

10 TIPS FOR SETTING UP YOUR DIRECT SALES STOREFRONT

**FEATURED
AUTHORS:**
*Annabel Chase,
Theresa Goodrich,
and Deborah Wilde*

MANY VOICES, ONE BOOK

*How Authors Build
Anthologies*

PRESS PLAY: 8 PODCASTS FROM INDIE LEADERS

WHAT'S TRENDING ON KICKSTARTER IN 2026

AI AND COPYRIGHT

*What Authors
Should Know*



**INDIE AUTHOR
MAGAZINE**



FOR
SELF-PUBLISHING
**NOVELISTS,
POETS AND
NON-FICTION
AUTHORS**

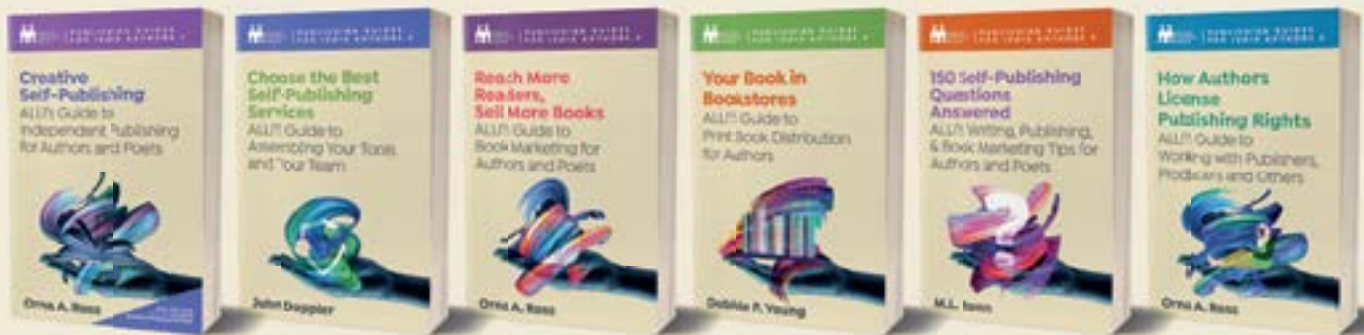
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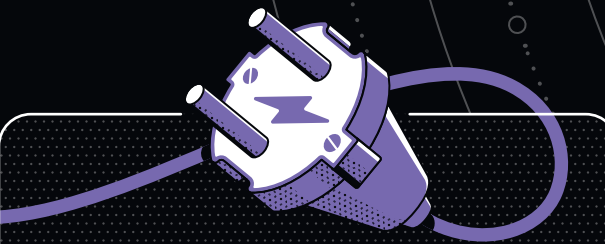


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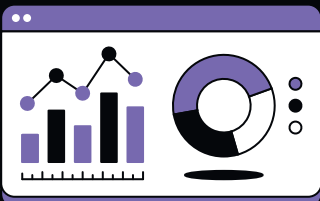
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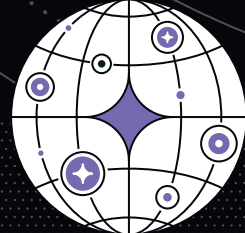
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By integrating Lulu's API with platforms like Ghost and Zapier, the magazine reduced its internal production time **from two weeks to just two hours**. Lulu's **high-quality printing** ensured that the magazine stood out as a professional, legitimate publication.

Chellie Honiker

Co-Founder & Publisher, Indie Author Magazine

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Nicole Schroeder
Editor in Chief

From the EDITOR IN CHIEF

Independent authors have always sought to write their own stories—and not just those they share with readers. For many creatives, the indie path has offered an opportunity to build and manage their business in whatever way they choose. While traditional publishing follows specific timelines and marketing strategies, independent authors can choose to keep their books exclusive to Amazon or publish widely, to release books at whatever speed suits their writing style, to market with paid advertising or grow their audience organically. They can set any goals, use any platforms, and pursue any strategies they think will work best for their books and their business.

Today, those options all still exist. But as the industry has adapted to platform changes, increasing costs, and the growth of AI, authors have found new ways to personalize their business according to what they value most.

In *IAM*'s second print issue of 2026, we've explored many of those new avenues. Some authors have moved to crowdfunding platforms to build reader excitement and fund custom projects beyond print-on-demand paperbacks. Kickstarter Head of Publishing Oriana Leckert shared the trends she's noticed on the platform in one of this quarter's features. Some authors have started direct sales storefronts to print and distribute books without the extra costs associated with third-party booksellers. You can read more about how to start your own direct sales storefront in this issue's Ten Tips article, or about how author Deborah Wilde has made her online store a key part of her business in her profile feature. Other authors, such as Annabel Chase—also a featured author in this issue—have shirked popular marketing trends and developed their own sales strategies instead.

Today's independent publishers are leaning into their independence more, and authors are funneling their creativity not only into their projects but into the foundations of their businesses as well. As you'll find in this issue, in many cases, their businesses have grown stronger because of it.

No matter the path you choose for your business, the point of indie publishing is that your business, like each story you write, is yours to create. You can choose to follow familiar paths, go in a different direction, or try something new altogether. But the pen is in your hands. And more than ever before, the next chapter is up to you.

Nicole Schroeder



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AUDIO SORCERESS

Transforming Stories into Sound

Audio Sorceress Uses Professional Voice Actors, Discovery Portal to Bring Books to Life for Authors

Indie authors may not commonly use the word “bespoke” to describe their businesses, but for an industry built on creatives paving unique paths for themselves and their work, the term is as apt as any other. Authors’ creative decisions, from the genre and tropes they select to the formats they offer and how they market them, strike a careful balance between fitting in and standing out. And as new authors and AI-generated content saturate the market further, that balance is more delicate than ever.

It’s a balance Marnye Young and Denise Black, of Audio Sor-

ceress, understand. They embrace the term “bespoke” as they describe their work—both for how it describes the authors they serve and for how it describes their own work at the company.

“Everything [at Audio Sorceress] is tailored,” says Young, founder and CEO of the company. “Instead of, ‘Everything is mass produced, and AI is mass produced, and these audiobooks are done by virtual voice, and we send out hundreds and hundreds of them at a time,’ this is humans. This is our blood, sweat, and tears, and we’re all working together to

ensure the success for all of us.”

The audiobook production company specializes in audiobooks that feel like “performances rather than recordings,” according to its website. Using SAG-AFTRA-contracted voice actors and incorporating music and sound effects into the narration, those performances have been enough to land authors in the Top Ten on Audible for fiction. The company’s newest feature, however, looks beyond the production stage of publishing to the marketing stage.

“There’s all these wonderfully talented indie authors that write



these books that no one ever hears about—in this case, audiobooks that no one ever listens to—because they don't even know that they exist," Young says.

She and Black hope Audio Sorceress's discovery portal, which launched earlier this year, will change that.

Giving Authors a Voice

Young, a voice actor herself, started Audio Sorceress in 2018, and Black joined a year later as the company's managing director—"and the bestie," Black jokes. The company is small; alongside the two women, the company employs just one graphic designer and five engineers. But the small company means the Audio Sorceress team can dedicate themselves fully to each new project.

"We kind of do it all," Black says. "If we don't do it, then we say yes and we figure it out as we go along."

For one project, that meant Young scrounging on social media to learn which agency represented a specific voice actor because the author had requested them. "I re-

member I spent, what was it, a week trying to find that guy?" Young asks Black. "But it's like a dog with a bone ... because it's the joy of being able to tell your author, 'I got him.'"

Although some audiobook production companies employ in-house narrators, Audio Sorceress has a roster of hundreds of SAG-AFTRA-contracted voice actors from which authors can choose—or Young will work to contact a specific actor, if the author has someone in mind.

"We want to be able to provide our authors with whoever they want as long as they have the budget for it," Black says.

Audio Sorceress offers single, dual, duet, and multi-cast narration, as well as immersive audio—most recently heard in David Viergutz's *Scaremail: The Drift*—in which sound effects and music are incorporated into the final recording. The company offers options for recording in Spanish and German as well; in February, the company began work on a project for the German translation of a best-selling LitRPG author whose series has sold more than a million copies.

More recently, the company has added a new feature meant to help authors market their work—not just the audiobooks created by Audio Sorceress, but other formats as well. The company's discovery portal provides each author with a landing page that includes information about their books, including blurbs, tropes lists, and content warnings; purchase links; links to the author's social media accounts; a book trailer created by Audio Sorceress; reviews; and interactive elements for readers, such as quizzes. "It's like a completely separate website, every one that you click on," Black says.

Authors work with designers in two one-hour sessions to design the page, which costs \$50 a month and is available to anyone who has produced at least one audiobook with the company. Like with each audiobook the company creates, the landing pages are fully customized to the author's preferences.

Audio Sorceress worked with design company Godot to create the discovery portal and advertises it to bring readers to authors' landing pages. From there, readers are recommended other authors, from across genres. Audio Sorceress already provided its authors with a book trailer and social media promotion along with each audiobook the company produced; however, Young says the discovery portal sup-

ports the company's mission even more.

"Our whole focus is about community, about human voices, human connectivity," she says. "Our company really focuses on empowerment, and these indie authors who don't get the exposure that they should have and deserve—this is empowering for them because this is another way for them to get out there."

Audio for All

Audio Sorceress is a woman-owned and women-led company, a distinction listed on the homepage of the company's website; both Young and Black consider that an important responsibility as mothers of daughters. They also recognize the role they can play for others in the industries they work with most.

In the audio industry, that means ensuring female narrators are paid equal rates to their male counterparts. "Some of the pay discrepancies, like the ones that exist in Hollywood, exist in the audio industry too, and we are trying hard to fix that," Young says.

On the author side of their business, the company offers scholarships for authors who aren't able to afford the cost of audiobook creation on their own. The company started the scholarship fund after raising money via Kickstarter in 2023; now, the scholarships are funded by donations from other authors who've worked with Audio Sorceress.

"One of our prolific female authors said, 'Hey, I want to pay for a scholarship for a Dark Romance author once a year. Rather than pay more in taxes, I want to put the money back into the community, which is what we're so huge on,'" Black says. Audiobook production prices vary based on several factors, including voice actors' individual



Marnye Young (left), founder and CEO of Audio Sorceress, and Denise Black, managing director of the company, pose for a photo while manning a booth for the company at an author event.

“Our whole focus is about community, about human voices, human connectivity.”
—Marnye Young, Audio Sorceress CEO

rates, the number of narrators used, and the length of the book. Since the first scholarships, however, another author has donated to fund an author’s first audiobook each year, and others have helped fund one-time scholarships for other authors.

“It just kind of has a ripple effect,” Young says.

Authors interested in applying for a scholarship with Audio Sorceress can learn more about the program at <https://audiosorceress.com/scholarships>. To be eligible, authors must be self-published or planning to self-publish, own full audio rights to their manuscript, have a final formatted manuscript ready for audio production, and be willing to engage in the promotion of the audiobook once its complete.

Creating Space

In the audiobook industry, where narrators are increasingly wrestling with the impact of AI, Young and Black celebrate that Audio Sorceress, at its core, is built by and for human creativity.

Between the company’s willingness to fully customize authors’ projects and experiences and the support authors in their community are willing to offer, they hope they can continue that trend.

“It’s always been successful when we work together,” Young says. It’s a message she and Black repeat often; they hope the discovery portal can help bring those words to life for their customers.

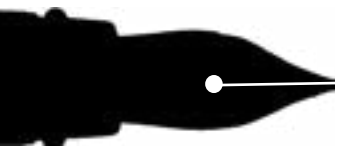
“We’ve run into a lot of authors that want to help other authors,” Young says. “This [portal] is not just recognizing their generosity but making it happen, putting it out there for others to partake in and be a part of developing an ecosystem where all these creatives are coming together and working for the benefit of each other.”

Authors who are interested in working with Audio Sorceress can reach out to the company on social media or email hello@audiosorceress.com. ■



Nicole Schroeder

Nicole Schroeder is a storyteller at heart. As the editor in chief of *Indie Author Magazine*, she brings nearly a decade of journalism and editorial experience to the publication, delighting in any opportunity to tell true stories and help others do the same. She holds a bachelor’s degree from the Missouri School of Journalism and minors in English and Spanish. Her previous work includes editorial roles at local publications, and she’s helped edit and produce numerous fiction and nonfiction books, including a Holocaust survivor’s memoir, alongside independent publishers. Her own creative writing has been published in national literary magazines. When she’s not at her writing desk, Nicole is usually in the saddle, cuddling her guinea pigs, or spending time with family. She loves any excuse to talk about Marvel movies and considers National Novel Writing Month its own holiday.



Author Inklings:

The Art of Showing up for Your Draft

Hello, my pretties!

We've spent the first quarter laying foundations for the new branch of our author business. Genre. Pen name. Branding. Series thinking. Outlining. All the invisible work that makes visible progress possible.

Now comes the part that actually matters: the writing. Maybe that's the part of the journey you find fun, or scary, or easy. Maybe it's the step you've already finished. Or maybe you haven't a clue where to start. Wherever you are in your journey, remember this series is about taking your lovely ideas and turning them into a sustainable author pipeline. So let's tease it out a little, shall we?

Here's what I've learned after years of drafting books: The writers who finish aren't always the fastest or the most talented. They're the ones who figured out how to show up consistently without burning out.

Sustainable drafting is not about word count sprints or writing until your eyes blur. It's about building a practice you can



Read more of Susan's yearlong endeavor to launch a new pen name at:

indieauthormagazine.com/tag/author-inklings.

maintain week after week, month after month, book after book.

Finding Your Rhythm

Every writer has a natural rhythm. Some write best in the morning before the world wakes up. Some come alive after midnight. Some need long, uninterrupted stretches. Others work better in short bursts.

The mistake most writers make is assuming their rhythm should look like someone else's.

I spent years trying to be a morning writer because that's what productivity advice told me to do. I would drag myself to my desk at 5 a.m., stare at the screen, and produce garbage. It wasn't until I admitted I'm an afternoon writer that things clicked.

Your rhythm is not a character flaw. It's information. Use it.

Word Count Goals That Actually Work

Word count goals can be motivating or crushing, depending on how you set them.

The key is choosing a number that feels slightly challenging but achievable on your worst days, not just your best ones. If you can only hit your target when everything aligns perfectly, you'll spend most of your time feeling like a failure.

I aim for one thousand words per writing session—well, actually, I tend to aim for a scene or a chapter a day, but one thousand words is my minimum goal. Some days I exceed that. Some days I fall short. But the goal is low enough that I rarely skip a session entirely, and that consistency adds up faster than sporadic bursts of productivity.

A thousand words a day, five days a week, gives you a sixty-thousand-word draft in three months. Perhaps your goal is five hundred words; that is still two books a year. Even small daily goals can add up quickly as long as you're consistent.

Protecting Your Writing Time

Writing time doesn't protect itself. You have to guard it like it's something precious, because it is.

This means saying no to things if they'll interfere with your writing. It means closing browser tabs. It means telling people you're unavailable, even when you're technically home. It means treating your writing time with the same respect you'd give a meeting with your boss.

I block my writing time in my calendar like an appointment. During those hours, I don't check email. I don't scroll social media. I don't "quickly" do one household task. I write.

Is this always easy? No. Is it always possible? Also no. But having the boundary makes it easier to return to writing when life inevitably interrupts.

When You Fall Off the Wagon

In your writing journey, no matter how sustainable you make your goals, you will miss days. You may miss weeks, even months. Life will happen, and your writing practice will stumble.

This is not failure. This is reality.

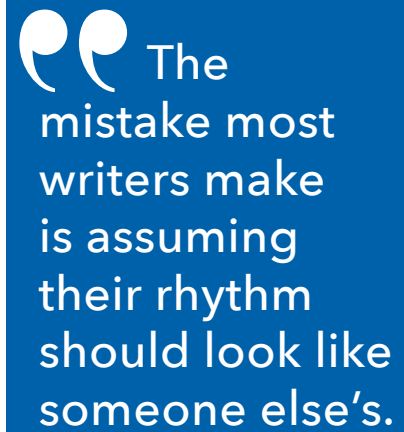
The writers who finish books aren't the ones who never stop. They're the ones who start again without punishing themselves. They treat every writing session as a fresh beginning rather than evidence of past failures.

When I miss my word count goal on a given day, I don't try to make up for it the next day with the words I should've written last time. I just sit down and try to hit today's word count. No guilt. No marathon catch-up attempts. Just the next session.

That grace is what makes a practice sustainable.

Progress over Perfection

First drafts are supposed to be messy. That's their job. They exist so you have something to revise.



The
mistake most
writers make
is assuming
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someone else's.

If you're agonizing over every sentence, you're editing while drafting, and that's a recipe for never finishing. Remember, your drafting brain is not your editing brain. One is creative; the other is critical. Allow the first one enough time to do its magical thing before you switch to the business

one. In essence, give yourself permission to write badly. You can fix bad writing later, but you can't fix a blank page.

I remind myself constantly: Done is better than perfect. A finished messy draft is infinitely more valuable than a perfect first chapter.

Reflection Exercise

I can give plenty of advice on setting sustainable word count goals and showing up to write consistently, but only you can decide what that means for you. Ask yourself:

- When do I naturally have the most creative energy?
- What word count goal would feel challenging but achievable on a bad day?
- What tends to interrupt my writing time, and how might I protect against it?
- How do I typically respond when I miss writing sessions?

If you are struggling to answer these questions in relation to your writing, consider how you behave with any other work processes. How did you study at school? How do you set about your daily routine or household chores? There will be patterns in any of these tasks that may give you insight into how you will best approach writing. Test it out, then review until you find a system that works for you.

Reality Check-In

I'm now twenty-five thousand words into my Romance draft, and the sustainable approach is working. I write Tuesday through Saturday afternoons, aiming for one thousand words per session. Some weeks I hit six thousand words. Some weeks I manage three thousand. But I haven't stopped.

The story is taking shape in ways I didn't expect. My outline is holding, mostly, though one subplot has grown larger than planned. I'm letting it happen rather than forcing the original vision.

What surprises me most is how much I'm enjoying the process. By keeping the pressure manageable, I've preserved the joy. And that joy is what keeps me coming back.

Happy writing,

Susan



Susan Odev

Susan Odev is the co-author of the Mike Atwell Cozy Mystery series and several other successful whodunnits involving vicars, Shakespeare, and suspicious cake. A lifelong list-maker, deadline-dodger, and one-woman writing retreat (complete with dog), she wrote her first best-selling nonfiction book in 2010. She lives in Kent, England, dreams of the Portuguese hills, occasionally tidies her desk, and is always five minutes late for her own ideas. Susan has written for numerous magazines, spoken at international conferences, and contributed to workshops on a range of personal development topics, and yet can still get lost in her own bathroom.



From the Stacks

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<https://webinars.indieauthortraining.com/talks/whats-your-books-job-writing-nonfiction-as-a-tool-to-grow-your-business>

Every decision you’ll make about your book’s content, structure, voice, and publishing path gets shaped by the answer to one question: What’s your book’s job? In other words, what will it do for your business, for yourself, and for your audience?

Getting clear on what you want out of your book will shape every other decision you make, and knowing your book’s job will prevent you from writing the book you wanted to write instead of the book your audience needs. A book can serve your business even if it’s not a bestseller. In this session, we explore different potential jobs, including models for how writing a non-fiction book can provide return on investment, both personally and professionally.



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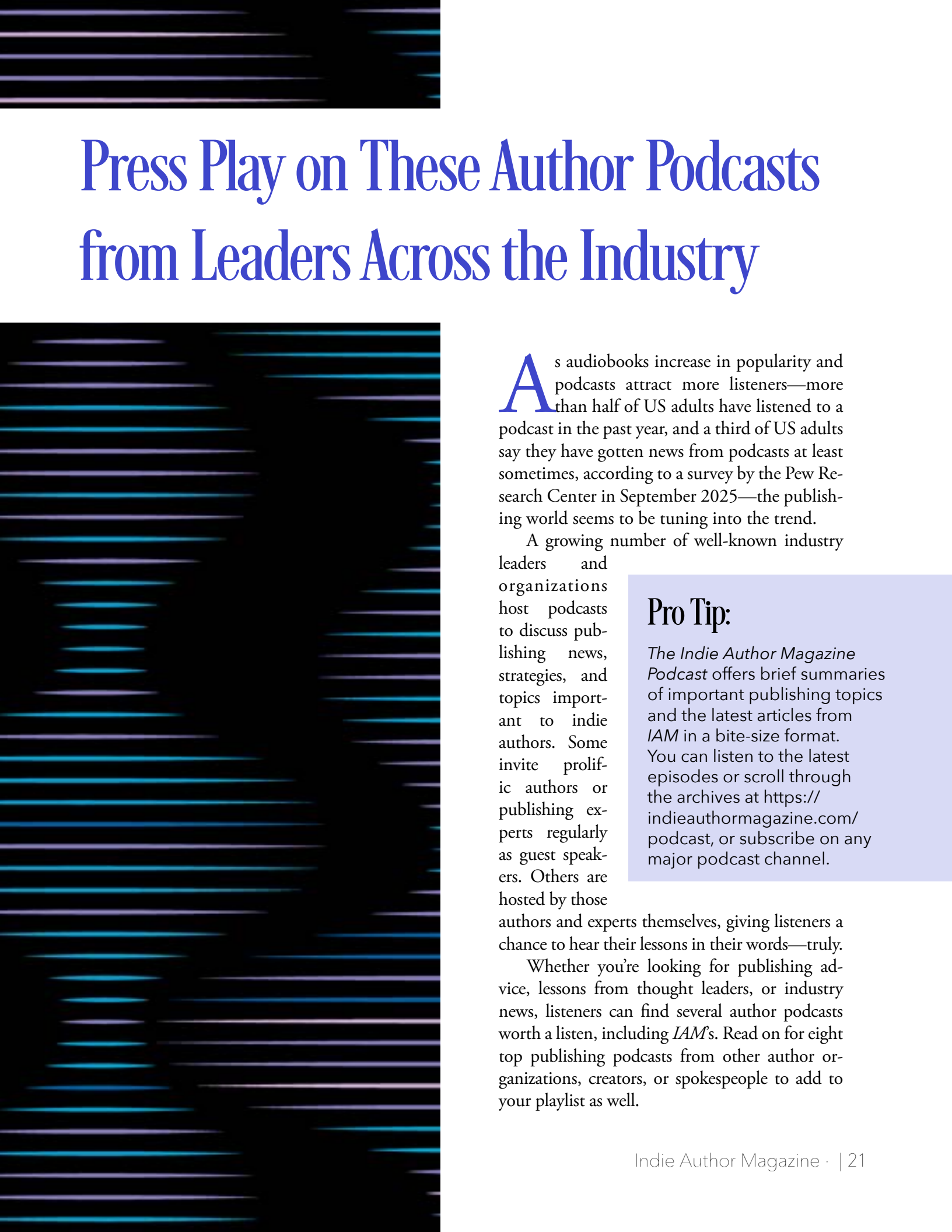


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Press Play on These Author Podcasts from Leaders Across the Industry

As audiobooks increase in popularity and podcasts attract more listeners—more than half of US adults have listened to a podcast in the past year, and a third of US adults say they have gotten news from podcasts at least sometimes, according to a survey by the Pew Research Center in September 2025—the publishing world seems to be tuning into the trend.

A growing number of well-known industry leaders and organizations host podcasts to discuss publishing news, strategies, and topics important to indie authors. Some invite prolific authors or publishing experts regularly as guest speakers. Others are hosted by those

authors and experts themselves, giving listeners a chance to hear their lessons in their words—truly.

Whether you're looking for publishing advice, lessons from thought leaders, or industry news, listeners can find several author podcasts worth a listen, including *IAM*'s. Read on for eight top publishing podcasts from other author organizations, creators, or spokespeople to add to your playlist as well.

Pro Tip:

The Indie Author Magazine Podcast offers brief summaries of important publishing topics and the latest articles from *IAM* in a bite-size format. You can listen to the latest episodes or scroll through the archives at <https://indieauthormagazine.com/podcast>, or subscribe on any major podcast channel.

The Creative Penn

Listen at:

<https://www.thecreativepenn.com/the-creative-penn-podcast-for-authors/>

With nearly nine hundred episodes as of publication and more than 10 million downloads as of April 11, 2026, it's understandable why Joanna Penn's podcast for author-entrepreneurs is one of the most well-known in the independent publishing world. New episodes of *The Creative Penn* drop every Monday, offering advice, information, and inspiration for independent authors at every stage of their publishing careers. Penn frequently invites guests to the podcast to share lessons from their businesses and openly shares her own publishing strategies as well. Penn also makes a point of incorporating industry-adjacent news into her discussions—what updates may be coming to Spotify Music, for example—to highlight changes that may affect indie authors down the road.



Helping Writers Become Authors

Listen at:

<https://www.helpingwritersbecomeauthors.com/podcast-episodes-archive/>



For authors looking for lessons on craft and some extra writing inspiration, K.M. Weiland, author of several writing guides and an award-winning craft blog, hosts *Helping Writers Become Authors*. The podcast echoes many of the lessons on Weiland's blog and in her books in its weekly thirty-minute episodes. Installments focus on writing technique and story structure while also often touching on how authors can find motivation and inspiration when working through their drafts.

Are there any author podcasts we missed that you think deserve to be featured? Send us an email at feedback@indieauthormagazine.com and let us know!

Self Publishing Insiders

Listen at:

<https://draft2digital.com/blog/category/self-publishing-insiders-podcast/>

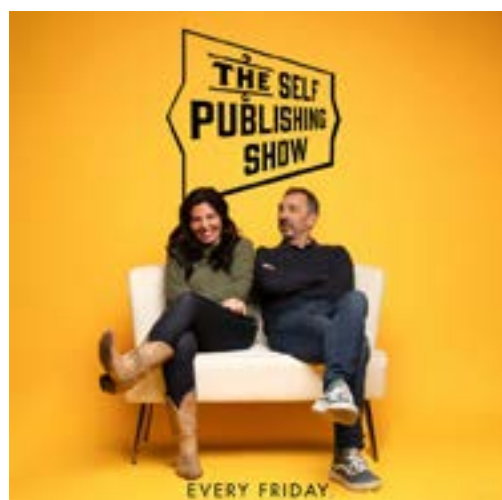
Although Draft2Digital leaders host *Self Publishing Insiders*, the company's podcast is useful for more than just those who use the platform. In the weekly hour-long episodes, Mark Leslie Lefebvre, Jim Azevedo, and Lexi Greene interview industry leaders on craft, production topics, marketing, and general business strategies. Many episodes center on insights and advice shared via D2D Spotlight, a series of live-streamed interviews on Facebook and YouTube. Additionally, some episodes highlight updates to Draft2Digital or explore industry changes that may affect the platform's users.



The Self Publishing Show

Listen at: <https://www.learnselfpublishing.com/podcast-sps-audio>

The Learn Self Publishing courses and the annual Self Publishing Show Live have offered plenty of lessons for authors for the past two years; as of the start of this year, *The Self Publishing Show* is bringing those lessons directly to authors once again. After an eighteen-month hiatus, James Blatch relaunched the podcast in February and introduced his new co-host, Cecilia “Cissy” Mecca. The two publish new episodes weekly—running forty-five minutes to an hour long, installments include discussions about popular publishing strategies, such as what to include in your front matter and back matter; interviews with guest authors; and conversations about popular topics in the industry, including marketing strategies and the use of AI.



Self-Publishing with ALLi

Listen at: <https://selfpublishingadvice.org/podcast/>



The Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi) hosts *The Self-Publishing with ALLi* podcast, an industry-focused podcast that publishes multiple times a week. Sunday's episodes feature inspirational interviews with guest speakers, discussions about creative strategy and goal setting with ALLi founder and director Orna Ross, or a member Q&A that spotlights ALLi's services for authors. Wednesday's episodes feature deep dives into publishing strategies on a list of rotating topics: editing and design, production and distribution, marketing and promotion, and publishing for profit. Friday's episodes, hosted by Dan Holloway, include a brief overview of publishing news and updates from the previous week. The variety of hosts and their backgrounds—many are from countries outside the US, including Ross—gives authors an even broader look at the industry.

The Self Publishing with Dale Podcast

Listen at: <https://selfpublishingwithdale.com/index.php/podcast/>

Dale L. Roberts has been a full-time independent author since 2014, according to his website. Now, he shares what he's learned on his podcast, *The Self Publishing with Dale Podcast*, and on his YouTube channel of the same name. Through both outlets, Roberts covers news and popular topics within the industry, including platform changes to Amazon and publishing headlines such as the Anthropocene settlement. Episodes are only fifteen to twenty minutes long, and new episodes air weekly.



Sell More Books Show

Listen at: <https://www.sellmorebooksshow.com/>

Hosts of the *Sell More Books Show* podcast, Bryan Cohen and H. Claire Taylor, keep the spotlight of their show on book marketing. New episodes air every week, each one covering a topic related to boosting your sales and strengthening your readership. Covering topics such as direct sales for audiobooks, reader magnets, and avoiding book marketing burnout, Cohen and Taylor approach each topic with both new and experienced authors in mind and frequently feature guest speakers from across the industry.



Writer's, Ink

Listen at: <https://writersinkpodcast.com/episodes/>

J. D. Barker, Christine Daigle, Kevin Tumlinson, and Jena Brown host *Writers, Ink*, a weekly conversational podcast with a collection of prolific authors from both traditional publishing and indie publishing circles. Episodes begin with discussions about entertainment headlines and publishing news from the industry, including occasional behind-the-scenes updates on topics important to authors, such as updates to platforms like Draft2Digital or Scrivener. The hosts then shift to discussions with guest authors,

such as V. E. Schwab, Johnny B. Truant, James Patterson, and A.G. Riddle, about their journey to publishing, their writing process, and more. Episodes are an hour long, and new episodes are published weekly. ■



Nicole Schroeder

Nicole Schroeder is a storyteller at heart. As the editor in chief of *Indie Author Magazine*, she brings nearly a decade of journalism and editorial experience to the publication, delighting in any opportunity to tell true stories and help others do the same. She holds a bachelor's degree from the Missouri School of Journalism and minors in English and Spanish. Her previous work includes editorial roles at local publications, and she's helped edit and produce numerous fiction and nonfiction books, including a Holocaust survivor's memoir, alongside independent publishers. Her own creative writing has been published in national literary magazines. When she's not at her writing desk, Nicole is usually in the saddle, cuddling her guinea pigs, or spending time with family. She loves any excuse to talk about Marvel movies and considers National Novel Writing Month its own holiday.



An AI Writing
System Built
for the Moment
Writers Usually
Stop

Inside a Web-Based Writing Tool Helping Authors Build Story Outlines, Maintain Voice, and Keep Momentum Through Drafting

For a lot of writers, getting started isn't the hardest part. It's what happens a few thousand words in.

Drafting slows down. A scene stops working. The next step in the story feels unclear. Sometimes the problem is structural—a missed beat or underdeveloped character. Other times it isn't technical at all; instead, hesitation, uncertainty, or a loss of creative momentum pull the writer out of the work entirely.

Plotdrive is built for that moment, whether that break in momentum comes from narrative friction, technical uncertainty, or a quieter creative stall.

The AI-assisted writing software is designed for longform work like novels and scripts. It combines a document editor with built-in tools for outlining, drafting, and revision, allowing writers to generate ideas or text without leaving their manuscript. But the platform isn't only designed for mid-draft recovery. It can also be used from the beginning of a project, with guided prompts that help writers build character profiles, outlines, and style guides before drafting starts. Writers can construct an entire story foundation inside the system, import existing work, or start from scratch. Planners can assemble a full story bible before writing a single chapter, and discovery writers can skip that layer entirely and begin drafting.

The system adapts to both approaches.

As founder Jay Rosenkrantz explains it, “We think writers were meant to create stories, not fight computer programs or do it alone.” The goal, he says, is to “remove the blocks and friction and get more finished stories into the world.”

The smartest writing software for finishing your work

Plotdrive adapts to you, giving you simple, joyful tools to overcome blocks, stay in flow, and love the writing process again.

Tools: One-Click Breakthroughs

Plotdrive's AI Tools are like power-ups for your writing. Expand a

continue on from where I left off in Chapter 3!

Go

The central corridors of the station felt like entering a tomb. The environmental systems barely functioned, leaving the air stale and the lighting flickering sporadically. Frost condensation coated the walls.

A Writing System Built Around Flow

Plotdrive's workspace is organized around the manuscript. Writers work inside a document editor that looks a lot like Google Docs with similar formatting and sharing tools. Everything else is layered around that core.

Similarly to Scrivener, a persistent sidebar organizes projects, notes, character profiles, and other supporting materials, allowing writers to move through different parts of a manuscript without switching tools. As projects grow more complex, the sidebar becomes a navigation system, keeping story elements accessible as the draft evolves.

AI functionality is integrated into this environment rather than layered on top of it. Writers interact with the program through actions tied to the text—often as pre-built tools designed for specific tasks like expanding a passage, adjusting tone, or continuing a scene. Suggestions appear in place, where they can be accepted, revised, or

ignored. The system also distinguishes between AI-generated and human-written text, making it easier to review changes and maintain control over the draft. The emphasis is on reducing the need to stop and formulate prompts, allowing the writer to stay focused on the draft.

Beside this sits Co-writer, a more flexible AI tool that Rosenkrantz describes as a mix of developmental editor, writing coach, and assistant. It can be prompted directly when a writer wants input, or in a more active “auto mode,” where it surfaces suggestions during the writing process.

Rosenkrantz contrasts this with more common AI workflows: “ChatGPT feels like a hundred fragmented conversations. Every session starts from scratch,” he says. Plotdrive is designed to avoid that fragmentation, functioning instead as “a co-writer who’s read every word you’ve written and doesn’t forget.” It doesn’t have to be every word, however; users can also be selective about

which words the tool can access and, in the navigational sidebar, toggle a switch to determine whether a document is visible to AI tools.

Tools like Google NotebookLM operate from a similar premise of working directly with provided

documents, but they tend to function more as an external layer for reference, analysis, or synthesis. Plotdrive, in contrast, is designed to be an environment where drafting and revision happen continuously inside the same workspace.

How Writers Use Plotdrive

Plotdrive is designed to fit into existing workflows rather than replace them, and in practice, writers tend to engage with it in a few distinct ways.

For some, the entry point isn't drafting at all. They begin instead by working through ideas with Co-writer, developing character profiles and plot outlines. At this stage, the chatbot-style AI tool built into Plotdrive functions less as a text generator and more as a space for maintaining momentum at the conceptual level—helping writers clarify structure, direction, or narrative problems before committing anything to draft.

From there, most long-term use shifts into the manuscript itself. This is where drafting, revision, and comparison happen in context. Writers move between sections of their work while keeping edits anchored directly to the text, using in-line feedback and revision tools as they refine scenes and structure.

How each part of the system is used varies significantly by writer. Newer authors tend to rely on Plotdrive's AI tools more heavily for structure and guidance throughout drafting, but more experienced writers use them selectively—for example, to troubleshoot a scene, test alternatives, or speed up specific revision passes. Planners often spend more time upfront building outlines, character profiles, and style guides, and discovery writers are more likely to engage these tools as needed during the drafting process.

Within its workspace, Plotdrive also includes a library of tools designed to support different stages of the writing process. These tools are grouped by function. Early-stage features support brainstorming



and idea development, helping writers explore character concepts, world-building directions, or possible narrative paths before drafting begins. Mid-stage tools focus on revision, such as restructuring scenes, adjusting tone, or refining passages at the paragraph level. Additional tools extend beyond the manuscript, supporting planning work related to a book's positioning or post-draft preparation.

Each tool works directly inside the manuscript and completes a single, defined action based on an AI prompt and selected text or project context documents. This allows writers to move between drafting and editing without leaving the document or re-entering instructions each time.

Writers can also create custom tools tailored to their own process. These allow repeated workflows—such as recurring edits or stylistic checks—to be saved and reused consistently across a project.

In one example from the walk-through, Rosenkantz described a writer who built a custom tool not for drafting or revision but for motivation: generating inspirational quotes in the style of preferred authors. Although not part of the core writing process, it became a way to reengage with the work during moments of stalled momentum.

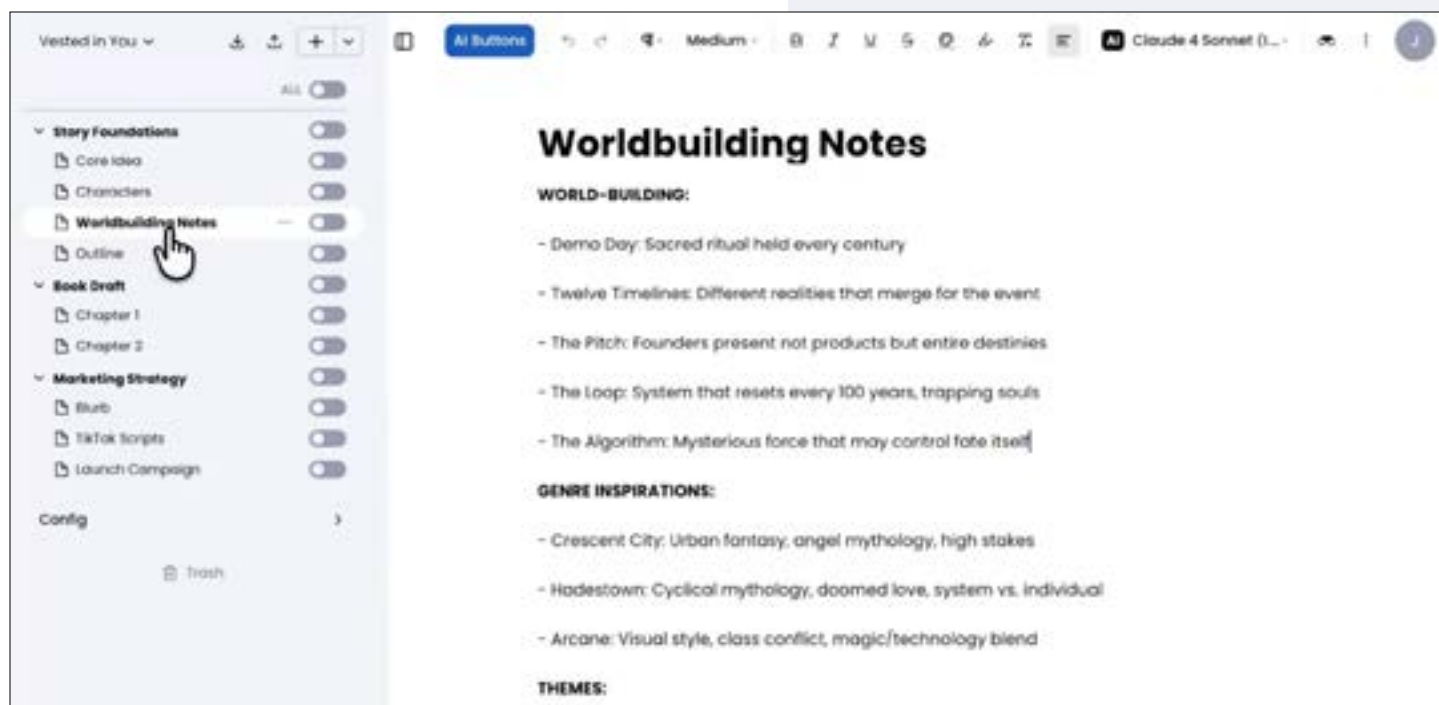
Overall, the system is designed to be flexible enough to reflect how individual writers work rather than requiring them to adapt to a fixed set of predefined steps.

Voice, Context, and Workflow Continuity

A core part of Plotdrive's design is how it handles an author's voice—not as a preset setting, even though there are several options during onboarding, but instead as something that emerges over time through context and use.

At the center of that system is the writing style guide feature, which is a collection of working documents that define a project's tone, structure, narrative behavior, and stylistic preferences. Writers can build these documents manually, generate them through prompts, or construct them from existing writing samples.

In practice, these guides often become substantial reference documents.



Rather than a few notes or a checklist, they can run several thousand words, combining examples of the writer's own prose, genre expectations, and counterexamples that define what the writing should not do. That distinction matters for writers concerned about AI flattening their style. Plotdrive's approach is highly dependent on input quality: The more specific and grounded the material, the more accurately the system can reflect a writer's voice instead of defaulting to generic prose patterns.

Behind the scenes, the platform integrates multiple AI models, including Claude, ChatGPT, and Gemini, and authors can switch between them manually. Writers don't interact with these directly, but they shape how responses are generated.

Rosenkrantz frames this through what he calls a "creative control pyramid." At the base is model selection: "Which AI model do you like to use? They can all come into Plotdrive, and you can choose," he says. Above that is instruction clarity: "How clear are you in what you want the AI to accomplish for you at any phase of your workflow?" And at the top is context—the accumulated understanding the system has of the story, characters, and intent.

Plotdrive's design focuses heavily on protecting that top layer while also giving users control over the other two. By keeping drafts, notes, and style guides inside a unified workspace, the system maintains context automatically. Writers don't have to repeatedly reintroduce information or restart conversations. Instead, the AI responds with awareness of the broader project, drawing from materials already embedded in the workspace.

This idea of continuity extends into how the platform handles movement and flexibility. Because everything lives in the cloud and syncs across devices, writers can shift between desktop, laptop, tablet, or phone without losing their place in the work. Drafts can be imported from Word documents, Google Docs, or Markdown files, then exported back into those formats when needed. For writers working in short bursts or fragmented sessions, that continuity reduces the need to reconstruct context every time they return to a project.

A high-angle, close-up photograph of a person's hands typing on a white, minimalist keyboard. The person is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt. To the right of the keyboard, a dark-colored cup sits on a dark desk. The background is slightly blurred, showing a laptop screen and other desk items. The overall lighting is soft and professional.

Pricing

Plotdrive operates on a subscription model where AI usage is tied to monthly credit allocation.

The Pro plan is \$29 per month when billed annually, or \$39 on a month-to-month basis. It includes 20,000 AI credits per month, access to multiple AI models, unlimited projects, and collaboration for one additional user.

The Team plan is \$149 per month annually, or \$199 monthly, with 80,000 AI credits, up to three users, and shared workspaces designed for collaborative writing environments.

A Publisher tier is also available with custom pricing, including onboarding support, workflow design, and reporting tools for larger organizations.

Those interested in the platform can learn more or sign up for a free trial at <https://plotdrive.com>.

Limitations and Practical Considerations

Plotdrive is most effective when writers bring intentionality to the process. It is not designed to replace foundational thinking but to extend it once that foundation exists and a project already has direction, structure, or voice to work from.

Without strong inputs—such as structured notes, a working style guide, or a developed draft—output can drift toward generic phrasing or surface-level suggestions. The system performs best when it has a specific element it can use as an anchor, whether that is narrative direction, clearly defined character voice, or examples of the writer's own prose that establish tone and rhythm.

Rosenkrantz is explicit that the system does not create voice on its own; it reflects what it is given. In other words, the more clearly a writer defines their style and provides grounded examples, the more accurately the tool can echo that voice rather than defaulting to generic patterns.

Rosenkrantz is also careful not to frame AI as a replacement for editorial expertise. Although Plotdrive can speed

up drafting, help refine scenes, and offer developmental feedback during the writing process, he acknowledges that human editors still play a crucial role: understanding how a manuscript will actually land with readers and how tone, pacing, and structure translate into market expectations and emotional impact. AI can assist with shaping the text, but it does not replace that interpretive judgment or the experience of working with real audiences and publishing contexts.

For writers who prefer fully manual workflows or who are uncomfortable incorporating AI into their creative process, the platform is unlikely to feel necessary. It is not designed for automation without engagement, and it does not attempt to remove the writer from decision-making. Instead, it assumes active participation throughout—writers remain responsible for shaping, accepting, or rejecting what the system produces at every stage.

Plotdrive is not trying to redefine what writing is. Instead, it focuses on solving a

more specific, practical problem: what happens when writing stops.

For some writers, that solution manifests as smoother drafting and fewer breaks in flow. For others, the benefit of the app is less about speed and more about recovery—having a place where both technical and creative blocks can be addressed without stepping away from the manuscript or rebuilding context from scratch.

Updates to credit usage focus on streamlining drafting, revision, and restructuring. Planned features also extend beyond the manuscript into marketing and post-publication tasks, such as drafting marketing and social media copy. Together, these changes suggest a gradual broadening of the platform's scope beyond drafting alone and into more of the work involved in finishing a book.

What Plotdrive ultimately offers users is not a new definition of writing but instead a different environment for continuing it—built on the assumption that momentum is fragile and worth protecting. ■



Jenn Lessmann

Jenn Lessmann is the author of *Unmagical: a Witchy Mystery* and three stories on Kindle Vella. A former barista, stage manager, and high school English teacher with advanced degrees from impressive colleges, she continues to drink excessive amounts of caffeine, stay up later than is absolutely necessary, and read three or four books at a time. Jenn is currently studying witchcraft and the craft of writing, and giggling internally whenever they intersect. She writes snarky paranormal fantasy for new adults whenever her dog will allow it.

A photograph of two young women in an office environment. The woman in the foreground, wearing a pink sweater, is smiling and looking down at a desk. The woman behind her, wearing a blue cardigan, is also smiling and holding a tablet, with a pen in her hand as if writing. The background is a blurred office space with shelves and windows. Overlaid on the image is the text '10 Tips for' in a large, white, serif font with a black outline.

10 Tips for

Setting up a Direct Sales Storefront



The 2025 Written Word Media Indie Author Survey found 30 percent of authors surveyed are already selling direct, and another 30 percent plan to start this year. Among authors earning more than \$10,000 per month, roughly half sell direct.

The appeal is straightforward: higher per-sale margins—up to 95 percent of the sale price minus processing fees, compared with 70 percent maximum on Amazon; ownership of customer data, such as email addresses, purchase history, and format preferences; and independence from any single retailer's algorithms or policy changes. The tradeoff is equally straightforward: The author handles what retailers used to handle—storefront setup, file delivery, payment processing, tax compliance, and driving traffic. Kindlepreneur reports 66 percent of authors selling direct have more than five books, and 46 percent have more than ten—which means that many titles to manage in a direct sales storefront while trying to write the next one.

The following ten tips cover how to get a direct sales storefront running without turning the project into a second full-time job. The emphasis is on starting simply, proving the concept, and scaling only after the basics are working.

Pick a Platform that Matches Your Comfort Level.

Indie authors have three broad categories of options for selling direct, and the right choice depends on how much infrastructure you want to manage and how you plan to reach readers. Hosted platforms handle the technical side for you in exchange for a monthly fee, transaction percentage, or both. Self-hosted platforms run on your own site, offering maximum control and customization in exchange for more technical setup. Payment processors skip the storefront entirely, letting you create products and generate direct purchase links—including QR codes—without building a full shop.

- **Hosted platforms** are the lowest-friction entry point for most authors. Payhip is free to start and only takes 5 percent per transaction on the free tier, with no monthly fees, and it handles EU and UK digital VAT automatically. It works well for authors who primarily want to sell ebooks and audiobooks with minimal setup. Shopify sits at the other end of the hosted spectrum, starting at \$39 per month for the basic plan, with a massive app ecosystem and deep integrations with print-on-demand services, email platforms, and payment processors. It suits authors planning to sell across multiple formats and scale over time. Curios takes a different approach—it's an author-focused marketplace where readers can browse across multiple authors' catalogs, which adds a layer of built-in discoverability that a stand-alone storefront doesn't offer. Direct2Readers is a sister site of *Indie Author Magazine* and functions primarily as a discoverability engine, helping readers find indie authors and their work, with direct sales available as a fallback option rather than the central focus.
- **Self-hosted platforms** trade convenience for control. WooCommerce is a free WordPress plugin that offers maximum customization but requires a self-hosted WordPress site and more technical comfort. FluentCart is a rising option in the same space and a strong contender. Both options suit authors who already have a WordPress site or are comfortable setting one up and who want to keep more of each sale and own their entire sales stack.
- **Payment processors** are the most stripped-down option. Tools like Stripe and Square let you create a product inside the processor and generate a direct purchase link without building a storefront. Those links can be converted into QR codes, which is especially useful for in-person sales at conventions, signings, book fairs, and library events, where a reader can scan the code and complete the purchase from their phone. Both also handle in-person card payments directly, which pairs well with selling physical books at events. Payhip can function this way too—you can use it as a full hosted storefront or just as a way to generate product links, which makes it a flexible bridge between the hosted and payment-processor categories.

If the plan is to sell primarily digital products with minimal overhead, a hosted platform like Payhip is the lowest-friction starting point. If the plan includes print books, merchandise, special editions, or multiple product lines, Shopify provides a more robust foundation. For authors who already have a WordPress site, WooCommerce or FluentCart can be a strong middle-ground option. And for authors who don't need a storefront at all—or who do most of their selling in person—a payment processor with product links and QR codes may be all they need. Marketplaces like Curios and Direct2Readers can layer on top of any of these choices to extend reach without replacing your main sales channel. Author Jessica S. Taylor's direct sales guide recommends choosing a platform that integrates with BookFunnel for digital delivery, which Payhip, Shopify, and WooCommerce all support.



fluentCart



shopify



CURIOS



WORDPRESS

woo

02

Start with Digital Products.

Ebooks and audiobooks are the simplest products to sell direct because they require no inventory, no shipping, and no physical fulfillment. The reader pays and receives a download link—

usually delivered through platforms like BookFunnel

or StoryOrigin—

and the transaction is complete.

BookFunnel focuses specifically on file delivery and reader support, handling

format detection, device-specific delivery, and

customer support for download issues.

Its First-Time

Author plan starts at

\$30 per year, with Mid-

List and Bestseller tiers available

for authors who need integrations,

higher download volumes, or audiobook

delivery. StoryOrigin takes a broader, all-

in-one approach, bundling ebook file delivery

with newsletter swaps, group promotions, review copy management, universal book links, and goal tracking. Its Standard Plan is \$10 per month or \$100 per year and includes unlimited file delivery and integrations with most major email service providers. The main functional difference for direct sales is that StoryOrigin doesn't currently deliver audiobook files—it can distribute audiobook promo codes, but actual audiobook file delivery requires BookFunnel or another solution. Authors selling audiobooks direct generally need BookFunnel; authors selling only ebooks can use either, and many use both for different purposes.

An important caveat: Authors with ebooks enrolled in Amazon's KDP Select cannot sell those ebooks directly, as KDP Select requires Amazon exclusivity for the ebook format. Authors who are wide—distributing ebooks across multiple retailers—can add direct sales as an additional channel without conflict. Print editions and audiobooks are not affected by KDP Select enrollment, so there are still direct sales opportunities for authors whose books are part of the program.



Add Print-on-Demand.

Many who imagine selling print books directly likely picture boxes of their books stacked in a spare room waiting to be packaged and shipped. Print-on-demand services eliminate that entirely. Some print distributors can connect with an author's storefront so that when a reader orders a physical copy of a book, the title is printed and shipped from the company instead of by the author. Lulu Direct offers plug-and-play integrations for Shopify, Wix, and WooCommerce. When a reader orders a paperback or hardcover from the author's storefront, Lulu prints and ships the book automatically, and the author never handles inventory. Bookvault offers ready-made plugins for Shopify, WooCommerce, Wix, and Payhip, with TikTok Shop integration on the way, and it provides the same hands-off fulfillment model.

Both Lulu and Bookvault also offer a free open API that authors with custom or bespoke websites can use to connect any platform to their print-on-demand net-

work. The API approach requires technical knowledge or a developer's help, but it removes the limitation of needing to be on one of the supported ecommerce platforms—if it can talk to an API, it can integrate. Lulu's API has been publicly available since 2017 and has more extensive third-party documentation and community resources, which can make initial setup smoother, but both services provide their own documentation, sandbox environments, and developer support.

IngramSpark has introduced Share & Sell direct-selling links for US accounts. These don't plug into storefront platforms the way Lulu and Bookvault's apps do, but they support QR codes and HTML embeds, so authors can place them on a website, in a newsletter, on social media, or on signage at in-person events. For authors who already publish through IngramSpark, this can serve as a way to offer print titles for direct purchase while using a separate platform for ebook and audiobook sales.

What's an API?

API stands for application programming interface. Think of it as a set of instructions that lets two pieces of software talk to each other directly, without a human in the middle. When a print-on-demand service offers an API, it means a developer can connect your website—or any custom tool—straight to their printing and shipping system. A reader clicks “Buy” on your site, your site tells the API to print and ship a book to a specific address, and the order is fulfilled automatically. Plug-and-play integrations like the Shopify or WooCommerce apps are essentially pre-built API connections that someone else has already wired up for you. Pre-built apps are easier to set up but limit you to supported platforms, but a direct API connection works with anything but typically requires a developer to configure.



Set up Payment Processing Before You List a Product.

Payment processing setup involves connecting a bank account to receive funds and verifying your identity. The connection should be tested before the store goes live.

Do not test by placing an order with your own credit card, even on your own store. Card networks, such as Visa, Mastercard, and American Express, and payment processors, such as Stripe, PayPal, and Square, all prohibit transactions between a cardholder and a merchant account they

own or are associated with, even for legitimate testing purposes. Violations can trigger declined charges, lowered spend limits, account holds, or termination of either the card or the merchant account. Instead, use the test mode or sandbox environment that most processors provide—Stripe offers test card numbers, PayPal has a sandbox account system, and Square provides a test dashboard—which simulates a full transaction without moving real money.



Understand Your Tax Obligations Early.

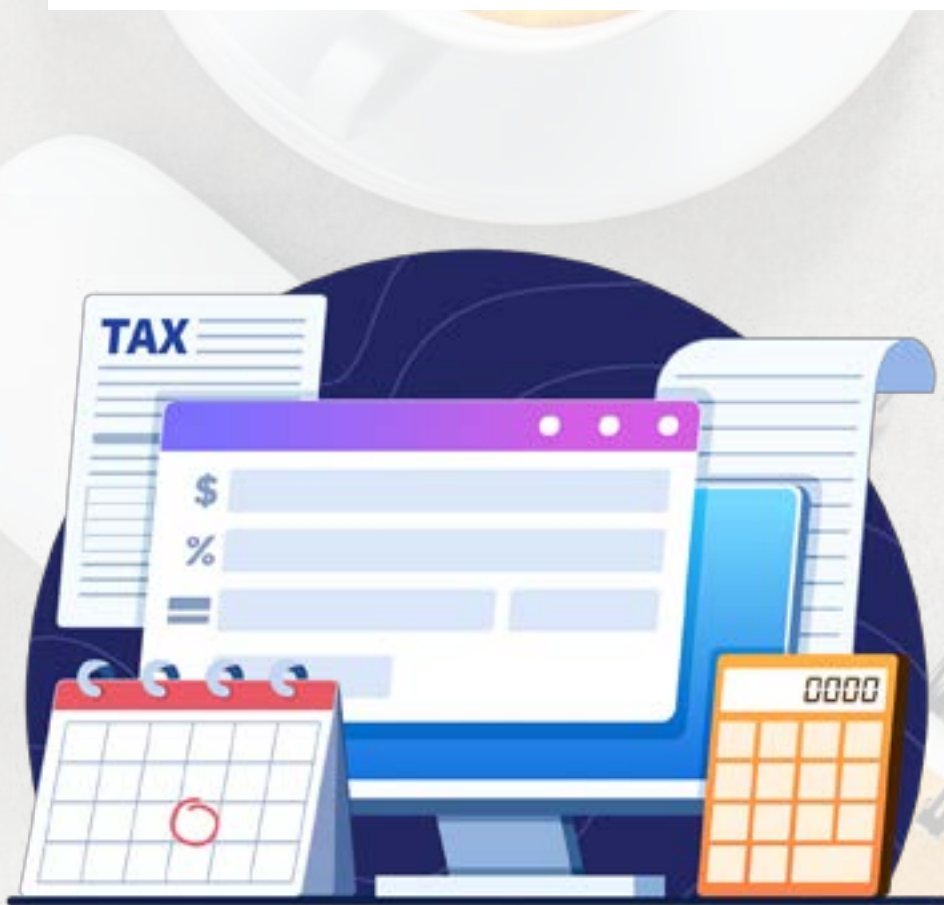
Sales tax is the part of direct sales that can make some authors nervous, and understandably so. The rules vary significantly by country.

For US-based authors: Sales tax obligations are determined by “nexus”—the state or states where the author has a physical presence, which always includes their home state—or has exceeded an economic threshold for remote sales. The most common economic nexus threshold is \$100,000 in sales or two hundred transactions in a given state, but the landscape is shifting: As of January 1, 2026, sixteen states have eliminated the two-hundred-transaction threshold, leaving revenue as the sole trigger, and some states use different numbers entirely—California, Texas, and New York all use a \$500,000 threshold. Most indie authors starting out will only have nexus in their home state. Shopify’s built-in tax reporting tracks where you’re approaching thresholds in other states, which is helpful as sales scale.

For US-based authors selling internationally: Different rules apply when you sell to readers in the UK or EU, regardless of where you're based. The UK has no registration threshold for non-UK sellers of digital products—you must register for UK VAT from your very first sale of an ebook or audiobook to a UK customer. The EU maintains a €10,000 annual threshold for cross-border digital sales; once you exceed that across the EU as a whole, you must collect and remit VAT for all subsequent sales. Payhip handles both EU and UK digital VAT collection and remittance automatically, which is one of its significant advantages for authors selling internationally. Shopify requires a third-party app or manual configuration for VAT compliance.

For UK-based authors: UK ebooks and audiobooks have specific rules. Since May 2020, ebooks in the UK have been zero-rated for VAT, meaning the listed price is exactly what UK readers pay, with no tax added at checkout. Print books have always been zero-rated. Audiobooks, however, are still charged at the standard 20 percent rate—a frequently missed distinction that affects pricing decisions. UK businesses must register for VAT once taxable turnover exceeds £90,000 in any rolling twelve-month period, though zero-rated sales still count toward that threshold. Voluntary registration is available below the threshold and can be beneficial for authors with significant business expenses, since registered businesses can reclaim VAT on purchases.

For EU-based authors: Local VAT registration rules vary by member state, and most countries require VAT registration from the first sale or at very low thresholds for resident businesses, even though the €10,000 cross-border threshold gives some relief for sales to other EU countries. The EU's One-Stop Shop (OSS) scheme lets you register once in your home country and remit VAT for all EU sales through a single return rather than registering in each country individually.



Pro Tip:

For a more in-depth explanation of VAT and related sales tax terms, see *IAM's* article from the April 2025 issue on understanding sales tax as someone who sells direct: <https://indieauthormagazine.com/sales-tax-simplified-what-indie-authors-must-know-when-selling-books-direct>.

Tax obligations are manageable, but they need to be understood before the first sale, not after. Consider consulting a local accountant familiar with digital and ecommerce sales before launching, especially if you plan to sell across borders.

Pro Tip:

For specific walk-throughs of using these tools for direct sales setup, see the recent AI Summit hosted by Indie Author Training.

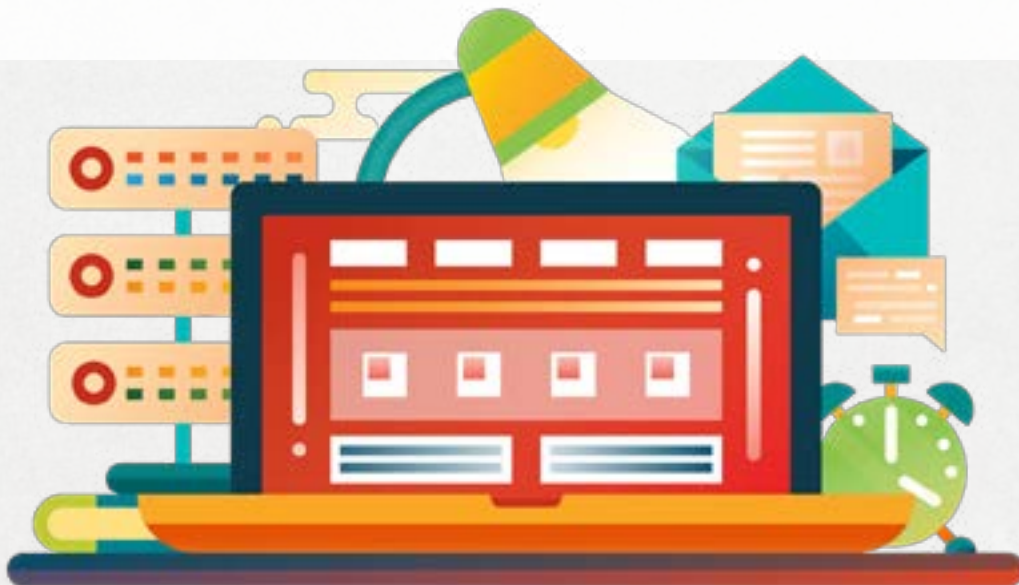
06

Create Product Pages that Look Professional.

Readers browsing an author's direct store are making a trust decision: Is this a legitimate place to buy a book, or does it feel sketchy? Professional product pages close that gap. Each product listing on your site should include a high-quality cover mockup, a clear product description with the format specified—ebook, paperback, audiobook, or bundle, for example—the price and what's included, and a visible buy button that works on mobile.

Designing your product page can be a balancing act. Your page needs to look professional for your readers, but it also needs to be something you can manage long term. Joanna Penn, host of *The Creative Penn* podcast, spoke about building what she calls a “minimum viable store” in the August 12, 2022, episode of her podcast. The minimum viable store is one that looks professional enough to convert browsers into buyers without requiring weeks of design work. Penn set up 134 products for her Shopify launch, using consistent mockup images created in Canva and organized into Collections—groups of products by series, format, or type. “Keep it simple,” Penn wrote after her experience. “Otherwise, it's easy to become confused and overwhelmed by all the options, and you might give up.” Consistency creates the professional impression, not complexity.

For authors comfortable using AI, design work that used to require either a paid designer or hours of hands-on layout tinkering is now accessible through AI tools. Claude.ai/design can generate product page mockups, suggest visual hierarchies, and draft layout structures you can adapt for your storefront. Canva has integrated AI features for generating cover mockups, promotional graphics, and product imagery at scale. Finally, Claude Cowork can connect directly to your WooCommerce or Shopify store and help update product page designs, descriptions, and layouts conversationally—you describe what you want changed, and Cowork can make the updates on your behalf rather than requiring you to navigate the platform's design tools. This is particularly useful for authors managing large catalogs, where consistency across dozens or hundreds of product pages would otherwise be a significant time investment.



Connect Your Store to Your Email List from Day 1.

The single biggest strategic advantage of selling direct is gathering customer data. When an author sells through Amazon, the retailer keeps the customer's email address, purchase history, and browsing behavior. When an author sells through their own store, that data belongs to the author. Connecting the storefront to an email marketing platform—Kit, Mailer-Lite, Mailchimp, or FluentCRM—from the very first sale ensures that every buyer is automatically added to the author's newsletter list with a purchase tag.

This enables you to set up post-purchase automations you can't offer through other retailers: a thank-you email, a recommendation for similar items based on what the reader just bought, a review request timed to when the reader has likely finished the book, or a notification when the next book in the series releases. These automations can be set to run in the background and compound over time, turning one-time buyers into repeat customers.

The same purchase data also opens up advertising opportunities that retailer sales simply can't match. Because you know exactly what each reader bought, you can build highly specific custom audiences for both email campaigns and paid advertising on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Amazon. Rather

than sending a generic review request to your entire list, you can target only readers who bought book 1 three weeks ago, when they're statistically most likely to have finished reading and to remember the story clearly enough to write a meaningful review. Rather than promoting book 2 to everyone, you can build a Facebook custom audience of book 1 buyers who haven't yet purchased the second book and run ads specifically to that group, with copy that references the cliffhanger they just experienced. You can build separate audiences for ebook buyers versus paperback buyers, since they often respond to different upgrade offers like special editions or signed copies, for series completers versus mid-series readers, or for readers who bought a starter book at a discount versus those who paid full price.

These segments also power similar audiences on advertising platforms, where Facebook or Amazon takes your list of confirmed buyers and finds new users who match their patterns. A look-alike audience built from five hundred confirmed direct buyers will almost always outperform a cold-targeted audience built from generic genre interests, because you're starting from people who have already proven they'll pay for your work.

Give Readers a Reason to Buy from You Instead of Amazon.

Readers are accustomed to Amazon's one-click checkout, reviews, and shipping speed. An author's direct store needs to offer something the retailer doesn't. The most effective incentives authors can offer include exclusive bonus content—a bonus chapter, an alternate ending, or a short story available only through the author's store; signed bookplates or personalized elements like dedications or character name drops; early access

to new releases before they hit retailers; bundle pricing that saves readers money compared with buying titles individually; special edition formats with sprayed edges, foil stamping, character art, or custom endpapers that simply aren't available on retailer platforms; or coupon codes that reward loyalty or incentivize first-time direct purchases.

The point is not to compete with Amazon on convenience;

authors will not win that race. Instead, offer something readers value that Amazon cannot provide—exclusivity, personal connection, collector-quality physical editions, or better pricing on bundles. The rise of special edition collector culture in genres like Romantasy and Romance has shown that readers will pay premium prices—often \$50 to \$100 or more per book—for editions that feel worth owning rather than just reading.

Don't Abandon Retailers. Add a Channel.

Selling direct does not mean pulling books from Amazon, Kobo, Apple, or any other retailer. Most authors who sell direct treat it as an additional channel rather than a replacement. The retailer storefronts handle discoverability and impulse purchases from new readers. The author's direct store serves existing fans who want to support the author more directly, and who want the bonuses and exclusives that come with buying direct.

As Joanna Penn noted in her “Selling Books Direct With Shopify: The Minimum Viable Store”

podcast episode, selling direct is part of the ethos of publishing wide. An ebook might be in Kindle Unlimited on Amazon while the audiobook and signed hardcover are sold direct. Authors can choose different strategies by format, by series, or by pen name, giving them flexibility to test what works without committing every title to the same channel mix. A common pattern is to keep backlist titles in KU for the borrow income while selling new releases direct first—giving direct buyers a head start—before going wide across retailers a few weeks or months later.

Launch Small, Then Build.

The most common mistake with direct sales is trying to build the perfect store before selling a single book. A functional direct sales set-up can start with one product, one delivery mechanism, one payment processor, and one way to drive traffic. From there, the author can evaluate what worked, add more products, refine the storefront design, and layer in print-on-demand integration or special editions as demand warrants. Joanna Penn's approach to building a "minimum viable store" on Shopify followed exactly this philosophy: Start with the basics, prove the concept, and expand based on the data you gather.

A practical first-month roadmap might look like this: In week

1, choose a platform and set up payment processing; in week 2, list one or two products with mock-ups, descriptions, and delivery configured; in week 3, run a soft launch to your existing newsletter list and place a sandbox test order to confirm everything works end-to-end; in week 4, announce more broadly and watch the data. The store you launch with does not need to be the store you have a year from now—it just needs to function well enough to make the first sale.

Direct sales is not a silver bullet. Joanna Penn notes that it's harder work than uploading an ebook to Amazon, and it requires business skills not every author has needed before, from understand-

ing payment processing and tax compliance to managing customer support, handling chargebacks and refunds, and driving ongoing traffic generation. The customer support load is the part most authors underestimate—when a reader has trouble downloading their ebook or their package arrives damaged, you're the one answering the email, not Amazon's support team.

But for authors who want to own their customer relationships, keep more of each sale, and build a business that doesn't depend entirely on a retailer's algorithm, a direct storefront is increasingly the infrastructure that supports everything else. The tools are accessible, the entry costs are low, and the first sale can happen this month. ■



More Reading

Want to explore direct sales options for your business further? Here are a few additional resources to check out.

- *The Creative Penn*: “2026 Trends And Predictions For Indie Authors And The Book Publishing Industry with Joanna Penn”

<https://www.thecreativepenn.com/2026/01/05/2026-trends-and-predictions-for-indie-authors-and-the-book-publishing-industry-with-joanna-penn/>

- ScribeCount: “Selling Direct as an Indie Author”

<https://scribecount.com/author-resource/direct-sales/selling-direct-indie-authors>

- ScribeCount: “Payment Processing for Indie Author Direct Stores”

<https://scribecount.com/author-resource/direct-sales/payment-portals-for-indie-authors>

- *The Pulp Writer Show*: “Payhip vs Shopify for Indie Author Direct Sales”

<https://thepulpwritershow.com/episode-197-payhip-vs-shopify-for-indie-author-direct-sales/>

- Bookvault: Special Edition Book Printing

<https://bookvault.app/special-edition-book-printing/>

- Written Word Media: “2026 Author Trends You Need to Know”

<https://www.writtenwordmedia.com/2026-author-trends/>



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.

From Screenplays to Storefronts

How Deborah Wilde Turned Snark into a Sustainable Author Brand

The Teaser

Today Deborah—pronounced “Deb-O-rah”—Wilde is the author of twenty-five novels, but before she began building magical worlds and a loyal readership, she was writing for the screen. She described her television work as “a mix of stuff” that included “a lot of Fantasy, especially animation.” But a career shaped by other people’s productions eventually gave way to one built around her own stories, her own audience, and a signature voice.

Frustrated by an industry trend toward reality television, the Canadian screenwriter challenged herself to write five novels in three years. Deborah’s YA Rom-Coms, written under the pen name Tellulah Darling, featured sassy girls and swoony boys drowning in Greek mythology-inspired drama. She succeeded in publishing five of them between 2012 and 2015, and had written and published another by 2018. She loved it. But something was missing.

So she started again. When she reinvented herself a second time, this time as Deborah Wilde, the former screenwriter says she “jumped to Urban Fantasy that was very much for adults and spicy.” Her next four series starred snarky adult heroines solving high-stakes supernatural mysteries with open-door heat and salty language. And this time, she says, her characters could use “my favorite old Hollywood banter.”

Photo Courtesy of Deborah Wilde





The second shift was the answer she'd been looking for. Deborah is now an author of adult Urban Fantasy and Paranormal Women's Fiction, written in four different series, released in three different formats, and translated into two additional languages, French and German. She has a fifth series debut novel up for preorder. *Mad Queens Inc.: Golem For Broke* leans into the success of her Magic After Midlife series, following the adventures of a wickedly competent heroine in her forties who runs an unlicensed magical problem-solving agency with her best friends.

But Deborah's new persona isn't entirely distinct from the screenwriter who took a risk. In fact, she says, starting over as Deborah Wilde allowed her to develop a persona that felt more authentic to who she really is: "a global wanderer and hopeless romantic" who is "also a total cynic with a broken edit button," according to her website.

Act One: Setup

Reader interest guided Deborah's transition from YA to New Adult stories, and the response to her Magic After Midlife series influenced her decision to develop her newest series around an older main character. "I am a Gen Xer, and we want our representation in Fantasy. So having an older heroine, even though she's not in her fifties, she's in her forties—the response has been amazing," she says.

Deborah's books are sources of representation in other ways, too. As a Jewish woman, she says that growing up, "the only books I ever saw myself in were Holocaust stories and those very important stories. But I wanted the Jewish girl who was going through the wardrobe or going down the rabbit hole, and there wasn't that." So she developed her first adult series around Nava Katz, the Unlikeable Demon Hunter—a Jewish main character with a Jewish love interest.

When asked about the skills that transferred over when she transitioned from screen to page, Deborah says, "What transfers over is structure. Writing dialogue is my happy place. I joke that I actually don't know how to write a book. I just

know how to write a very long prose screenplay." The biggest learning curve, coming from screenwriting, was adding description and character action. "The actors generally hate it if you tell them exactly what they're doing. And that was really hard for me," she says.

The former screenwriter says that structure also led to her starting her author career as a plotter—though that's since shifted. "Because of my screenwriting training, it was all nailed down," she says. "And then I've just gotten really loose, and now I just have this sort of wonky hybrid where I'll know my first act."

Although she described her day-to-day process as a mess, the writing system Deborah has developed for her novels now works for her. "I do a lot of thinking," she says. "I count thinking and consuming other storytelling as part of my writing process." Because all her series take place in separate universes, she says most of that thinking focuses on building each world: "What's the magic system? How am I building it? What is their personal problem? What's their backstory mystery that might follow them into this?"

When she starts to write, Deborah follows Becca Syme's advice to avoid social media and other distractions. "I try to do it in the morning and really protect that time and not look at other stuff. It's like ... it is my sacred time until I make my word count, and then [I'm] moving on to what else I have to do," she says.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, she uses Save the Cat, a system that was built on screenwriting

“I am a Gen Xer, and we want our representation in Fantasy. So having an older heroine ... the response has been amazing.”

—Deborah Wilde



SMART (ASS) HEROINES.
EPIC MAGIC.
RED-HOT ROMANCE.

SHOP BUNDLES

techniques, to develop the first drafts of her stories. Once the draft is done, Deborah takes the manuscript through what she calls “a really extensive editing process” with her editor. She’s worked with the same one for all twenty-five Deborah Wilde books. “I do two extensive developmental edits, really full rewrites,” she says. “Because for me, it allows me to get to the theme the way I want to and get to the depth of character development the way I want to. And then I do two line edits. A lot of it is punching up humor at that point, or maybe there’s some pacing issues, and then it goes off to the proofreader.”

With the draft out of her hands, Deborah starts to think about the next book. She doesn’t keep a series bible. But she says, “I have a giant Word file that I just dump stuff in. And then with each book, I go back and go, ‘Oh, yeah, that. Oh, hey, look, I put that in two books

ago! How clever of me. I didn’t realize I’d need it.” The books are published as she finishes them, and each series lasts until the characters “get to the end of their thematic journey,” however long that takes. Deborah says she can’t predict how long a series will go; some take five books and others six or seven. “I think the only series I ever knew for sure was my first one because it was seven books, and it was based around the seven deadly sins.”

Of course, she takes her readers’ interests into account, too. She extended the Jezebel Files series, which she had planned to finish with four books, because of reader interest. But when she felt the main character had “run out of story,” and readers still wanted more, she “created a cousin, who was a nerdy magic scientist, and I put her in that world for two books,” says Deborah.

As her career has gone on, each new series has taken place in “different versions of Vancouver that

have no connection to each other, so I am reinventing the magic system every time,” she says. Maintaining the connection to Judaism in her books has been a unique test, too. “In terms of magic mythology in Judaism and Jewish mythology or folklore, it’s not like Greek and Roman, where there’s so much. Or Celtic, where there’s so much. So I sort of got to this fifth series, and I was like, ‘Huh, how am I including it this time?’”

Act Two: Confrontation

As she started writing books tailored to adults, Deborah found that her voice resonated so well with Gen X readers that she quickly built a community through her website, newsletter, and Facebook Group. “I just feel like this is what I can give them,” she says. “I can give them, you know, who I am.”

The peace she found in this community contrasted starkly with

the stress of maintaining her Amazon rankings in Kindle Unlimited (KU). “It was not great for my mental health, always worrying about that,” Deborah says. So she left it behind. Deborah has now removed all of her books from KU and has no intention of ever going back, she says, though her books remain available for regular purchase through Amazon.

When she decided to take her books wide and try selling direct, Deborah faced a new set of challenges. “I had no idea how much work it would be,” she says. “I actually convinced my husband to leave his job in the film industry and come run it for me, and it is his full-time job. We have rebuilt the store probably three times.”

Deborah’s husband, Loreto, came from the post-production side of film and television. So while Deborah has had to adjust her writing skills from screenplays to manuscripts, his learning curve has revolved around technical work. “He knows a lot of the editing programs and a lot of things that have come in handy, but he still had to learn, and is still, because it keeps changing,” says Deborah.

Loreto took the lead with the online store, where the most recent revisions have included updating accessibility requirements and addressing generative engine optimization (GEO) to improve the site’s discoverability by chatbots—“because more people are using, say, ChatGPT to say, ‘How do I find a book?’ than necessarily Google,” Deborah says.

The store’s current incarnation is running

through Shopify with some help from Bookvault and BookFunnel for distribution. “Shipping from Canada is a nightmare,” says Deborah. “We don’t have media mail—it’s really expensive.” So Bookvault handles her paperbacks in a print-on-demand system that also provides readers with a digitally signed option. Their shop merchandise is also handled by print-on-demand services.

Deborah’s About page on her website includes a blog full of book recommendations, a suggested reading order, and a helpful FAQ. After addressing questions about the genre and reader suitability,

Deborah explains to her readers, “Why should I buy direct from your store?” The answer goes into cozy detail about her dream of owning a Victorian house with a bookshop inside before describing the perks of connecting with the author and the



Deborah Wilde smiles from her booth at an author event. Deborah leans heavily on direct sales in her business. Recently, she and her husband have rebuilt her storefront to optimize it for generative engine searches and ensure it meets accessibility requirements. Photo courtesy of Deborah Wilde.

economic and logistical benefits to readers. Deborah says she put that entry into the FAQ for “the same reason that I wanted to sell direct. It was just another way to have a connection with my readers,” she says. “That’s what’s so appealing, you know? My readers have kept me going in my reader group, and in my newsletters when they respond to me, and with memes or just funny, snarky things back at me. So for me, direct sales was [a way that] I get to still have more of this one-on-one engagement with people.”

Act Three: Resolution

After testing her options and learning her boundaries, Deborah's shop now works as part of a larger community. It's an ecosystem built on wide releases that launch to her store two to three weeks ahead of other distributors. "I don't look at launches as a short-term thing," she says. "I know I can make my backlist work for me. I know there can be longevity." Deborah's readers find her through Facebook ads that target her Magic After Midlife series and direct traffic to the shop. Back matter sends them to her newsletter, which introduces them to a Facebook reader group, where 1,900 readers discuss her work.

"It's been an enormous learning curve," Deborah says, discussing the challenges of direct sales. "I don't regret any of it. I love being wide, I love having my own store, but I also know I am very fortunate to have somebody who can run it for me, because there's no way it would exist if it was on me."

For authors thinking about starting their own direct sales shops, Deborah says it's important to remember that you can do it in pieces. "You don't have to do all of it all at once like I did," she says. "Test it, you know: Start with your paperbacks, or start with your audiobooks if they're



not exclusive to ACX, or try one thing and see how that goes."

The next act in Deborah's career will include her first Kickstarter campaign. Although she could have started small, that wouldn't have matched the energy of her brand. "I didn't just decide, 'Oh, it's my first one, let's just do a single volume.' No, no. I did a three-omnibus set," Deborah says. The set will include all seven of her Nava Katz: The Unlikeable Demon Hunter books. She's nervous about fulfillment, since this will be the first product she plans to distribute herself from Canada rather than print-on-demand. "I hired a

company to help me run it, but ... for some reason, there's something about Kickstarter that I find so daunting," she says.

If Deborah has learned anything from screenwriting, though, it's that audiences come back for characters who keep evolving. Nearly thirty books into her publishing career, she's still rewriting the script in real time. And the snarky voice that started as a screenwriter's experiment continues to drive readers into the next story she writes—stories that, like her real life, feature strong, witty women over forty who take risks, face challenges, and find their own happily ever after. ■



Jenn Lessmann

Jenn Lessmann is the author of *Unmagical: a Witchy Mystery* and three stories on Kindle Vella. A former barista, stage manager, and high school English teacher with advanced degrees from impressive colleges, she continues to drink excessive amounts of caffeine, stay up later than is absolutely necessary, and read three or four books at a time. Jenn is currently studying witchcraft and the craft of writing, and giggling internally whenever they intersect. She writes snarky paranormal fantasy for new adults whenever her dog will allow it.

A woman with dark hair is seen from the side, talking on a red mobile phone. She is sitting at a wooden desk with a silver laptop in front of her. A brown paper coffee cup with a white lid is also on the desk. A large, dark blue, dome-shaped lamp hangs over the desk, casting a warm light. The background is a blurred office setting with large windows.

How Authors Are Succeeding on Kickstarter in 2026



Indie authors have never let their creativity stay confined to the page. Oriana Leckert, the head of publishing at Kickstarter, has seen that firsthand, in the projects authors have successfully funded using the platform and the rewards they've offered their backers in order to get there.

Kat Singleton, a Romance author, created a candle exclusive to her series. Penny Reid created a custom yarn color to commemorate her series's main character, who runs a yarn store. Other authors have offered handwritten notes, personalized scenes, or a Q&A with the author. Best-selling LitRPG author Matt Dinniman offered contradictory rewards in the Kickstarter campaign to produce hardcovers of the first *Dungeon Crawler Carl* book: For \$666, he would write you into the series and kill you off. For \$777, however, he would let your character live. "We've long seen naming rights in campaigns—we'll name the dragon after your dog, we'll name the villain after your mother-in-law, we'll name the hero after your son—but Matt took it a step further," Leckert says.

Since Kickstarter launched in 2009, the platform's publishing category has seen more than \$380 million pledged and more than 69,000 projects launched, according to Leckert in an April interview for *The Creative Penn* podcast. By every metric, Leckert says—whether it be the number of projects launched, the number of first-time creators on the site, the number of dollars raised, or the percent success rate of campaigns—the

publishing category has seen year-over-year growth since before 2020.

Indie authors and publishers have been a significant part of that. As another form of direct sales, Leckert says the platform's popularity reflects shifts in the industry toward connecting with audiences directly—something traditional publishers are starting to recognize.

"I think we're in a really fascinating moment in the sort of broader publishing ecosystem, where not just Kickstarter but many of the things that indie authors have been doing and finding great success in are becoming un-ignorable by the traditional gatekeepers and the more sort of conservative folks in the industry," she says. "[That success is] forcing major publishers to take notice and shift their thinking and maybe eventually ... begin to innovate."

Just as hard to ignore is Kickstarter's impact on individual indie authors' careers. In recent years, crowdfunding campaigns have become a key part of many authors' business models, shaping how they connect with superfans, reach new audiences, and launch and market new titles. Indie authors have long valued the creative freedom that comes with writing and publishing their own stories without a middleman. Today, trends on Kickstarter reflect how that idea is expanding within the industry to every other part of a publishing business as well, from the design of physical products to choosing printers and suppliers and even final distribution.

Kickstarter and the Industry

As the success of any crowdfunded campaign is influenced directly by audience interest and engagement, it's no surprise that successful projects on Kickstarter often mirror current trends in the larger publishing industry. Genre fiction—and particularly popular genres with large audiences, such as Romance, Romantasy, and Sci-Fi/Fantasy—tend to perform strongly, Leckert says. “I had a particular focus on Romance over the last three to four years, and so we’ve really seen that exploding,” she says.

Campaigns to create special editions are also popular, the reason for which is twofold. On the reader side, interest in special editions has been growing in recent years, a trend publishers theorize in part may stem from reader communities on social media and the growth of bookbox subscription companies, according to an article in *Publishers Weekly*. In Written Word Media's 2026 reader survey, at least 30 percent of respondents said they had purchased a special edition, and 23 percent of respondents said they'd be willing to spend more on an enhanced edition of a book that includes features like “bonus content, author commentary, or early access.”

On the author side, crowdfunding offers an opportunity for authors and publishers to gauge audience interest in special editions or certain aspects of the design before spending money or ordering copies. “Kickstarter is a really, really strong place to do special editions, again, because you get the money first,” Leckert says. “You can start by saying, ‘If we raise ten grand, we’re going to do French flaps and sprayed edges,’ and then if you hit that goal, you can say, ‘Well, now, if we raise

another two grand, we’re doing ribbon bookmarks,’ another couple grand beyond that, ‘We’re going to make a full color or vellum art inserts.’ You can really create it in collaboration with your audience as you go.”

Several standout Kickstarter campaigns from 2026 were created to fund special editions of new or existing books, including Jacquelyn Benson's “1898 edition” clothbound and foiled hardcover of her Historical Fiction novel, Willow Winters' Kickstarter-exclusive “blacklight collection” of special editions, and Dakota Krout's campaign to create special editions for books 2 and 3 in his series after the success of a previ-

ous campaign for book 1. In May of this year, Kickstarter Publishing also added new subcategories for audiobooks and tabletop role-playing games, suggesting creators are frequently turning to the platform to fund projects in those categories.

Although projects related to popular fiction genres often perform well on the platform, they are far from the only success stories. Leckert says plenty of projects from other genres have drawn just

as much attention and support, such as memoir and self-help books, business books, and children's books. Even those targeting niche audiences can find tremendous success when marketed well. “I think three years ago, our top-funded nonfiction project was an eight-hundred-page oversized coffee table book on the history of computer keyboards,” she says.

“The ceiling is really, really high. There's a lot of space,” Leckert says. “Anybody who's got a strong platform, an ability to reach their audience, can really find a lot of success here.”

“I think we're in a really fascinating moment ... where ... many of the things that indie authors have been doing and finding great success in are becoming un-ignorable by the traditional gatekeepers.

—Oriana Leckert
Head of Publishing, Kickstarter



Kickstarter and the Individual Author



The keyboard book campaign Leckert mentioned, created by designer and typographer Marcin Wichary, ultimately earned \$753,291 from 4,278 backers. Much of the support he received in his campaign came from the audience he'd built over years in the industry and funneled toward the site—something Leckert says anyone who creates a project on Kickstarter should be prepared to do.

“Generally, for an early career publishing campaign, we see maybe 20 to 30 percent of your audience will come from the larger Kickstarter ecosystem, so that’s not nothing,” she says. “You will certainly be growing your audience by being on the platform, but ... you definitely need to bring your people to bear first.”

Leckert reminds authors that setting realistic expectations for their campaigns will lead to greater chances of successfully funding their projects. “You have to make sure that your ambition matches your reach,” she says. If you’re an emerging author or starting with a smaller audience, focusing on smaller projects and funding goals initially will allow you to learn the platform and grow your audience before attempting larger-scale campaigns.

Just as authors should set realistic goals for their campaigns, they can also feel comfortable offering rewards that feel manageable to them. With more campaigns focused on creating artistic special editions of books, many campaigns are also leaning into eye-catching and artistic

rewards, such as custom bookmarks, character artwork, or stickers. But Leckert says that isn't a requirement.

"There's a persistent misapprehension that in order to run a Kickstarter, you have to turn yourself into a swag production facility, and that is not true," Leckert says. Although plenty of Kickstarter backers enjoy physical merchandise, it may not always be the most beneficial or cost-efficient way to attract support. Leckert encourages authors to think about offering rewards that are unique to their project and story worlds, as well as to explore non-tangible reward options, such as the opportunity to create a character later in a series or have their name printed in the final book.

Projects and rewards that have been created using AI are allowed on the site, as long as creators are clear about how and where they've used AI tools in the process. Leckert describes Kickstarter's policy as one of "radical transparency," so that backers have the opportunity to fully understand a project and how it will be created before they choose whether to support it. Even with this transparency, however, Leckert says she hasn't noticed trends toward or away from AI-assisted projects on the platform.

Backers on Kickstarter tend to be open-minded about different genres and willing to support unique projects, Leckert says. Whether they're supporting a grand series of special editions with an array of merch or an emerging author's book launch with only a few reward tiers, authors can generally find an audience on the platform.

"I think a really notable thing about Kickstarter Publishing—first of all, the average backing amount last year in publishing was \$72. So this is really different behavior than your standard internet book buyer who's trying to spend 99 cents on an e-book," she says. "People are willing to really invest here, and ... there's a real appetite for different tropes, different genres, taking a chance on just supporting the act of creativity wherever it is."

What to Know Before You Start

Authors new to the platform or curious about creating their first Kickstarter campaign can find a range of resources and advice for the platform on the Kickstarter website. The creator tips page for Kickstarter's publishing category includes basic how-to guides, marketing and budgeting advice, and more. Additionally, the Kickstarter for Authors Facebook Group, run by Anthea Sharp and Thorn Coyle, provides authors a place to ask questions and learn from other authors' and publishers' experiences with the platform.

One of the best ways to learn how to manage a successful Kickstarter campaign, however, is to look at—and back—other campaigns on the site, Leckert says.

"I am not suggesting that you spend all of your money on Kickstarter the way that I do, but pick five projects, back them for a few bucks, and begin to understand the Kickstarter experience from the backer perspective," she says. "That will help you know what things you will want to do or avoid as a creator."

From the initial planning to fulfillment, authors new to Kickstarter should be prepared for a significant time investment when hosting a campaign on the platform. But the more time a creator can dedicate to researching and strategizing before managing a campaign, the more their efforts can pay off—literally. During

Pro Tip:

Alongside the Kickstarter for Authors Facebook Group, Anthea Sharp's nonfiction book of the same name, updated in 2025, offers additional information, advice, and strategies for succeeding on the platform. Find it at <https://books2read.com/u/3nJNRK>.

the fundraising window, Leckert also recommends cross-promoting with other live campaigns to reach a wider audience of potential backers who are already familiar with Kickstarter.

As time goes on, Leckert believes the success of independent creators on Kickstarter will encourage more readers, as well as the wider publishing industry, to explore crowdfunding. Already, traditional publishers are taking note of the success independent creatives have had with the platform, and traditionally published authors are using the platform to build excitement and interest for their new titles. Earlier this year, a collection of traditional and indie Romance authors managed a campaign for a collection of Dystopian Romance novellas, raising more than \$1.4 million in total, and another campaign by Fantasy author Charles Soule allowed him to market a companion volume to his upcoming book before its release with Harper Perennial. “I think the savvier publishers will take note soon that any work done on Kickstarter is also going to augment all of the trad work that they and their authors are doing,” Leckert says. “This is a real rising-tide, lifting-all-the-boats scenario.”

She also hopes the publishing industry’s growing familiarity with crowdfunding and the number of success stories authors have shared will encourage more creators to explore the platform themselves.

“Somebody recently said that doing their first Kickstarter was like getting their first tattoo,” Leckert says. “It seemed like it was going to be really scary, and it was kind of painful while it was happening, and then as soon as it was done, they were like, ‘Okay, that was so much easier than I thought. Let’s do this again. I can’t wait.’” ■

KICK



STARTER



Nicole Schroeder

Nicole Schroeder is a storyteller at heart. As the editor in chief of Indie Author Magazine, she brings nearly a decade of journalism and editorial experience to the publication, delighting in any opportunity to tell true stories and help others do the same. She holds a bachelor's degree from the Missouri School of Journalism and minors in English and Spanish. Her previous work includes editorial roles at local publications, and she's helped edit and produce numerous fiction and nonfiction books, including a Holocaust survivor's memoir, alongside independent publishers. Her own creative writing has been published in national literary magazines. When she's not at her writing desk, Nicole is usually in the saddle, cuddling her guinea pigs, or spending time with family. She loves any excuse to talk about Marvel movies and considers National Novel Writing Month its own holiday.



The Quiet Empire

How Annabel Chase Made Her Brand, Not Herself, the Face of Her Business

Annabel Chase has published more than 150 books across a dozen-plus series since 2011. She has thousands of ratings on Goodreads, an international readership, audio deals, a catalog deep enough to keep a binge reader busy for months, and a Times Square billboard under her belt. She attended BookCon 2026 at the Javits Center alongside names like Cassandra Clare and Holly Black. By any measure, she's one of indie publishing's most prolific and commercially successful authors.

She's also one you'd have a hard time picking out of a crowd—and she'd prefer to keep it that way.

In an industry that increasingly tells authors their face is their brand, Chase made a different bet. She runs TikTok content, buys ads, and markets aggressively—she's as savvy as any indie author working today. She just made a deliberate decision about what gets the spotlight: the books, not her. And that distinction, fifteen years into her career, is looking more and more like a competitive advantage.

The Lawyer Who Became a Witch

Before she was conjuring magical towns and snarky heroines, Chase practiced law on two continents—she's a dual citizen of the US and the UK. When asked which legal skills transferred to indie publishing, however, her answer had nothing to do with contracts or IP rights. It was all operations—"the ability to adhere to deadlines, even when I set them myself," she says, or "an awareness of time—how long specific, repeated tasks take so I can plan accordingly."

Operational discipline is the infrastructure behind a 150-book catalog. She knows how long it takes to write a book, how long to review and tweak her ads, and how to plan her production schedule so that she's consistently feeding her backlist machine. To put into perspective just how much that discipline produces: She published all ten books of her Spellbound series between 2017 and early 2018, all while simultaneously launching the first Starry Hollow Witches novels. That production pace was calculated. In a genre where

reader appetite is high and attention spans are short, Chase was stacking her catalog faster than most authors could outline one series.

It's also worth noting the autobiographical echo in her most beloved series. The Spellbound books feature Emma Hart, a public interest lawyer drowning in student debt, who stumbles into a hidden supernatural town and discovers she's a witch. The parallel is hard to miss—a lawyer who turns out to be better suited for a hidden world. "I think it was more wish fulfillment than reflective," she says.

She went on to describe the wish fulfillment in more specific terms, listing what she called semi-universal desires: "being 'special,' discovering you're more powerful than you realized, being accepted by your found family, and most importantly, finding Brew-Ha-Ha, a magic coffee shop that adds shots of whatever traits you need for the day." That last detail is a big part of why readers can devour the twenty-six Starry Hollow books currently in the series—Chase builds worlds her readers want to live in and never leave.

And with the speed at which she's churning out new books, she makes sure they never have to.

From Keeley Bates to Annabel Chase

Chase's career didn't start with the Paranormal Cozy genre, and it didn't start under her current pen name. She began publishing in 2011 as Keeley Bates, writing Contemporary Fiction and Cozy Mysteries—her Saints & Strangers series earned an Honorable Mention in Library Journal's 2016 Indie Ebook Awards. She also wrote under a Romance pen name, which she describes as doing "reasonably well"—a phrase that, in indie publishing, usually means paying the bills without building the career you actually want.

She describes those early years with the kind of fondness people reserve for chaotic origin stories. There was no strategy, she says. "It was just 'look at this cool thing that allows me to publish my books and make some money.'" As the industry matured, she watched others forge new paths and started building her business more intention-

ally. She launched the Annabel Chase pen name, pivoted to writing Paranormal Cozy novels, and in 2017, she published *Curse the Day*—the first Spellbound novel and the inflection point of her career.

The pen name transition represented a moment of strategic clarity for Chase. Rather than trying to stretch an existing brand into a new genre, she started fresh with a name and identity built specifically around the kind of books she wanted to write for the next decade. She spent the following five years doubling down on Paranormal Cozy, stacking series like Starry Hollow Witches, Federal Bureau of Magic, and The Bloom-in' Psychic. Once the Annabel Chase brand had critical mass, she was able to bring older Urban Fantasy titles under the name as well, further consolidating her catalog.

Chase's pattern—build a reputation in a defined lane first, then expand—was intentional, and it paid off. She's now secure enough to publish a Contemporary Rom-Com or tackle a third-person, multi-POV series—a departure from her signature first-person voice—purely because the story demands it. "I have reached the point where I'm able to let myself do random stories just because I feel like it," she says. A catalog built on depth has bought her that kind of creative latitude.



I have reached
the point where
I'm able to
let myself do
random stories
just because I
feel like it.

—Annabel Chase

The Ecosystem: How the Catalog Feeds Itself

Chase's series don't sit in isolation. Spellslingers Academy is set in the same world as Spellbound, following the protectors of that universe as they train at school. Hex Support—a series co-written with Tana Grey—is a spin-off of Federal Bureau of Magic, which follows a retired agent. Starry Hollow exists in a different paranormal town from Spellbound but one that shares the same underlying mythology. The reader who finishes one series and wants more doesn't have to leave Chase's universe to find it.

The numbers behind this approach are proof enough that it's successful. On Goodreads alone, Chase has accumulated over 313,000 ratings across 221 works, with a 4.37 average. Starry Hollow Witches, at 26 books, has more than 52,000 ratings. Crossroads Queen, a newer series with just nine books, has already crossed 52,000 ratings of its own. Federal Bureau of Magic sits at nearly 40,000 across fourteen books.

Rather than chasing trends or scattering across unrelated genres, Chase built a network of interconnected series with overlapping worlds, consistent tones, and a core reader promise that holds across all of them: humor-infused supernatural stories with strong female leads. If a reader finishes one series and wants more, there's always another door to open. Her backlist is designed to keep readers circulating within her ecosystem, and that seems to be exactly what they're doing.





The Anti-Visibility Play

When I brought up the pressure for authors to become content creators and TikTok personalities, Chase didn't mince words: "I actively dislike the push to be the face of your brand, especially in light of AI," she says. "I would prefer [for] my stories to speak for themselves without the need to become a hoop-jumping poodle for the internet's amusement."

To be clear, Chase markets. She markets hard. She runs ads and has a TikTok presence. The difference is that her ads and social content center her books and her worlds, not her personal life or her face. It's a line that sounds simple to draw but requires real discipline to hold, especially when every platform's algorithm rewards personal content over product content.

She acknowledges that timing helped. She built her massive backlist before TikTok and Instagram Reels became the dominant discovery channels, which gave her the financial cushion to be selective about how she showed up. The philosophy underneath is transferable, though: If your income comes from

“I would prefer [for] my stories to speak for themselves without the need to become a hoop-jumping poodle for the internet's amusement.

—Annabel Chase



Annabel Chase's brand, built from more than 150 titles, is strong enough to have made several dreams into a reality for the author—including seeing one of her books featured on a billboard in Times Square.

a deep, interconnected catalog rather than from personal-brand momentum, you're far less vulnerable to platform shifts.

Many authors argue nowadays the value of a human face on camera is going up in light of AI-generated content flooding each platform, as a form of proof that there's a real person behind the work. Chase sees it differently. She'd rather invest in the thing AI can't replicate: a distinctive body of work with a consistent voice, and a universe readers return to because it feels like a specific per-

son wrote it. Her approach won't map perfectly to every author at every stage—a debut author in 2026 faces a different discovery landscape than Chase did in 2011. The underlying math still works, though.

Voice as Brand

If Chase's face isn't the brand, her narrative voice is. Across every series—Paranormal Cozy, Urban Fantasy, and even Contemporary Rom-Com—her protagonists share a recognizable DNA: They're sharp,

funny, slightly overwhelmed, and deeply human even when they're casting spells or fighting vengeance demons. The archetype was somewhat market-driven, somewhat personal, she admits. "That style of storytelling suits my voice and seems to land with readers, so it was a win-win," she says.

Pick up a *Starry Hollow* book after finishing *Spellbound* and you'll recognize the tone immediately. Same with *Crossroads Queen* and *Federal Bureau of Magic*. Chase's voice is the through line—

the connective tissue that makes the ecosystem work. A reader doesn't need to know what Annabel Chase looks like to know they're reading an Annabel Chase book within the first few pages. That kind of voice recognition is what most face-of-brand marketing tries to manufacture externally; Chase built it into the product itself.

She's also honest about the fact that staying in that lane was a choice. Now she's testing its edges, varying the point-of-view and narration style of her next book "because that's what the story requires." But when you have 150-plus titles generating backlist revenue, you can afford to experiment with one series without betting the business on it.

Worldbuilding as Philosophy

For someone who keeps herself out of the spotlight, Chase has a lot to say about community—she just says it through her fiction. "Community building and found family are important to me, and they're a common thread through almost all, if not all, of my series," she says. Her protagonists tend to start in isolation and then gradually integrate into the communities around them, becoming bridges that connect others. To her, they embody a simple philosophy: If you want to change the world, start with yourself.

It's a message that feels strikingly similar to anyone who's watched Chase navigate the indie

author community over the course of her career.

Chase's career illustrates a few principles that most indie authors already know intellectually but rarely execute with this kind of consistency. She started in a genre that didn't quite fit, recognized the mismatch, and pivoted to a genre and pen name built specifically around her natural voice. She stacked series within that genre that cross-pollinated her readership through shared worlds and spin-off characters. She treated her catalog as an interconnected system designed for reader retention, and she invested in production velocity during the critical early years when the backlist advantage compounds fastest. Along the way, she made a bet that the work itself—not her personal visibility—would be the more durable brand asset.

With her newest series, *Blind Fury*, releasing in 2026 and a BookCon appearance to her name as of this past April, she's showing no signs of slowing down. She is, however, showing zero interest in filming a "get ready with me."

For indie authors caught in the exhausting cycle of content creation, personal branding, and platform anxiety, Chase's career offers a different model: a body of work so deep and so well connected that it generates its own momentum. Her books are the amusement, she says, and she intends to keep it that way.

The 313,000 Goodreads ratings she has to her name suggest her readers agree. ■



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.

Many Voices, One Book: How Indie Authors Build Anthologies

Creating an anthology often starts with a simple question. What would it take to bring a group of writers together and turn that shared energy into a book? Anthologies offer a way to build something larger than a single voice while sharing both the work and the reward.

In indie publishing, anthologies have become a common path for collaboration and visibility. They allow multiple authors to share the work of building a book while reaching new audiences through each contributor's network. They create space for experimentation, giving writers a way to explore ideas without committing to a full-length project.

These collections are not all built the same way. Some grow from genre communities, like editor J. Curtis's *The Midnight Vault*. Others are shaped by crowdfunding efforts, such as *Love Me in Vegas*, coordinated by Isabella Lisak. Still others emerge from writing groups like the London Writers' Salon, represented by Editor-in-Chief Gina Beach.

Supporting them all, however, are platforms that provide the structure behind these efforts and help turn collaborative ideas into published work. In these three examples, Lulu worked with the author groups to guide the projects from manuscript to finished book, says Sarah Franklin, public relations manager for the company. These examples highlight both the opportunities for success and the shared challenges that come with indie anthologies, offering practical insight into how authors can organize, produce, and bring their own collaborative projects to life.





THE
MIDNIGHT
VAULT

VOLUME I ANTHOLOGY

A Horror Anthology Built on Shared Fear

Horror is a natural fit for an anthology. It thrives in short story form, where a single idea can sit with the reader long after the story ends. It also benefits from multiple voices, since fear shifts depending on who is telling the story. One writer leans into atmosphere. Another into shock. A third into quiet dread. When those approaches sit side by side, the result feels layered rather than repetitive.

That range shaped *The Midnight Vault*, a Horror anthology coordinated by author J. Curtis. The project began with a simple moment of curiosity within a writing community on Substack. As Curtis explains, “What intrigued me was how many people chimed in, of all ages, saying they had heard of *The Twilight Zone* and had a favorite episode.” That shared reference point gave the group a common language from which to build, even before the anthology existed.

What followed was less a formal launch and more of a collaborative leap. Curtis describes how quickly the idea turned into action. “We organized a list of a few people—thirty-one, I think—and asked if they would be interested,” he says. “They were from across the gamut: Horror writers, Sci-Fi writers, Speculative Fiction of all types, including some visual artists. We said, ‘Would you be interested in doing something? We’re going to do it ad hoc, and we’re going to post everybody’s story.’”

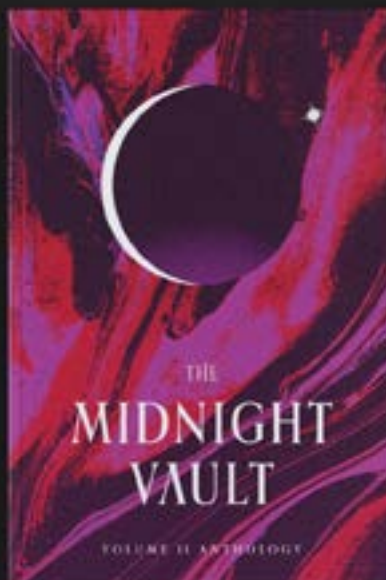
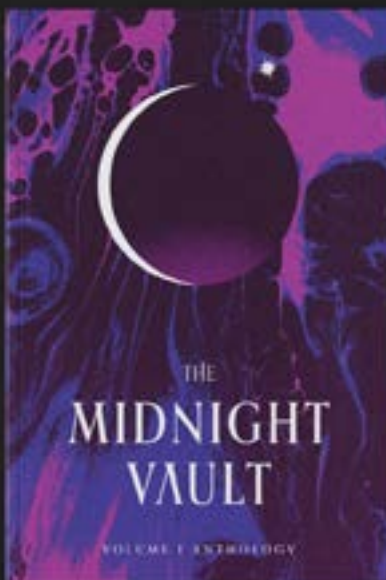
That openness shaped the tone of the anthology series from the beginning. Instead of narrowing the field to a specific type of Horror, the project invited a wide range of interpretations. As Curtis notes, “We loved the varied styles because we didn’t choose just Horror writers. We chose writers of all stripes.”

What held it together was not strict genre control but instead a shared investment not just in authors’ own stories but also in the complete collection. That sense of ownership helped carry the project through drafting, revision, and eventual publication.

As the anthology grew, so did the editorial demands. The next volume had the same theme, but because of the popularity of the first book, a more selective approach was needed to find the content. Organizers received ninety-eight submissions, Curtis says; from those, they selected only the nineteen most memorable for the anthology. That shift reflects a common turning point in anthology work, where a project moves from open collaboration into curated publication.

From a publishing perspective, projects like *The Midnight Vault* reveal a practical advantage. “One of the benefits is going to be that the immediate network is much larger with more authors involved in the process,” Franklin explains. Each contributor brings their own audience, creating a built-in system for visibility and promotion.

What stood out most about *The Midnight Vault* was not its reach, however, but its origin. “The community component of it added some extra flair of author-to-author support and friendliness that you might not find in traditional anthology publishing journeys,” Franklin continues. “This is something the publisher can lean into for book announcements, spreading positive reviews, and even having a bank of different personalities to tap into for any publicity opportunities that come about.”



The Kickstarter Anthology that Became a Campaign Story

Some anthologies develop quietly, with organizers creating the project behind closed doors and only revealing the polished collection once it's ready for publication. Others take shape in public, where every step of the process is visible to readers, backers, and the authors themselves. *Love Me in Vegas* falls into the second category. Built by the Author Nation Cohort and coordinated by Isabella Lisak in 2025, the anthology was designed not only as a collection of stories but as a shared experience that unfolded in real time.

From the beginning, the project served the dual purpose of being both creative and educational. Many of the participating authors were new to Kickstarter or to anthology work. The anthology was a way to learn by doing, with guidance from Lisak built into the process, to culminate with the Reader Nation event in Vegas during 2025. As she explains, "It felt like a natural capstone to the cohort experience."

What stood out most in the *Love Me in Vegas* project was how much of the work happened before the

campaign ever launched. Lisak describes this early stage. "There are a couple of months beforehand where you have to plan out who is participating in the anthology," she says. "Who is designing the cover? Who is going to print the books? How long it takes and how much it costs. There are a lot of people involved—editors, designers—and there are many moving pieces." These tasks are part of the normal process of an anthology, but they become more complex as the number of authors involved grows.

The level of coordination required for crowdfunded anthologies can turn the projects into something closer to a production schedule than a simple book project. Every decision connects to another. Every delay has ripple effects. It also means that when the campaign goes live, the team is already carrying months of preparation behind the scenes.

The pace shifts during the campaign itself. The focus of the organizers moves to visibility and communication. Backers ask questions. Even after the crowd-

KICKSTARTER

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Art Comics Crafts Dance Design Fashion Film Food Games Journalism Music Photography Publishing Technology Theater Discover

Love Me in Vegas: A Collection of Romance



Presented by Author Ventures, this Kickstarter-exclusive anthology features Willow Winters, KC Mills, and 25+ powerhouse indie writers.

Created by
Author Ventures LLC

370 backers pledged \$23,664 to help bring this project to life.

Last updated December 15, 2025

funding portion is done, organizers are required to keep not only their authors but also their backers informed of their progress. As Lisak notes, “The campaign itself may only run for a month, but everything before and after takes about half a year.” That longer timeline is easy to underestimate at the start.

Fulfillment is often the most demanding phase of any crowdfunded project. It takes time, coordination, and physical labor. In the case of *Love Me in Vegas*, it also became one of the most meaningful parts of the experience. Fulfillment to Kickstarter backers often is done by mail, but because of the conference, the project could allow backers to pick up their books in person and to volunteer to help pack and ship books to backers everywhere. “It was very touching how many people showed up to help,” Lisak says. “Authors, spouses, and attendees all pitched in. We set up an assembly line, and it moved much faster.” That image of authors packing their own books, side by side at a writer’s conference, reinforces the idea that the anthology is a shared effort from start to finish.

From a publishing standpoint, projects like *Love Me in Vegas* highlight the expanded reach of anthology work. As Franklin explains, “The publisher can lean into its community when it comes to book announcements, spreading positive reviews, and even having a bank of different personalities to tap into for any publicity opportunities.” Each contributor becomes part of the promotional network, extending the life of the book beyond the campaign. Instead of only the publishing company carrying the promotional load, all the participants in the anthology could lend their support too, expanding the success of the project.

That reach also connects to long-term planning for aspects such as the project’s

Pro Tip:

The Author Nation Cohort was a partnership between Author Nation and Kickstarter designed to teach authors about crowdfunding. About fifty authors participated in the 2025 cohort, of which more than thirty contributed to the *Love Me in Vegas* anthology.

IAM’s Jamie Davis shared more about the lessons he learned from the cohort in an October 2025 feature. Read it at <https://indieauthormagazine.com>.



distribution and how revenue will be shared, Franklin notes. Decisions made early in the process shape how the book continues to perform after the campaign ends. *Love Me in Vegas* was a successful anthology that helped to build community. Another volume is planned for the future.

A Writing Community Anthology that Built Itself

Some anthologies are built around a clear theme or market focus, but others take shape from an existing circle of trusted collaborators. The London Writers' Salon anthology, *Writing in Community*, emerged from the latter approach. It was not planned as a publishing project at the start. It was built out of a need to connect during a time when many writers felt isolated.

During the COVID pandemic in 2020, the Salon became more than a writing group. It became a daily habit for many of its members—a place where writers showed up, set intentions, and worked side by side in

quiet focus. The idea of creating an anthology of members' work came from that shared experience. As the editor-in-chief of the London Writers' Salon's anthology, Gina Beach, explains, "We wanted to do a community project that celebrated the work that came out of this difficult period in 2020." The anthology became a place for their community members to celebrate their work and form connections.

Unlike *Love Me in Vegas*, which was coordinated by organizers, the community itself drove the London Writers' Salon's project. "At that point, we didn't have our submission portal," Beach says.

"We didn't have much of a framework at all. We just asked people to email us ... and it just really grew organically." Later, the community adopted Typeform, a web-based program where a submission's information can be transferred to a Google Sheet to ease submission coordination.

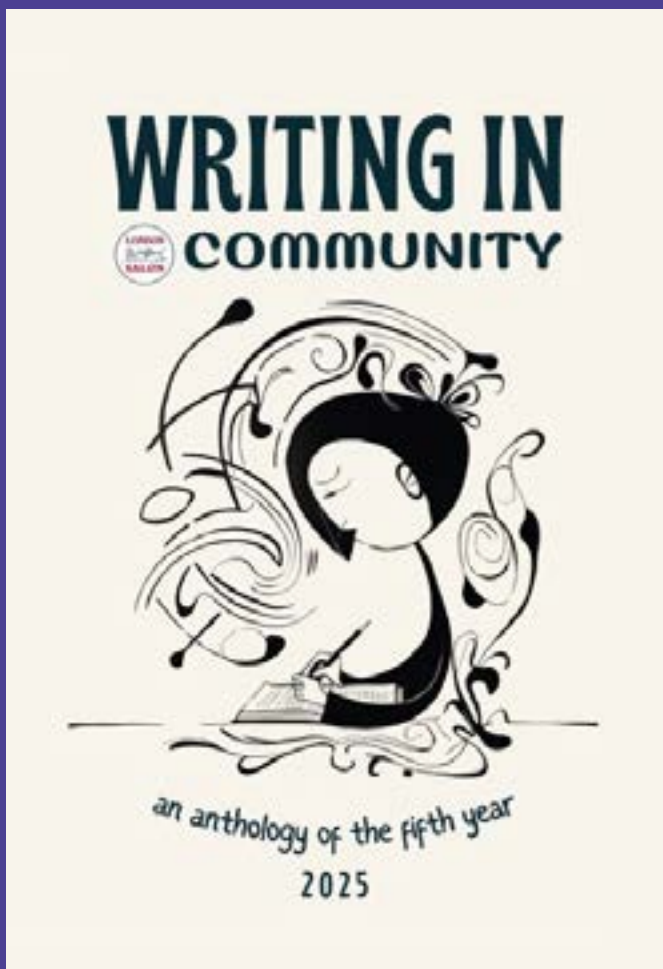
That lack of structure might seem risky from a publishing standpoint, but it also created a sense of

openness that shaped the identity of the book. Instead of building strict barriers to entry, the project leaned into trust. That trust continues to guide the fifth anthology today. "Anybody who considers themselves part of the London Writers' Salon community in any capacity is warmly welcome to submit," Beach says. The *Writing in Community* anthology is available both in print and online, reflecting the Salon's identity as a global, digital-first writing community that still values traditional book publication.

For many contributors, the anthology becomes a first publication, a confidence boost, or a way to mark progress in their writing life. Beach emphasizes how intentional the team is about that experience, especially during the editing phase. "We try to do it in a very gentle and encouraging way, where we're not going to just ghost someone," she says. "We're very back and forth ... saying, 'You didn't quite meet the brief. ... Can you try again?'"

The emotional impact of the finished book reflects that approach as well. "There is such gratitude and this overwhelming sense of collective ownership over the project," Beach says. The anthology does not belong to a single editor or publisher. It belongs to everyone who helped shape it.

From a publishing perspective, projects like this are more common than they might seem. As Franklin notes, "In



our twenty-three-year history we have over twelve thousand anthologies published on Lulu.” Many of those projects begin in communities just like the London Writers’ Salon.

The challenges are real, she acknowledges. Man-

aging submissions, edits, and communication across a large group can become overwhelming. As Franklin puts it, “If you’re working on one book and you’ve got the back and forth in your email inbox for one author, that times thirty is a lot of work.”

For Beach, however, the effort is worth it. “I volunteered to do this and continue to volunteer because I get so much out of supporting writers and seeing them come back and say, ‘Because of this, I did this,’” she says.

What Anthologies Mean in Indie Publishing

When you look at these three projects—a Horror anthology built from a Substack community, a Kickstarter Romance anthology tied to a live event, and a global writing group using a book to mark its shared experience—the differences are easy to see. Each one follows a different path, shaped by its purpose and the people behind it.

From Franklin’s perspective, however, every anthology is a complex publishing project that brings together many of the same moving parts as a traditional book, just on a larger scale. “For the first anthology, it’s probably a combination of all of the moving parts that a book would typically experience, but amplified,” she says. Communication becomes more demanding. Timelines become more difficult to manage. Expectations have to be set from the beginning for the participants and the publisher so everyone understands the stakes of the project.

Complexity also creates opportunities unique to anthologies. Each contributor to an anthology brings their own readers, their own networks, and their own platforms for sharing the work. For *The Midnight Vault*, the Substack community helped build early interest and engagement in the anthology. With *Love Me in Vegas*, the authors them-

selves became part of the campaign’s visibility and momentum as part of the crowdfunding campaign. In the London Writers’ Salon anthology, the existing community provided both contributors and readers from the start.

Authors interested in organizing or participating in their own anthologies should keep in mind the financial aspects of such projects. Beyond funding the initial project, managing royalties and payments for contributors, if part of the process, can be complicated without a solid system in place. Explore whether your publishing platform supports multiple contributors within a project and whether it can handle revenue splits automatically. In Lulu’s case, Franklin says, “We can allow for the publisher to include multiple pays for projects. ... If you’re splitting revenue thirty ways, it keeps it clean within our technology.” Other platforms, such as Draft2Digital, have similar features.

On the other hand, authors should consider the flexibility of a project post-publication. Indie anthologies are not fixed in the way traditional publications often are. They can evolve over time, even after release. “One of the beautiful things about self-publishing is the publisher can always go in and change

anything,” Franklin says. That means updates, corrections, and even strategic shifts can happen without restarting the entire process. That flexibility still needs a plan, however. How you share the book, set the price, and sell it all affect how well it does. “Understanding the distribution options and how the revenue is broken down is very important,” she says. Choices you make early can change how many people see it and how well it lasts over time. Before you join an anthology, take time to learn how it will be sold and how you will be paid.

What becomes clear across all three case studies is

that anthologies operate on two levels at once. They are creative collaborations, built on shared ideas and voices. Although every project takes shape differently, each one begins with an idea, grows through collaboration, and reaches readers through a mix of creative effort and practical structure.

Anthologies are not just collections of stories. They are a record of collaboration between writers, readers, and the larger publishing world. Each voice stands on its own, but together they create something larger—a shared space where writers and readers meet from many directions and celebrate the art of storytelling. ■



Wendy Van Camp

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

AI Copyright for Indie Authors: Where We Stand Now

Three Years of Court Rulings, Copyright Office Reports, and Billion-Dollar Settlements Have Reshaped the Landscape for Indie Authors



Only a few months after ChatGPT emerged in November 2022, as more users were discovering generative AI platforms and exploring their capabilities, authors and other creatives were already posing questions about AI and copyright. Would AI-generated content be copyrightable? What about works created by a mix of human and AI input? Would copyright protection extend to works being used to train AI models?

In *IAM*'s April 2023 special issue on artificial intelligence, guest author Ash Roberts explored where copyright law stood at the time—but with court cases still pending and without updated rulings from the Copyright Office, many of the answers authors wanted were still hypothetical.

Three years later, appellate court decisions, a three-part report from the US Copyright Office, over fifty active lawsuits against AI companies, and the \$1.5 billion *Bartz v. Anthropic* settlement have provided authors with many of the answers they were looking for. Some questions remain unanswered, and court precedents and the developments in generative technology have raised new ones. But the legal landscape for creatives today is much clearer than in 2023, offering definitions and distinctions that matter to all authors.

Whether you choose to use AI or simply seek to understand the protections that exist for your work in its midst, here's where things stand in 2026.

Note: This article is for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. Consult a qualified attorney for guidance on your specific situation.

AI Cannot Be an Author. That's Now Settled (Mostly).

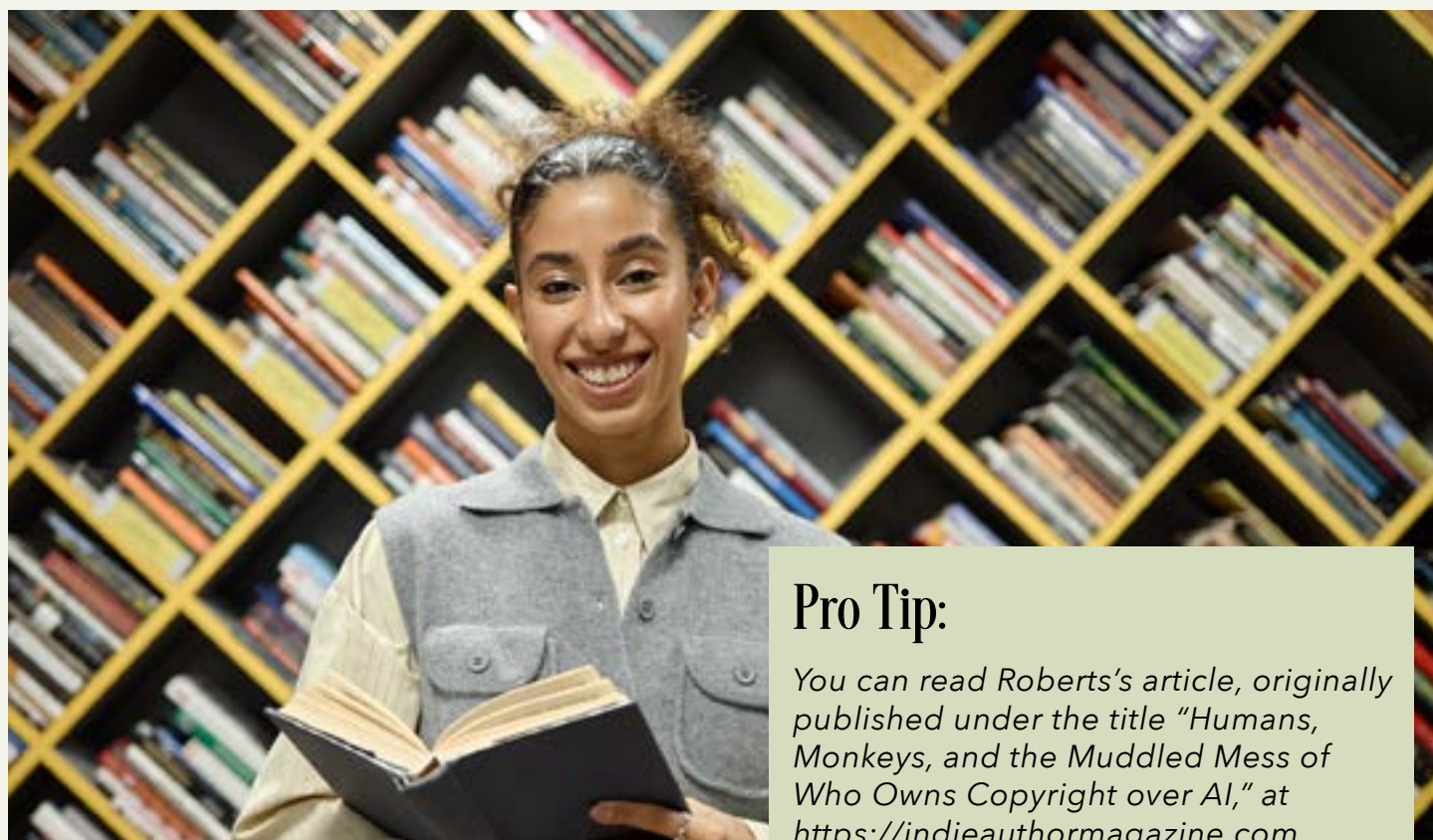
Roberts's original article detailed one of the standout cases taking place at the time of its publication. In *Thaler v. Perlmutter*, Stephen Thaler argued he should own the copyright to artwork his AI system, the Creative Machine, generated autonomously. In his original copyright registration application, which was denied, he listed the Creative Machine as the author of the work but claimed a "fruit of the tree" doctrine—if he owned the machine, he owned what it produced. At the time, that case was still pending.

It's not pending anymore. In March 2025, the DC Circuit Court of Appeals unanimously affirmed the lower court's ruling: The Copyright

Act requires all eligible work to be authored by a human being, and the Creativity Machine doesn't qualify. Multiple provisions within the Act make clear that authors must be humans, not machines, according to the court's ruling.

Thaler filed a petition asking the US Supreme Court to take the case in October 2025, so there's a slim chance the case will get revisited at the highest level. But for now, the legal standard is that AI acting on its own cannot hold copyright.

In the wake of Thaler's case, it's important to note that the court has yet to rule definitively on where the line is drawn for copyright protection when a human uses AI as a tool and contributes



Pro Tip:

You can read Roberts's article, originally published under the title "Humans, Monkeys, and the Muddled Mess of Who Owns Copyright over AI," at <https://indieauthormagazine.com>.

significant creative input along the way. Although this is likely the question many indie authors care about, the answer is yet to be decided.

The Copyright Office Got Specific.

Between 2024 and 2025, the US Copyright Office released a three-part report on AI and copyright that filled in a lot of gaps. The first part, published in July 2024, covered digital replicas, or “the use of digital technology to realistically replicate an individual’s voice or appearance,” according to the report. The subsequent parts, which were published in January 2025 and May 2025, covered the copyrightability of AI and the programs’ use of copyrighted works in training new AI models, respectively—topics many authors have wondered about. Although the Copyright Office’s report doesn’t have the force of law, it signals where the government thinks the line should be drawn.

On whether your AI-assisted work is copyrightable (Part 2, January 2025)

The Copyright Office confirmed that prompts alone—even extraordinarily detailed, multi-step, heavily engineered prompts—do not make you the author of whatever the AI produces. Legally, prompts function as instructions, not creative expression. The prompt author only tells the machine what they want; the machine decides how to execute it.



This doesn't mean AI-assisted work can never be copyrighted. The report laid out scenarios where copyright protection likely applies: If you input your own copyrighted writing and it's perceptible in the output, for example, you're the author of at least that portion. If you creatively select, arrange, or modify AI-generated content, those human contributions can be copyrightable. And hundreds of works incorporating some AI-generated material have been registered successfully since the 2023 guidance, so this isn't a blanket ban on using AI in your process.

The practical spectrum looks something like this: If you're brainstorming with AI, using it to check grammar, or letting it help you refine prose you wrote, your copyright is intact. If you're generating passages with AI and then substantially rewriting them, this is also likely protectable, though a court would need to evaluate eligibility case by case. But if you're prompting AI to write your entire book and hitting publish, the work is not copyrightable under current standards.

On whether AI companies can train on copyrighted works (Part 3, May 2025)

The Copyright Office released a 108-page report examining fair use in AI training and concluded that certain uses of copyrighted material for training cannot be defended as fair use. Where AI-generated outputs are substantially similar to the training data that went in, the Office sees a strong argument for infringement.



Three Courts, Three Cases, Three Different Answers.

Outside of the Copyright Office's reports, several landmark court cases have laid the groundwork for future rulings around copyright and AI. Legal analysts have started calling the first batch of fair use rulings "the Fair Use Triangle" because the three decisions point in different directions depending on the circumstances.

● ***Thomson Reuters v. ROSS Intelligence* (February 2025): The AI company lost.**

ROSS Intelligence used Westlaw's copyrighted legal headnotes to train a competing AI-powered legal search engine. The court rejected the fair use defense for two reasons: The copyrighted material was subject to full protection, and the resulting AI product competed directly against the original. When your AI tool is designed to replace the thing it was trained on, fair use is a hard sell.

● ***Bartz v. Anthropic* (June 2025): The AI company won on fair use for purchased books, though it settled with authors whose books were pirated.**

A group of authors sued Anthropic—the company behind Claude—for using their books to train its AI model. The judge found fair use for legally purchased books, calling training large language models "among the most transformative" uses the court expected to see. The case continued on the separate question of whether Anthropic's use of pirated copies obtained through BitTorrent for the same purpose was also considered fair use—a distinction the court treated very differently. The case ultimately settled for \$1.5 billion.

Additionally, a set of authors who opted out of the initial *Bartz v. Anthropic* settlement are suing the AI company for copyright infringement in a separate case. The authors argue they "did not discover, and could not have reasonably discovered, that their specific works were included in Anthropic's private, internal database" until the direct notice to class members was sent by the original plaintiffs. The case is still in early stages, so no rulings have been made yet.

● ***Kadrey et al. v. Meta Platforms, Inc.* (June 2025): The AI company won, but the court left a roadmap for future plaintiffs.**

Authors including Sarah Silverman and Richard Kadrey sued Meta for training its collection of AI models, called LLaMA, on pirated copies of their books. Meta prevailed because the plaintiffs didn't present sufficient evidence that Meta's use harmed the market for their original works. But the court's detailed reasoning argued the authors simply made the wrong argument in their motion and told future plaintiffs how to build a stronger case, particularly around the indirect ways AI-generated content can substitute for and devalue original creative work.

The scorecard so far: Three judges have ruled on fair use in AI training. Two of those have sided with AI companies, but one sided with the copyright holder. Yet with more than fifty active lawsuits regarding AI and copyright protections, filed by everyone from *The New York Times* to Disney to the Authors Guild, there's a lot more to come.



The Case Indie Authors Should Watch

Roberts's 2023 article mentioned Jason Allen, the artist who won a Colorado State Fair award with AI-generated artwork after spending eighty hours and nine hundred iterations creating his piece. He's now suing the Copyright Office in the case of *Allen v. Perlmutter* after they denied his copyright registration.

Allen argues his case is fundamentally different from Thaler's. Where Thaler listed the AI as the sole author and himself as merely the owner, Allen is arguing that he exercised significant creative control through more than six hundred prompts and extensive iteration—that the AI was his tool, not his replacement. His filing specifically distinguishes his level of involvement from the autonomous generation at issue in Thaler.

This case tests a scenario many authors navigate daily: using AI with substantial human direction, iteration, and creative decision-making. The outcome will go a long way toward defining where “assisted by AI” ends and “generated by AI” begins. As of June 2026, the case is still pending in federal court in Colorado.



What Hasn't Changed

Some fundamentals from 2023 remain solid. Copyright still attaches automatically the moment you create something; registration with the Copyright Office is only required if you need to enforce it in court, and a DMCA takedown notice handles most situations indie authors encounter. You still don't own the copyright to most elements on your book cover—the stock photos, typography, and design elements belong to their respective creators unless rights are explicitly transferred to you. Courts and the Copyright Office maintain that non-human creators can't hold copyright, citing precedent in *Naruto v. Slater*

that says Congress has not specifically extended copyright law to animals. And the terms of service for whatever AI tool you're using still govern your right to use its output—most platforms transfer usage rights to you, but it's always worth checking.

Other countries continue to handle the gray area of protecting creative works in the wake of artificial intelligence differently. Some jurisdictions assign copyright of AI-generated material to the programmer or the person who arranged for the work to be created. If you're publishing internationally, the rules in each market may vary.

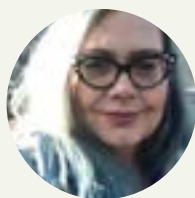


What to Do

If you use AI in your creative process: Use it as a tool within your workflow, not as a substitute for your creativity. Document your human contributions—keep drafts, revision notes, and records that show your creative decision-making. Substantially modify any AI-generated content before it goes into your final manuscript. And when registering work with the Copyright Office, disclose your AI involvement honestly, and describe your human contributions clearly. The Copyright Office has registered hundreds of works with AI components since 2023; transparency works in your favor.

If you're concerned about your books being used to train AI: You're in good company; dozens of lawsuits are pursuing exactly this issue. The legal landscape is still developing, with major decisions expected through 2026 and beyond. Monitor opt-out mechanisms offered by AI platforms where they're available, and keep an eye on the Authors Guild and similar organizations that are actively litigating on behalf of creators.

“Substantial human intervention” is still the standard for copyright, just as it was in 2023. The difference is that we now have court rulings, Copyright Office reports, and billion-dollar settlements that offer additional definition. The law is catching up to the technology—but just like AI, it's always evolving and likely won't stay still for long. ■



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.



Writing the Next Chapter

Theresa Goodrich on the 'Gut-Punch' Diagnosis that Gave Her Permission to Stop Waiting

Ask any group of authors about what their writing means to them, and many will share how stories have shaped their lives, often from early childhood, when they fell in love with reading or found comfort in books.

Some will share how stories have changed their lives—how writing has helped them step away from an old career or altered their daily routine for the better.

For Theresa Goodrich, writing has done both of these things. And in one of the most challenging parts of her story—which came amid a difficult period for people across the world—though writing didn’t save her life directly, it gave her hope in the midst of it.

She hadn’t expected it would become such a source of hope for other people too.

Today, Theresa writes nonfiction travel books under the name Theresa L. Goodrich and fictional Cozy Travel Mysteries under the pen name Theresa L. Carter. Before that, she studied journalism, though she opted for a less traditional route with her career once she graduated.

“My dad’s an artist, so I grew up with him creating. He created his own schedule, and he created what he wanted to create, and that was the kind of lifestyle that I wanted, and I just couldn’t see going through the obits and city beats and all that,” Theresa says.

Rather than working for a paper, she instead began waiting tables and writing on the side. After moving to Chicago in 2001, she started sharing the stories of her new home on her blog, *The Local Tourist*, hoping to expand later into writing about other towns and cities across the Midwest. That opportunity came

in 2016, when a cross-country road trip with her husband inspired a memoir about the journey. She published her second book in 2018 and had a launch party planned for her third book in March 2020.

Then came the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. Her book launch event was canceled; Theresa continued writing the book from a new angle.

A few months later, a routine mammogram revealed Theresa had breast cancer.

Finding Joy

Theresa had celebrated her fiftieth birthday in May 2020, and she’d scheduled her first routine mammogram for August of that year.

“It did its job,” she says.

After the mammogram and a follow-up biopsy came back abnormal, Theresa and her husband, Jim, took a weekend camping trip to unplug while they waited for further results. On the final day of the trip, Theresa received the news of her diagnosis.

“I remember all that was left in the campsite was we had this blue tarp that was under our tent, and there was a little baby frog on the tarp, and it was the cutest little thing,” she says. “We were just about to wrap that up, and then I got the call from the doctor.”

After the couple returned home “and had a chance to breathe a little bit,” Theresa says, she and her husband told their parents. Soon after, Theresa posted an update on Facebook.

“From that point on, I was very public about the entire experience because we were all so isolated,” she says. “And then once I began chemo, we became even more isolated.” At the start of the pandemic, Theresa



From top, Theresa poses in her fourth, seventh, and ninth wigs for her "Twelve Wigs of Christmas" series. The series was a source of levity for her and her husband as she went through cancer treatment, but it uplifted those around them, too.



had started writing about her thoughts and experiences through lockdown on her blog. As she began chemotherapy, she continued writing and posting, detailing everything from the isolation of lockdown to smoking marijuana with a friend for the first time to ease the nausea from the chemotherapy drugs. "There's not a whole lot that I hid," she says with a laugh.

When Theresa shaved her head a few days after her first chemotherapy appointment—her husband shaved his, too, in solidarity—a friend porch-dropped a collection of fun wigs she had amassed from her annual New Year's Eve parties. "I mean, one is, like, this big," Theresa says, holding her hands up on either side of her head, "and it's white, and one had blue tips, and there was a red one." The couple saw an opportunity to turn the wigs into a source of joy around the holidays. Starting on Christmas, the couple would try on a new wig and costume and hold a photoshoot, then post the results on Facebook. They continued for twelve days and called it "The Twelve Wigs of Christmas."

"People would just—they just loved it," Theresa says. "I went to a friend's birthday party, and someone was there I hadn't seen in probably a decade ... and she came up and she just hugged me. And she started crying, and she's like, 'I cannot tell you how much that meant to see you and Jim doing this.'"

She continues, "It was obviously the toughest time of my life. And it was the hardest time in my husband's life. And to be able to do something fun and bring some levity to all of it, and to have people also just having fun with it—yes, it's hard, and it sucked. And it's also one of the best things that's ever happened to me."

“At fifty-one, I finished treatment, and I was just like, “I’m not waiting anymore.”

—Theresa Goodrich

No More Waiting

As Theresa was sharing her own story online, she was also writing a different story. She continued writing her third nonfiction book, *Living Landmarks of Chicago*, while undergoing chemotherapy. The book gave her “something to look forward to,” she says.

“I would bring my computer and work on it while I was doing chemo because when you’re undergoing chemo, you’re pretty much there for most of the day. It could be anywhere from four to eight hours, sometimes even longer,” she says. Her nurses became her cheerleaders; at her appointments each week, they would ask about her progress over the past week and the chapter she was working on.

“I was just so thrilled that they have so many patients and they actually wanted to know how I was doing,” she says. “It just was really motivating.”

She finished writing the book April 21, five days before she finished chemo. The book had been a passion project, and it had kept her going. But the end of treatment gave Theresa a new perspective on life, and a new direction for her fourth solo book.

“I realized I’d always wanted to write novels,” she says. “I mean, my grandma would give me her books. I remember read-

ing *Clan of the Cave Bear* because Grandma had given it to me, and I was like, ‘I want to do this when I grow up.’ And finally, at fifty-one, I finished treatment, and I was just like, ‘I’m not waiting anymore.’”

Theresa finished the book in March 2022 and published it in August. She had to work up the courage to publish it. Although she’d been writing and publishing for years, she had only ever published nonfiction. “I was terrified,” she says. “It’s a lot more vulnerable and a lot more raw when you’re writing fiction.”

The protagonist of that book, Alex Paige, was a travel writ-

er and breast cancer survivor, just like Theresa. But her story, like her author’s, was only getting started. Today, Theresa has published seven Alex Paige Travel Mysteries, with more still to come. Alongside the Mysteries, Theresa has also continued writing nonfiction travel guides and even branched into Fantasy for a five-book series.

And in July 2026, she launched a Kickstarter for her first memoir. The book, *Diary of a Cockeyed Optimist*, explores how receiving an unexpected cancer diagnosis changed her outlook on life and inspired her to finally pursue her dream career.



Theresa smiles behind a mask during one of her chemotherapy appointments.

Lessons from the Journey

Theresa is compiling her memoir from the posts and journal entries she wrote during her cancer treatment as well as her reflections from today. The process has been an emotional one—but it was also a chance to reflect on the brighter moments she experienced.

“God, the kindness,” she says. “I’ve always believed that people are kind, and that’s actually why I wrote my first book because it was in 2017 and tensions were really, really high. ... I wanted to write that book to show that people are kind and we’re more alike than we are different. And that came back to me in spades when I put myself out there.

“[When writing about my cancer diagnosis] I was definitely not ‘Rah, rah, this is fine. I’m strong. I’m a warrior,’” she continues. “That is not how I approached it. It was like, ‘This sucks. And I also have a lot of hope, and I’m going to be fine, and look at all you amazing people who are lifting me up.’”

Theresa hopes her writing—whether fiction or non-fiction—offers people a glimpse of the same kindness. She doesn’t always write with that theme in mind, she clarifies; it just comes naturally with the stories she likes to tell. When writing blog posts about places to visit or compiling one of her travel guides, she opts to focus on places she would recommend versus the places she wouldn’t. In her Alex Paige novels, even though there’s drama—“I’m writing Murder Mysteries,” she says. “People die. People commit murder.”—she makes sure each character always gets a satisfying ending.

“When they read ‘The End,’ I want them to feel like I’ve given them a hug,” she says. “I’ve got readers who will say, when the book comes, ‘I’m saving this until Sunday,’ and they just spend the day reading it, and that is the best feeling in the world—to know that I’m their self-care Sunday.”

In her life post-treatment, Theresa has tried to show herself kindness, too. She says no to the projects and opportunities that she isn’t truly excited about—as she puts it, “things that I realize don’t align with my soul.” She gives herself permission to create what fills her, and to decorate her planner with stickers and highlighters rather than saving them. She’s trying to find more outlets for creativity, such as knitting and cooking.

And she’s allowing herself the chance to see herself as more than one thing—at least, she’s working on it.

A fluffy white wig became the twelfth wig in Theresa’s “Twelve Wigs of Christmas” series. Throughout her cancer treatment, Theresa was honest about her emotions around the experience, though she says she also found hope in the kindness of those who supported her.





“I feel like you don’t have to pigeonhole yourself and say, ‘This is what I am. This is what I do,’” she says. “For many, many years, I defined myself. ‘I am the Local Tourist.’ That’s who I was. And that was another transition after going through cancer is realizing, ‘I’m not one thing. I’m not just a travel writer. I am a storyteller, and I’m a creative.’”

The Road Ahead

The lessons Theresa has learned are the same ones she hopes to pass along to others who hear her story. “You don’t have to wait for that gut punch,” she says. “You don’t have to wait for that devastating diagnosis or to look your mortality in the face.”

The leap doesn’t have to happen all at once; she encourages authors—and others—to start small. Instead of learning to travel solo by taking a monthlong adventure through Europe, she says, plan a weekend trip close to home. Instead of clearing your schedule to write for hours each day, block out thirty minutes. “I think anything that calls to you and fills your soul, you just take one step,” she says.

She encourages authors to make writing time “sacrosanct” and to read as much as they can, and to remember, “You are worth being happy,” she says.

“I think we get so caught up in, ‘We should do that, this, and we should do that,’ and doing something that brings you joy feels like an indulgence,” she says. “Something that I’ve learned since diagnosis and treatment is that, no, your life should bring you joy.”

For Theresa, that means dedicating time to her



Today, Theresa is focused on giving herself permission to create and to explore the things that bring her joy.

writing. The Kickstarter for her memoir launched July 14 and ends August 4—the anniversary of her first mammogram. She has another Kickstarter planned for her Fantasy series after that. In the meantime, she’s still travel writing, still “saying yes more to the things that fill me,” she says.

On the pre-launch page for her Kickstarter, she writes that her latest mammogram was benign; her cancer markers are clear. She also clarifies that her new book is not a cancer memoir. “Cancer is the canvas, not the picture,” it reads. “This is a book about surviving with your whole self intact, about the gifts hidden inside the worst moments, and about the permission we forget to give ourselves: to feel what we feel, to want what we want, and to stop waiting for our lives to begin.”

She hopes she can be an example to those around her of exactly that.

“I’m going to be fifty-six in May, and I plan to live another fifty-four, fifty-five, fifty-six years,” she says. “I’m not going to wait for something to say, ‘You may not have that much time’ to do what brings me joy and what brings me love.” ■



Nicole Schroeder

Nicole Schroeder is a storyteller at heart. As the editor in chief of *Indie Author Magazine*, she brings nearly a decade of journalism and editorial experience to the publication, delighting in any opportunity to tell true stories and help others do the same. She holds a bachelor’s degree from the Missouri School of Journalism and minors in English and Spanish. Her previous work includes editorial roles at local publications, and she’s helped edit and produce numerous fiction and nonfiction books, including a Holocaust survivor’s memoir, alongside independent publishers. Her own creative writing has been published in national literary magazines. When she’s not at her writing desk, Nicole is usually in the saddle, cuddling her guinea pigs, or spending time with family. She loves any excuse to talk about Marvel movies and considers National Novel Writing Month its own holiday.

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WIDE for the WIN

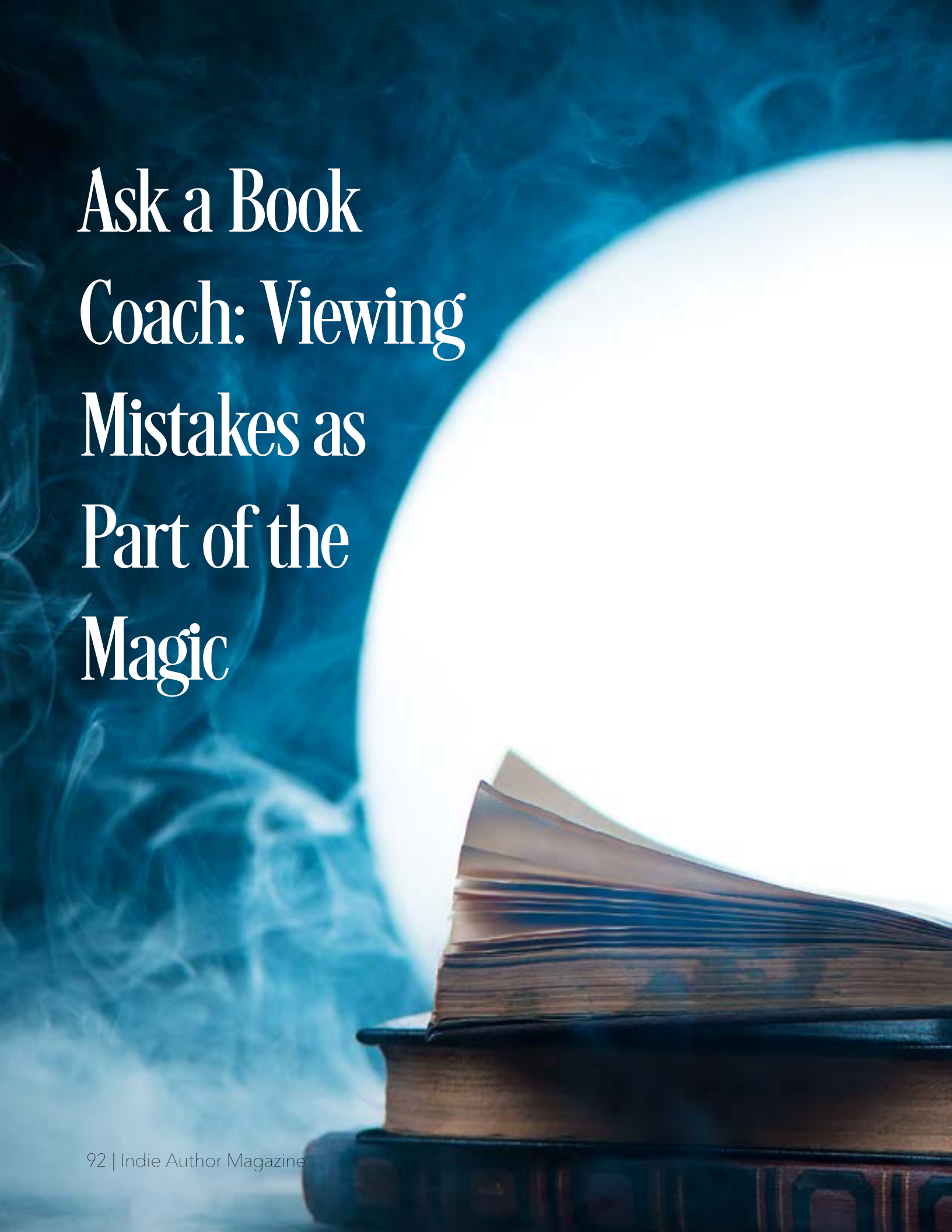
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The background of the entire page is a deep blue with wispy white smoke or mist rising from the bottom left. In the bottom right corner, there is a stack of three old, thick books with worn, brownish pages and dark spines. A large, bright white circle, resembling a full moon, is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the image.

Ask a Book Coach: Viewing Mistakes as Part of the Magic



Every author has a manuscript they will never publish. Every main character grapples with challenges as they travel through their story. Both in fiction and in the real world, mistakes are unavoidable. But they're also one of the best ways for us to grow. Mistakes help our characters discover who they need to become by the end of the book, and they help us find our voices, shape our businesses, and perfect the stories we put into the world. In this installment of her guest series, book coach Rona Gofstein reminds authors that success won't always happen the first time—but even failure can be a good thing, if you look at it the right way.

Most of us have been trained to think of mistakes we make as writers as a bad thing, from starting the book in the wrong spot to not giving our characters enough agency. But the truth is mistakes aren't only necessary; they can be helpful—both for us and for our characters.

As a book coach, I often hear questions like:

- “What if I choose the wrong point of view?”
- “What if I waste months on a project that doesn't work?”
- “What if I'm not clear on what is driving my character and what they need?”

These questions come from a vulnerable place every writer has felt, whether they are working on their first book or their tenth. We want to do well. We want to avoid pain, skip the mistakes, and get straight to success.

Unfortunately, that's not how writing works. In fact, I'd argue that mistakes are not only inevitable; they're essential. But mistakes are also fixable with time, further writing, or an outside perspective, be it a fellow author, an editor, a beta reader, or yes, a book coach.

As writers, we often view mistakes as evidence that we're failing. But most of the time, they're evidence that we're learning, growing, and improving.

Maybe you started writing a book and realized halfway through that your story isn't actually about the character you thought it was. Maybe you spent weeks outlining only to lose your inspiration and realize you're a discovery writer at heart. Maybe you wrote an entire draft, then decided it would never see the light of day. Every writer I know has!

Were these mistakes? Perhaps. But they were also information.

Every writing choice teaches us something. Every wrong turn reveals a new path. Every abandoned draft helps us better understand our voice, our process, our strengths, and the stories we most want to tell.

And mistakes aren't just important for us. Our characters need to make them too. There needs to be friction in the fiction, or your characters won't grow, learn, or change.

Think about your favorite novels. Chances are the protagonist doesn't make perfect decisions from page 1. They stumble. They trust the wrong person. They run away when they should stay. They stay when they should leave. At the midpoint, they still haven't learned what they needed, and they face a setback on their journey. In the dark moment of Act 3, they must trust what they've learned and believe in their goal, despite the mistakes they've made along

the way, or there will be no victory. And that's exactly why you kept turning the pages.

Characters who always make the right choice are not only difficult to relate to or root for; they're also boring. Growth happens when actions have consequences, when a character discovers that their old beliefs no longer serve them, and when they fail, regroup, and try again.

Readers don't connect with perfection. They connect with humanity. The mistakes your characters make are often the engine that drives the story forward.

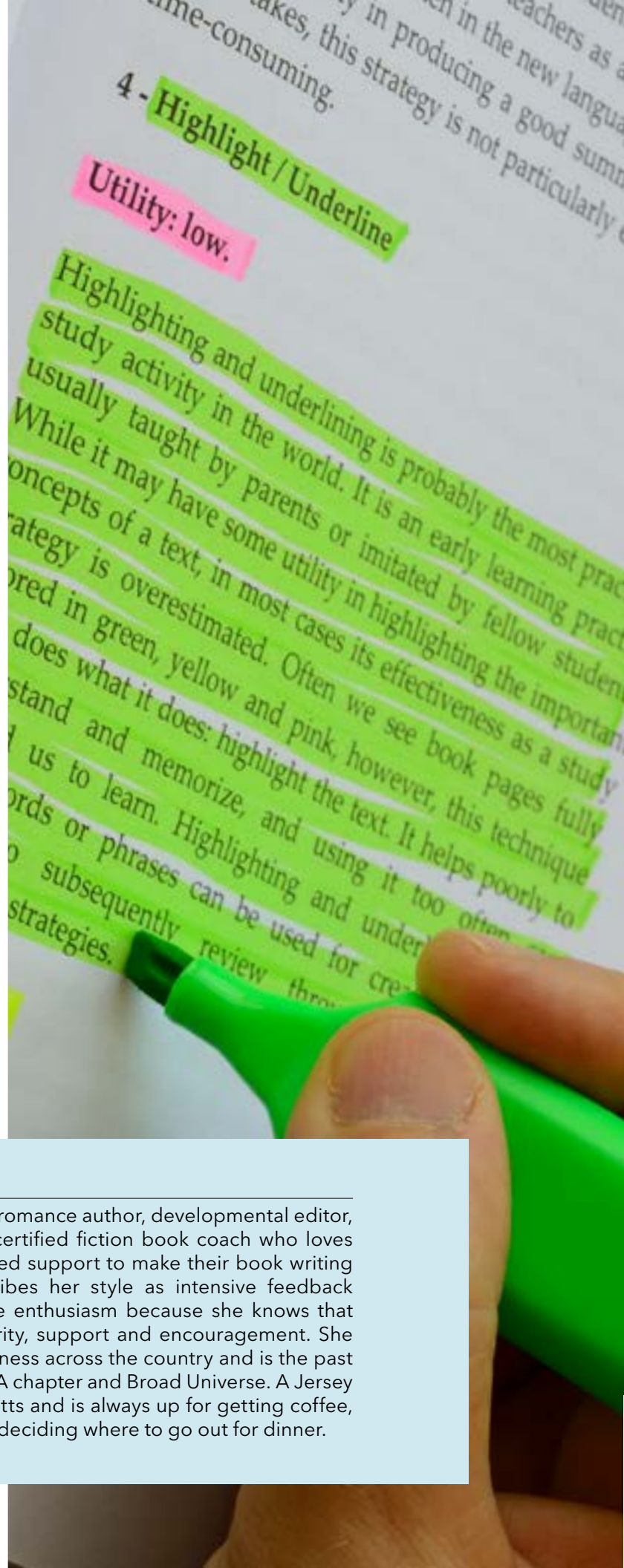
Your mistakes can do the same—on and off the page. The course you signed up for that didn't meet your expectations may help you clarify what kind of learning works best for you. The book you wrote that will never get published may contain lessons that make your next book stronger. And when you take the time to figure out what's not working in your draft, you'll learn more about what your story needs. Maybe it just needs your character to make a mistake.

When we stop treating mistakes as proof that we're doing something wrong and start viewing them as part of the creative process, we become more willing to experiment, take risks, and, hopefully, keep going. So if you're staring at a writing mistake today, consider a different possibility. Maybe it isn't a dead end. Maybe it's a doorway. And maybe the thing you're learning right now is something you couldn't have discovered any other way. ■



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.



The Sleep Reset

How Better Sleep Health Affects Your Creativity

Writers often romanticize exhaustion. We stay up too late chasing one more paragraph, one more edit, one more spark of inspiration blinking across the screen at two in the morning. Creative work fits into a neat schedule, and many of us have convinced ourselves that sacrificing sleep is part of the artistic life. Yet sleep is not lost writing time. Rest is part of the creative process. A well-rested mind is better equipped to imagine, problem-solve, regulate emotions, and return to the page with clarity the next day.

The Myth of the Sleepless Creative

There is a long-standing myth that great art only comes from sacrifice, especially the sacrifice of sleep. Writers joke about surviving on caffeine, working through the night, and ignoring exhaustion to meet deadlines or capture inspiration before it fades.

Although an occasional late night may be unavoidable, chronic sleep deprivation works against the creative process. According to a 2014 study published by researchers at the University of California–Berkeley, lack of sleep affects concentration, memory, emotional balance, and decision-making. For writers, this can mean struggling to find the right words, losing focus in the middle of a draft, or feeling drained by work that once felt exciting and alive.

Alternatively, sleep may make your next writing session easier, and it won't necessarily stop your creative flow. Research shows that slumber gives the brain time to continue processing be-

neath the surface, forming connections we may not reach while exhausted and forcing the work.

One of the most fascinating findings in sleep research is the role REM sleep plays in creative problem-solving. REM sleep allows the brain to make connections that might not seem obvious during our waking hours, writes *TIME Magazine's* Jeffrey Kluger in his 2017 article, "How To Wake Up To Your Creativity." While we sleep, our minds are less focused on logic and routine thinking, giving us the freedom to approach challenges from unexpected angles. Have you ever gone to bed frustrated by a plot problem, only to wake up with the answer? That's not just a coincidence. During REM sleep, the brain continues working behind the scenes, sorting through ideas, combining memories, and testing new possibilities. For writers and other creative people, a good night's sleep may be one of the most effective brainstorming tools available.

Many writers have experienced the strange magic of waking up with the answer to a problem that felt impossible the night before. A stubborn plot hole now makes sense. Dialogue flows more naturally. An emotional scene gains clarity. Dreams, memory

consolidation, and emotional processing all contribute to creativity in ways science is still exploring, but the takeaway for authors is less mysterious: Sometimes the most productive thing a writer can do for a difficult draft is to step away from it long enough to rest.



A photograph of a woman with dark hair sleeping peacefully in a bed. She is lying on her side, facing the camera, with her head resting on a white pillow. Her eyes are closed, and her expression is relaxed. She is wearing a light-colored, patterned top. The bed has a white pillow and a patterned blanket. The background is a dark wooden headboard. The entire image has a strong blue color cast, giving it a calm, nocturnal feel.

“ Yet sleep is not lost writing time.
Rest is part of the creative process.

Why Writers Struggle with Sleep

Writers face unique challenges with sleep. Creativework does not always stop when the laptop closes. Story ideas linger, dialogue loops through the mind, and unfinished projects can create anxiety long after bedtime.

However, the problem with sleep can extend further. Many authors work and relax on the same devices, making it difficult for the brain to separate creative stimulation from rest. Even the writing space itself can blur boundaries. When we answer emails, edit chapters, or scroll social media in bed, the mind associates that space with activity rather than sleep.

Many writers are also guilty of burning the

candle at both ends. Faced with deadlines, day jobs, family responsibilities, and creative ambitions, it can be tempting to sacrifice sleep in order to squeeze in a few more pages before bed. Yet articles suggest that cutting back on sleep may actually work against the creative process. The hours we spend sleeping are not wasted time. During sleep, the brain continues processing information, making new connections, and exploring solutions to problems that may have seemed impossible the night before. By giving ourselves enough time to rest, we may give our creativity the space it needs to do some of its best work.

Practical Sleep Tips for Writers

Protecting sleep health often begins with creating stronger boundaries between creative work and personal rest. Writers may not always control deadlines or inspiration, but small habits can help signal to the brain that it is time to slow down for the evening.

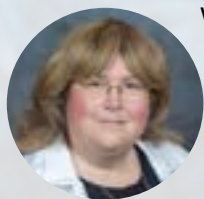
In a *Washington Post* article called “Does Sleeping on an Idea Work?” researchers explore how sleep functions as a creative tool. The article highlights studies showing that even short naps may help people discover solutions they’ve missed while fully awake. Rather than viewing sleep as time lost from the creative process, the article suggests that sleep can be an active part of it.

The CDC offers several tips and strategies for monitoring and improving your sleep health, but in addition, authors may want to try to

- avoid drafting or editing in bed;
- reduce screen use before sleep, especially intense writing or endless scrolling research;
- leave themselves notes about where to continue writing tomorrow to reduce anxiety about forgetting ideas;
- create a short wind-down ritual, such as reading poetry, journaling, stretching, or listening to calming music;
- dim lights an hour before bed to reduce stimulation; and
- keep a notebook nearby so they can jot down late-night ideas without reopening devices.

Some medications, life events, and health conditions can also contribute to a lack of sleep. If you are concerned about your sleep health or issues with your sleep, it may also be necessary to consult with your medical practitioner for further advice and guidance.

Creative minds do not shut off completely, but consistent routines can help train the body and mind to rest more fully. The blinking cursor will still be there in the morning. Sometimes the kindest thing a writer can do for their craft is to close the laptop, turn out the light, and trust that a rested mind will return to the page ready to create something even better. ■



Wendy Van Camp

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

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You do the brilliant.



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reedsystudio

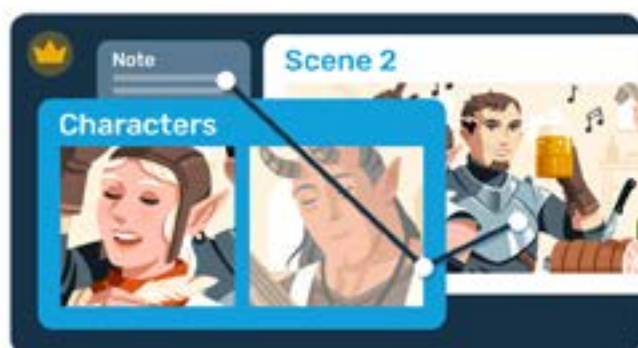
Every writer needs a Studio

A **FREE** place to plan, draft, edit,
and typeset your book

The screenshot displays the reedsystudio interface, which is divided into several sections:

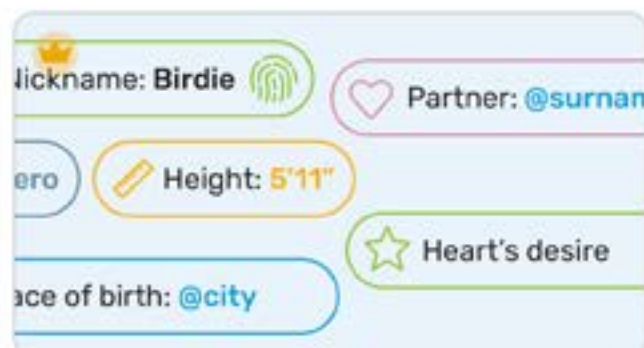
- Manuscript Sidebar:** Contains a list of manuscript components: Front matter, Copyright, Table of Contents, Body, and Back matter. The 'Body' section is expanded, showing '1 Chapter 1'.
- Main Editor:** Displays the title 'Rocket Bride' and the chapter title 'The Rehearsal D'. The text content reads: "Are you ready, Princess?" Bria placed the delicate silver crown "I don't know." Ximara pressed temples, just below where the ci bit of a headache. Maybe it's the braids?
- Goals & Insights Panel:** Shows a progress bar for the 'Manuscript goal' at 30% (12,079 words) out of a target of 40,000 words. It also includes a calendar view for the week of October 23rd to 27th, with a goal to write 1,117 words/day to finish on time.
- Main Characters Panel:** Lists three characters: Princess Andromeda, Aether Leifeld, and Captain Perseus, each with a corresponding character card.

The interface is designed for writers to plan, draft, edit, and typeset their books, with a focus on tracking progress and managing characters.



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Get unlimited access and full customization of boards to plan your characters, plot, and more.



Unlimited attributes

Define important character attributes and link notes together with dynamic relationships.



Advanced stats

Unlock new insights into your writing to help you polish your prose.



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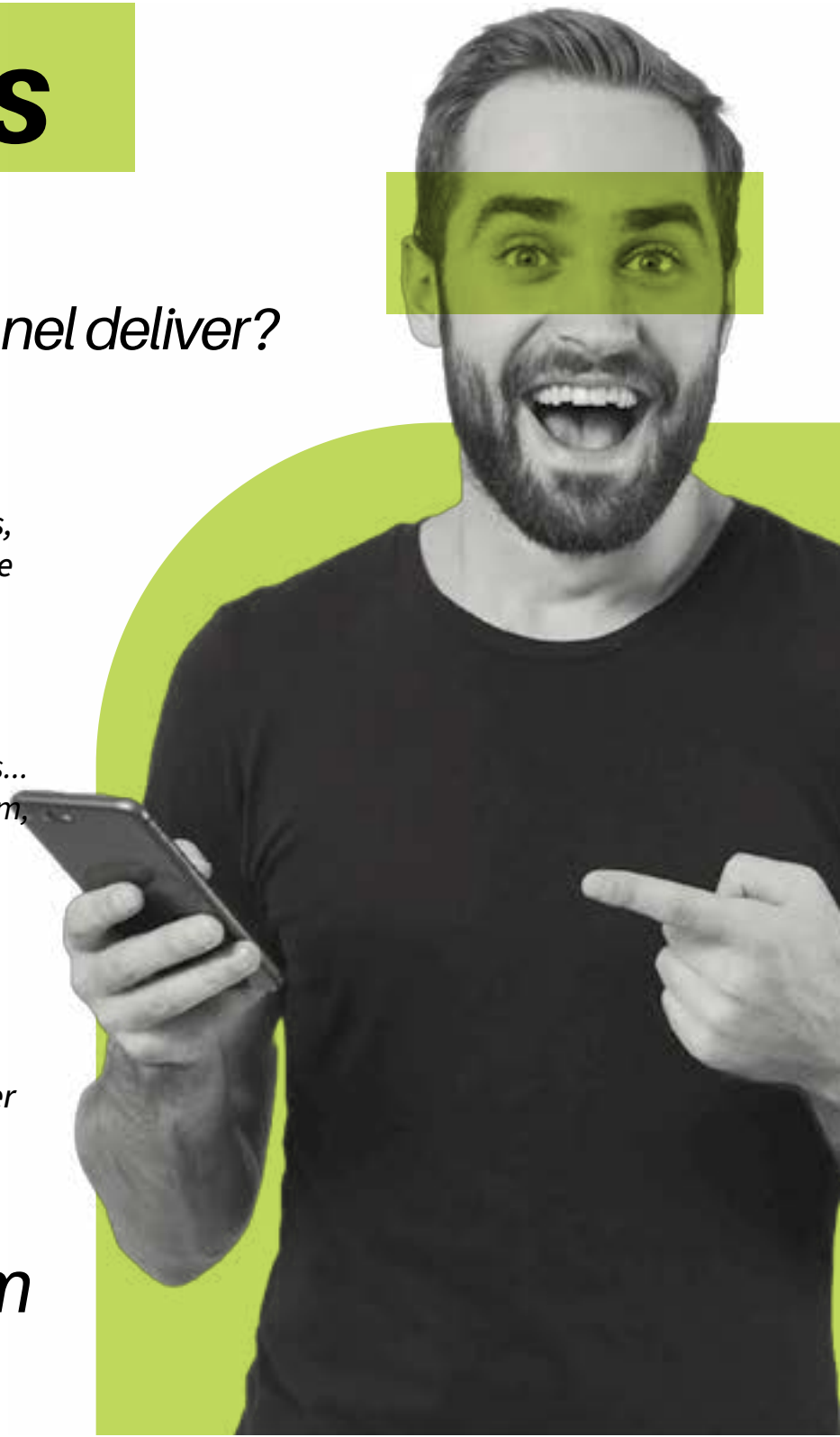
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