

## Chapter 26

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### FUNDAMENTALS OF BOOK MARKETING

If you thought writing a novel was hard, wait until you see what is involved in getting people to notice it. Even the best-written book will not succeed if no one knows it exists and where to purchase it. With hundreds of thousands of new titles published each year, authors need to focus on effective marketing and promotion more now than ever. So remove your writer hat, under which you were allowed to be somewhat reclusive with your brilliant thoughts, and put on your marketing and promotion hat to test your public persona and salesmanship skills.

I learned in business school about the four elements of marketing: product, place, price, and promotion. This holds true for us authors.

Product = our books

Place = where our books are available for purchase

Price = that sweet spot where we'll earn the most profit

Promotion = everything we do to reach prospective readers

I mention this because being an author is like running a business. You have to produce a quality product, let people know it's for sale for a reasonable and competitive price, and promptly deliver it.

While this part of author life may not seem as exciting or creative as the writing part, it is essential. You can't succeed without it.

There are five elements most fundamental to a successful book promotion.

1. Good-quality product
2. Well-targeted audience
3. Title and cover design that draw attention
4. Back-cover blurb that entices readers to buy the book
5. Competitive pricing

#### **Good-Quality Product**

Unlike with traditionally published books, self-published titles have no quality-control mechanisms in place, and some authors are merely uploading a Word document to Amazon to get published. That's unfortunate, as it puts many poor-quality books out there and gives self-published authors in general a bad name. Please don't be one of these authors. The successful self-published authors I know work hard to write and rewrite a manuscript until it is as polished as they can make it, and then they hire professional editors and cover designers.

The traditional publishers expect that only a handful of the titles they publish each year will be big sellers. They publish a manageable number of books in the hope that one or two will take off and generate a nice profit. The situation is similar with self-published titles—only a few will go on to be best-sellers. A book that is badly written, unconventionally structured, and full of technical errors and typos has little chance becoming a big success and will most likely fail altogether. I can't emphasize this enough—all the marketing in the world will not sell a badly written book. At the very least, I recommend investing in a professional proofreader. But if you're serious about writing, you'll hire an editor. (See Chapter 21, for more on editors.) Strive to make your finished product flawless—one you're proud to call your own.

#### **Target Audience**

Knowing your target audience is extremely important. Forget the notion that you've written a book everyone will love—it's never been done and never will be. Without a solid grasp of who will read and like your book, you will

waste time, energy, and money promoting your work to the wrong market. Or worse yet, you will receive negative attention and reviews from people who had no chance of ever liking it.

Once you have a description of your ideal reader, it becomes easier to please them—both in your writing and marketing. Start by understanding genres, as they each appeal to a different set of readers. Even if your book falls within multiple genres, you can still narrow your target audience to a more manageable number. If you're not certain of your genre, find a comparable book online or in a bookstore to see where it has been categorized.

There doesn't appear to be a nice, neat chart of who reads which genres, but after perusing many articles and opinions on the subject, I can offer the following compilation of reader demographics I found for a few of the current most popular genres.

- Crime/Thrillers—A fairly even split between male and female readers with more males reading books written by males with male protagonists, and females reading books written by females with female protagonists. Reader age range is typically 15 to 40 years old.
- Literary Fiction—Twice as many females as males. 30 to 55 years old.
- Fantasy—Slightly more females than males. 15 to 35 years old.
- Science Fiction—Slightly more males than females. 15 to 35 years old.
- Historical—Twice as many males as females. 18 to 40 years old.
- Horror—Twice as many males as females. 18 to 40 years old.
- Romance—Primarily females. 30 to 55 years old.
- Books in General—Three times as many female readers as males. 18 to 29 years old seems to be the largest group (a surprise to me—I would have thought older).

The size of your target audience is important, as it is difficult to write a book with wide appeal. Even very successful authors don't attempt to write overly broad books. The old adage that trying to please everyone leads to pleasing no one is particularly relevant here. With readers having access to virtually any book at any time, it's hard enough to make a single book stand out to people who are interested in your genre, let alone to the masses. If you write for and create your marketing campaign toward a targeted group of people, they will purchase enough copies of your book to make it successful. Anyone else who happens to purchase your book is a bonus. The goal is to reach people who will become loyal fans. Write for an audience that is too broad, and you wind up writing something that is generic and will have to face a lot of competition.

Trying to appeal to the masses instead of understanding the needs, wants, and desires of readers of a particular genre usually doesn't work. Authors tend to do well with a narrow niche audience—one that gives them a better chance of finding loyal fans and the most effective channels for reaching them.

### **Title and Cover Design**

I talk more about the creation of title and cover design in Chapter 23. The front cover is the first impression people have of your book, and so it's important to grab their attention quickly. Make sure the cover suits the genre of your book and stands out from the competition.

### **Back Cover Blurb**

Keep the description tight. Include references to character emotion as well as story line. Use headlines to catch readers' attention. (The topic of creating effective back covers is discussed in detail in Chapter 23.)

### **Competitive Pricing**

Determining the ideal price for your book is an extremely important aspect of marketing. Price it too low, and you run the risk of readers associating a low price with low quality. Price it too high, and you can price it right out of the market. Unfortunately, there's no magic formula for pricing. In the end, it boils down to positioning your book to be competitive, but other contributing factors include your experience as an author and the market demand for your subject matter.

It is imperative to know where competing books are priced, as they are vying for the attention of the same audience as yours. This is relatively easy to do by browsing the bookshelves on Amazon and in local bookstores. Look at books in the same genre, format (paperback, e-book, audio, and hardcover), and trim size as yours and that are of similar length. Pricing your book slightly lower than the others, especially if you are a new author, may give you a competitive edge.

When establishing the list price for paperback books, factor in how much it costs to print the book. In print-on-demand scenarios, the printing cost will be deducted from the retail price before your royalty is calculated, so you don't want to price your book so low that the printing costs cut too far into your profit. You will want to make sure you're still making enough money with each book sale to meet your revenue goals.

If you publish your paperback book on Amazon, their submission tool helps guide you through the pricing process.

Here is a pricing scenario for one of my books. The cost to print this book is \$3.59, and the royalty is 60%.

If I price this book at \$10.00, my royalty is \$2.41.

If I price it at \$9.00, my royalty is \$1.81.

If I price it at \$8.00, my royalty is \$1.21.

Amazon's pricing guidelines for printed books will not allow me to price this book under \$5.98 or above \$250.00

IngramSpark also provides a pricing tool on its website

<https://myaccount.ingramspark.com/Portal/Tools/PubCompCalculator> that calculates how much you will earn from the sale of each copy of your book after entering your book's specifications (trim size, interior color and paper types, binding style, number of pages, list price).

When pricing a book, one of the questions you will probably ask yourself is whether it will be more profitable to price it low and hope to sell more copies of it, or price it higher but perhaps sell fewer copies. Here are some overly simplified scenarios that assume a \$4.00 print cost and 50% royalty.

Price it at \$10.00. If you sell 1,000 copies, your profit will be \$3,000.

Price it at \$10.00. If you sell 1,500 copies, your profit will be \$4,500.

Price it at \$10.00. If you sell 2,000 copies, your profit will be \$6,000.

Price it at \$9.00. If you sell 1,000 copies, your profit will be \$2,500.

Price it at \$9.00. If you sell 1,500 copies, your profit will be \$3,750.

Price it at \$9.00. If you sell 2,000 copies, your profit will be \$5,000.

Price it at \$8.00. If you sell 1,000 copies, your profit will be \$2,000.

Price it at \$8.00. If you sell 1,500 copies, your profit will be \$3,000.

Price it at \$8.00. If you sell 2,000 copies, your profit will be \$4,000.

Similarly, when pricing e-books it's important to factor in what competitors are doing. One method to use to get started is to take the price you set for your paperback and subtract the cost of printing. Round this number off to the nearest dollar, and then subtract one cent. (Apparently, it's been proven that prices ending in odd numbers, especially .99 are more attractive to retail buyers than prices ending in other numbers.) Compare this price to that of your competition and adjust accordingly.

If you publish your e-book on Amazon, their royalty program (which presumably has been designed to optimize sales) may help you in your pricing decision. Amazon pays authors a 35 percent royalty for e-books priced between \$0.99 and \$2.98; a 70 percent royalty for e-books priced between \$2.99 and \$9.99; and a 35 percent royalty for e-books priced \$10 and above.

Determining where to price your book is a bit of a crap shoot. My best advice is to keep current with what is taking place in the industry to see what is trending, and then go from there.

Once these five requirements have been met, you're ready to start marketing your book. Keep in mind that it's difficult to predict which of the strategies in the following chapters will pay off for you—sometimes book sales happen as a result of a combination of two or more different strategies. And if you've implemented many different strategies simultaneously, like most of us do, it's not always obvious which ones had the most effect. I personally find this to be the most frustrating aspect of selling books.

Many of the approaches discussed in the succeeding chapters are cost-free, except for your time, so try as many as you can.

### **Suggested Reading:**

Beckwith, Sandra. The Book Designer (blog): *3 Fiction Marketing Success Tips for 2020*.  
<https://www.thebookdesigner.com/2019/12/3-fiction-marketing-success-tips-for-2020/>.

Bolt, Chandler. Self-Publishing School (blog): *Book Marketing: Best Practices for Higher Sustained Book Sales*.  
<https://self-publishingschool.com/book-marketing-how-to-skyrocket-sales-of-your-book/>.

Wagner-Stafford, Boni. The Book Designer (blog): *Engineer Success with a Good Marketing Strategy*.  
<https://www.thebookdesigner.com/2019/09/engineer-success-with-a-good-marketing-strategy/>.