

Basics of Book Marketing

By Joel Friedlander

What lies behind the fantastic success of some of the most high-profile independent authors? You know, the people like J.A. Konrath and Amanda Hocking, who we read about on the blogs and news sites?

The answer is marketing. That is, communicating the message about their books to a wide audience, in many channels, and over a period of time. Sure, these authors have a lot of other things going for them, but you can't discount all the time and effort they put into spreading the word, growing their brands, and converting readers into raving fans.

If that's what you want to do, too, it's time to get up to speed on the basics of book marketing.

Generally speaking, there are two ways to approach independent publishing:

1. You write the book, perhaps spending years doing it. You hire an editor and polish the manuscript as best you can. When it's done, you produce the book and then ask the question, "How do I sell this book?"
2. You have the idea for the book. You find ways to test the idea, preferably with people who might actually buy it. You use the feedback you receive to shape the book to readers' desires, and then produce the book which they have essentially requested.

Most indie authors, because they are motivated by passion, take option #1. You can market either kind of book, but your results may be very different. With option #1, you're counting on determination (and a little luck) to make your book interesting to people, marketable, and profitable. If you're publishing and selling a book you already know your readers want, you've taken option #2. Whichever path you've chosen, book marketing is essential to helping you reach your goals.

Let's take a closer look at the basics.

Book Marketing Today

Book marketing is a big topic, so to make it more approachable, let's break it down into areas we can look at individually. Taken all together, you should have a complete look at what's involved in successfully marketing your book and allowing it to reach its full potential.

Having said that, the absolute first and most important element of all in book marketing is... the book itself.

Why Books Sell

There is no replacement for a good book. Quality products repay our marketing investment because once other people learn about and interact with the product, they are much more likely to buy it and recommend it to others.

There are lots of different kinds of books, and we can point to a few clear reasons why some books sell better than others:

- It has unique information that's in demand, but that cannot be found anywhere else
- It solves a problem that many people have
- The story is compelling and/or entertaining
- The author is a celebrity
- The book is already selling and people start telling others about the book

This last point is the ultimate goal of our marketing efforts. You cannot force people to buy your book, no matter how much you spend on advertising or how many times you appear in television shows. A friend who tells you that you just "have to read it" is far more powerful than any other influence for most people.

Keep in mind that you also need to avoid building defects into your book, because a book that's poorly edited, hard to read or awkward to handle is going to have significant obstacles finding a wide readership. For this reason, make sure your book conforms to generally accepted editing and design standards so you don't cripple your own marketing efforts.

Okay, let's say you've done your research and put together a book you know people will want. It's been edited, designed, and you're ready to go. What's next?

Marketing is Communication

First, it is important to understand the difference between marketing and selling, two aspects which are often confused by new self-published authors.

Selling is a transaction: one person pays to acquire a product from another. That's not what marketing is about, and you'll be much more successful if you realize that you don't actually have to sell your book at all.

Your duty as an author/publisher is to market the book. Marketing is communication; the process of taking the ideas you've put into your book and communicating those ideas - and your own passion for the subject - to as many people who might be interested in that subject as possible.

How do you communicate about your subject? This is the basis of your marketing efforts, so it makes sense to pay attention to the parameters of your marketing. For instance:

1. Identify who your audience is. Who will respond to the subject you communicate in your book?
2. Speak to those people in the language/terminology they're used to using on this subject.
3. Elaborate on how your approach to this subject might benefit them. Communicate how they will be informed, entertained, or educated by your treatment of the subject.
4. Finally, demonstrate the results by showing how these ideas have changed your own approach to the subject or how they have affected others.

Creating a Marketing Plan

To some authors, this part sounds like going in for dental surgery, and to others it's the reason they wrote their book. Even if you're not particularly looking forward to working on your marketing plan, spend some time thinking about these important points. You'll be glad you did.

First, understand niche marketing. Most indie books that sell well are in niche markets. That is, they may be of interest to only a small segment of the book-buying public, but within that niche they are authoritative, influential, or groundbreaking in some way.

Understanding the niche into which you are publishing is critical for creating your marketing plan. For instance, you will know where the people interested in this subject tend to congregate, online or off, what kinds of books they buy, and what motivates them to want to learn more about your subject. These elements will form the basis of your marketing plan, a step-by-step set of activities that you'll complete to reach the greatest number of people with your message.

Remember that your message is not, "Hey, I just published a new book, buy it." Your message is the same reason you wrote the book, more like, "Hey, did you know that you can bake pizza at home? If you're interested in that kind of stuff, there are recipes and instructions in my new book."

Also, a big part of your marketing plan is likely to involve social media, and there are great reasons for that. Social media is the easiest, fastest, cheapest place to build buzz. It's constantly changing as far as features, yet it is consistently a way for people to communicate and network; and that will only increase.

You can read more detailed instructions for creating a marketing plan in [Developing a Marketing Plan and Strategy](#), or choose a [Genre-Specific Plan](#).

Setting Goals

As with most things in life, if you have no idea where you are going, you're unlikely to know when - or whether - you've arrived. That's why goals are important.

A key part of book marketing is establishing realistic, attainable, and exciting goals. What are your goals? They might be as diverse as:

- Sales targets for a specific number of books sold
- Readership, where sales are less important than spreading your message
- Establishing authority in your field
- Creating a revenue stream
- Persuading others to take action on a social or environmental issue

With each of these goals, you can measure the effects of your marketing efforts to track your progress, and you can read more about goals and planning in subsequent articles in this series. Read [How to Set SMART Writing Goals](#).

Next, you need to understand how to know whether you're meeting your goals.

Measuring Results

In each of the goals I've listed above, there's a way to track your results. For instance:

- For sales, use the reports you get from retailers or distributors and keep a spreadsheet of results.
- For readership, you can send readers to a website or blog for additional information or interaction and use the analytics provided by the site to measure traffic.
- For authority, look at whether other people start to quote you and mention your ideas, how often your blog or Twitter posts are forwarded by others, and whether you start to get inquiries from people who want to partner with you to use your new authority for mutual advantage.
- For revenue goals, keep track of the profit from your book. You may have acquired expenses in getting your book to market, and by tracking this you'll know exactly when your book becomes profitable.
- For persuasive goals, you can track membership numbers or levels of engagement with your ideas as expressed by blog comments, Twitter re-tweets, and the number of subscribers who sign up to receive more information from you.

Nuances of Book Marketing

As you progress with your marketing, you can start to explore even more ways to make your marketing effective. Here are some ideas to get started:

- *PR as a marketing tool*: Strategically using press releases and other media communications can supercharge your other marketing efforts and can be surprisingly affordable, or even free.
- *Audience segmentation*: Understanding the dynamics of the audience you're trying to reach can help create offers or marketing communications aimed at one segment or another of the total audience for your book. Read more in [Guide to Targeting an Audience](#).
- *Tie-ins as marketing leverage*: Many nonfiction books have potential tie-ins to companies or products. With the flexibility of CreateSpace's print-on-demand manufacturing, you are ideally placed to customize your product for a corporate customer who may buy dozens, hundreds, or thousands of copies of your book for their own promotions.

Long-term Marketing

Being a successful independent author means taking a long-term view. Many marketing efforts take months or years to come to fruition, and as you mature as an independent author, you will start to think

of other books you can write and publish to further engage your current audience.

Here are some of the strategies you can put in place that could pay off down the road:

- *Build a media list:* It's never too soon to start building a list of media, editors, influencers, networkers, and mavens in your field.
- *Create relationships:* Interact with other experts in your field, identifying bloggers, book reviewers, and others interested in the same topics you're writing about.
- *Build your brand:* Your brand is how other people view and relate to you. Building your expertise, authority, and influence in your niche is a classic long-term strategy.
- *Gather an audience:* As you continue to publish and market your books, your audience will continue to grow over time, providing a larger and larger platform for all of your books to come.

Do these things, and as the release of your book approaches, you'll be miles ahead in starting to market that book. Communicating, listening to the responses you get, improving your products, and networking within your area of specialty will soon be part and parcel of your independent publishing efforts. And you will reap the success that comes with intelligent book marketing.

*Joel Friedlander is the proprietor of Marin Bookworks, a publishing services company where he's helped launch many self-published authors. He blogs about book design, writing and self-publishing at www.TheBookDesigner.com. Joel is also the author of the newly-published [*A Self-Publisher's Companion: Expert Advice for Authors Who Want to Publish*](#).*