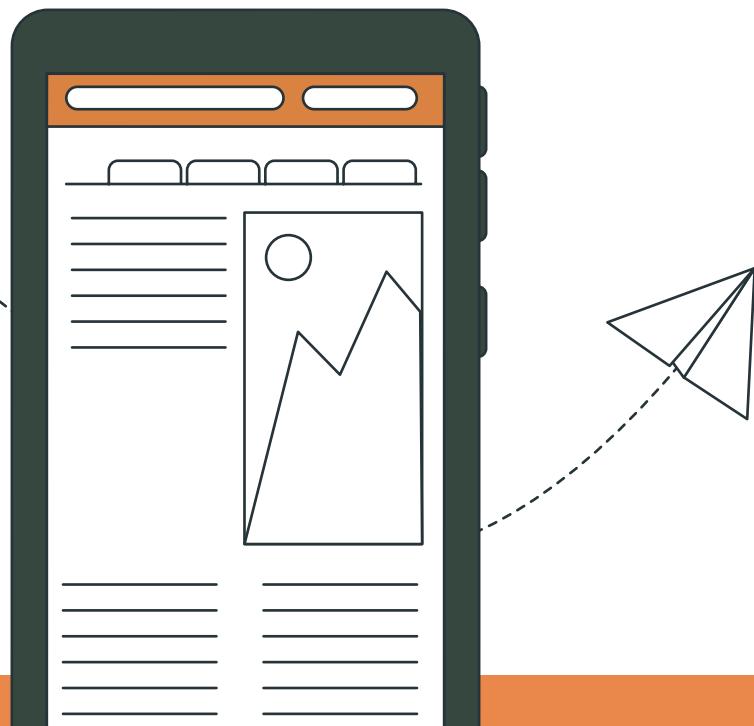
Final Thoughts

SMS marketing presents a unique opportunity for authors to reach readers directly, bypassing the challenges of crowded email inboxes and unpredictable social media algorithms. By leveraging text messaging strategically—whether for book launches, exclusive content, or personalized engagement—authors can build deeper connections and drive book sales effectively. For those new to the strategy, starting small with an opt-in campaign and testing different engagement tactics can help determine whether SMS is the right tool for their marketing arsenal.

With thoughtful implementation and respect for reader preferences, SMS marketing can be a powerful addition to an author's promotional toolkit. ■
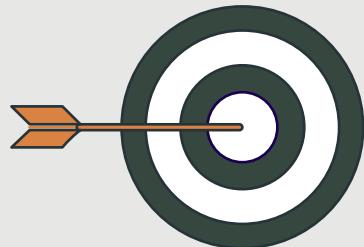
Dana Claire

Meet Dana Claire, a seasoned marketing and sales pro, public speaker, and acclaimed author. Combining her literary knowledge and marketing expertise, Dana founded The INKfluence—an innovative design and global printing agency exclusively for authors. Passionate about author education, she empowers fellow writers to build their literary empires. INKfluence's services include special edition design and production, Kickstarter campaign management, and design/production of swag and merchandise. The agency focuses on equipping authors with valuable insights and skills to thrive in publishing's ever-evolving landscape. With a commitment to success, The INKfluence is the go-to resource for writers making a significant impact in the publishing world today.

Straight from the Source

Platforms, Technology, and Strategies for Reaching Readers with Direct Sales

Selling directly to readers is a rapidly evolving strategy that more authors are embracing as they seek more control over their businesses. According to Kindlepreneur, 31 percent of those authors jumping into direct sales have only done so in the last year, and 29 percent have done so in the past one to two years. The strategy can require more hands-on effort from authors but can also promise better royalties and more flexibility in pricing, format options, and customization of products than third-party distributors.

Authors making the shift from Amazon and other retailers toward a website or landing page they control often see the switch as an opportunity to grow their business, earn more royalties, and find new readers outside of the traditional bookselling ecosystems.

But a direct sales strategy isn't for everyone. Like exclusivity to the Kindle Unlimited program or publishing widely across platforms, selling directly has its own strategies, advantages, and best practices that authors should know before diving in headfirst.

Who Should Sell Directly?

Selling directly is for authors who want to know everything about their customers. Whereas sales via retailers provide limited reader information and sales data, often only with the help of newsletter sign-ups or other calls-to-action in a book's back matter, direct sales provide authors a customer's email address, mailing address, phone number, and sometimes even birthdays. Customers who purchase directly are used to handing over this information to a vendor, as they expect it to be necessary to deliver what they purchased, yet it provides authors with valuable data about their readership and ways to build stronger, more personalized connections with readers.

!

Authors can sell directly to readers using several strategies, from utilizing platforms to build their own storefront or crowdfund products based on reader demand to doing the legwork, literally, to host in-person sales at reader-adjacent events. Each method has its advantages and disadvantages, and authors should weigh each against their business to decide which method or combination of methods will meet their needs.

Platforms

Most authors deal in audiobooks, ebooks, and print books, and third-party vendors like Amazon have made it easy for readers to access their purchases. Authors drive traffic and make sales, and the retailer handles distributing the digital products or print books on the author's behalf. Now, direct sales platforms such as Shopify and WooCommerce have made setting up a direct sales store on a site owned and managed by the author simple enough that the average author can get started immediately, without extensive knowledge of coding and programming.

Shopify

As one of the most commonly used platforms for direct sales, Shopify has all the major functions sellers would expect of a digital storefront, from order tracking to advanced customization options through apps and custom coding. Shopify also excels in its seamless integration with platforms that are already familiar to both authors and readers.

For direct delivery of ebooks and audiobooks, many authors opt to use BookFunnel as their delivery gateway. When BookFunnel is integrated with Shopify, once a customer makes a purchase, the delivery of the digital product is seamless and immediate. BookFunnel's service also provides access to their customer support team, who can assist the reader in accessing their purchase. Other ebook and audiobook distribution software, such as StoryOrigin, as well as various WordPress plug-ins and Shopify apps, can also deliver digital files directly to readers; you'll need to explore each software's capabilities and make the right decision for your business.

Shopify also integrates with drop-shipping providers, such as BookVault and Lulu, for print-book delivery.

Where authors might find friction in working with Shopify is in the fees and setup time it requires. Over time, Shopify and the apps that authors may want to use to add different functions to their store can quickly add up. For example, Jude.Me, an app to collect reviews automatically, can cost $10 or more a month to start, and certain subscription apps, such as Recharge, cost $500 or more per month. Furthermore, any third-party app that isn't created by Shopify will have its own capabilities, customer support, and features.

WooCommerce

Authors familiar with WordPress may also be drawn to the plug-in WooCommerce as a platform for hosting direct sales. Like Shopify, WooCommerce links with BookVault, BookFunnel, and Lulu and allows the user to transform a WordPress website into an ecommerce-capable storefront without having to start from scratch.

WooCommerce has many features the average author might need built into the platform, such as product management, payment processing, and tax calculation. However, it may require that authors be more tech savvy to keep all the pieces working. WordPress is an open source platform, meaning those using it may need to utilize outside developers to help pull things together.

Other Routes for Direct Sales

Selling products directly from an author's website is one of the most obvious routes to incorporating direct sales in a business, but there are other options for those who are interested in exploring direct sales. If you're hesitant to commit to creating your own ecommerce storefront or want to explore other methods of selling direct, crowdfunding, subscription platforms, and in-person sales can offer authors some of the same advantages as direct sales from a website, including closer relationships with readers and greater overall royalties.

Crowdfunding

In 2024, Brandon Sanderson, author of the Stormlight Archives, launched the largest crowdfunding campaign in Kickstarter's history, raising over $43 million to self-publish four novels he'd written outside of his traditional publishing contracts. Kickstarter allowed him to not only reach new customers but also take those customers with him off the platform—one of the major appeals of selling directly.

Kickstarter and other crowdfunding platforms have been part of authors' publishing strategies for years, but Sanderson's success catapulted the popularity of these strategies among indie authors. What separates big-box retailers from platforms like Kickstarter is the ability to retain your customer data. Authors are embracing Kickstarter as an opportunity to not only crowdfund their latest project but also jumpstart their direct sales stores by retaining the customer data after pushing their customers from their email service provider to the platform to make purchases.

Authors should remember that Kickstarter and other crowdfunding platforms are an entire marketplace of readers and should treat them as such. Authors who want to crowdfund should know their market intimately, and preferably should know the market of the platform as well.

Although crowdfunding platforms can be a great place to test a market and help bring projects to life, they also carry the risk that the audiences on those crowdfunding platforms will not resonate with a project. Ahead of any crowdfunding campaign, authors should be prepared to do extensive research on their given platform and how other authors have structured successful projects previously, as well as commit to consistent social media and marketing pushes to promote the work while the campaign is ongoing.

Subscriptions

With the popularity of Kindle Unlimited, Kobo Plus, and other reading subscription platforms, it's not surprising that authors have begun offering their own subscription services through other outlets. These services can be hosted on various platforms, including Patreon, Substack, and Ghost, and can offer the author the same access to customer data as other direct sales methods, as well as additional income between releases.

Subscriptions shine as a way for authors to offer dedicated readers exclusive content, such as early access to works in progress, book boxes, and monthly video calls with the author. The author is front and center and often the provider of all perks and deals offered at various tier levels within the subscription. Where a reader might pay for just a book or merchandise, a lot of authors are embracing selling access to themselves directly and erasing the line in the sand that has been drawn between creator and reader.

In Person

Normally, indie authors picture in-person sales in the context of large book events that require an author to pay for a table and bring books and merchandise to sell. But there are other events authors are seeing as opportunities to get in front of readers. Local farmers' markets, craft fairs, and even genre-adjacent events, such as a Horror author selling at a Horror convention, are not only possible direct sales opportunities but can be highly profitable.

In-person sales provide authors the opportunity to speak to readers one-on-one about their books in a way that can't be done from a webpage. Authors control their table, the setup, how their books appear, the pricing, and can even help guide readers toward books in their catalog that might better suit them.

Authors considering in-person sales should be prepared for the up-front costs of marketing materials, such as banners and table runners; booth prices; table reservations; chairs and other furniture; and more. Authors should also be prepared to spend hours in the elements and meeting new people who come to explore your books. In-person sales are great for those who want to try something new or who aren't afraid to meet people where they are to sell their books, but they can be physically taxing and require hours of work before, during, and after the event in order to be successful.
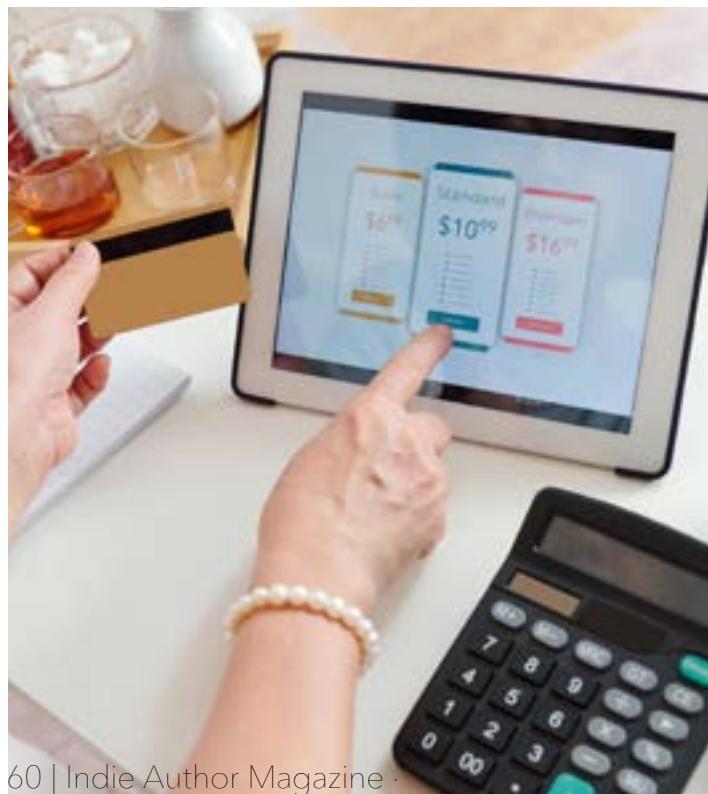
A Hybrid Approach

Selling directly is a strategic business move that needs to be evaluated to determine how it can benefit an author. That said, many authors are choosing to diversify their business by incorporating elements of direct sales into their business plan. Some authors may choose to ship paperbacks directly from their own storefront but leave ebook and audiobook delivery up to Amazon. Other authors might consider non-exclusivity through KDP and opt out of the Kindle Unlimited program to meet readers where they are and sell across multiple channels, including their own website. Likewise, some authors may make special appearances at book signings and otherwise direct readers to third-party vendors. In this, authors need to consider and select the path they deem most appropriate for their business. The direct sales strategy isn't new, but it may be new to authors, and those curious about how it can fit into their long-term goals should consider both the risks and the benefits. ■

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.

'A World Filled with Magic'

Zac Diamanti Lives Out His Own Fantasy as a Full-Time Creative

Dark green built-in bookshelves brim with colorful tomes and set the moody, fantastical atmosphere as Zac "Z.S." Diamanti settles in for our interview. His published and printed titles are displayed, covers out, in front of the neatly shelved books behind him, and he's eager to point them out. It's a bookshelf any reader—or writer—could be proud of, and that goes double for the success Zac has cultivated over the past two years.

If you've seen his TikTok account, Kickstarter projects, or the overwhelmingly five-star reviews of his Epic Fantasy novels, you'd never imagine that Zac struggled to read as a child because of an undiagnosed vision problem, and his schoolwork and reading suffered because of it. While he loved comic books and drawing, reading was a much more difficult task when he was young. When he joined the Air Force, the problem was identified and corrected with glasses, broadening his world and making reading and drawing easier and more enjoyable. Eventually, it would help him write, too.

After Afghanistan

Zac joined the Air Force in a medical field to ensure he could pay for college and spent six years serving before ending his time in service and settling in Colorado. But as he readjusted to civilian life, he found he needed a break from the visual arts and drawing that had been his outlet previously, "because visual arts, after everything you see while you're deployed—it's a little difficult, sometimes, to process that way," Zac says. "So I started writing."

He started by writing Horror short stories and short stories in other genres, and the practice helped him process some of what he'd witnessed and experienced during deployment. When he started sending out his short stories to publishers and magazines, the feedback came in the form of praise and money. As payments for his stories rolled in, Zac was encouraged to write more.

He'd explored other genres to start, but when Zac decided he would write a book, nothing called to him more than Epic Fantasy. It all stemmed from his childhood: Although he had to lean his head against the pages to see the words, he managed to read The Hobbit in its entirety. He still owns a copy now and insists that everyone should.

"The Hobbit was just this wonderful Fantasy adventure… so when I knew I wanted to write books, it was like, 'We gotta write Epic Fantasy!'"

He started writing *Stone & Sky* in 2020, and from there, his grand adventure began.

Going All In

When Zac wrote *Stone & Sky*, he still had a full-time job, so he spent his early mornings writing consistently and sometimes fit additional time into the evenings around his kids' after-school activities. He dabbled in short form before writing the sprawling Epic Fantasy that would become the first in an ongoing series. His wife, Brittany, read the book and gave him the honest—and surprising—feedback he needed to dive in and invest himself in publishing.

"This is good," Brittany told him. "You could do this."

The timing was perfect for their family. Zac and Brittany were trying to figure out what was next for them as Zac suffered in a job that was, as he says, "slowly killing me." He spent months educating himself about self-publishing and the business, researching the ins and outs of how other authors were making themselves successful. He immersed himself in the study of marketing assets, like websites, newsletters, and social media.

With the support of his wife, Zac quit his job on August 30, 2022, to pursue his publishing goals.

"*Stone & Sky* came out on August 29 of 2023," Zac says. "I did not have a job for a year before the book came out. So I was spending every second I had working on marketing." He started with his website, which was made easier by a background in graphic design, then focused on building his social media presence. But Zac didn't talk about his own work for at least the first six months.

"I was instead talking about books like the one I was trying to put out," he says. "I was gathering all these people who love these types of books."

> ## "I was instead talking about books like the one I was trying to put out. I was gathering all these people who love these types of books.
> — *Zac Diamanti*

Zac quickly grew an audience of people who loved the kinds of Fantasy books that matched the Epic Fantasy he had waiting in the wings. His followers were ready to become fans the moment he shared, "Oh, by the way, I've got this book coming out, *Stone & Sky*, and you know what? You can get a little taste by joining my newsletter for free and getting these seven stories for free."

He packaged his short stories as a reader magnet to grow his newsletter and waited. Throughout the process, Brittany supported her husband, encouraging his transition to a full-time author career, which allowed him time to do additional research before launching the book, and helping keep him on track when things got scary. Zac said his wife's support was "invaluable."

"I could not have done it without that," Zac says.

By the time *Stone & Sky* released, "We were down to our bottom dollar," he says. "I mean, literally, no dollars left." But Zac's focus and strategy worked, especially when it came to TikTok. "TikTok Shop was kind of new, and we were jumping in on the front end of that, and we made all our investment back. We could breathe a sigh of relief. Our family had invested all this time and money and effort into this."

And all their research and willingness to experiment had paid off.

Writing and Marketing

Zac is writing faster these days, and he's loving what he's writing. *Stone & Sky* took two and a half years to complete, but the stories that followed took significantly less time to finish. *Stone & Tide* and *Stone & Ruin* each took approximately two months of active writing to complete, and *Guard in the Garden*—a Cozy Fantasy in the same universe but the first in a new series—took about a month and a half.

"I wrote that book so fast because my heart was light," he says. "I was ready to go." The book was published March 4, 2025.

Although he's writing faster, he's still launching each book with carefully managed strategies, and he's incorporating Kickstarter to get his book in the black sooner. His first Kickstarter campaign, for *Stone & Sky*, earned north of $8,000 in pledges, and his third and most recent campaign for *Guard in the Garden* earned more than $25,000.

Perhaps better than simply being in the black on his investments is the fact that Zac's shop sales and crowdfunding campaigns have turned his author career into a family affair. Brittany enjoys the business side of things, handling the accounting and the taxes, while their children help Dad pack boxes and fulfill orders.

As of the time of this writing, Zac has completed two more novels, and another is currently in the drafting stage; all three are awaiting release this year. With careful planning and dedication, his career has taken off. Now, the sky is the limit for this Air Force veteran turned author.
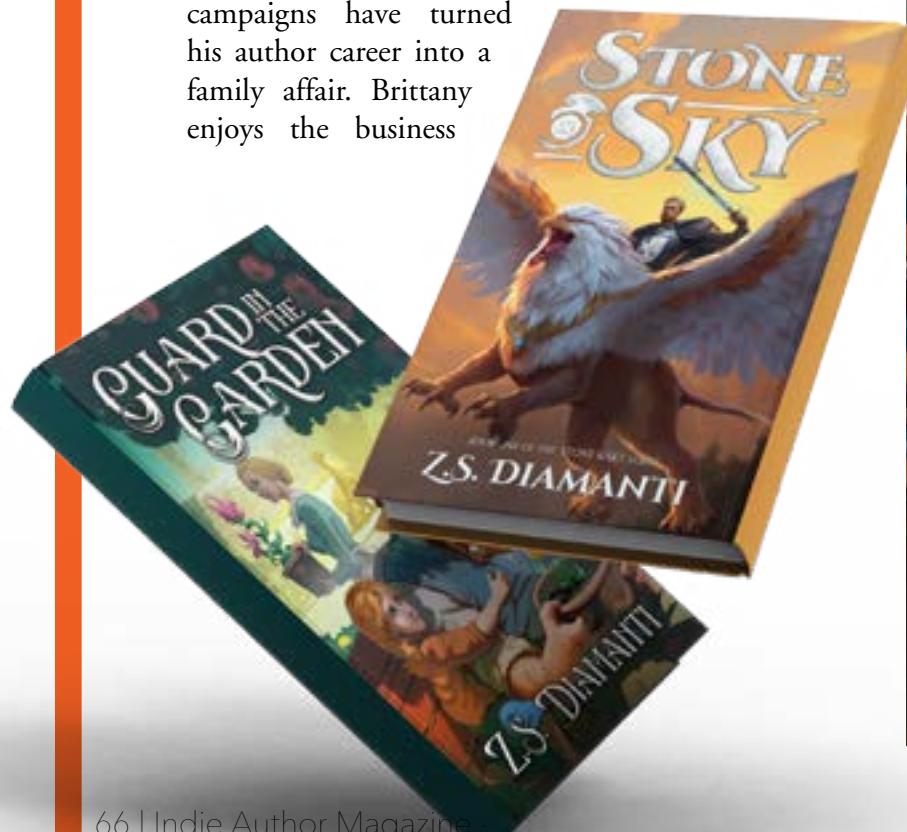
Be Joyful Always

Zac's service has undeniably affected how he tells his stories, especially in Epic Fantasy. His love for flying is represented in all the flying creatures in his books, and Finlestia, the Fantasy world "filled with magic," according to his website, where his novels take place, has no shortage of epic battles. But he also incorporates the medical side of his knowledge and experience, detailing both physical injuries and mental well-being after battle—all in a family-friendly narrative. Drawing on his experience has paid off: Zac's inclusion of deep and difficult topics resonates strongly with his readers, who love his balance between grounded detail and the developing arcs of vibrant characters.

His newest novel, *Guard in the Garden*, leans in further. "It's a veteran's healing journey told in a Cozy Fantasy setting," Zac says. "That's a direct link to my time in the military."

Now that he's utilized so much of his military experience in his novels, Zac has been able to move into other aspects of life within his stories and shine a light on them. One of those experiences, likely shared by a majority of people, is highlighted in one of his upcoming Cozy Fantasy novels: being in an awful job with a bad boss, then losing that job and having to find one's place in the world all over again.

With Grimdark on the rise in the broader Fantasy genre, Zac says he is intent on "writing good, wholesome, family-friendly Epic Fantasy stories like the ones that we remember."

He says, "I just wanted to bring some more brightness and stories that I could enjoy with my children and my grandchildren someday."

That focus on joy also plays a prominent role in Zac and Brittany's plans for the year to come. They are focusing on spending time with their teenage son before he graduates after his final year of high school. This impending, momentous event has reminded them to slow down and enjoy more quality time with their children.

Whether it's someone meeting Zac in person or a reader picking up his books, the Epic Fantasy author aims to spread joy and laughter—and he succeeds. In a roomful of friendly writers, Zac might be one of the friendliest faces you could meet. Fittingly, it's this intention for his storytelling and the legacy he is creating that he takes more seriously than anything. As a child, Zac attended Catholic school for a few years, and during the summer retreats, nuns would pass out slips of paper containing inspirational words or Bible verses. One day, a nun started to give him a slip, then quickly took it back and searched for a different one for Zac.

"I was like, 'Oh, great. What did I do?'" he says. Worry gripped him over why he didn't get the first slip. "But it was one line. It said 'Be joyful always.' And that changed my life."

Zac continues, "We can have some fun. We can laugh together, and we can smile together, and we can walk away with joy … and it'll rub off on someone else. We're fighting these epic battles against evil that's rising up to try and take away joy. At the end of the day, we're fighting for joy because, man, we need it." ■

> **It's a veteran's healing journey told in a Cozy Fantasy setting. That's a direct link to my time in the military.**
>
> *— Zac Diamanti*

Audrey Hughey

Audrey Hughey designs planners, writes fiction, and works diligently to help her fellow authors. Although she currently writes horror and thrillers, she's as eclectic in her writing tastes as in her reading. When she's not submerged in the worlds of fiction and nonfiction, she's caring for her family, enjoying nature, or finding more ways to bring a little more light into the world.

From the Stacks

Book Club Summary

The War of Art
Steven Pressfield

https://indieauthortraining.com/courses/the-war-of-art-by-steven-pressfield

Every indie author faces an invisible force that holds them back from success. Whether it's procrastination, self-doubt, or the fear of failure, *The War of Art* by Steven Pressfield offers a powerful guide to overcoming these barriers and winning the inner battle against creative blocks.

This summary explores Pressfield's key ideas tailored for indie authors, helping you recognize resistance, push through setbacks, and treat your writing the way a professional would.

Plus, enjoy an exclusive deep-dive audio discussion, where we break down how you can apply these lessons to your indie author journey and creative business.

Take a look at this book through Indie Author Training's Book Club Summaries to find
- an audio deep dive into the material,
- a synopsis geared toward indie authors,
- a discussion forum to connect with other readers, and
- questions to help you apply what you learn to your business.

Visit https://indieauthortraining.com/course-category/book-club-summaries to learn more and explore other titles.

Tool

ProWritingAid Manuscript Analysis
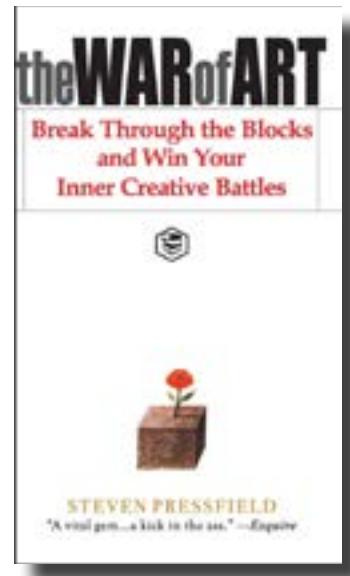
https://indieauthortraining.com/pro-writing-aid-manuscript-analysis

ProWritingAid has long been a comprehensive tool to help you improve your writing through self-editing. The program's new manuscript analysis function can analyze up to three hundred thousand words in minutes, with feedback prioritized by how critical it is to your story. One free credit is available to every user, so authors can test-drive this new feature on their latest work-in-progress.

Webinar

"How to Make Amazon Ads Work for You with Publishing Performance"

https://indieauthortraining.com/webinars/how-to-get-am-azon-ads-to-work-for-you-with-publishing-performance/

In this webinar, best-selling author Teddy Smith introduces Publishing Performance, software that will run your Amazon Ads campaigns and provide clear and pertinent data based on your results. The platform incorporates AI to tweak live campaigns according to your advertising goals.

Podcast

https://open.spotify.com/show/1MjZYaA5iClRL2JMtEiY12

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:

"Mastering Newsletter Swaps: From Zero Subscribers to Building a Thriving Author Network"

https://open.spotify.com/episode/1Pa4XFocLilC0DGXn2A7v8

 Explore the benefits of hosting an engaging author newsletter, plus discover strategies and tips from other indies about how to grow your audience authentically through newsletter swaps, group promotions, and other means.

"Ditch Resolutions: Embrace Values for a Fulfilling Life"

https://open.spotify.com/episode/4fyHyDCcEF7SYomZMDj6F7

With the new year well underway, now could be a good time to recalibrate those resolutions where you've fallen behind. In this episode, learn to reassess your approach to resolutions with values-based goals that focus not on what you want to achieve but why you want to achieve it. ■

Karen Guyler

Karen Guyler

Always being the new girl at nine schools on two continents was no fun at all so books became the only constant in Karen Guyler's life, even if they didn't help her get out of sports days. Now settled in Milton Keynes, England, Britain's best kept secret, she juggles reading with writing twisty thrilling stories, her children, husband and two grand-puppies – a much nicer mix! She also teaches Creative Writing for Adult Education with lots of laughter in amongst the word wrangling and discovery.

How StimuWrite Sets the Scene for Authors Prone to Distraction

Writing often feels like a tug-of-war with distractions, be it the constant ping of notifications, the pull of social media, or the endless temptation to tweak and fiddle with previous sentences instead of writing new words.

Plenty of word processors offer features meant to combat this. Scrivener's Composition Mode fills your screen and dims everything around the text to direct your attention. Calmly Writer Online features a blank screen where you only see a paragraph as you write, and the rest fades out of sight until you save the text to your computer. Several companies offer specific devices without an internet connection to help authors stay focused. I've drafted on the AlphaSmart digital typewriter, which is a simple portable word processor with a tiny screen that shows a handful of lines at a time.

Distractions can pose even more of a challenge for neurodivergent authors. Neurodivergence looks different for everyone, even among those with diagnoses like ADHD, autism, dyslexia, or dyspraxia. No one-size-fits-all approach exists for tackling long writing projects, but

> *StimuWrite offers the buzz of a café or the dreamy stillness of outer space right on your screen to keep you on task.*

StimuWrite, a platform designed for those who need more feedback and stimulation as they work, provides a potential solution that may be worth a try. Using the idea of triggering dopamine bursts with tiny rewards for a project, StimuWrite offers themed environments, dyslexia-friendly fonts, and timers designed for short, focused bursts of productivity, meeting the unique needs of these writers.

If you're the type who finds yourself constantly distracted by notifications or just staring at a blank page, StimuWrite might be your new favorite writing buddy. Picture a progress bar steadily filling up as you type, paired with emoji that change and celebrate every milestone you hit, like a tiny cheer squad on your laptop. But that's just the start. If your writing environment feels too quiet or dull, you can jazz it up with video backgrounds. Plenty of authors prefer ambient noise or music over silence in their writing environment to help them stay focused or provide inspiration. StimuWrite offers the buzz of a café or the dreamy stillness of outer space right on your screen to keep you on task.

The Basics

StimuWrite is a writing app hosted on itch.io, "an open marketplace for independent digital creators with a focus on independent video games," according to the website. StimuWrite isn't quite a video game, but it offers many of the same feedback and reward features that can help authors stay focused when writing. The creator recently upgraded the app, and version 2 is free to use, or you can make a donation to the creator if you choose. This is the basic program on which all the extras run, but the standard package is ready to rock on boot-up. You can find it at the programmer's website at https://thatclowngoddess.itch.io/stimuwrite.

When you first download the program, the noise and flashing emoji feel like an assault on your senses. All the moving backgrounds and sounds are a surprise. The writing environment is not your typical computer screen. Instead, the program opens to a simple text window in black and white, which is surrounded by a bright moving background. The means to select your favorite font, sounds, and backgrounds are to the right side in a selection bar with a toggle on/off button. The program also offers a full-screen option. In full screen, the writing window covers your computer's taskbar and clock, and outside distractions are masked, creating a more immersive writing environment.

For authors who need more stimulation than the average writer to keep the words flowing or who thrive on short bursts of work, StimuWrite allows users to customize the level of stimulation in the app to their needs. Looking down at the bottom of the screen, the "options" button is where you can turn off the noise, set the background dark, and lessen the emoji. If you need plenty of dopamine hits to keep you writing, you can turn the floating hearts and smiling faces to full blast. The level of stimulation is up to you.

The basic app comes with several themes pre-installed.

Themes are moving backgrounds paired with an audio track, and they include

- a fireplace video paired with a crackling soundtrack,
- an aquarium of fish paired with ocean sounds,
- a coffeehouse interior with ambient café audio, and
- a waterfall with a burbling stream soundtrack.

Additional options include typing sounds and the ability to set the typing area to various neutral colors or to a parchment texture. There are dozens of options to choose from as you mix and match the backgrounds and sounds.
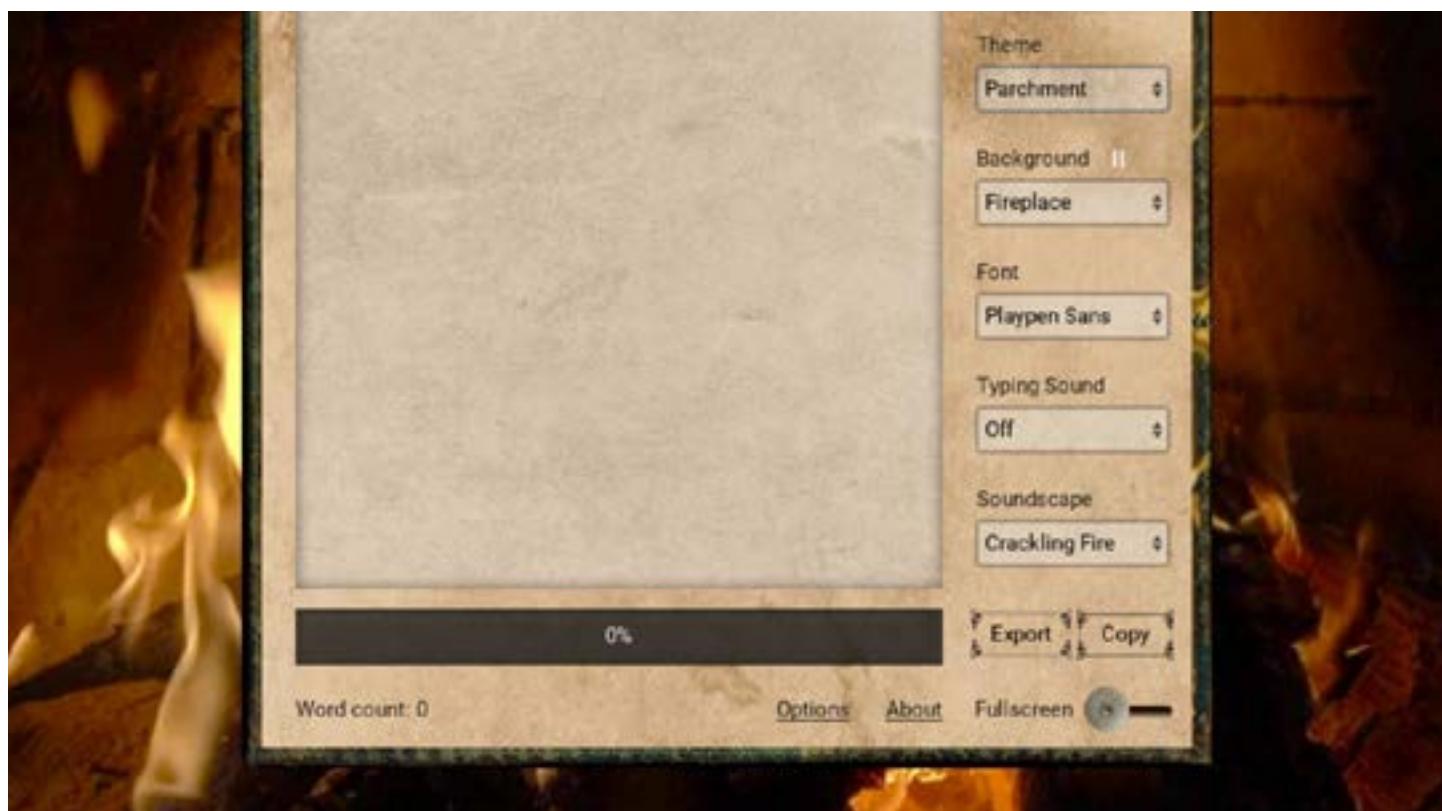
Pro Tip

Fonts in the program are adjustable by font size and style, with eight possible selections. Since you can't print or format in StimuWrite, the font choice is purely for the comfort of the writer. One font, designed for dyslexic writers, is called OpenDyslexic and weights the bottoms of the characters more heavily to provide a visual cue. In the past, dyslexic writers and readers would need to download this font on their own, but StimuWrite offers it as part of the free app, ready to go.

How To Use It

StimuWrite is not a fully fledged word processor and doesn't save files to re-import as other writing programs do. It is structured more like a note-taking platform—a place to jot down what is on your mind and then copy it and paste it elsewhere or export it as a TXT file. You can't import prewritten words into it unless you cut and paste directly into the text window. It also offers limited Markdown support for formatting.

Although the base program comes preloaded with several themes, you can purchase additional themes or a language pack for the program for between $2 and $5. Several Science Fiction themes, a gothic one, and a pack of colorful themes are available. The writing window also doesn't need to remain black; you can set it up with different colors or textures if that is your preference.

Pro Tip

Although the creator of StimuWrite recommends you save your work to your own computer or cloud storage, it has a backup feature. To find it, go to the bottom of the screen under the options menu and then select "Recover Session." Your text is saved in a single scrolling file. To recover your words, highlight and copy. Paste the text in the word processor of your choice.
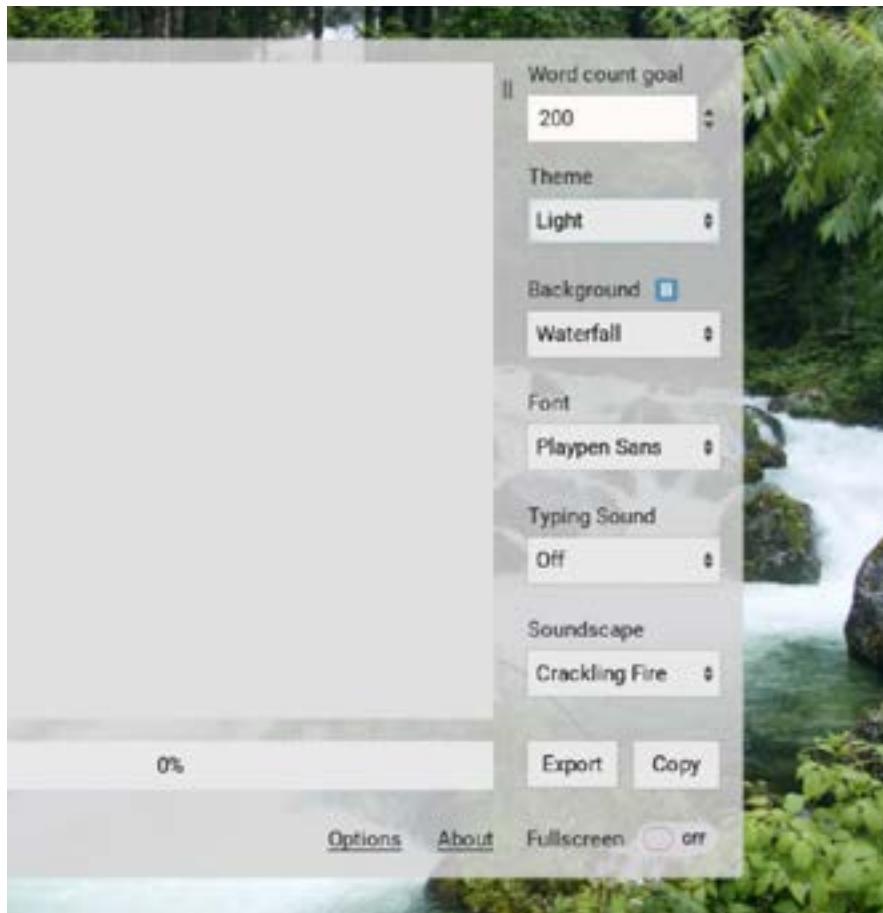

Pro Tip

Most of StimuWrite's free themes are paired in the V2 downloaded app. The coffeehouse has a video background, which is matched with a coffeehouse soundscape. The fireplace is matched with crackling fire sounds. There is an ocean wave sound to go with the aquarium. StimuWrite gives you the option to simulate a new place at the press of a button, or you can match your writing environment to the genre of your book.

Additional Add-Ons

Alongside the additional themes you can purchase for StimuWrite, the app has optional features for purchase as well. These include a built-in Pomodoro timer, allowing you to write in bursts, then take a short break before returning to the page. There is also a built-in sticky note system that pastes over your theme background as if you've pasted a note on the screen. For those that enjoy having notes in front of them as they write, these add-on apps could be useful. These additions are also in the $2 to $5 range.
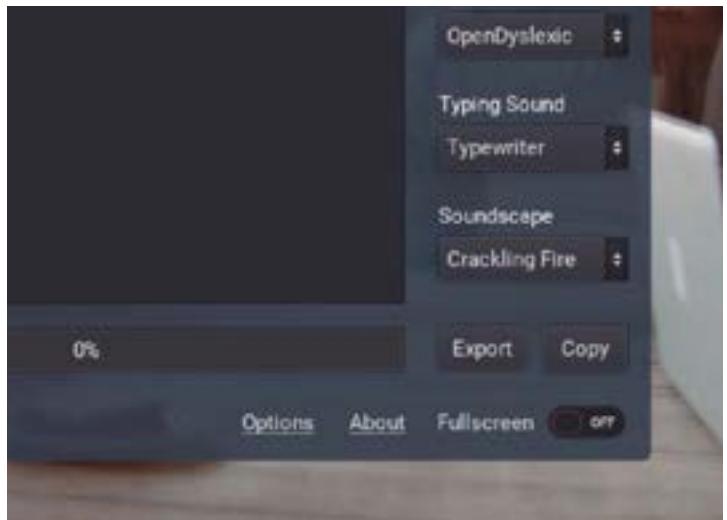
Final Thoughts

StimuWrite isn't out to replace your trusty word processor. Think of it as a creative scratchpad, a space for brainstorming wild ideas or drafting the bones of your next masterpiece. If you've ever loved gamified online writing apps like The Most Dangerous Writing App or Written? Kitten!, you'll feel right at home. And as a free app, it's easy enough to download it and try it out for a writing session or two before deciding whether it fits into your writing routine.

Writing can be a slog, but who says it can't be fun, too? ■

Wendy Van Camp

Wendy Van Camp, Anaheim's Poet Laureate Emerita, is a dynamic voice in speculative poetry, blending cutting-edge technology, astronomy, and daydreams. Her talent has earned her nominations for the Elgin Award, Pushcart Prize, and Dwarf Stars Award. Wendy's poems, stories, and articles grace journals worldwide such as "Star*Line," "Scifaikuest," and "San Diego Poetry Annual." You can hear Wendy as a rotating radio host of "Poets Cafe" on KPFK 90.7 FM Los Angeles or on her own audio podcast "No Wasted Ink Ramblecast." As a member of SFWA, SFPA, and IBPA, Wendy is a passionate advocate for the speculative community. Her debut poetry collection, "The Planets," was nominated for the Elgin Award. Discover more at **wendyvancamp.com.**

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What's Best for Your Brain?

As Neurodivergence Gains Wider Acceptance, How You Can Adapt Your Writing Routine to Your Needs

Neurodiversity is a part of the beautiful experience of being human. If we all thought the same, our books might be a tad boring. It is because human minds think differently that we experience the world through different lenses. The diversity of stories expands our understanding of the world—but it shouldn't exist only on the page.

According to Johns Hopkins University's 2022 article "Neurodivergence at a Glance," "essentially, neurodivergent means 'different brain,' and rather than there existing a clearcut black-and-white separation between different and normal brain function, it can be viewed as a spectrum that people can fall anywhere on depending on the severity of their identified (or unidentified) mental illness (or lack thereof)." Although some may have professional diagnoses of specific differences, a growing awareness of neurodiversity in online spaces and in media has allowed some to self-identify with particular forms of neurodivergence, even if they aren't diagnosed by a medical professional. That trend toward acceptance has also allowed more adults, including authors, to reevaluate how they function best—and adapt to it.

Knowledge Is Power

For any author, not just those who are formally diagnosed with neurodivergence or who have self-identified as such, taking the time to examine your needs and address them can turn frustration into confidence. As autism advocate and researcher Temple Grandin said in 2022, "It don't matter how you know you're different; give yourself what you need."

The process of learning those needs doesn't need to be complicated. First, write a list of your areas of difficulty, as well as where you excel. Where do you thrive in your author business? Where do you have difficulty or feel the most stress? Explore where your struggles and strengths lie and what you need to succeed.

After you create your list, consider how you can change your daily routine, your environment, or the responsibilities you manage versus those you allow someone else to take over for you to better accommodate your needs. If you are distracted by sensory or auditory environmental factors, consider using a nicer chair or creating a quieter environment. If you are often distracted by new ideas, create a system to manage them—a glass jar filled with scraps of paper that contain your thoughts or a digital document filled with ideas, for example.

Allow this knowledge to guide you in planning your time and determining your unique form of productivity. Find solutions that work best for you, and focus on your strengths. By giving yourself a foundation grounded in self-knowledge and acceptance, you can create a more sustainable author career. ■

Heather Clement Davis

Heather Clement Davis has twenty-six years' experience in museums, archaeology, art, counseling, art therapy, creative writing, and nonprofit management. She holds enough graduate work to make a Ph.D. cry as her neurodivergent brain is hooked on learning everything. She's currently a masters candidate in Arts Management. Her paintings and pottery are in galleries and collections worldwide and her poetry and her nonfiction and fiction has found its way to literary journals around the U.S. When not writing or making art, Heather can be found playing Catan or watching Star Trek with her family.
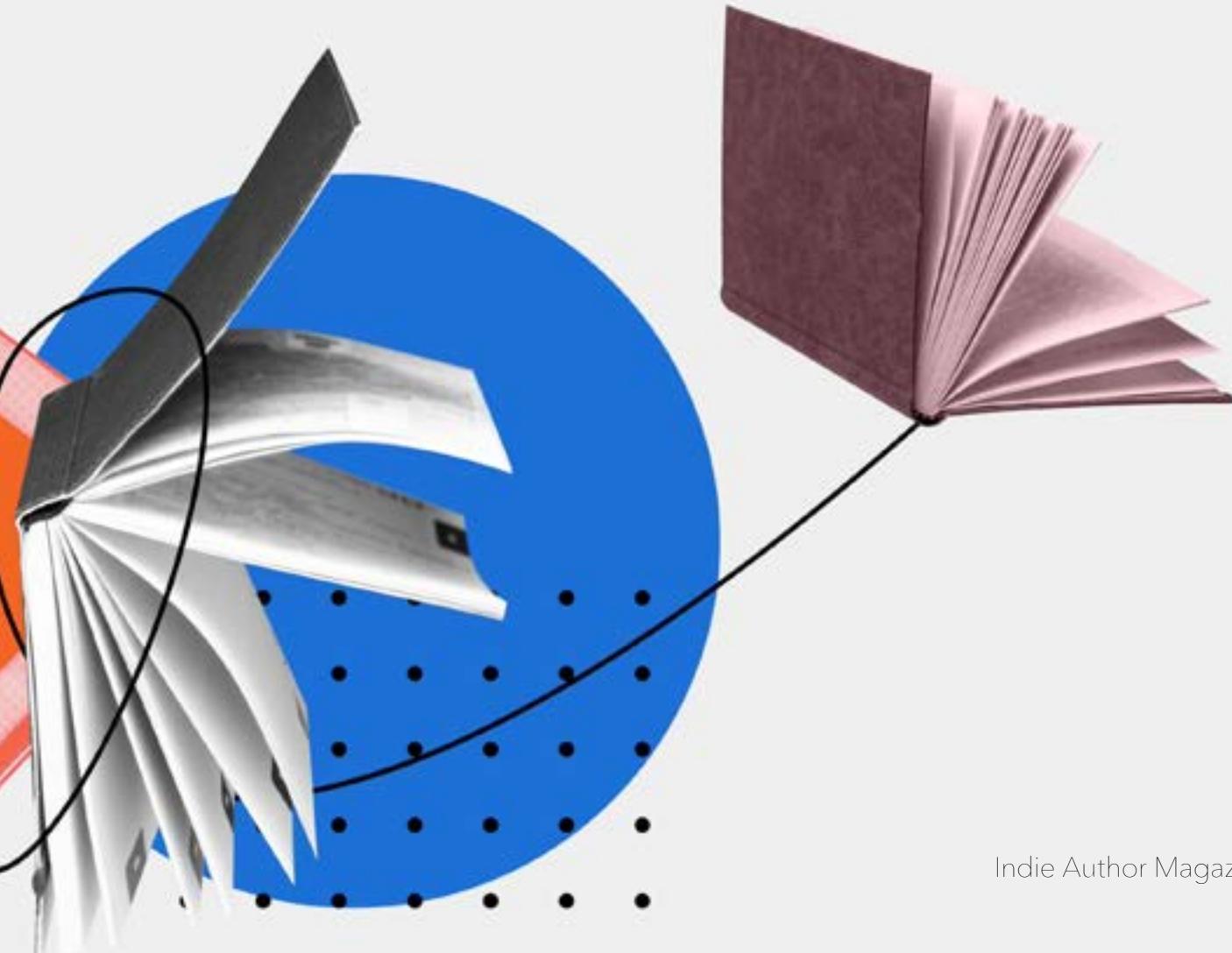
What Authors Need to Know About Sales Tax Before Diving into Direct Sales
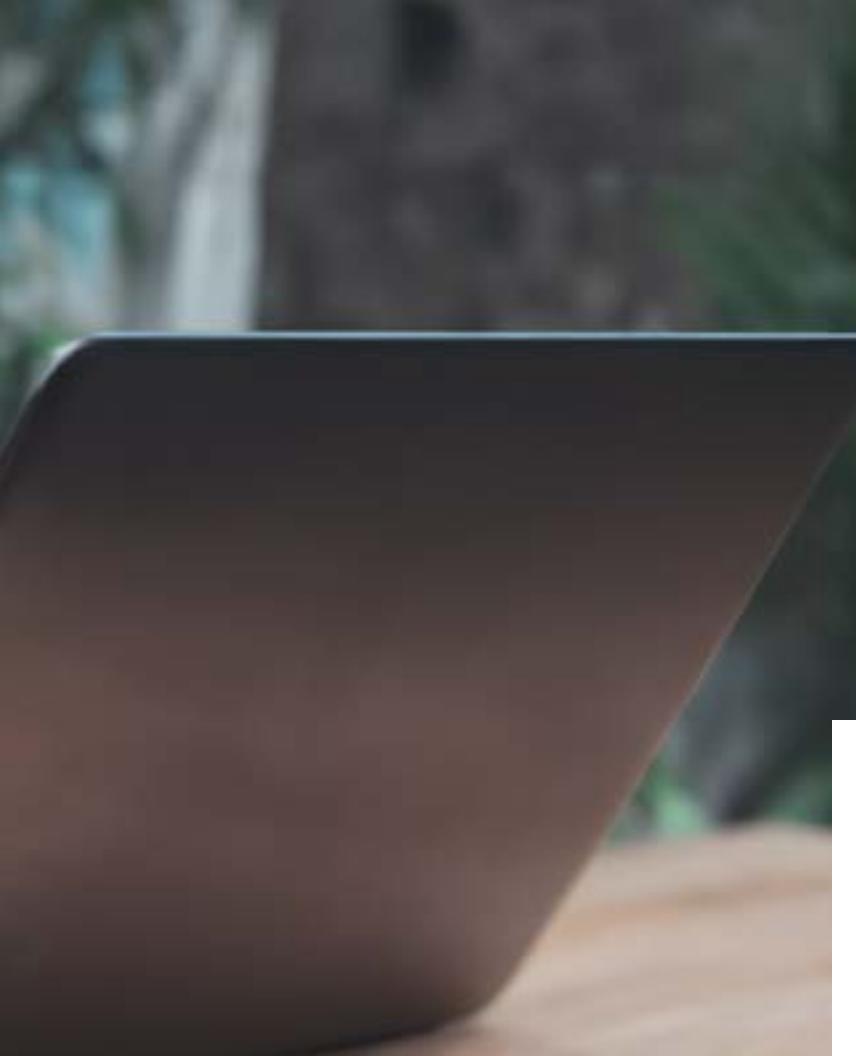
Direct sales—selling books or other products and services from your own website instead of relying on retailers—is one of the fastest growing strategies for diversifying author income today. However, it can also be complex, and among other elements of the process, understanding sales taxes for a small online business can turn authors off from this possibly lucrative revenue source.

It used to be, when you made a sale via the mail or online, you only owed sales tax if the sale was made in the same place you lived. As online sales have grown to take up a greater percentage of all retail, governments have passed new laws to ensure those sales will still be taxed.

Today, online sellers need to collect sales tax for most of their sales, often even if the buyers live in another country. This addition to the rules of doing business has added new layers of complexity to starting online retail stores, but with a little study, it's manageable. Read on for a basic understanding of how this works, with links to resources for more reading.

What Is Nexus?

Nexus is an element of US sales tax law that determines whether a business must collect sales tax in each state—more specifically, "the connection between a business and state or local government that triggers the requirement to collect and remit sales," according to the online payment platform Stripe. Each state calculates nexus differently. When a business has enough connection to a state, it gains nexus in that state and must begin collecting and remitting sales tax to that state. You can gain nexus because you live or operate a business in a given state, because of the number of individual sales made in that state, or because of the total volume of sales made in that state.

Each state has its own sales tax rate and its own threshold where collection must begin. Some states have passed laws making nexus happen with as few as two hundred sales in that state, and others require as much as $500,000 in sales per year and one hundred or more sales. A website with a rundown of the current sales thresholds for nexus in all US states can be found here: https://www.avalara.com/us/en/learn/guides/sales-tax-nexus-laws-by-state.html.

US sales taxes apply to all online stores, regardless of where in the world they are based. Because most nations have treaties to support tax collection mutually, the best practice is to collect US taxes when required, regardless of what nation you live in. However, US nexus thresholds are so high that most smaller stores won't gain nexus.
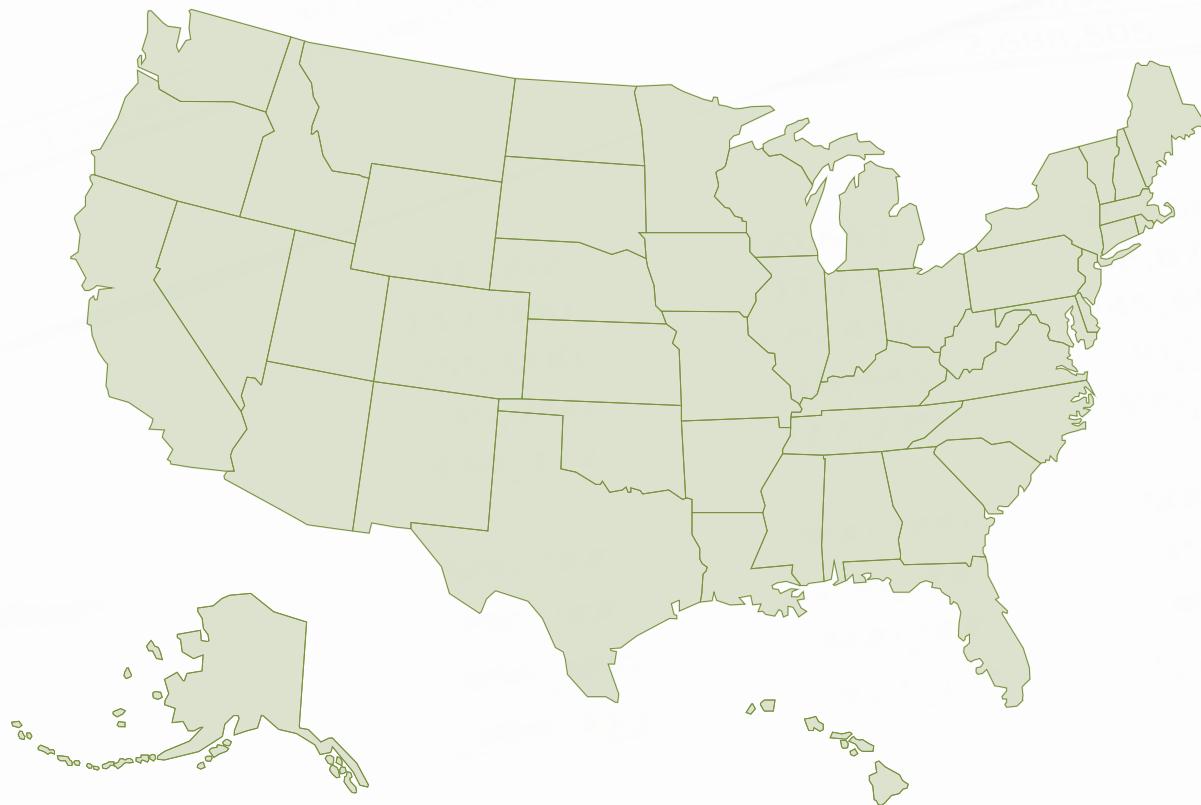
What about EU and UK VAT?

The EU and UK collect VAT, or value-added tax, instead of sales tax. While the US sales tax only taxes products at the retail point of sale to consumers, a businessperson pays VAT each time a business adds value to a product. In simple terms, this means a manufacturer in the EU would pay VAT on supplies of iron they used to make nails; the nail distributor would pay VAT when distributing them; and the consumer would pay VAT when buying them at retail.

The EU has a €10,000-per-year minimum threshold on goods imported into the EU or from one EU nation to another. After a business hits that sales amount, the business needs to pay VAT for all retail sales. Authors based in the EU will need to pay attention to local VAT laws, as they will likely have to collect VAT on sales within their home nation even below that threshold. The European Union has set up a one-stop shop to allow international businesses to register on one website and remit all necessary VAT. You can learn about that here: https://vat-one-stop-shop.ec.europa.eu/index_en.

The UK has no minimum threshold. All sales made into the UK from any nation must collect VAT. This means most authors will have to deal with UK VAT fairly early on compared with when they'll need to pay VAT for other nations. You can read more on the UK website here: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/vat-and-overseas-goods-sold-directly-to-customers-in-the-uk.

Canada, Too? Yes.

Canada also requires all online stores globally to pay sales tax if they meet the minimum threshold for nexus. As of this writing, that's $30,000 CAN per year or more. Any online retail store from any nation in the world is required to remit Canadian goods and services tax (GST) or, in some provinces, harmonized sales tax (HST) for digital and physical products once they hit that minimum.

You can read more about this on the official Government of Canada site here: https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/tax/businesses/topics/gst-hst-businesses/digital-economy-gsthst/charge-collect/cross-border.html.

How to Manage This

Sales tax and VAT can feel complex. Having to worry about foreign tax structures is often a reason authors don't want to run their own stores. However, a range of tools can help authors manage taxes and make them less of a burden. Consider either of the following approaches to simplify the process.

1 **Use a shop that acts as the merchant of record.** A platform that serves as the merchant of record takes on the responsibility for collecting and remitting all sales tax. An author using such a platform doesn't have to worry about sales tax or VAT collection; the platform does that for you. In return, the platform generally keeps a percentage of sales. Examples of this include Gumroad, which retains 10 percent of all sales, and Fourthwall, which retains 3 percent to 5 percent of all sales. Using a platform that acts as a merchant of record is an easy shortcut to tax management woes, though you will lose a percentage of income in return.

2 **Use an app or plug-in for compliance.** Shopify and WooCommerce both have several plug-ins that will manage tax collection for you. In some cases, you might be able to use a single plug-in to manage all tax collection; other cases might require multiple plug-ins for different nations.

Dive In!

For years, I've watched authors struggle with fear over increasingly complex tax systems. It's understandable; a lot of nations collect international taxes, and it can be a struggle to understand even one nation's tax code, let alone a dozen or more.

The good news is that authors aren't alone. Small online stores today all face the same problems. A merchant of record platform, especially for someone who's nervous about the tax side of running a business, can completely wipe out any concerns about tax collection because the platform handles it for you. Or maybe you're ready to jump in with both feet. Right now, the main platforms for advanced online stores are Shopify or WooCommerce, and both have fully integrated tax compliance offerings available, for a fee.

Whichever path you choose, don't hesitate because you're concerned about taxes. Rather, spend the time to learn more about how they work. There are copious resources for advanced reading; visit the links in this article as starting points, or reach out to a tax adviser or other expert with more specific questions. Don't let this stumbling block hold you back from enjoying one of the most swiftly growing areas of the industry. ◼

Kevin McLaughlin

Kevin McLaughlin is the USA Today bestselling author of 83 books. He writes mostly science fiction and fantasy, and is also the author of The Coffee Break Novelist and You Must Write. He's enjoyed reading and writing serials for decades.