

INDIE AUTHOR MAGAZINE

Johnny B. Truant
The Artisan Author



ALLI EXCLUSIVE:

Creating Your Book's Billboard

COVERING COPYRIGHT

How Copyright Works for Book Covers

ARTIST VERSUS ALGORITHM

Who Wins the Cover Game?

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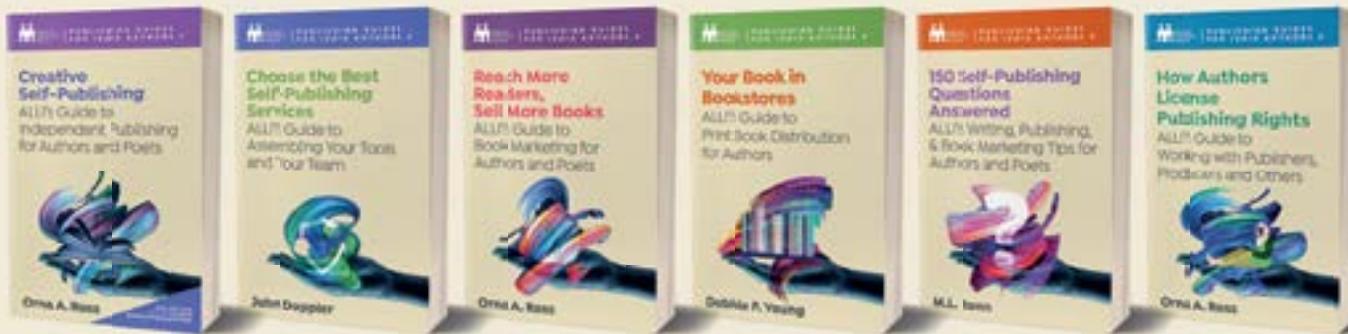
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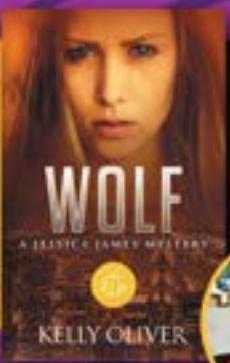
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Nicole Schroeder
Editor in Chief

From the **EDITOR IN CHIEF**

In late April 2025, Sophia Nguyen wrote an article for *The Washington Post* asking, “Why do romance covers all look like this now?” The article detailed the recent transition from photorealistic, dramatically posed “clinch covers” to the brightly colored vector covers that now dominate the genre’s shelves. Several factors played into the shift—a need for more diverse representation than that offered by stock photo libraries, a desire to bring new readers to the genre, wanting to highlight the bright and bubbly feelings the books promise their readers—but Nguyen’s article sums up the many reasons with one quote from Julie Schrader, Sourcebooks’s associate creative director: “Trends are trends.”

Trends and tropes within genres—far beyond just romance—have always shaped the stories writers choose to tell, but they play just as important a role in how we present our stories visually. To play off the adage, if a picture is worth a thousand words, a book cover must be worth somewhere between fifty thousand and one hundred thousand—maybe more, depending on how long it takes to tell your story. A good cover must tell readers about what they’ll read without spoiling the plot, follow genre conventions while standing out from the crowd, obey general design expectations and your book’s formatting specifications …

It’s a lot of weight for one design to carry.

Earlier in Nguyen’s article, designer Neil Swaab says, “Book covers are primarily a marketing tool as much as they’re an art,” and the statement couldn’t be more true. This month’s issue of *IAM* focuses on cover design because, as important as the craft of your story is, your cover will convince readers to pick it up off physical shelves or click to read more. Within our pages this month, cover designer Alice Briggs explores how trends differ between traditional publishing and indie publishing, *IAM*’s Kevin McLaughlin answers your questions about covers and copyright, and an author asks for advice on how much their cover design should adhere to the smaller details of their story.

Your cover is your biggest advertisement to potential new fans. But it’s also a love letter to the story you took so much care in telling. The perfect cover balances both—and that’s an art form in and of itself.

Nicole Schroeder

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ALLi Exclusive: Creating Your Book's Billboard

A book cover is more than just a visual representation of your work—it's a vital tool for attracting readers and conveying the essence of your story. As Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi) advisor Russell Nohelty notes, “Do you want your words to be read, or do you want to have a cover you love? If it's the former, then it needs to follow genre expectations, so enough of the right readers give it a try.” In this article, we offer tailored advice for beginning, emerging, and experienced authors to help them create covers that not only captivate but also sell.

Me

Building a Foundation for Success

Understanding Genre Conventions

For new authors, the first step in cover design is understanding the rules of your genre. A book cover acts as a billboard for your book—it must clearly communicate the genre and subgenre at a glance. As ALLi director Orna Ross explains, “The function of a cover is to cause the reader to look further into the book. It’s the first step towards the sale.”

To get started,

1. study the top ten bestsellers in your genre;
2. break down their covers into key elements: title, subtitle, colors, imagery, and typography; and
3. analyze what these elements communicate to readers.

Another source of insights is the email newsletters that notify subscribers of new or discounted books in selected genres; it’s informative to see how often the books featured in a newsletter focused on mystery, for example, share common color schemes, layouts, and fonts. Remember, your cover is like a visual keyword, representative of what readers expect in your niche.

Engaging a Cover Design Expert

This study of your genre’s cover design conventions lays the groundwork for the next step in the process: engaging a cover design expert. With a few rare

exceptions, authors excel at working with words, not with visual elements, and even those with graphic design expertise might not be equipped to create the optimal cover; as Ross warns, “Book design has its own unique demands.”

For genre-specific expertise, look at the credits in books similar to yours. Many authors list their cover designer on the copyright page. Researching these designers ensures you hire someone with relevant experience. And always check ALLi’s Service Ratings Directory, which reviews and rates service providers based on ALLi’s Code of Standards, ensuring you populate your publishing team with ethical professionals.

Although the cost of hiring a designer can feel daunting, it’s a worthwhile investment. “A high-quality book cover sets your publication apart in today’s crowded marketplace, and indie authors no longer need to spend thousands on an experienced designer,” ALLi advisor Dale L. Roberts highlights. “Shop around and always review a designer’s portfolio before investing.”

For authors on a tight budget, pre-made covers can be a viable option. These professionally designed templates often cost less and can be customized to suit your book’s needs.

Crafting a Design Brief

When working with a designer, clarity is key. Your design brief should include:

- 1 genre and target audience,
- 2 key themes or symbols from your story, and
- 3 examples of covers you admire.

A detailed brief will help your designer create a cover that aligns with your vision while appealing to your target audience.

Engaging Readers in the Process

Emerging authors often have the advantage of a growing fan base. Leverage this community to gather feedback on cover designs. As Jane Friedman suggests, “Rather than randomly crowdsourcing feedback on your cover design—e.g., by posting on social media to your friends—survey your fans and readers or study genre reports like those from K-lytics to see what’s selling in your niche” and what will resonate with your audience.

Emerging Authors: Establishing a Cohesive Brand

Developing Visual Consistency

As your portfolio of works grows, it's vital to focus on author branding. This involves creating a cohesive visual identity across your books. Consistency in fonts, colors, and layouts helps readers instantly recognize your work. Use a similar layout for all books in a series, and incorporate recurring visual motifs that reflect your genre.

As your earnings increase, you may have more money to invest in attention-getting elements like custom illustrations.

Enhancing Marketing Efforts

Experienced authors can maximize the value of their cover images by using design elements in promotional materials. Cohesive branding across social media, ads, and merchandise strengthens recognition and reinforces your author brand.

Using Your Cover as Creative Inspiration

Once you have a few books under your belt, consider having the cover for your work-in-progress designed early. A well-crafted cover can serve as a powerful source of inspiration, fueling your creativity as you write. Ensure that any story elements reflected in the cover are finalized to avoid the need for adjustments once the book is complete. This approach not only enhances your creative work but also keeps your project aligned with your vision from the outset.



Experienced Authors: Leveraging Covers for Long-Term Success

Evolving with Market Trends

Even the most experienced authors need to stay attuned to changing market trends. A cover design that worked five years ago may no longer attract readers today. Regularly review the top-selling books in your genre to identify shifts in design preferences. If your sales dip, it might be time to refresh your covers. Rebranding, however, should be approached thoughtfully. Split-test new designs to ensure they outperform the originals.

Managing Series Cohesion

For authors with multiple series, maintaining distinct yet cohesive branding is crucial. Each series should have its own unique identity and meet its genre's cover design conventions, but all should fit within your overarching brand. For example, you might consider having the size, font, and color of your author name be the same on all your books. This balance ensures readers can easily identify their favorite series while recognizing you as the author.

Best Practices for All Authors

Prioritizing Readability

Always ensure your cover's text is legible at thumbnail size. Online shoppers often see book covers as small images, so clarity is essential. Use high-contrast colors and clean typography to make your title and author name stand out.

Balancing Creativity and Clarity

Although creativity is important, your cover should clearly communicate your book's genre. "There's no point in someone picking up the book because they like the cover if they don't read it," Ross advises. Focus on creating a design that resonates emotionally with your ideal reader.

Testing Cover Effectiveness

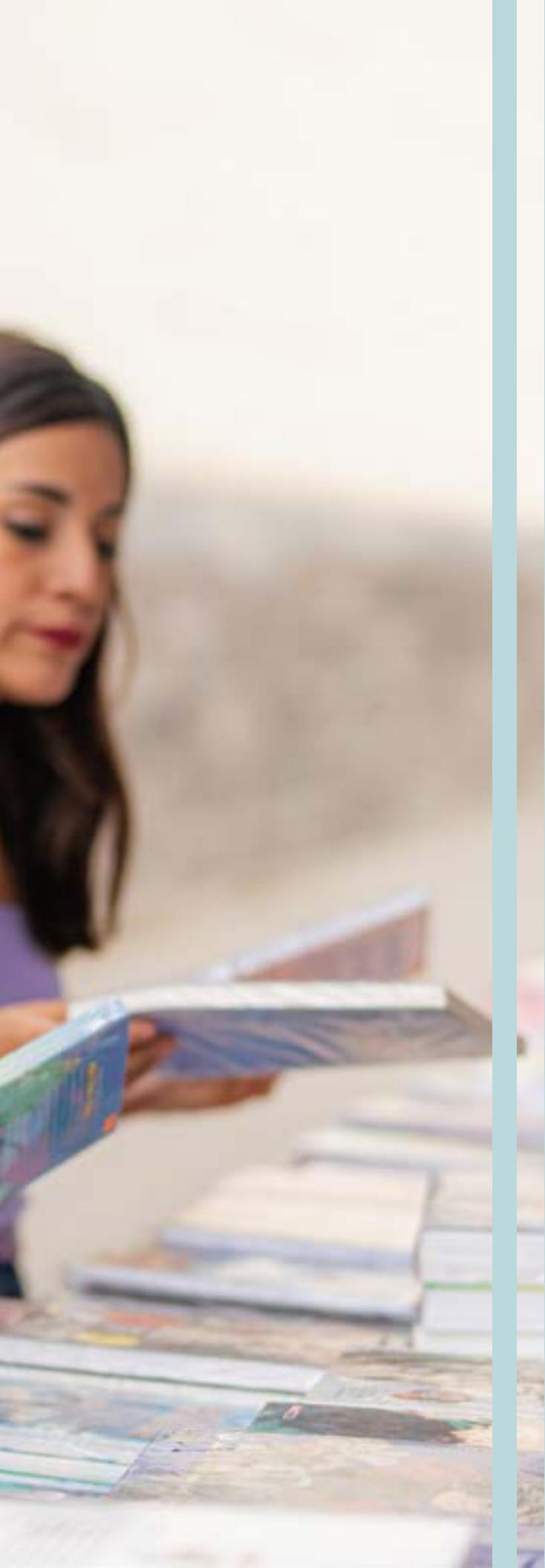
Before finalizing a cover, test its appeal with a sample of your target audience. Gather feedback to identify potential improvements and ensure the design aligns with reader expectations.



The function of a cover is to cause the reader to look further into the book. It's the first step towards the sale.

Orna Ross
ALLi director



A blurred background image of a woman with dark hair, wearing a purple shirt, looking down at a stack of books on a shelf. The books are stacked horizontally, showing various colorful covers.

A compelling book cover is a cornerstone of successful self-publishing. As your publishing business evolves, so too should your approach to cover design. Whether you're a beginner learning the basics, an emerging author building a brand, or an experienced writer refining your strategy, investing in professional design will always pay dividends.

By understanding your genre, collaborating with the right designer, and staying attuned to market trends, you can create covers that attract readers, boost sales, and solidify your presence in the marketplace.

For more on cover design, check out the following resources from ALLi:

- 1 Search ALLi's database of self-publishing services for services you're interested in using and their quality ratings based on a review by ALLi's Watchdog Desk: <https://selfpublishingadvice.org/best-self-publishing-services>.
- 2 For a deeper look at the design aspect of publishing, read ALLi's overview article, "The Seven Processes of Publishing: Design" at <https://selfpublishingadvice.org/design>.
- 3 ALLi's blog post "How to Design a Great Book Cover" features design guidance from creators at 1106 Design and Miblart, both ALLi partner members: <https://selfpublishingadvice.org/how-to-design-a-great-book-cover>. ■

A circular portrait of a woman with short brown hair, smiling. She is wearing a patterned top.

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

I know good covers sell books—despite what everyone else likes to say! But how accurate does my cover need to be to the story? Does it matter if the people on my cover don't match the descriptions in the book, or if there are details in the story that don't make it into the cover design?

Judging My Books by Their Covers

D

ear Judging My Books,

Ahem. Greetings, anxious author! I'm stepping in for our beloved Indie Annie, who's mysteriously vanished on what she called a "research expedition"—though between us, I suspect she's recuperating in a hotel spa in Harrogate, Yorkshire, like her favorite mystery writer, Agatha Christie. Who else could've inspired the clue left in last month's letter?

"On that note, sometimes one has to move on. It's something I have been pondering for some time—how to make my excuses politely and exit leaving no crumbs."

Very mysterious and just like our Indie Annie. Always an enigma.

Although I am a mere indie author and not a seasoned columnist like Annie, I will do my best to answer your question.

About your cover conundrum—let's slice this cake differently, shall we?

I think Indie Annie would tell you to view book covers like restaurant menus. Their primary job isn't to document every ingredient in the dish; it's to make customers hungry enough to order. Your cover isn't an illustrated summary; it's a visual appetizer designed to entice readers to the main course.

Must your hero's eyes be exactly the shade of storm-tossed sea at twilight as described on page 17? Not necessarily. Should your heroine's cascading auburn tresses be perfectly represented? Only if they're central to the plot.

From a thorough search of all the best advice I could find on the subject, including past issues of this illustrious magazine, here's my practical menu of considerations.

The Entrée (Core Elements)

- Genre recognition is non-negotiable. Your thriller must look thrilling, your romance swoony, your fantasy magical. This is your restaurant's signature dish.
- Emotional tone must align with the story. A lighthearted comedy shouldn't have a cover that looks like it's announcing the apocalypse.
- Professional execution is essential. A sloppily plated dish gets sent back to the kitchen.

The Side Dishes (Important but Flexible)

- Your characters' physical attributes

can be approximated unless they're plot critical. If your protagonist's unusual eye color is just a description, flexibility is fine. If it's the reason they're being hunted by supernatural forces, that's another story.

- Settings can be suggestive rather than photorealistic. A hint of mountains often serves better than a geological survey.
- Symbols and themes are often more powerful than literal representations. A single red rose can speak volumes about a romance without showing the exact gazebo where the proposal happens.
- Hint at the plot, but don't give the game away. If the dagger appears in the first ten thousand words, it could go on the cover, but if the dagger appears as the missing clue just before the villain is exposed, perhaps think twice about putting it on the front.

The Garnish (Nice but Optional)

- Minor plot points don't need cover representation. That dramatic scene with the runaway horse? Probably not cover material unless it's central to the story.
- Secondary characters rarely need to appear on the cover.
- Specific time periods should be suggested but don't require documentary precision.

Let me serve up some concrete examples:

If you've written a steamy romance where the hero's scars are central to his character arc, showing him scar-free on the cover is misleading advertising.

If your fantasy novel features a protagonist with unique purple hair that's significant to the plot, that hair color matters on the cover.

If your mystery features a historic lighthouse that's central to the murder, but your cover shows a Victorian mansion instead, that's problematic.

But:

If your heroine's freckles are mentioned twice in passing, a freckle-free cover model isn't

a crisis.

If your hero drives a specific model of car that has no bearing on the plot, don't worry if the cover shows a different vehicle.

If your story takes place in Paris but the cover shows only a generic European cityscape, that's generally fine.

The master chef's secret? Talk to your cover designer. Give them the essential ingredients: the genre, tone, key visual elements, and target audience. Let them create a dish that will make readers' mouths water.

Remember, your cover is making a promise to readers. Ensure it's a promise your book can keep, but don't fret if the garnish in the photo doesn't match the one on the plate.

If you're still uncertain, try this test: Show your cover to a stranger for five seconds, then ask them what genre they think it represents and what mood it evokes. If their answers align with your book's essence, you're on the right track.

And for heaven's sake, test your cover as a thumbnail. If it looks like an indecipherable blob at Amazon search size, even the most accurate cover in the world won't sell your masterpiece.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to check whether Indie Annie left any further clues about her whereabouts. There's a mysterious receipt for "spy equipment" in her desk drawer that I find most intriguing ...

Happy writing,
(Not) Indie Annie





Ask a Book Coach

THE BASICS OF BOOK MENTORING

As authors move closer to the finish lines of their novels, they look to several service providers, from editors and cover designers to social media managers and drop-shipping services, to help them bring their books to life and into readers' hands. But some authors need support even before they've reached "The End." Book coaches can provide individualized, specialized advice to authors who need it, on craft, revision, and publication, but they're also there to cheer you on through the emotional roller coaster that publishing can be. In this guest series, book coach Rona Gofstein is here to answer your questions about coaching, craft, and more; all you have to do is ask.

Many authors see writing a book as an often solitary pursuit, but the truth is authors don't do it alone. We have editors, critique groups, beta readers, masterminds, and more to help us through the publishing process.

And some choose to work with book coaches, who are there with you for a portion—or the entirety—of the journey that is developing, writing, editing, and submitting your book.

I was doing work as a development editor when I found the Book

Coaching Certification program from Author Accelerator. Over nine months, I earned my certification so that I could help writers with stronger structure and encouragement skills. I work with authors at all levels to develop their characters and their arcs while staying motivated through the writing process.

The question I get most often about book coaching is: With all the courses and conferences out there, why would a writer choose to work with a coach?

Have questions about book coaches, craft, or balancing your writing career with everything else? Send them to feedback@indieauthormagazine.com for a chance to be featured.

The simplest answer is because coaching works better for some writers in helping them reach their writing and publishing goals. There are people, so I hear, who can stick to a nutrition plan and go to the gym. Others of us need consultants and trainers to help with motivation, staying on track, and seeing our progress. When

we want to get better at something, such as relationships, fitness, or personal development, and a class isn't enough, a coach might offer the individualized support we need.

Not every writer can take what they learn in a course or workshop and put it into usable, sustainable action. Sometimes, a class turns out not to align with how an author wants and needs to write a book, or a conference overwhelms them with information, and they don't know how to get started. A book coach comes in to provide personalized support.

You can look to a coach for help with brainstorming, drafting, revising, or submitting your manuscript to publishers or awards but also for accountability, encouragement, and clarity. Most often, the right coach provides a combination of guidance and structure—elements that can make the difference between a manuscript that remains unfinished and one that reaches publication. There are also coaches who specialize in working with authors of a particular genre; a particular personal situation, such as neurodivergent writers, moms with young children, or people who struggle with perfectionism; or a particular need within the publishing industry, such as those who are getting started, revising, or working without an outline and struggling to move their book forward. A coach meets a writer where they are with the goal of offering what they need most.

A coach can offer many services at different stages of the production process. Some writers choose to work with a coach early in the story development stage to clarify character arcs, conflicts, and major plot points. Some authors find they want a man-

script evaluation after finishing the first draft to give them feedback on where the book is working. Others work with a coach more directly through the revision process, taking a deep dive into each chapter to expand the story. It all depends on when you want more support. Like when you hire an editor, the cost of these services varies from coach to coach and whether you hire them on an ongoing basis, but the services generally align in price.

Coaching provides a special opportunity to work with a writer as they learn to trust their creative instincts, tell the story they want to tell while overcoming challenges that come up—expected and unexpected—and support them to finish their books while making choices that work best for them. We are there for the good days and the bad ones; the breakthroughs and the breakdowns; the beginning, messy middle, dark moment, and the end—which is, hopefully, the beginning of the next book.

And I hope to offer you a piece of that. Send your questions to me at feedback@indieauthormagazine.com with the subject “Asking A Book Coach,” and let’s see if I can help. ■

Rona Gofstein



Rona Gofstein is a published romance author, developmental editor, and an Author Accelerator certified fiction book coach who loves working with writers who need support to make their book writing dreams a reality.

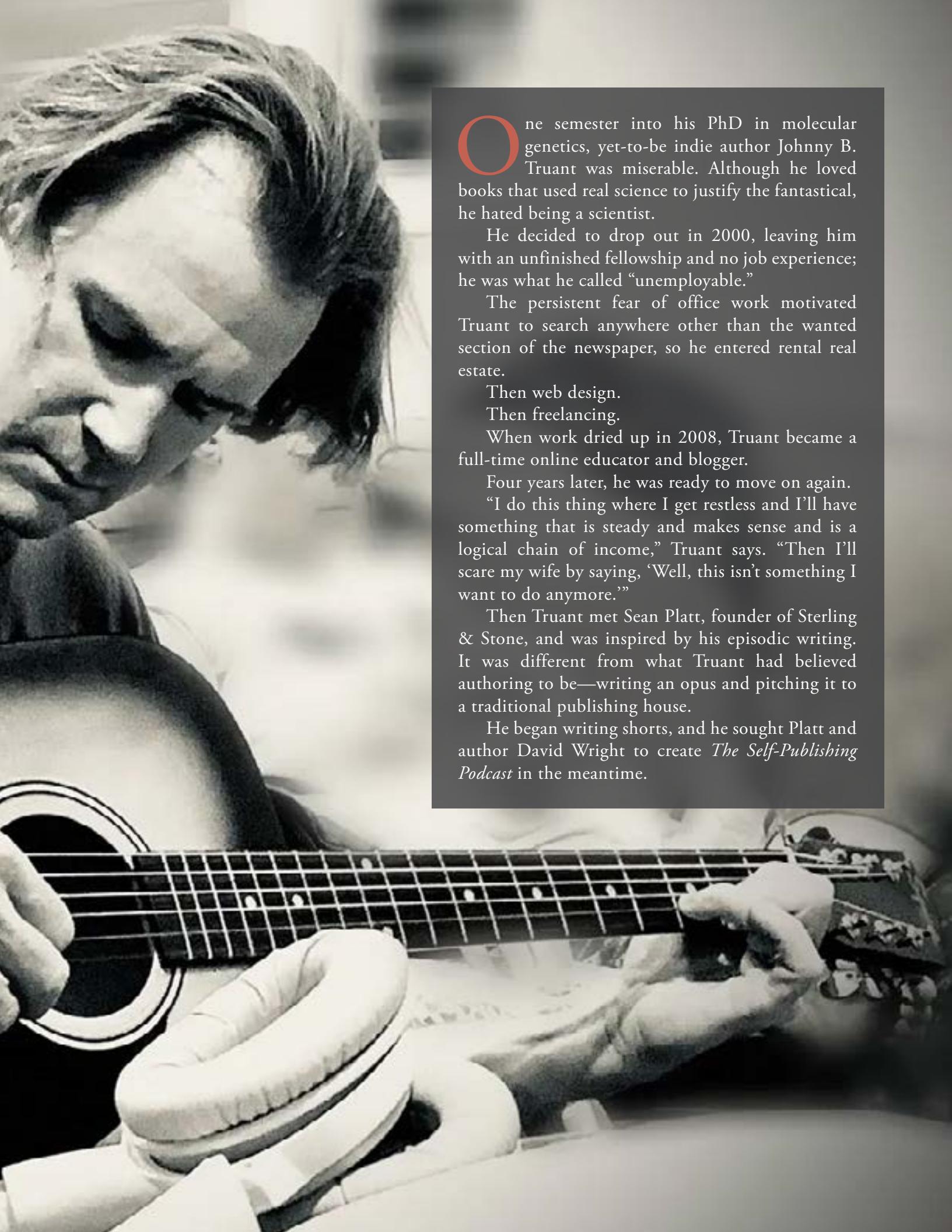
She describes her style as intensive feedback combined with compassionate enthusiasm because she knows that on this journey, writers need clarity, support and encouragement. She has spoken on writing craft and business across the country and is the past president of the New Hampshire RWA chapter and Broad Universe. A Jersey girl at heart, she lives in Massachusetts and is always up for getting coffee, finding a great new pair of shoes, or deciding where to go out for dinner.



Ditching the Narrative



Johnny B. Truant, Creator of the Artisan Author, Centers His Fiction-Writing Career on Authenticity



One semester into his PhD in molecular genetics, yet-to-be indie author Johnny B. Truant was miserable. Although he loved books that used real science to justify the fantastical, he hated being a scientist.

He decided to drop out in 2000, leaving him with an unfinished fellowship and no job experience; he was what he called “unemployable.”

The persistent fear of office work motivated Truant to search anywhere other than the wanted section of the newspaper, so he entered rental real estate.

Then web design.

Then freelancing.

When work dried up in 2008, Truant became a full-time online educator and blogger.

Four years later, he was ready to move on again.

“I do this thing where I get restless and I’ll have something that is steady and makes sense and is a logical chain of income,” Truant says. “Then I’ll scare my wife by saying, ‘Well, this isn’t something I want to do anymore.’”

Then Truant met Sean Platt, founder of Sterling & Stone, and was inspired by his episodic writing. It was different from what Truant had believed authoring to be—writing an opus and pitching it to a traditional publishing house.

He began writing shorts, and he sought Platt and author David Wright to create *The Self-Publishing Podcast* in the meantime.

Truant describes his strategy as sensible and entrepreneurial. He priced his shorts at \$0.99, \$2.99, or \$5.99 for a six-episode season. Emboldened by his fast writing, Truant soon developed a fan base and dug himself out of bankruptcy.

Truant's vision began with *The Fat Vampire* in 2012, which was adapted to screen by SYFY in 2022. Today, his success continues in the form of hundreds of cross-genre books, a full-time writing career, and an approach to authorship that seems entirely opposed to what many indie authors say is the key to reaching readers.

Truant's focus is on writing slowly when many are writing quickly, on telling his own stories rather than those the market wants. He's paving a different path in the publishing world, but he's proud of it—and more importantly, his readers are following.



Photo by Michael Dailey

Johnny B. Truant sits in his writing space, surrounded by stacks of his books. The decorations on the walls and on his desk are as seemingly eccentric as his career and tell a story of their own. There's the Slushies for the People poster and Slushy Shack cup from the Reginald the Vampire TV show, which was based on his book The Fat Vampire; the San Diego Comic Con nameplate from when Truant moderated the Reginald the Vampire panel; and the painting that served as a backdrop for his interviews during his time hosting The Self-Publishing Podcast.

Write. Publish. Rapid Release?

Early into his publishing career, alongside his fiction, Truant co-authored *Write. Publish. Repeat.* with Platt in 2013. The book became widely known to self-publishers—and he believes it was widely misunderstood.

“It was supposed to be about persistence,” Truant says.

On the surface, *Write. Publish. Repeat.* appears to be a guide for rapid release. The book is a guide for authors seeking to stand out from the crowd by enhancing their story creation, editing, and marketing, and it was released to shelves around the time the indie author world began to center the rapid release strategy.

Truant says the two share DNA.

Credited to paranormal romance author Amanda Hocking in 2010, and popularized by Michael Anderle and Craig Martele with 20BooksTo50K® in 2015, the rapid release strategy encourages authors to publish books at a frequent pace, typically every few weeks or months, to strengthen their fan base quickly.

Truant’s book contained a similar strategy: Write, independently publish, then sell a few copies. Truant and Platt instructed authors to write series, claiming audiences would be more compelled to read an expanded storyline.

“It was never ‘Publish as fast as you can, anything else is secondary,’ which in my mind is the way rapid release has become,” Truant says. “You can do it with quality for sure, but it’s not primary. What’s primary is speed and quantity.”

He noticed the leap to rapid release while producing the early stages of *The Self-Publishing Podcast*. Truant began receiving messages inquiring how fast authors should write, what their word count should be, and how authors could hack the system. Truant recalls the term “rapid release” being thrown around more as his podcast series came to an end.

“It’s like they’re cousins,” Truant says. “Rapid release looks, symptomatically, a lot like the idea of *Write. Publish. Repeat.*, and it’s easy to confuse

them, but it’s like they just got the headline and stripped out all of the nuance, especially in the age of AI.”

Truant was skeptical of the hallmark algorithm the self-publishing world was leaning into. Despite the lingering question of how he’d make authorship into a sustainable career without the structure of rapid release, he committed to his decision to write stand-alones.

“It’s not in line with what you’re supposed to do,” Truant says. “I’m kind of stubborn that way. I’m artistic in that way; I’m arrogant enough to say the art matters first, then I need to find a way to sell it.”

Creating the Artisan Author

While the industry was maturing, Truant’s Artisan Author philosophy was in its adolescence.

Truant describes the Artisan Author as an intentional path to successful self-publishing that doesn’t require authors to give up their joys. More personally, it is an articulation of the values Truant has operated by since he began writing.

“For me, the whole thing has been about listening to the brainwashing less and leaning hard into what makes me me,” Truant says. “Because that’s each author’s point of differentiation. It’s not that they’re an artist and author or whatever. It’s that they are fully and completely themselves.”

A fan of late ’80s and early ’90s pop culture, Truant says that if readers looked closely, they’d recognize references to *RoboCop* and *Escape from New York* incorporated in his stories. Truant explained that by leaning into his quirks and avoiding the mainstream, he’s connecting with an underserved group of readers who desire authenticity.

Truant believes that readers can distinguish between artisan authors and mechanist authors. Previously, he says, the difference was small, and the gray areas blended together. As rapid release widened the gap in the author community, it did the same among readership.

“There used to be a little bit of a difference, but now the difference is so huge that this, to me, feels

like the only viable option,” Truant says. “I think it’s something that people are looking for now and maybe the only way that you can stand out in the age of overproduction and AI.”

Truant clarified he is not against artificial intelligence; he often uses AI imagery for his Substack and personal website. Truant believes self-publishers can still be artisan authors and use AI as long as they’re not using it with the intention of hacking the writing process.

Double Down on Being You

Aside from his website, Truant’s only social media is an author Reddit account to connect with other indie authors. No Facebook, no Instagram, no TikTok, proactive over email, and paying with cash, Truant adopts a Luddite-esque approach to life.

Without social media, Truant’s fans depend on his email responses and in-person presence. Readers can order direct for a lower price than third-party sites, or the ones near enough to him can find him live-selling at events and farmers’ markets.

Typically, authors that live-sell bring a smaller haul, so potential readers aren’t overwhelmed with options. But the expansiveness of the Truantverse means Truant has something for every reader, so instead, when people approach his stall, Truant asks them what books they like to read.

More than anything else, the response is all over the place, he says.

“I want people to like me. Which is why I’m so diligent about interacting with people on email and why I’m so proactive about interacting with people in person over anything else,” Truant says. “I don’t have anything else. If they don’t like me they might read a given book and move on, but my core true fans, they have to like me.”

The Artisan Author philosophy has been brewing for Truant long before he could articulate it, but now, he says he’s tired of the one-size-fits-all rhetoric that’s attached itself to the author world.

Truant’s upcoming project, *The Artisan Author: Your Way Out of the Self-Pub Rat Race*, launches July 15, 2025, on Kickstarter. Intended for authors at any point in their career, Truant’s latest project offers a sensible return to creativity without the burnout.



JOHNNY B. TRUANT
Author. Disruptor. Unicorn Rider.



"The whole thing has been about listening to the brainwashing less and leaning hard into what makes me me."

—Johnny B. Truant

Truant encourages the authors that successfully use the rapid release model to incorporate the Artisan Author approach into their lifestyle, though he recommends they step slowly because the process requires reinvention.

For the authors who struggle with rapid release, Truant recommends they ditch the tactic of the week and adopt a connective strategy.

"There's no ninja tricks to being an artisan author; it's unlearning all the ninja tricks," Truant says. "It's, really, 'Write good books, and get them in front of people who you connect with, who want to read them.' It doesn't get more simple than that." ■

Samantha Margot



Curious by trade, Samantha Margot is a passionate people-person with experience in the newsroom and behind the microscope. If she's not writing her latest story, Samantha can be found tending to her plants or using any excuse to ride her bike.

10 Tips for Google Play Books

Google is already doing a fair amount of marketing on your behalf, whether you've asked it to or not. A reader types your name into the search bar, and depending on what Google knows about you, they're served a mix of book listings, blog posts, and author bios. If you've published through Google Play Books, chances are good that your work shows up there too, often near the top of the results.

Despite this visibility, Google Play Books isn't always top of mind for independent authors. Amazon and Kindle Direct Publishing tend to dominate the retailer conversation, and Apple Books often takes second billing. But Google Play Books occupies a unique corner of the ebook marketplace—especially for Android users, who may already have the app preinstalled on their devices.

Unlike other retailers, Google's ebook store is closely tied to the broader search engine infrastructure. That means your metadata, pricing, and previews can surface beyond the bookstore itself, appearing in organic search results or even on your Google Knowledge Panel. Whether you've spent much time thinking about it, Google has already placed itself between you and potential readers.

In the following ten tips, we'll break down how you can make the most of that position—from setting up your account and optimizing your listings to using search-friendly features that extend your visibility well beyond the Play Store.



01

Set up a Google Play Books Partner Account.

Before you can list your titles on Google Play Books, you'll need to register as a content partner through the Google Play Books Partner Center. This portal functions as the back end for authors and publishers to upload, manage, and distribute ebooks on the platform.

You'll be asked to provide basic business details, tax and payment information, and the usual publishing assets: manuscript files (preferably in EPUB format), cover images, and metadata. If you already have books published elsewhere, you can use the same EPUB files here—Google doesn't require exclusivity.

Unlike Amazon KDP, where accounts are automatically approved, the Google Books Partner Program may take a few days to verify and activate your profile. Once it's live, you'll have access to tools for pricing, preview settings, promotions, and performance tracking.

You can sign up at <https://play.google.com/books/publish>. Note that though Google has reopened the program to new publishers after several years of being invite-only, access may still be limited in some regions. Authors outside supported countries may need to use a distributor that works with Google Play instead.

Pro Tip:

Google allows multiple payment thresholds based on region. If you're expecting slow but steady sales, adjusting the minimum payout can help you receive royalty payments faster.

02

Optimize Your Book's Metadata.

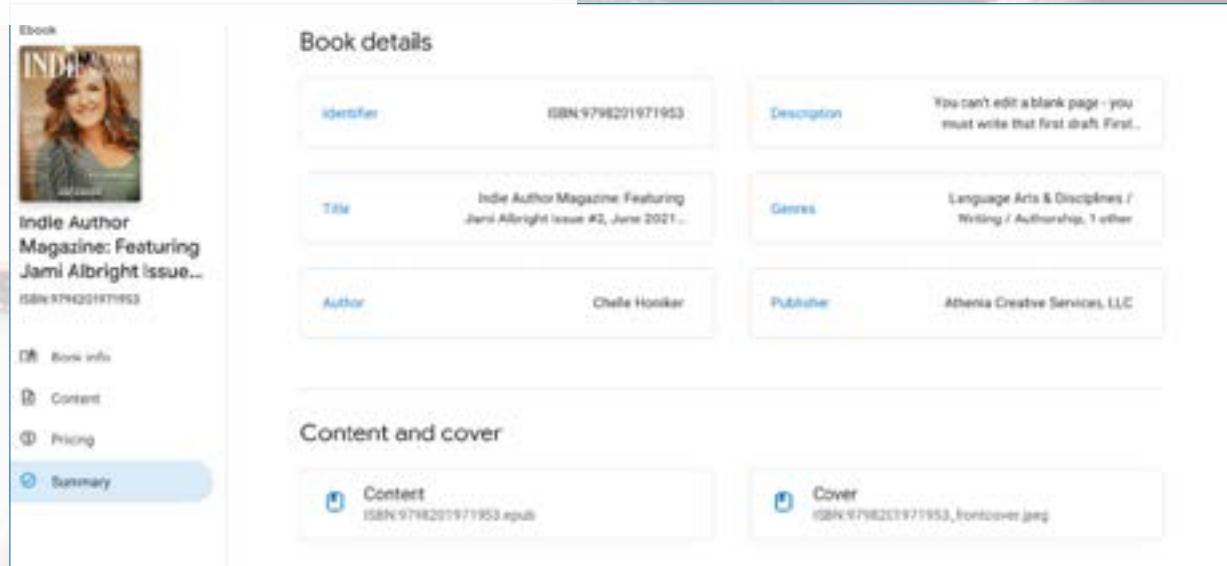
Once you've set up your account, you need to ensure your book is discoverable—and that begins with metadata. On Google Play Books, metadata includes your book's title, subtitle, series information, and description; author name; categories; and keywords. These elements play a significant role in how your book appears in both the Play Store and broader Google search results.

Descriptions should be clear, keyword rich, and reader focused. Use natural language that reflects how readers might search for a book like yours. Phrases like “urban fantasy detective series” or “post-apocalyptic thriller with a female lead” can improve your book's relevance in search queries.

Google allows up to two BISAC subject codes per book, so choose categories that accurately reflect your content. Unlike some retailers that rely more heavily on browse paths or niche subgenres, Google leans on BISAC and metadata matching for placement. If you're unsure, look at how similar books in your genre are listed, and emulate those conventions.

Pro Tip:

Google indexes the text inside your book for search purposes. That means keywords used in your manuscript—especially in the first few pages—can influence discoverability. Don't force it, but keep it in mind during the drafting stage as another layer of SEO at play.



The screenshot shows the Google Play Books metadata editor interface. On the left, there's a sidebar with navigation links: 'Book info', 'Content', 'Pricing', and 'Summary' (which is highlighted in blue). The main area is divided into two sections: 'Book details' and 'Content and cover'.

Book details:

- Identifier:** ISBN 9798291971953
- Description:** You can't edit a blank page - you must write that first draft first...
- Title:** Indie Author Magazine: Featuring Jami Albright Issue #2, June 2021...
- Genres:** Language Arts & Disciplines / Writing / Authorship, 1 other
- Author:** Chelle Honiker
- Publisher:** Athena Creative Services, LLC

Content and cover:

- Content:** ISBN:9798291971953.epub
- Cover:** ISBN:9798291971953_frontcover.jpg

03

Use Google's Preview Program to Your Advantage.

Google Play Books's built-in preview function lets readers sample your book directly within the store—and sometimes even within search results. When enabled, previews can appear on your book's Play Store page and via the Preview link in Google Search, giving potential readers a chance to browse your content before they commit to a purchase.

By default, Google sets a preview range of about 20 percent of the book's content, but you can customize this in your book settings. Some authors opt to show more for reader engagement; others choose a smaller slice to maintain intrigue. The key is striking a balance that gives enough to hook the reader without giving away the full story.

Unlike Amazon's Look Inside feature, which is confined to the Amazon ecosystem, Google's preview links can appear across a broader range of search and discovery surfaces—especially for nonfiction, educational, or reference titles, where keyword matches may trigger preview links to specific chapters or pages.

Pro Tip:

You can embed your book's preview directly onto your author website or blog using Google's preview widget. It's a low-effort way to give readers a taste of your book without asking them to leave your site.

04

Take Advantage of Global Reach and Pricing.

Unlike some platforms that require additional enrollment or regional settings to sell globally, Google Play Books automatically makes your book available in dozens of countries across the Americas, Europe, Asia, and beyond, assuming you've set your pricing and rights accordingly.

The pricing system is flexible and allows for both manual and automated price conversion. You can enter individual prices in multiple currencies or let Google convert your primary price into local equivalents using current exchange rates.

Google also supports price templates, allowing you to apply default pricing to multiple books with a single setting. To create a template, visit your book catalog in your Partner Center account, then click on the advanced options dropdown menu and select "Manage templates." If you write in series or manage a large catalog, this feature can streamline the process of launching or updating titles in bulk.

When setting up your territorial rights, check that all supported countries are selected. If a country isn't explicitly included, your book won't appear there—even if you've set a price for it. Look for the "World" option to cover all available territories unless you have a reason to limit access.

- Indie Author Magazine**
Discover the ultimate resource for indie authors! Indie Author Magazine offers insights, tips, and inspiration to help you succeed in your writing journey and ...
- Best Book Formatting Tools for ...**
Purpose-built software. Two pieces of software, Vellum (\$249) and ...
- About**
Indie Author Magazine is a project of Athenia Creative Services ...
- Meet Our Team**
Nicole Schroeder, 71 articles. Nicole Schroeder is a ...
- Subscribe**

05

Claim and Manage Your Google Knowledge Panel.

Although not officially part of Google Play Books, the Google Knowledge Panel—the information box that appears on the right side of desktop search results when someone looks up your name—is closely tied to how readers discover your books online. If your books are listed on Google Play, and you've been mentioned in enough sources across the web, Google may autogenerate a Knowledge Panel that includes your author photo, bio, and links to your work.

Claiming the panel gives you more control over what appears there. You can suggest edits, update your image, and connect your verified profiles like YouTube, Twitter, or your official website. If your books are correctly linked to your name on Google Play, they may also appear as part of the panel.

To claim your panel, search for your name while logged into the Google account associated with your author identity. If a panel appears, look for the “Claim this knowledge panel” link, and follow the verification steps. If a panel doesn’t exist yet, you can still influence what appears in the future by maintaining consistent bylines, linking to authoritative sources, and building your presence across the web.

Pro Tip:

If you use a pen name, make sure your metadata and online presence are consistent across platforms. Inconsistencies in spelling, formatting, or naming can prevent Google from linking your books to your author identity in both its search engine and the Play Store.

06

Use Promotional Pricing and Free Offers.

Google Play Books gives authors the ability to set temporary discounts or offer books for free—without exclusivity requirements or special enrollment programs. This flexibility makes it a useful tool for running promotions, whether you’re launching a new release, boosting the first book in a series, or coordinating with a newsletter promo service.

Unlike Amazon’s Kindle Countdown Deals, there’s no formal promotion calendar or limit on how often you can adjust your pricing. You can set start and end dates for a discount in advance or update pricing manually whenever needed. The changes usually go live within hours, though in some cases they may take up to twenty-four hours to reflect across all regions.

Offering a book for free can also improve visibility in search and on the Play Store’s free ebooks charts. Since Google indexes your listing more broadly across its ecosystem, a well-timed freebie can surface in search results, related book recommendations, or in the Google Discover feed.

Pro Tip:

Google Play has been known to automatically price-match free books offered on other platforms. And if you list your book as free on Play but charge for it elsewhere, you could see similar ripple effects across other stores—so plan your promotions with consistency in mind.

07

Understand the Analytics Dashboard.

Once your book is live on Google Play Books, the Partner Center dashboard offers a basic overview of how your titles are performing. You’ll find reports for sales, downloads—if offering free books—and revenue broken down by country and currency. It’s not as robust as some other retailers’ analytics tools, but it provides enough detail to track trends and understand where your audience is coming from.

Sales reports are updated daily and can be exported in spreadsheet format for deeper analysis. You’ll see both unit sales and total revenue, along with tax and currency conversion details. Google also includes information about canceled or refunded purchases, which can help you spot potential formatting or delivery issues that might be affecting reader experience.

Google’s dashboard doesn’t offer insight into page reads, conversion rates, or user behavior within the Play Store, so for a more complete picture, some authors supplement with link-tracking tools like UTM parameters in URLs or analytics from their websites to monitor where clicks are coming from and which platforms are driving traffic.

If you’re running ads that link to your Google Play book page, append UTM tags to the URLs to track performance through Google Analytics. It’s one of the few ways to get detailed traffic insights beyond what the Play dashboard provides.

What's a UTM Link, and Why Should Authors Use It?

UTM stands for urchin tracking module—a fancy name for a small string of code you can add to the end of a URL to track where your traffic is coming from. It's useful when you're promoting your book across different platforms and want to see what's actually driving clicks.

Here's a basic Google Play Books link:

<https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=YourBookID>

Now here's that same link with a UTM tag added:

https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=YourBookID&utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=launch

Each piece of the tag tells Google Analytics where the visitor came from:

- `utm_source` identifies the platform, like “newsletter” or “Facebook”
- `utm_medium` shows the type of content, like “email” or “social”
- `utm_campaign` helps you label the specific promotion, like “launch” or “sale2025”

By using UTM links, you can log into your Google Analytics dashboard and see exactly how many readers clicked through from your newsletter, your blog, or a paid ad—allowing you to focus your efforts where they're working.

Pro Tip:

You can create UTM-tagged URLs quickly using Google's free Campaign URL Builder at ga-dev-tools.google/ga4/campaign-url-builder.

08

Format and Upload Like a Pro.

To avoid hiccups during the publishing process, it's worth taking time to prepare clean, properly formatted files before uploading them to Google Play Books. The platform accepts both EPUB and PDF formats, but EPUB offers better compatibility across devices and allows for reflowable text, which improves the reader experience, especially on mobile.

If you're using a tool like Vellum, Atticus, or Scrivener, export an EPUB and check the output using Google's built-in previewer or a desktop EPUB reader before uploading. Be sure that metadata within the file—like author name, title, and chapter headings—matches what you've entered in the Partner Center to avoid conflicts or display issues.

Google automatically scans your upload for errors and will flag problems like missing fonts, improperly embedded images, or invalid EPUB structure. You'll need to address these before your book can go live. In some cases, Google may accept the file but issue warnings that your book's formatting could load incorrectly on certain devices.

If your book includes nonstandard formatting—like sidebars, charts, or footnotes—consider testing how it looks on both the Google Play Books app and in the web browser. Each handles formatting slightly differently, and catching problems early can save you headaches later.

09

Experiment with Direct Linking in Ads and Emails.

Because Google Play Books is integrated into the broader Google ecosystem, direct links to your book can do more than just send readers to a purchase page; they can also enhance discoverability and support your overall marketing efforts. Every book you publish on the platform has a unique, shareable URL that you can use in email newsletters, social media posts, blog pages, and paid ads.

One strategic advantage: Android users who click a Play Books link from a mobile device are typically taken directly into the Google Play Books app, where they can preview or purchase the book in just a few taps. This native experience can lead to smoother conversions compared with browser-based storefronts.

For authors running Google Ads, direct-linking to your Play Books product page also means you're staying within the Google ecosystem, which can sometimes lead to better performance and lower ad costs. Even outside of paid campaigns, using UTM-tagged links allows you to track where clicks are coming from—especially helpful if you're testing which platforms or audiences respond best.

Pro Tip:

To make your links more inviting, consider using a custom URL shortener or branded domain that includes your pen name and book title to direct readers to your Google Play listing. It keeps your promotions consistent across channels and is easier to remember.

10

Don't Set It and Forget It.

Like any sales channel, Google Play Books benefits from ongoing attention. Make a habit of reviewing your metadata every few months to ensure your description still aligns with current reader expectations or marketing campaigns. If you've released a new book in a series, update your earlier titles to reflect that. Google doesn't automatically link series together unless you've entered consistent series metadata across titles, so maintaining that manually is essential.

Likewise, pricing and territorial settings deserve regular checks. Currency fluctuations can lead to awkward local pricing, like \$3.17 instead of a cleaner \$2.99, and newer territories may become available. Small updates can go a long way in improving the buying experience for readers and signaling to the algorithm that your content is fresh and active.



Why Google Play Books Deserves a Spot in Your Publishing Strategy

For indie authors, visibility is everything—and Google already has a front-row seat to your author brand. Google Play Books may not replace your primary sales channel, but it can enhance your discoverability, broaden your global reach, and strengthen the foundation of your author platform. With the right setup, it doesn't take much to keep it running smoothly—and the potential payoff, especially in search visibility and mobile engagement, is well worth the effort. ■



Chelle Honiker

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



Artist versus Algorithm: Who Wins the Cover Game?

Nothing starts a book conversation like a well-designed cover, but if the cover is doing the talking for you, it needs to speak volumes.

An aesthetically pleasing cover design can pique a potential reader's interest before they've clicked on your blurb to read more. When it comes to balancing creative passion with business decisions, the stakes for delivering a strong visual representation have never been higher. So once the latest contender in the design world, AI-generated book covers, entered the publishing game, things changed drastically. But for bet-

ter or for worse?

Suddenly, a process once driven by human collaboration, intuition, and artistry was now competing with code. Affordable, fast, and increasingly convincing, AI tools have changed the way some authors approach their cover design process. But though these are enticing perks for authors working within tight budgets and on strict timelines, they spark bigger, career-defining questions concerning quality, originality, ethics, and the future of human designers. What do we lose when we trade artistry for automation? Is AI the ultimate hack for savvy indie authors, or is it a

shortcut that could eventually cause more harm than good?

Let's explore the growing debate, breaking down the pros and cons, so you can decide what kind of cover creation best aligns with your vision, values, and long-term author brand.

The Case for AI Covers: Speed, Savings, and Scalability

One of the biggest advantages of AI-generated covers is that they're fast and cheap. With platforms like

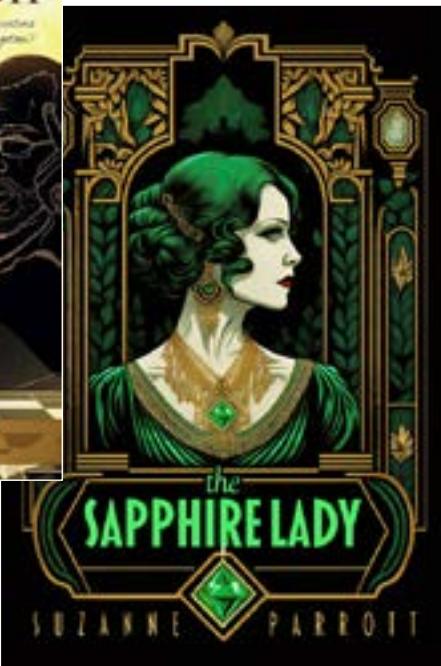
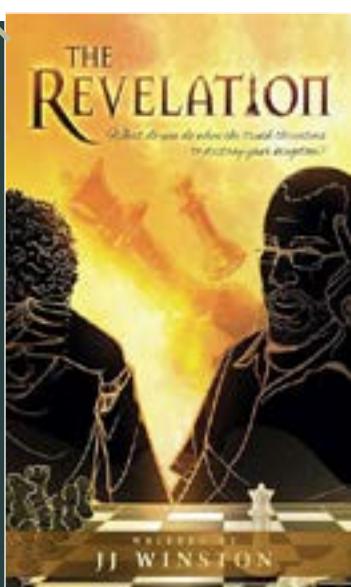
Midjourney, Canva AI, and Adobe Firefly, authors can whip up professional-looking designs in minutes—sometimes for free or at a fraction of the cost of hiring a designer.

This has changed the game for indie authors with tight timelines or for those who are planning multiple releases in a year. AI can churn out dozens of cover mockups and promo images with the click of a button. For authors writing in niche or underserved genres, AI tools can easily generate genre-appropriate designs quicker than the time it takes to find a designer who is familiar with that market.

During an episode of *The Creative Penn* podcast, UK-based *New York Times*

and *USA Today* best-selling author Joanna Penn shared how she uses AI-generated images in collaboration with her professional designer to overcome challenges in sourcing specific visuals—particularly when representation is lacking in traditional stock photo libraries. In one case, she needed an image of a female combat photographer for a project and was unable to find one that matched her vision. She generated a base image using AI, which then became a creative reference point that she and her designer used to develop a cover that felt true to the story.

Many AI platforms, such as BookBrush and Adobe Firefly, also have built-in features that optimize content for online visibility, producing vibrant, scroll-stopping thumbnails that pop on retailer platforms or social media. For indie authors hustling in an overcrowded digital marketplace, these performance-driven designs can be a serious perk.



Where the Robots Fall Short: The Missing Human Touch

Although AI might check boxes on affordability and speed, it often misses the mark when it comes to emotional resonance and originality.

Professional designers bring a human intuition that AI can't replicate. A skilled designer doesn't just slap together on-brand colors and genre-appropriate fonts—they read your story pitch, talk through your vision, and help you shape a visual identity that reflects the heart of your book and author theme.

There are also the issues of repetition and formulaic design. AI cover generators are trained on existing images and data, which can lead to designs that feel a little ... familiar. And it's not always in that feel-good kind of way. If a dozen other authors in your genre use the same tools and

prompts to generate their own covers, it's easy to end up with a design that blends into the background rather than stands out on the virtual shelf.

When it comes to print readiness, professional designers know how

to handle technical specs like bleed lines, trim size, spine width, and file formatting. Sure, an AI-generated image might look great on your screen, but that doesn't mean it will play nice with printers or picky distributors. A blurry spine or off-center barcode will quickly soil a reader's first impression. AI also has its quirks with physical details. Hands, eyes, and smaller or more intricate accessories can appear blurry, warped, or blended in ways that look unnatural and that stand out on a book cover for all the wrong reasons. Authors who use generative AI to create their covers may find themselves correcting or retouching AI-generated images to clean up these flaws. Without design experience, that editing process can become frustrating or costly.

Lastly, for branding across a series, a human artist can maintain consistency across multiple books, incorporating subtle design cues to help readers recognize your work immediately. AI doesn't retain this information, nor can it regenerate or make revisions to a design it's produced.

Legal and Ethical Speed Bumps

As tempting as AI covers can be, they also come with their fair share of ethical and legal gray areas—especially with copyright and consent.

During a keynote at IBPA's 2025 Publishing University, Maria A. Palante, president and CEO of the Association of American Publishers, stated, "AI-generated content does not have protection under the copy-



right clause. The artist must be human.” According to the US Copyright Office, as of now, generative AI images that are not transformatively altered by a human are considered to be in the public domain and are therefore uncopyrightable.

Many popular AI tools are trained on published content gathered from the internet, including copyrighted artwork. That means the image your AI tool generates might be based on work from an artist who never granted permission for its use—and who’s not getting paid for it. That raises big concerns for authors, especially those who are planning to monetize their book. You could unknowingly be infringing on someone else’s intellectual property, which could lead to takedown notices or legal challenges down the road.

There’s also the growing issue of designer disclosure. Some designers—especially those offering ultra-low-cost packages—don’t inform authors they’re using AI tools or stock sites that provide AI-generated images. If originality and ethical sourcing are important to you, it’s worth asking direct questions like:

- Do you use AI tools in your design process?
- Are the stock images AI-generated?
- Can you confirm that I have commercial rights to use this cover?

A Growing Environmental Concern

Another factor worth considering is the environmental impact of AI. Training and running large-scale AI models require substantial computing power, which consumes energy and contributes to carbon emissions. Although the

Treating your cover design process like a business decision focuses not only on what looks good but also on what sells and builds your brand long term.

full scope of AI’s ecological footprint is still being studied, it’s an emerging concern, especially for authors and publishers who prioritize sustainability in their publishing practices.

Blending the Best of Both Worlds

AI and human artists stand on opposite sides of the cover design debate, but many authors have taken a strategic approach that may be somewhere in the middle: using AI as a conceptual tool to generate mood boards, play with color palettes, or create rough drafts that help communicate their vision to an artist. They later bring in a professional designer to refine, format, and finalize a polished, market-ready product.

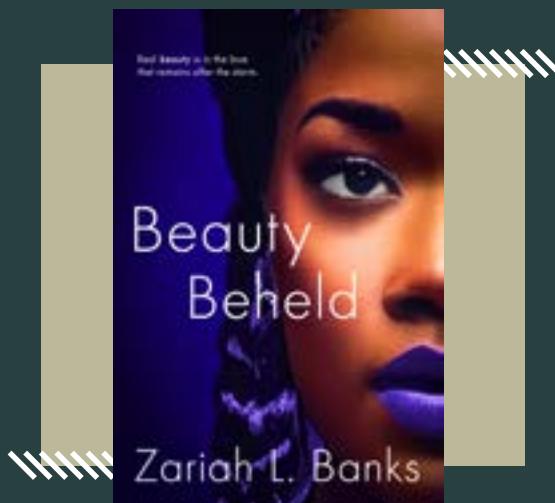
This hybrid approach can save them time and money on the front end while ensuring their final design meets professional standards. This option may offer creative exploration without giving up the benefits of human collaboration and experience.

Whichever route you choose, treating your cover design process like a business decision focuses not only on what looks good but also on what sells and builds your brand long term.

Cover Your Bases: Best Practices for Authors

To avoid headaches and keep your project on track, consider the following, regardless of the design approach you'd like to use.

- Vet your tools.** If using AI, choose platforms with clear terms of use and transparent licensing.
- Ask the right questions.** If hiring a designer, request proof of licensing for all images.
- Read the fine print.** Don't assume you have commercial rights just because you paid for the image. Make sure your license covers print, digital, advertising, and merchandise if needed.
- Test before you invest.** AI can be great for quick mockups or A/B testing with your audience before committing to a final design.
- Keep your brand in mind.** Whether using AI or professional design, think beyond just one book. Does the style align with your author brand?



Who Wins the Cover Game?

The cover design decision you make for your business ultimately depends on your goals.

AI-generated covers are a viable option for budget-conscious authors who need fast, genre-savvy visuals and aren't overly concerned with long-term branding or originality. Professional designers, on the other hand, are still the gold standard for customized, print-ready work that authentically reflects your story. Still other authors have found success with using AI as an initial creative partner for building a visual reference, then partnering with a designer to bring the final concept to life with precision and polish.

No matter the route you take, always be informed. Your book cover is your first impression on your reader. Whether you build it with an artist, an algorithm, or both, make sure it reflects your values, your voice, and your vision. Your cover isn't just decoration—it's your book's visual identity. ■



Eryka Parker

Eryka Parker is a book coach, an award-winning developmental editor, and writing instructor.

As a women's contemporary author under the pen name Zariah L. Banks, she creates emotional intimacy novels that prove that everyone deserves to feel seen, appreciated, and loved. She lives in Northeast Ohio with her husband and two children and is currently working on her third novel.





Cover Story

The Indie Author's Strategic Guide to Cover Design That Sells

Although book covers have been an attractive and protective addition to books for hundreds of years, indie authors owe a debt of gratitude for their appearance today to three brothers: Allen, Richard, and John Lane. Illustrative and decorative book covers were popular in the nineteenth century, according to a history of the craft by graphic design company Graphéine, as publishers knew an attractive book sold better. Publishers would compete for illustrators, and many of the books that are collectible today are considered valuable because of the cover design as well, not just the author or publisher. Some illustrators even signed their work on the cover and were commissioned to complete a series at a time.

However, costs prohibited these books from being available to the general public. When the Lane brothers launched Penguin Books, it was with the goal of providing more publicly accessible reading material at train stations in the

1930s. The Lane brothers achieved a successful balance of price, format, and excellence that launched Penguin Books to remarkable success. They sold one million books within the first month of forming the company.

At the start, Penguin Books used a simple vertical grid design for all their covers, and these differed only in details: color, title, and author name. In 1938, according to the book *Penguin by Design*, the first illustration other than the Penguin Books logo was an airplane, and it appeared on a cover so small it was easily overlooked.

In the 1940 and 1950s, publishers used full-color images and dynamic typography on their covers, viewing the cover as a marketing tool as much as a piece of the final product. It's a common sentiment among all publishers, traditional and independent, that carries into today. The tastes of consumers and technological advancements encourage publishers to

adapt and update their cover designs over time to match changing trends and interests.

But there, the two paths divide.

Indie authors and the cover designers who work with them approach cover design as a business decision, while traditional covers continue to be more of an artistic choice. Indies are more flexible and more likely to change their covers as trends change or to better attract their ideal reader. Traditional houses still maintain large marketing budgets and rely on ad spend and other avenues of promotion to attract readers to a book.

Priorities in Cover Designs

In some ways, a traditionally published cover is a more artistic process

that primarily considers the art of the cover over its marketability. Designers for traditional publishers often read the book and draw inspiration from the content of the book. Holly Dunn, a designer who works with traditional publishers, writes in her blog that she also considers placement of the book in a bookshop as well as what the author desires as she's considering design options.

This emphasis is in part because of the marketing budgets and infrastructure that are only accessible to traditional publishing houses—at least for now. They rely on these marketing channels to overcome any disconnect between the genre expectations and their targeted reader. But for indie cover design, the emphasis is first marketability by a wide margin—and

though this may sound like a downside, the indie author's ability to focus more on marketability is actually a significant success strategy. Cover designers who are familiar with indie books are cognizant of this and often educate new authors who are looking for a more traditional approach.

The lack of consideration of the author's wishes is not because it's irrelevant but because, as Karen Dimmick of Arcane Covers writes, "the cover isn't there for the author. It's there for the potential readers who've never heard of the author. They're the people who will hopefully take a chance on a cover that speaks to them." Your cover is an ad for your book. In indie publishing, where most people will only see your book online, the entire goal of the cover is to cause the right



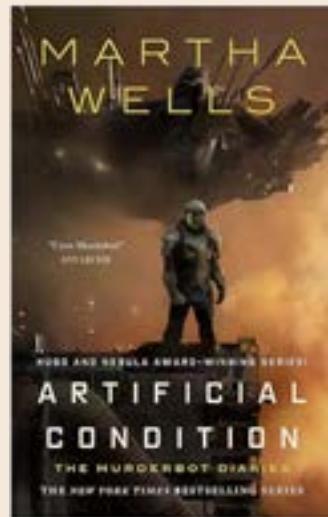
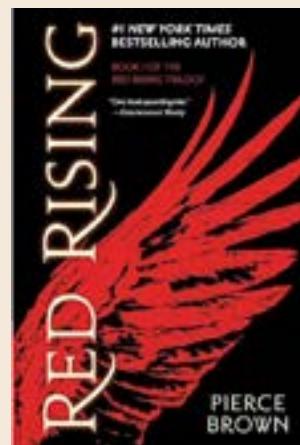
reader to click on the thumbnail and read the description, which will hopefully entice the reader to click “Buy.”

Dimmick considers genre cover tropes first. She designs Fantasy and Paranormal and considers how the book will fit into the best-sellers’ lists for the genre and any subgenres. Rebekah Haskell of Vivid Covers also considers the visual cues common among best-selling books in the genre. She designs and illustrates primarily Science Fiction and Fantasy and also considers the visual impact of the book, especially in a thumbnail size.

Stephanie Anderson of Alt 19 Creative designs primarily Romance, and the subgenre is her key consideration, she writes, as this shapes reader expectations for the book and indicates heat level and emotional tone. She designs her covers to speak to the target audience and balances emotional resonance with marketability.

Interestingly, hybrid publishing cover design is also a hybrid of the two approaches. Abigail Elliott designs in part for Streamline Books, a hybrid publisher, and balances category expectations with author desires for what they want on their cover. She seeks to elevate the design to stand out from others in the book’s category through “brighter colors, punchier fonts, and bolder illustrations,” she writes. She designs primarily nonfiction.

Trad titles



Cover Designs in Sci-Fi



Indie titles

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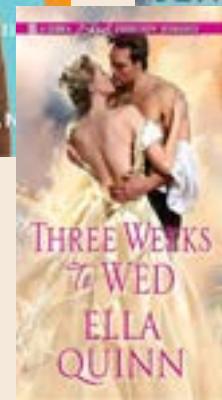
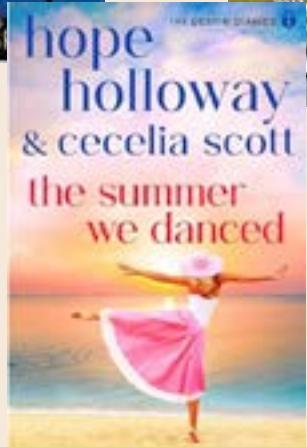
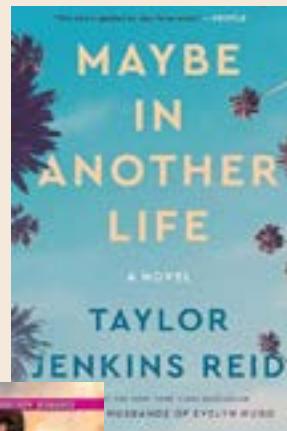
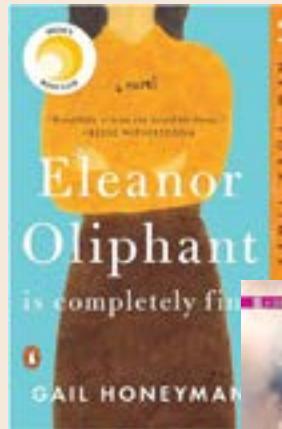
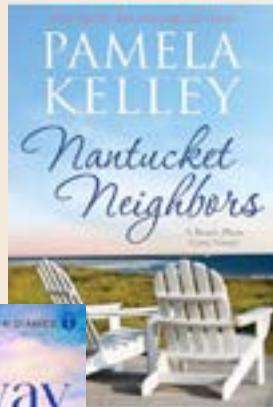
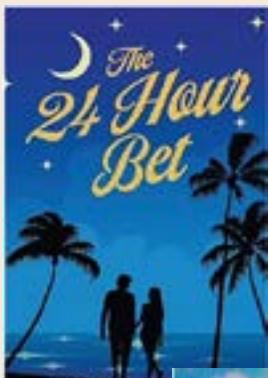
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Cover Designs in Single Women Fiction



Indie titles

Trad titles

Choose Your Comps Wisely

Haskell notes that genres with a more significant indie representation on the best-seller lists become more differentiated in their cover designs. Science Fiction, Fantasy, Urban Fantasy, and Paranormal Romance all have a high indie representation, and therefore covers may differ more significantly between indie- and traditionally published titles.

For Romance, Anderson writes that the lines have blurred significantly over the years. Historically, illustrated covers were the province of traditional publishers while indies trended toward photographic covers due to financial constraints. As more providers offer illustration services, however, as Anderson does, those designs have become more accessible to indie authors. She states

that typography is still one area where traditional titles stand out from indies, as they often use a stylized author name; indies tend to use a more simplified branding font.

Dimmick writes there are often lots of differences in Fantasy covers as well. Traditional titles may not have typical cover tropes on them. They overcome this lack with an increased marketing budget, but indies should use cover tropes so that potential readers know this is a book they will want to read.

Traditional publishing makes use of covers that are flashy and unique from others in the genre, but for authors publishing independently, the first consideration in cover design must be whether they want their book to sell. Are you creating a product for a market? Or is this a passion project for

friends and family? If the latter, then you really can do whatever you wish to do. However, if you want your book to be financially rewarding as well, consider the cover to be an advertising tool.

As you do so, and as you are choosing a designer, it will help if you consider:

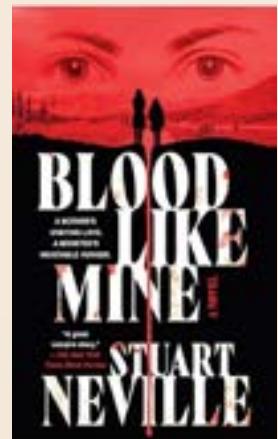
- your goals for your book, and an overall strategic vision for your cover.
- your genre and subgenre for fiction or category and subcategory for nonfiction, which will help you select the right designer for your book, as many designers specialize in specific genres or types of designs.
- the style of the cover that will work best for your book. Do you need an illustrated cover? A symbol-based cover? A photographic cover? A typographic cover? Make sure your designer's portfolio shows a skill set in the style of cover you need.
- whether your book is part of a series or a stand-alone. If it is part of a series, how will you visually link the books, so it's clear to readers that they belong together? If you have multiple series, how will you visually differentiate between the series?
- elements that will assist you with creating a cover that will sell your book well, such as color pallets, fonts, and other elements that are consistent across other books on the digital shelf where your book will sit.

Cover Designs in Vampire Fiction



Indie titles

Trad titles



As an indie author, you have the freedom to do nearly anything you want with your cover, and sometimes that means more choices than are actually helpful. As you consider your options and see ads for traditionally published titles, remember that following their pattern may not serve you well when it comes to sales.

Even before you're ready to work with a designer, track the best-sellers in your subgenres and subcategories, and get a feel for cover design trends, so you can spot a winner when you see one. As you work with your designer, you'll be able to create a book that will serve you well in your author business, attracting your ideal readers and increasing your sales. ■



Alice Briggs

Alice is a business owner, publisher, writer, teacher, and artist. She loves to assist others to achieve their goals. Through KingdomCovers.com, she helps authors and publishers go from manuscript to published book. Or from published book to special edition with hidden page edges or page edge designs. She recently launched CozyLetterClub.com, delighting readers with a letters through the mail project.

Covering Copyright

Understanding How Copyright Works for Book Covers

A row of wooden blocks spelling out "COPYRIGHT" in front of a bookshelf. The blocks are light-colored wood with dark letters. The bookshelf behind them is filled with books, though they are slightly out of focus.

C O P Y R I

Copyright is a complex subject that often gets far too little attention from authors. It's easy to shy away from topics when they're more difficult to grasp, but this is a subject where mastery conveys strong benefits to nearly every creator.

The US Copyright Office defines copyright as "a type of intellectual property that protects original works of authorship as soon as an author fixes the work in a tangible form of expression." That's a start, but it's the barest definition. Let's try for a definition that's a little stronger. Copyright grants a creator the exclusive right to display and distribute copies of their works. Those rights can be licensed to other people, such as when we give Amazon a license to sell our ebooks. In the US, copyrights

owned by individuals last for seventy years after the death of the creator, after which the rights to use that material enter the public domain.

Copyright isn't a monolith. Every nation has slight variations on how they approach copyright law. In the US, one cannot sue for infringement unless one has registered the copyright with the Copyright Office. In Germany, copyrights cannot be transferred from one person to another; the creator forever owns the copyright.

Like books, covers are also generally protected by copyright, which places some legal restrictions on the authors who commission the artwork as much as it does readers who purchase the book. Let's look at the nuances of that in more depth.



Is My Cover Protected by Copyright?

Virtually all book covers are protected by copyright. Once a work is created, it gains copyright protection immediately, from the moment of creation. Even in the US, registration is required in order to use the courts to sue someone; protections exist from the moment of creation, whether registered or not.

There's a common misconception that covers made from multiple pieces of stock art "photo-bashed" into a composite piece do not gain copyright protections. That is, broadly speaking, untrue. When using stock images to make a cover, the type of usage determines

whether the cover obtains copyright status; in order to gain copyright, the photo-bashed cover needs to make transformative changes to the images. The US Copyright Office defines transformative use as "those that add something new, with a further purpose or different character, and do not substitute for the original use of the work." A transformative change could be something as simple as pasting a human into a landscape without people in it; that has transformed the nature and character of the image and will almost always generate a copyright for the final image.

Covers made from single stock images will rarely gain copyright unless they have done substantial overpainting or in some other way modified the original image extensively

enough to qualify as transformative use.

It's also important to license the images you use. Like books, most stock images will have copyright protection. Ensure you're getting legal commercial licenses for all images you use in your business, whether it be for a book cover or for any other purpose.



Who Owns My Cover?

Once we know whether a cover has copyright, the next question would be: Who owns it? The answer to that is pretty simple: Look at your contract with the artist.

Absent any written agreement, the artist who made a work will generally own the copyright. In most nations, a written agreement is required to transfer copyright from one person to another, so without a written agreement, the copyright is retained by the artist. Many artists prefer to work this way, and it's not unusual for artists to charge extra if a client is asking for a transfer of copyright.

In the US and many other nations, these are typically called work-for-hire agreements. Such contracts stipulate that the copyright of the finished piece will belong to the person paying for the work and transfer the copyright from the creator to the buyer. Absent a work-for-hire agreement, the cover artist retains copyright, and the buyer acquires use rights: the right to use the artist's work in specific ways, for specific purposes, as outlined in the contract. Make sure to read and understand your contract with your cover artist completely, and always use a contract. Having a contract with your artist protects both parties from headaches down the road.

Unless the contract requires it, there's no legal obligation to provide credit to a cover artist, even if they're the copyright holder of the work. However, it is nice to do so and can really boost that artist's career. Check with your artists, but most will be thrilled to have their name listed on the copyright page of your book.



AI Covers and Copyright

There's a lot of confusion around AI images and how they interact with copyright, but it's not actually as complicated as it sometimes sounds. The bottom line is fairly simple: In almost all nations, raw and unaltered AI images are public domain. That means they're not protected by copyright, except in the UK, China, Japan, and New Zealand, all of which offer full copyright protection.

However, covers that use AI images can gain copyright through transformative use in the same manner as any other cover that uses public domain photos or images. For example, if an artist takes an AI image of a landscape and another AI image of a person, then pastes the person into the empty landscape, that's almost certainly transformative use, as it has changed the message of the image. The US Copyright Office will grant copyright in virtually all such cases.

Mild fixes to an image are not sufficient to generate a copyright, and using a single AI image as a cover would create a public domain cover, in the same manner that using a single public domain photo would. Photo-bashing multiple AI images into a composite, however, will generate a copyright on the same basis that photo-bashing stock art will. In some cases, adding sufficient artistic typography to a single AI image can generate a copyright as well, as long as the cover typography can be deemed art in itself.

Note that it is not safe to use an AI image someone else has generated for your covers, unless you license the use of the image. This is because AI images do have copyright protection in the UK, and if you use an image that has copyright in the UK for a product you sell globally, the person who made that image can sue for infringement in the UK courts, even if neither party lives there. The best practice is to always get a license for any images used in cover designs, whether AI or not.



For more reading on copyright and AI, visit the following resources:

For an understanding of US law surrounding copyright and AI, visit https://www.copyright.gov/ai/ai_policy_guidance.pdf.

For an understanding of UK copyright laws around generative AI, visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/copyright-and-artificial-intelligence> and click on "Copyright and Artificial Intelligence."

What about Fonts and Copyright?

Like images, the fonts you use for cover design are themselves protected by copyright. It's important to ensure you have the proper commercial use rights for all fonts used on your covers. Many authors have landed themselves in hot legal waters by using a font they downloaded from somewhere without acquiring the legal right to use it commercially.

How do you know whether you have the right to use a font? The good news is that in almost all cases, the fonts loaded into commercial software and operating systems are already licensed for commercial use. For example, all fonts installed as part of the Mac operating system are licensed for commercial use, as are all fonts installed with properly licensed Adobe products. If you own a legal Photoshop sub-



scription, you can legally use any font installed with Photoshop on your covers. In most cases, the fonts installed with Windows are likewise allowed for commercial use. Be cautious, however, as some Home or Student editions may not be licensed for commercial use.

Most cover artists want to go beyond the fonts that come installed with operating systems and applications, and when doing so, it's vital they acquire commercial licenses for such use. There are copious sites that have fonts for sale, including Font Squirrel, Adobe Fonts, and MyFonts. When hiring an artist, it's also

totally acceptable to ask them for screenshots of their license for any special fonts they used in the work.

Pro Tip:

Book publishers will generally not need the more expensive license required to embed a font; that's used for media like video games, where the font gets included in the download to the end user. Since that's not done in books, it's not a license we require.

Our Bread and Butter

For authors, like most artists, copyright is our bread and butter. It allows us the exclusive right to monetize our works and prevents other people from sharing our work for free. Gaining a deeper understanding of copyright is extremely important for an author. *The Copyright Handbook: What Every Writer Needs to Know* by Stephen Fishman offers a primer on the topic. Reading through that book will give any author a crash course on the fundamentals of how copyright works in our businesses.

Aside from encouraging deeper learning on this topic, I'll close with a final thought. Since copyright is so important to our ability to sell our works, it's equally important to respect the copyrights held by others. Ensuring that you have legally licensed all works you use is the legally sound and ethically sensible way to run your businesses. We don't care for it when someone pirates our books, so let us be sure to give others' work the same respect we want for our own. ■

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.



The Small but Mighty Irish Wild Atlantic Indie Author Conference

When I arrived at the first indie author conference on Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way, I did not expect to meet a bunch of authors in a pub, drinking and laughing with the top talent our industry has to offer. But isn't that the secret of the indie movement's success? Where else would you be able to rub shoulders and exchange tips and tricks of the trade than at these brilliant smaller conferences?

The Irish Wild Atlantic Indie Author Conference, held at the Inn at Dromoland in County Clare, Ireland, March 19 and 20, was an experience unlike any other. Starting with an informal mixer on the first evening and over the following two days, an estimated one hundred fifty attendees, ranging from first-time authors to six-figure veterans, came together in an intimate setting to share knowledge, insights, and, of course, a few pints.

A Conference with a Personal Touch

From the moment I walked into the venue, the energy at "Ireland's Publishing Show" differed from larger events. There was no sense of being lost in a crowd and no need to chase down speakers for a rushed conversation. Here, you could sit at a table with authors like Celeste Barclay, Sarah Noffke, or Steve Higgs and have real discussions about what's working in publishing right now.

At one point, I chatted with Paddy Finn,

who shared his experience of launching books through Kickstarter before putting them on Amazon. It was a lightbulb moment: Why wait for royalty payments when you can engage your audience upfront? Suzie K. Quinn also offered valuable insights into the British book market and how authors should be ready to pivot their business strategies when industry changes demand it. These weren't just casual conversations; they were career-shaping discussions.

Of course, the event wasn't without its quirks. Siobhan Purcell, the organizer, found herself in



Siobhan Purcell, conference organizer

an ongoing battle with a faulty microphone. Every time she spoke, the tech gremlins struck, turning it into an unintentional running joke. By the end of the conference, it felt like a new tradition: Siobhan taking the stage, the mic cutting out, the audience laughing, and the presentations rolling on with good humor.

Panels, Workshops, and Industry-Shifting Insights

Twenty-two presentations, two panel discussions, and one workshop took place in both the main room and a smaller breakout room across the two days. The organizers recorded all sessions, and attendees had immediate access to any events they missed via a dedicated Facebook page.

The speaker lineup was impressive, with inspiring presentations that offered practical takeaways. Tony Lee's keynote was a standout, particularly for his advice on perfectionism. "Published is better than perfect," he told attendees. It was a simple but powerful reminder that endless tinkering won't make a book a bestseller; publishing it will.

In his second speech, Lee dove deep into productivity strategies. He runs his entire business through Notion, dictating voice notes to maximize efficiency. I jokingly offered him money for his templates—he declined, but I'm still holding out hope.

One of the biggest surprises came from Steven Aitchison, who stepped in at the last minute to fill a canceled slot. He broke down how he made six figures from a single Facebook video, proving that authors need to think outside the box. A.P. Beswick, on the other hand, demonstrated how TikTok had leveled up his author career. Short-form video isn't only for influencers; it's a powerful tool for selling books.

Of course, no modern publishing conference would be complete without a discussion on AI. Although the topic didn't dominate



A.P. Beswick



Steven Atchison, left, with Marion Hermannsen

“Published is better than perfect.”

—Tony Lee
2025 keynote speaker,
Ireland’s Publishing Show

the event, discussions made it clear the industry is still navigating how to incorporate AI into writing and marketing. A more pressing concern was the perceived decline in Kindle Unlimited sales, which seemed to affect multiple authors. The consensus? It’s time to rethink our reliance on Amazon and explore other revenue streams, whether through direct sales, Kickstarter, or a wide publishing strategy.

The Perfect Irish Setting

One of the conference’s best features was its location. Dromoland is just a short drive from Shannon Airport, making travel easy for international attendees. And though we were here to talk books, it didn’t hurt that County Clare is home to some of Ireland’s most famous landmarks, including the Cliffs of Moher and the UNESCO-listed Burren Geopark.

The venue itself, the Inn at Dromoland, was excellent. The service was outstanding, and the three-course dinner on the first conference evening, included in the attendance fee, was a pleasant surprise, with options for vegetarians, vegans, and those with special diets. Unlike some conferences where you have to fend for yourself when it comes to meals, here, everything was organized down to the last detail; breakfast was not included, but lunches and even tea and coffee with biscuits were.



Marion Hermannsen, left, with Lorna Sixsmith

Where else would you be able to rub shoulders and exchange tips and tricks of the trade than at these brilliant smaller conferences?

—Marion Hermannsen

Networking that Actually Matters

One of the biggest advantages of smaller conferences is the ability to build relationships. Many attendees had met at previous events, and you could see new friendships and collaborations forming in real time at the conference. Whether it was in the hallways, at the bar, or even in the bathroom line, people were swapping insights and offering advice. At larger conferences, you often leave with notes but no real connections. Here, I left knowing that I had new contacts I could reach out to not just for advice but also for potential future collaborations.

Biggest Lessons and Key Takeaways

By the end of the event, a few major lessons stood out:

- A three-star book is a finished book. Many authors spend too much time chasing five-star perfection. *The Great Gatsby* averages 3.83 stars. If it's good enough for F. Scott Fitzgerald, it's good enough for us.
- Amazon isn't the only path to success. With Kindle Unlimited sales dropping, more authors are exploring Kickstarter, direct sales, and wide distribution.
- Social media is still a gold mine if you use it right. TikTok and Facebook videos continue to generate massive income for indie authors who leverage them effectively.

By the time I had packed up and left, I had zero regrets, except for one. I had booked a nearby B&B instead of a room at the conference hotel, which meant missing out on late-night networking at the bar. Next year, I'll make sure I'm staying on site because that's where some of the best conversations happen.

Speaking of next year, this conference is now a permanent fixture on my author event calendar. The next “Ireland’s Publishing Show on the Wild Atlantic Way” will take place March 17–19, 2026. March 17 is St. Patrick’s Day, so expect even more fun in the pub the night before the event kicks off. Tickets are available on the website: <https://irelandspublishingshow.com/collections/tickets>.

If you’re an indie author, whether starting out or well established in your genre, you need to get yourself to one of these author events. You won’t just leave with new knowledge. You’ll leave with new friends, new strategies, and possibly a new direction for your career. ■



Paul Ian Cross, left, with Marion Hermannsen



Marion Hermannsen



Marion is a bilingual author, working in both German and English. She holds a masters of artsan MA in English, Spanish, and Italian, as well as a DipM (Marketing). She spent thirteen years both in London and Ireland while working in the finance and consulting industry.



Publish Drive Aims to Do It All



**The Platform's Range of Features Aids Authors
through Four Stages of Publishing**

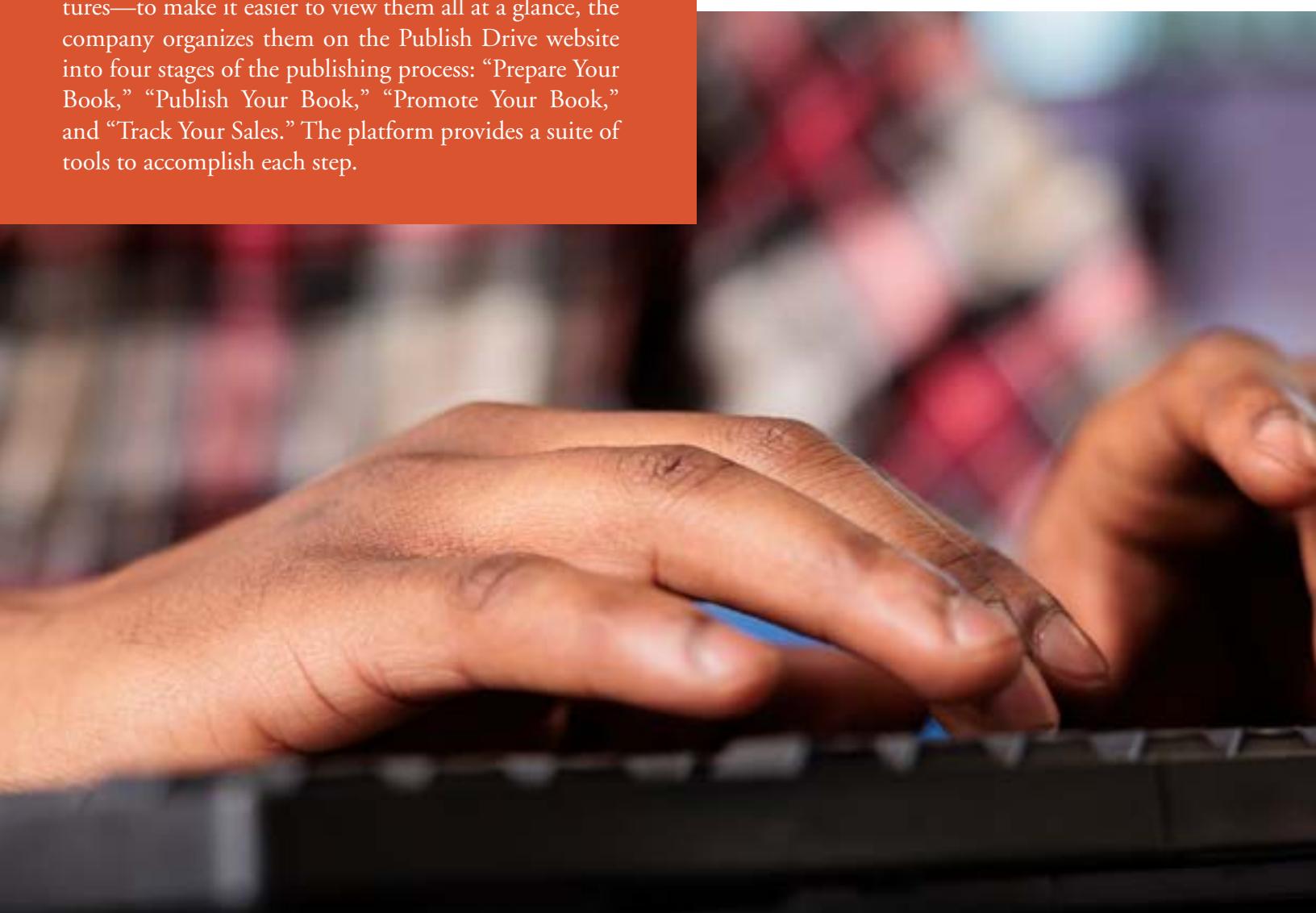


In an indie author's career, writing is only one piece of a large pie. The other slices of the pie consist of all the administrative, marketing, and publishing tasks that go into running an author business. Those tasks can often be time consuming, but getting them right is just as important to your success as the writing. Publish Drive (<https://publishdrive.com>) is an online publishing and distribution platform that aims to make many of those non-writing tasks faster, easier, and more fun.

Publish Drive allows users to upload and publish their first book for free, so authors can get a feel for what the platform has to offer. It's a broad range of features—to make it easier to view them all at a glance, the company organizes them on the Publish Drive website into four stages of the publishing process: "Prepare Your Book," "Publish Your Book," "Promote Your Book," and "Track Your Sales." The platform provides a suite of tools to accomplish each step.

Prepare Your Book

One area in which Publish Drive shines and where authors can have fun flexing their creative muscles is in the program's suite of book production tools. "It starts with a simple upload of your manuscript and cover files," according to the website. "Then we help you put everything together from book formatting to metadata." This includes several AI capabilities incorporated into Publish Drive's "Publishing Assistant," which launched in 2024.



To activate Publish Drive's AI Publishing Assistant, click on the Apps menu at the upper right corner of the screen, choose "Publishing Assistant," and find yourself face-to-screen with your new personal publishing assistant, "Alexandra," who cheerily informs you that you make the decisions; she'll show you the opportunities that lie ahead.

Alexandra guides users through a range of AI features and tools offered

Pro Tip:

Covers can be downloaded in ebook or audiobook format, and Alexandra can help ensure your cover aligns with the current cover trends for your genre.



by the site. Publish Drive's Publishing Assistant can help you in a number of areas, including:

- **Crafting and Optimizing Your Metadata:** Alexandra can help you optimize your book's metadata for improved visibility and sales across multiple channels by focusing on the eight types of metadata that are important to book sales—title, subtitle, series title, pen name, description, BISAC categories, keywords, and price—and providing suggestions to improve them.
- **Creating Cover Images:** Publish Drive's AI can analyze your book and pick eight key scenes to provide you with three AI-generated potential cover designs for your project. You can then modify the images, request more, or create all new images.
- **Crafting Descriptions, Blurb, and Titles:** Alexandra can help you craft search-engine-friendly descriptions, blurbs, and titles to increase your book's visibility and expand your reader base.
- **Generating Keywords, Amazon Categories, and BISAC Categories:** Alexandra is programmed to help wide authors pick keywords, Amazon categories, and BISAC categories that

best fit their book's plot and help boost its visibility in online stores.

Publish Your Book

Publish Drive was founded in 2014 with the primary purpose of helping simplify the process of publishing books wide to several retailers. Now, "It takes a few clicks to publish ebook, audiobook, and print book formats" in more than four hundred bookstores and 240,000 libraries across more than one hundred countries, according to the platform's website.

Distribution channels include: Amazon, Apple, Audible, Google Books, Ingram, Barnes & Noble, Baker & Taylor, Dreame, Scribd, and OverDrive. The platform also offers a free ebook conversion tool that can convert DOCX manuscripts to reflowable EPUB files. Authors are not required to have an account to use the conversion tool.

Pro Tip:

Publish Drive is one of Apple's preferred providers, so authors who choose to distribute their ebooks to Apple Books via Publish Drive have the option to turn on Apple Books Digital Narration to produce AI-narrated audiobooks. According to Publish Drive's site, the process takes approximately two months to complete.

Promote Your Book

Publish Drive offers built-in user tools for managing Amazon-sponsored Product Ads. Amazon also integrates with Savant, Publish Drive's proprietary AI technology, to help users identify product targets and improve ad campaign performance.

Track Your Sales

Publish Drive's sales analytics dashboard makes it easy to track your sales and performance data, according to the site. Select whether you want to view sales data or preorder data from the top of the screen. With built-in filtering, charts, and the ability to export data to Excel, authors have flexibility in managing sales and preorder data.

The site also sends users auto-royalty reports, so they can track earnings and payments.

Pro Tip:

Take a deeper dive into the features associated with each pricing tier and find a comparison graphic at <https://publishdrive.com/pricing.html>.

Pricing

Authors interested in Publish Drive can choose from two pricing models. The Public Plan consists of five tiers, with the option to pay monthly or annually by credit card or PayPal. Below is a high-level overview of the cost, number of distribution channels, and output formats associated with each tier.

- **Free:** Includes one book; access to thirty-one distribution channels; and ebook-format only.
- **Starter (\$13.99 annually or \$16.99 monthly):** Includes up to three books; access to fifty distribution channels; and ebook, audio, and print formats.
- **Standard (\$20.99 annually or \$24.99 monthly):** Includes up to six books; access to fifty distribution channels; and ebook, audio, and print formats.
- **Plus (\$41.99 annually or \$49.99 monthly):** Includes up to eighteen books; access to fifty distribution channels; and ebook, audio, and print formats.
- **Pro (\$83.99 annually or \$99.99 monthly):** Includes up to forty-eight books; access to fifty distribution channels; and ebook, audio, and print formats.

There is also a Subscription Plan for those with more than fifty books in their backlist, offering authors a flat-fee distribution model in place of the traditional tiers. Publish Drive also offers custom payment models by request.

In addition to the above plans, some of Publish Drive's added-value features, like Publishing Assistant, have charges associated with them. Upon sign-up, us-

ers are given sixty credits to try the Alexandra interface. To obtain more credit, users can click the blue diamond-shaped credit icon in the upper right corner of the screen to open the Buy Credits Now window.

Credits can be purchased in three amounts:

- one hundred credits for \$9.99,
- three hundred credits for \$24.99, or
- five hundred credits for \$34.99.

Credits never expire and can be redeemed at any time.

Starting at \$1.49 per title per month and adjusting upward as titles are added, users who need to track and manage royalty sharing can also add Abacus royalty management to their Publish Drive account. For authors who need to manage royalty splits with co-authors, translators, or others, data importing is available from Amazon KDP accounts (Kindle Unlimited), IngramSpark, Draft2Digital, Kobo Publishing/Subscription/Plus, Google, Apple Books, and more.

According to Publish Drive's website, Abacus can help you calculate author royalties automatically; share royalty reports with authors; add other revenue and cost sources for financials; run custom analytics for series, authors, or other datasets; and manage payments for authors using one royalty reporting software.

Authors with larger operations may be interested in a case study detailing how large indie publishers like Michael Anderle's LMPBN and others have used Abacus, which can be found on the Publish Drive site.



Strengths and Limitations

Among Publish Drive's many strengths is its robust tool set, user-friendly interface, AI-driven data insight capabilities, and its 0 percent revenue share pricing models. It's important to note that in lieu of a percentage-based revenue share, Publish Drive takes a flat fee that scales based on catalog size and sales volume, which can be a limitation for authors with smaller backlists and lower overall sales volume. Percentage-based revenue models of its competitors like Draft2Digital (10 percent) and IngramSpark (30 percent) can result in authors receiving a larger percentage of their profits. As catalog size and sales volume increase, however, Publish Drive's flat fee model quickly moves from a limitation to a strength.

Publish Drive users may also appreciate the ability to share and manage their account access. Publish Drive's User Management system allows you to invite other users via email and to enable or disable their access as an account owner or administrator, content manager, or accountant role for PD Distribution and/or an administrator for Abacus.

Some may consider the platform's reliance on AI a limitation; in order to use some of the program's features, an author needs to upload one or more of their books and allow the platform's AI to consume that content. Authors wishing to use a fixed format for image-heavy books, books with tables, or other unique formatting may also encounter is-

sues with Publish Drive's free EPUB converter, as it only offers reflowable format conversions, though Publish Drive offers paid conversion services that are guaranteed to be accepted during the upload process.

Finally, Publish Drive only offers print-on-demand author copies in a beta version as of the time of writing.

With tools, features, and multiple pricing options to accommodate backlists of any size, Kinga Jentetics and the team at Publish Drive have created a distribution platform worth considering. For authors seeking a customizable, data-driven approach to publishing across global platforms, Publish Drive might just be the missing piece of your publishing puzzle. ■

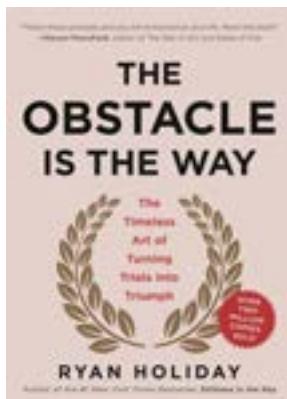
Jenn Mitchell

Jenn Mitchell writes Urban Fantasy and Weird West, as well as culinary cozy mysteries under the pen name, J Lee Mitchell. She writes, cooks, and gardens in the heart of South Central Pennsylvania's Amish Country. When she's not doing these things, she dreams of training llama riding ninjas. She enjoys traveling, quilting, hoarding cookbooks, Sanntangling, and spending time with the World's most patient and loving significant other.



From the Stacks

Book Club Summary



The Obstacle Is the Way

Ryan Holiday

<https://indieauthortraining.com/courses/the-obstacle-is-the-way-by-ryan-holiday>

As an indie author, you've probably encountered your fair share of obstacles. Whether it's finishing that manuscript, finding your audience, or navigating the ups and downs of self-publishing, it can feel like there's always something in the way.

But what if those obstacles weren't holding you back? What if they were actually showing you the way forward?

Ryan Holiday's *The Obstacle Is the Way* offers a new perspective—based on Stoic philosophy—where every challenge you face isn't a roadblock but an opportunity to grow and succeed. We've summarized the key ideas of this game-changing book to show you how you can turn your indie author struggles into the fuel that drives your success.

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.

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Universal book links have always been a handy shortcut to help readers easily find your books for purchase. Watch this tech tour to discover how Booklinker's universal book links can also help you, the author, by linking them to data on your readers' behavior, so you can understand what marketing strategy is working.

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Webinar

“How to Read, Speak About, and Promote Your Book—Without the Nerves!”

<https://indieauthortraining.com/webinars/author-speaking-confidence-from-dread-to-delight>

As an author, you know that visibility is key to getting your book into more readers’ hands. And you know the avenues that will take you there—speaking on stage, panels, interviews, book readings, and signings. But what if the thought of speaking about your book fills you with dread? What if you struggle with nerves, self-doubt, or simply don’t know how to present yourself in a way that feels natural and engaging?

In this webinar, you’ll learn how to overcome these obstacles, and you’ll get access to a free speaker checklist to help you feel prepared.



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.

“Embrace the Chaos: Creative Strategies for Indie Authors During Disruptions”

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/1UTyXvzYuuhgJu4h5l8qOT>

How do you deal with your author responsibilities when personal responsibilities get in the way? In this episode, learn how to break down daunting tasks into manageable chunks and embrace imperfections to keep your author business on track through whatever life throws at you: sicknesses, celebrations, burnout, and more.

“Decision Fatigue Demystified: Tips for Indie Authors to Streamline Choices”

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/1eBD087ihpoGef4JHWqIaW>

In June 2024, *IAM* author Jen B. Green wrote five tips for overcoming analysis paralysis in your author career. Revisit her article in this episode to learn how you can lighten the load of those day-to-day decisions, in your book business and beyond. ■

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.

Take Flight with Finch

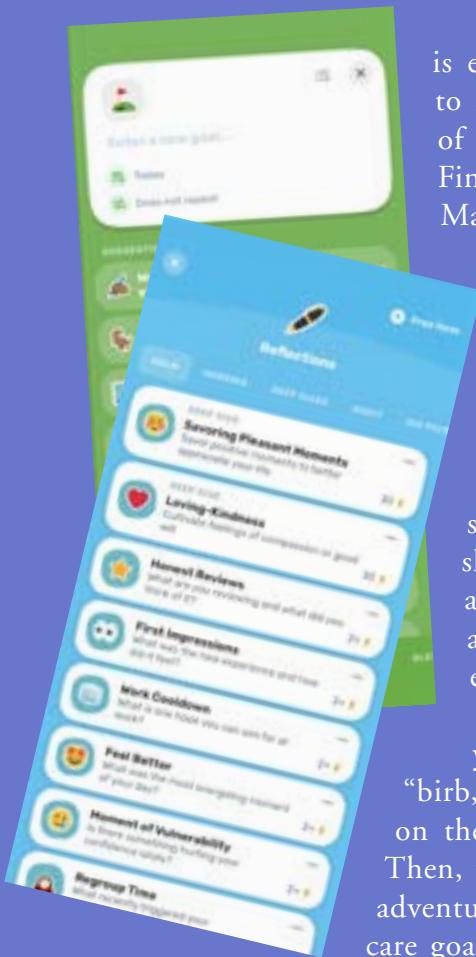


How a Cute App Can Help You Build Happier Writing Habits and Healthier Routines

Life as a writer can sometimes feel like a profound juggling act. Between family responsibilities, day jobs, and the complex work that comes with the independent publisher territory, self-care and positive habit building can often feel like the last things we have time to worry about. But everyone should know by now that our habits can play a major role in our success—or at least the time that it takes to achieve our most meaningful goals. So where do you start when you already feel so much weight on your shoulders?

Great news: There's an app for that.

The Finch app provides gamified self-care in the form of a pet "birb" that you nurture on your journey of growth by completing tasks and building habits to send it on adventures to locations around the world.



“We believe self-care is essential and we strive to make it a natural part of everyday life,” writes Finch’s Vice President of Marketing Katie Shill.

“In a world that glorifies overwork and self-neglect, we’re redefining well-being—empowering people to care for themselves with the same compassion they show others—through a fun, motivating, and meaningful experience.”

Inside the app, you’ll customize your “birb,” whose design is based on the real-life zebra finch. Then, you’ll send it on daily adventures by completing self-care goals you’ve selected. You can choose goals from a list of suggestions or self-care “journeys,” or you can create your own goals. As you complete your goals, your birb can acquire its own micropets, furniture for its home, clothing, and accessories.

The app also provides weekly reports to give you an overview of your goal progress. You can access insights any time to see which goals you’re completing the most and which goals you’re missing most often. Notifications can be adjusted to remind you to work on a particular goal at a day and time you set.

Each month, Finch releases a new theme with fun goodies you can earn by completing your chosen goals. Additionally, you and your friends or family members can “visit” each other, send your birbs on daily adventures together, and send one another gifts and words of encouragement.

Along with habit tracking, Finch offers goal-setting and mindfulness tools, including journaling prompts, meditations, breathing exercises, and

more. The app has both free and paid features, and users can even opt to become a “guardian” by sponsoring premium memberships for those who are sticking with their goals but who may not be able to afford upgrades on their own.

Finch for Authors

For authors, the Finch app can represent a gateway to structure, progress, and small but consistent acts of self-care, even when life feels chaotic. If your goal is to build or rebuild a consistent daily writing routine, you can create that goal and track it, and you’ll be rewarded every time you achieve that daily task. As the seasons change, you, too, can change. Over time, you can edit, alter, or replace your goals as needed to fit your life. You can start small, such as with a goal of one hundred, two hundred, or five hundred words, then edit the goal from one time per day to two times per day or more as your habit grows.

Consider setting once-per-week goals, such as a “30 Minutes of Social Media Work” on Mondays, or once-per-month goals, such as “Monthly Review and Planning Session” on the last Sunday of each month. Every goal created, whether focused on self-care or productivity, is completely customizable and can help indie authors build or improve their self-care, systems, and writing consistency—and whole-life balance—in a fun, trackable, and rewarding way.

Consider adopting your own birb with the Finch app, and you may just adopt a more balanced writing life in the process. ■



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.

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