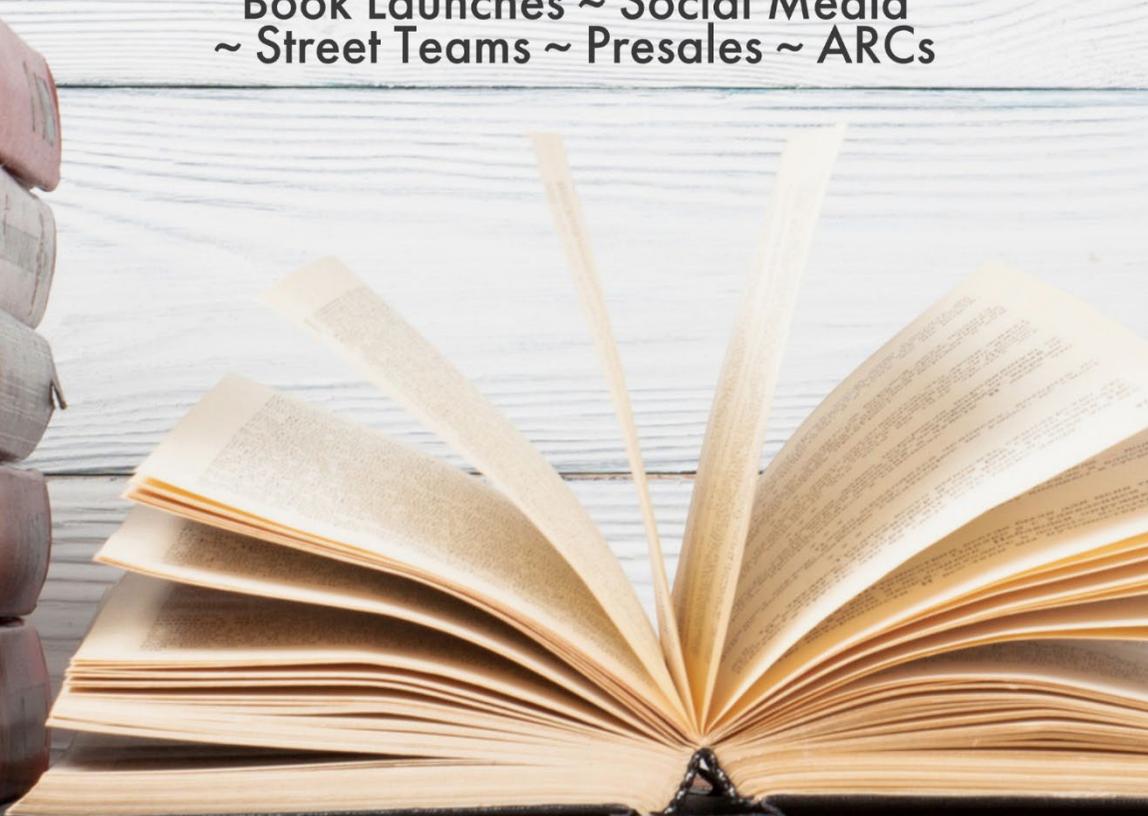


Now Comes the Hard Part

THE AUTHORS PUBLISH INTRODUCTION TO MARKETING YOUR BOOK

A QUICK-START GUIDE
FOR INDIE AUTHORS

Book Launches ~ Social Media
~ Street Teams ~ Presales ~ ARCs



Aliya Bree Hall

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Foreword

Writing a book is hard. It takes years of time, dedication, effort and an upsetting amount of rewriting. Yet, you have persevered through the challenges because of the love for your story and desire to get it out into the world, and you're finally ready to publish. Congratulations!

Now comes the hard part: Marketing.

Unlike the process of writing the book, marketing is seen as a “necessary evil” authors have to endure to get their book into the hands of readers. It's an aspect of the job many authors try to forget about, but the sooner you lean into the eventuality that you will have to market your book, the less daunting the task becomes. You may never enjoy it, but putting the pieces in place to build an author platform and a strategy to promote your work pre- and post-publication will make navigating the world of publishing overall easier.

Regardless of traditional or indie publishing, self-promotion will always be an aspect of the writing job. Being traditionally published does not inherently mean that your publisher is going to take on all (if any) of the book's marketing, which means it is always going to be on the author to promote their own work.

Even though marketing isn't easy, there are tactics to make it *easier* and more approachable. In this book, you won't find a fool proof plan that is guaranteed to land you a Netflix deal or ensure you sell every copy of your book. Instead, I hope you find within these pages tools that will help you lay the foundation for your marketing strategy.

The biggest message I hope you take away from reading this book is the importance of being authentic in your marketing strategy. With the emphasis on social media and the weight being put on authors to promote their work, it's become increasingly harder for authors to remain a faceless entity behind their words. Readers are expecting more of a connection, and many authors who have embraced marketing — particularly across social media platforms — have seen more success in reaching their prospective readership. While it's important to set up boundaries for what you choose to share, giving readers a taste of who you are and why you're telling the stories you're telling will give them more of a reason to pick up your next book.

The marketing stage of the publishing process may not be what you signed up for when you first began drafting, but it is going to be how you get your book into readers' hands. The hard part is here, but hopefully this book will make it more tolerable.

Chapter One

Building an Author Platform

The first step of marketing anything is knowing who your expected audience is. It's been said that, "Those who market to everyone are actually marketing to no one," and that's especially true with books.

While there are some readers out there who will pick up a book regardless of genre or age-range, simply because the premise or the cover interests them, those readers are not stable marketing targets. It is better for you to focus your marketing efforts towards readers who are naturally drawn to the elements that make up your book. It's not uncommon for readers to have a preference for the books they read, and it's your job to make sure you're getting your book into the hands of people who will treasure it most.

How to Identify Your Audience

How to Identify Your Audience During the Writing Process

For many writers, this question starts to pop up during the writing process. While it's not necessary to have an answer while you're drafting

— especially because your focus should be getting words on the page — it can be helpful to have the basics covered. Does your book fall into the middle grade, young adult, or adult category? What are the genres closest associated with your book? Does your book have any comparative titles for readers to get a sense of your work?

Even if you're not fully able to answer these questions at this time, at least beginning to think about them can help you see how big a market there is for the book you're writing. It will also help you position where the bulk of your marketing energy will go later on.

How to Identify Your Audience While Building a Platform

As you're working on your manuscript, you should also start with the basics of building an author platform. Later on in this section we'll discuss the different types of platforms that authors use to connect with their audience, but for now we're going to focus on how curating your presence will help you to find your readers.

Essentially, along with marketing your book — you're also marketing yourself. By making a name of yourself within the writing community, you are creating a following that is interested in the work you're producing. That doesn't mean, however, that every follower you gain is going to go out and buy your book. You need to use your platform

to purposely connect with your intended audience. The same rules apply: If you're trying to talk to everyone, you're probably not talking to anyone.

Knowing who you are as a writer and highlighting your unique qualities is one of the easiest ways to ensure that the following you garner is your intended audience. Branding yourself while being authentic will help draw in *your* people and also make it more likely for someone to give your book a chance. Engaging with hashtags and accounts of people who are also interested in your same genre or themes is one tactical method to finding your niche and, ultimately, your audience.

Once you know who your potential readers are, you now just have to get their attention.

If you haven't started curating your online platform, there are some basic tips that will help get your name out there. Two of the easiest ways to connect with your potential readership is by building an author website that gives readers a landing page to find you and your books, and setting up a newsletter for writing announcements and updates.

The Makings of a Successful Website

When it comes to creating your author website — don't overthink it. Your website is meant to inform people about your book and guide

them towards where they can buy it, as well as showcase who you are as an author and how people can get in contact with you.

Buying a domain name is an affordable investment that you can take with you regardless of where you choose to host your website. The url should include your name and be easy to remember so it's recognizable. It also helps to make a list of options in case your first choice is already in use.

When it comes to choosing which website service to go with, there are a variety of options to consider from Wix, Squarespace, Wordpress and more. Each site has their own benefits and drawbacks, so it's worth exploring what each site will offer you. Go with what makes the most sense for you, personally.

The design of the site though should remain consistent with your author brand and work as a through line across all your platforms. This will help readers learn what vibe they can expect from you and the work you're producing. The templates on the sites will also offer some level of customization that will help you put your unique spin on your webpage without needing much expertise.

#

Promoting Through an Author Newsletter

A newsletter is an easy way to reach your prospective readership and is easy to set up in tandem with your website. They also don't have to follow a set release structure. While some authors prefer a monthly check in to inform their readers of the latest updates in their drafting or publishing process, others prefer a quarterly approach or on an as-needed basis when there is something to announce. It's up to you how frequently you want to release your newsletter, but having one available for people to sign up for — even if it's just to tell readers about the most current news — is a direct way to reach your audience.

There are a few newsletter creation services, such as Substack and Mail Chimp, that you can use either for free or with a paid subscription for more upgrades. While making the newsletter, you will also be able to customize fonts, colors and photos to be in line with your author brand.

When it comes to content, you can share important publishing dates such as cover reveal, pre-orders and publishing dates. For more in depth newsletters, some authors will use this opportunity to discuss what their writing journey looks like, whether its drafting, editing, querying or a peek into their personal life. Some newsletters even include writing

snippets or segments about what they're currently reading or book reviews.

Keep in mind, however, that a newsletter is different than a blog, and being cognoscente of its length and your readers' time will ensure that they will read, or at least skim, through the entire message. Especially if you plan to share your big news at the end of the email, you don't want people to have already clicked away because the newsletter was too long.

Pay attention to the subject lines, this will be the first thing your subscribers will see and will determine if they actually open the newsletter. Using words like "Announcement" or "big news" pop and are more eye-catching than simply "monthly newsletter." One or two emojis will also help set your subject line apart, although refrain from using more than two or your newsletter may be sent to a spam folder!

Chapter Two

Cutting Through the Noise of Social Media

Social media is a stressful beast for many writers, but it doesn't have to be. There's a lot of information out there about what a writer needs to do in order to have a successful social media platform and it can be overwhelming to take in.

At the end of the day, social media is there to help you, not hinder you. The strategies in this section are meant to help guide you toward a relationship with social media that is balanced and sustainable.

Here are some friendly reminders before we get started:

You don't have to be everywhere on social media

One of the biggest misconceptions writers have is thinking they have to be active on every single social media platform, whether they want to be or not. While having some sort of social media presence helps because you're able to engage with your readers, forcing yourself to produce content across multiple sites that you don't enjoy won't help grow

your audience. In fact, it could hinder you because many of your followers won't want to witness you doing something you hate.

Instead, focus your attention on the social media platforms that seem the most fun or accessible to you. It will make it easier for you to produce content that feels more genuine to who you are as a writer, and will help establish meaningful connections to your followers.

Connection is more valuable than followers

Seeing someone with a high follower and “like” count can be intimidating, but it is not the end all when it comes to social media promotion; you can have a high follower count and still struggle to get engagement on posts. It's more valuable for you to focus on growing the relationship you have to your current followers than worrying about not having *enough* followers. Following hashtags to find the right people and commenting on posts in a meaningful way will give you more of a presence on your account. It is also more likely to actually increase engagement than if you were solely producing content.

Use the right platform

Make sure you're using the platform that best aligns to your marketing goals. Different people flock to different social media channels and to best capture your demographic, it's important to consider where your audience is. A lot of authors use Twitter as a networking tool for other industry professionals, but that doesn't necessarily mean that's where your reader base is. (Although there are many book reviewers who stick to using twitter over other platforms.) Many writers have found success on Instagram or Tiktok as well, where they can lean into creative visual marketing strategies. Knowing your audience can also influence where you put your emphasis on marketing. If you're writing a YA story, going to where the young adult readers are will make you more likely to reach them.

Adaptation is key

Social media is also changing constantly. As new apps and social networks are released, the ones we have been using also change to stay relevant. With TikTok emerging as the most popular platform for the moment, it's been pushing other platforms like Instagram to start including more videos, or "reels," and evaluating their engagement metric

based on different factors. “Likes” now mean less than comments, saves, or carousels — all of which show that you’re spending more time with a particular post.

It can be disheartening to get used to a platform and have your content plan be disrupted by the algorithm, but, at the end of the day, fighting against the system isn’t going to change it. Your best bet is to learn and adapt with the platform. These marketing channels will not stay stagnant forever, and if you want to keep your spot in your followers’ feeds, you will have to change along with them.

Social media is one the best free marketing tools available for authors, but to get the most of it, you’re going to have to put time into it. You should be dedicating at least 30 minutes each day to interact with social media, even if you’re not posting, to help build your brand.

Even though there are intricacies within each platform, the messaging is consistent regardless of which site you favor. There isn’t a network that is inherently better for an author to use, but picking one that you’re most comfortable being active on helps, especially when you’re starting out.

Posting “professional” content

If you’re transitioning your personal account into a professional one, or starting with a clean slate, you will want to start posting content with a purpose. This doesn’t mean you have to fully isolate your personal life from your professional life, but if your followers are there for your writing, you should meet their expectations.

Starting with a “meet the author” post is a good way to jumpstart any account. It tells followers right off the bat who you are and what they can expect from you and your work. From there, introducing your project or upcoming book release will further brand yourself and help you establish yourself among others in the writing community.

Once you have that base, incorporating posts that showcase your writing journey or peeks into the book you’re writing will help bolster the brand you’re forging. While curating posts, you can also take it a step further and create an aesthetic for your page, which can be seen through the type of posts you make or photo editing style. Together, this results in a cohesive, professional author page.

Engagement works both ways

It takes more than a “like” or a “favorite” on someone’s post to build community among your peers. Taking the time to actually engage with other writers’ or book reviewers’ posts helps to build more of a foundation with each of your followers. Adding to the conversation will bring in your unique perspective and makes you more relatable to your audience. If you’re spending time producing content to upload that you’re hoping people will appreciate, sharing that recognition on a follower’s post by interacting with it will further strengthen your bonds and create networking opportunities and friendships.

Set measurable goals

When building your social media presence, keep in mind what your goals are with building your brand. Not every follower you get is going to translate into a direct sale. Setting attainable goals that are actionable, specific, relevant and time-based (also known commonly as SMART goals) will help keep you on the right track with what you’re trying to accomplish. If you start by building your platform in terms of engaged followers first, that will make it easier to market your book to potential readers who are already invested in your brand. This takes time

to achieve, and you can't expect to jump onto social media and have everyone immediately go out and buy your book. Being intentional and reasonable with the goals you set going in will help you keep the results in perspective.

Follow the trends

Right now, short videos or “reels” are having a *moment* across most of the social media platforms. While created mostly on Instagram and TikTok, these videos are still shared across all social media networks, and it doesn't look like they're going away soon. While all trending content will eventually shift, riding the wave in the moment helps you stay relevant and get the most out of your platform. There are even trends within the videos that creators make, which you can adjust your own content to fit. Perusing what's popular on your platform will give you a better idea of what is gaining traction and how you can relate it to your work.

Get creative

The product your marketing is the fine form of your creative pursuits, lean into that when you're marketing. Sharing character aesthetics or mood boards of your work are visual manifestations of your words that are eye-catching and give readers a sense of the atmosphere to expect from your work. The same goes with posting snippets from your story, little teasers like these give readers a glimpse into your writing style and story, which will make them more excited about what you're working on and more likely to buy it. Creating memes around your book will drum up intrigue, and using reels or Tiktoks are a fun way to capture more of your world or writing process.

Let yourself have fun with it.

Podcasting

Creating a podcast is one more tool authors can utilize to get their name out there, find an audience and promote their work. Although there are many writing and fiction podcasts available already, you will still offer listeners a unique perspective — especially when you find your niche in the market.

Writing related podcasts take on multiple forms, from giving writing advice and interviewing authors to sharing snippets of your work. There's plenty of room for creativity, all you need to start with is a concept.

Finding your niche

The most important part of starting your podcast is determining what your subject matter is going to be about and identifying who your audience is. What are you trying to achieve with your podcast? Are you trying to reach aspiring authors or network with other writers in the field? Once you have a clear picture of your goal and audience, then you can decide what format would work best to accomplish that mission and if you're going to record solo or with a cohost.

With so much of podcasting hinging on personality, it's important for you to be authentic on your podcast. The information you're sharing may be valuable, but the thing that will set apart your podcast and keep people tuning in is going to be you as the host.

How to create a podcast

There's a variety of options out there to make starting a podcast fairly affordable. Audio equipment will always elevate your show, but if investing in a premier podcasting setup is out of the budget, recording audio on a smart phone in an enclosed space is still a viable option. When it comes to editing the content, any editing software from Audacity to iMovie or Garageband will give you the ability to trim down your podcast or add features like an intro and outro. After you have finished preparing the content, you will need to upload your file to a podcast hosting site. Each site is different, but usually there is a monthly fee for a set amount of upload capacity, and the site helps syndicate your podcast so it will appear on most podcast streaming services. Do some research and see what site works best for you.

Once you start posting, it's important to remember that consistency is key. Setting a schedule and sticking to it helps you build a reliable

fanbase and makes it easier for you to work it into your routine. In a Podcasting 101 Workshop I attended, Science Fiction Author James S. Aaron quoted that the average podcast only lasts around five episodes, which proves consistency with posting is crucial to ensure the longevity of your podcast and engagement.

Benefits to podcasting

By podcasting, you're able to market yourself and your work across multiple platforms and it gives you a chance to meet potential readers, share your expertise with the writing community and learn a new skillset. Podcasting is a fun medium that gives you a new way to talk about the writing industry or any subject that you care about. Even if the podcast itself isn't writing related, highlighting your work or mentioning your bio on a podcast helps you publicize your work and allows more people to discover it.

While there is money itself in podcasting, it's not necessarily a get-quick-rich scheme. Depending on your hosting site, you may have the possibility of including affiliate links or you could lease out airtime in your podcast for advertisements. If money is a motivator for you, setting

up a Patreon or a “buy me a coffee” page for your podcast is one method to bring in more funding.

Writing podcasts are multi-purpose. Beyond promoting your brand and your work, you are helping your listeners learn something new or think about a subject in a different way.

How to get regular financial support from readers

Outside of book sales and contest prizes, it can be challenging for authors to bring in income for their creative writing skills. Fortunately, there’s a handful of websites where fans can directly pay authors for their creative goods, all while authors grow their reader base.

Patreon is one of the best options for writers to receive compensation for their creative work. The site runs on a tiered subscription-style payment model, where creators offer in exchange exclusive access, extra content or personal insight into the creative journey.

Setting up a Patreon

The entry level of Patreon is free to join and creators keep complete ownership of their work. (Patreon does get its income through a

platform fee, and there is a payment processing fee as well once you start receiving revenue.) You create the membership levels you want to offer to readers on your author account, and each tier you offer correlates with a set of benefits that you will provide for those patrons. Many authors have their lowest tier set to \$1 to \$3 a month as a “general support” option that could unlock basic author updates and newsletter access to base level digital content.

As you add each tier and assign a monetary value with it, the number of benefits you include grow. Creators have seen the most success when offering three to five membership options, keeping the top tier for the most valuable offerings. While this price ranges based on the creator, you could charge anywhere from \$10, \$50 or \$100 — depending on what you offer.

(For what it’s worth, Patreon also offers a paid “Patreon Pro” option to create an unlimited number of tiers, but this is not necessary to have success on the platform.)

It’s also important to keep in mind the balance of accessibility for the reader without shortchanging yourself. Having tiers with a wide range of financial support helps you reach a wider audience but will also ensure you’ll be paid for the work you’re putting in.

Maximizing the Benefits

Although your benefits will range based off the type of writing you're pursuing, there are benefit options tailored for short story novelists, poets, episodic writers and long-form writers.

With mid- to lower-level patrons, it's common to offer behind the scenes extras such as character studies, deleted scenes or access to personal projects. Writers who use Patreon to publish a serial novel will often offer access at a lower level to cast a larger net of readers. This content is usually available digitally, sometimes with the option for readers to download. Some long-form writers will even upload early drafts or first access to drafts as a way to entice readers into the story before the editing developments.

For upper-level patrons, these benefits can increase to providing an annual, physical edition of the content you've been producing through Patreon, discount codes for books or merch, or even short stories. At their highest membership level, indie authors have even offered a signed, physical copy of their next book release.

Every writer sets up their membership tiers differently, and it's up to you to decide your level of accessibility and what content you feel

comfortable providing on a recurring basis to your patrons. There's a lot of customization options available too, so writers can get the most out of their Patreon page while also keeping it a fair value to their fans.

Alternatives to Patreon

If Patreon doesn't sound like the right fit, or you want to add more options to your arsenal, there are other platforms that authors can use to get paid for their work. Ko-fi and Buy Me A Coffee are two different income producing sites that allow for either one-off tips or membership packages, which could be beneficial for writers too.

Sites like Patreon give authors more revenue flexibility, but it can also be used as a marketing strategy. For some writers, Patreon is the only platform they use to publish their work and they have a dedicated patron fanbase for it. For other writers, it may make more sense to use this platform to supplement book sales by selling added content that relates to your book. At the end of the day, these sites are designed to help creators make a living off their work and give fans a direct tool to support them.

Chapter Three

Pre-Publishing Promotions

Advanced reader copies

Advanced Reader Copies (ARCs) are a helpful tool for authors to jumpstart the reader review process, which is crucial to help get new releases noticed. Traditional publishers often release a set number of ARCs to book bloggers or reviewers to help raise awareness and hype for upcoming books, and for indie authors this marketing opportunity cannot be underestimated.

But why would I give my book away for free?

You have already invested so much in your story, and this is just one more facet of investment. By sharing ARCs with interested readers you're utilizing word of mouth tactics to boost reviews and recommendations before your book is even released. With reviewers drumming up interest, readers are more likely to preorder or pick that book up because they already know more about it.

But with all things with marketing, there's multiple aspects to keep in mind before you start sending out ARCs.

What makes the most sense for you?

How you choose to handle ARCs is a personal decision. You're in charge of who gets one, the number you want to send out as well as what the format looks like. There are pros and cons to each option: You just have to decide what works best for you.

Digital copies are the most common format of ARCs to send out because it's the cheapest in terms of production and shipping costs. Even without a traditional e-reader, readers have multiple downloading options to access your book. That said, physical ARC's are often the most sought after. For book reviewers on Instagram, printed ARCs make it even easier to take impressive photos that will capture their followers' attention and gives textile readers an idea of what your book will look like in their hands. While it costs more for print copies, depending on how many you release and who they are given to, physical editions might be worth the price.

It can be tantalizing to offer ARCs to friends and family first, but it's important to make sure you're casting a wide net to get your book in front of as many readers' eyes as possible. The number of people you choose to have ARCs may depend on what format you choose and your marketing budget, but shooting for around 20 reviewers will help cushion your book reviews on launch date.

Creating a submission form for readers to apply to be an ARC reader is one way to put a list of potential ARC readers together. Sharing the synopsis of the book as well as genre or content warnings for applicants can help them determine if this book is the right fit for them, and helps you tailor your audience. Their answers can also tell you where they will be reviewing your book, what format preference they have and what their social media or Goodreads following looks like.

You can also use a form to educate ARC readers who aren't familiar with the process about what is expected of them. Although you will probably always have situations where a reader doesn't review the book or post about the book, there are precautions you can put into place to mediate that behavior.

Some authors have set requirements that ARC readers must follow if they're going to participate in the process — particularly if they receive a physical ARC. I've been part of ARC teams where the author has asked us to post two Instagram photos featuring the book, as well as doing an unboxing in our Instagram stories. Although this method still isn't fool proof, it is more likely to keep away people who are just looking to get a free copy of a book without actually reading or reviewing it.

Preparing for launch

Before you get the ARCs into reviewers' hands, make sure you schedule enough time for them to read your book before its release date. Not everyone reads at the same pace, and having a one to three month lead time ensures reviewers have enough time to finish the book and review it before it releases.

How street teams can give you marketing momentum

Now that your book's release date is on the horizon, how do you promote it while balancing those last minute publishing details? Marketing is always a challenge and it's even harder to do if you're an

indie author, which is why creating a street team is crucial to getting eyes on your book before it's even published.

A **Street team** is a small group of volunteers that help drum up support for your book a few months before it's actually available to readers, as well as celebrate the book's release day with you. They help build up anticipation for your book through sharing the book cover, synopsis or reviews, and using word of mouth to help authors connect with readers. This method of self-promotion is also popular among traditionally published authors because it helps bring readers and fans into the publishing process.

The benefits of having a street team

As an indie author you're a writer, publisher and marketer all rolled into one. Utilizing these tried and true support systems takes a little of the pressure off, because it's not just solely you talking about your book. Your street team is behind you every step of the way to tell potential readers what your book is about, when it's coming out, and why people should buy it. Every time you make a post about your book, you know your team will share the information and get it in front of as many eyes as possible.

Finding a street team

As helpful as it is to have friends and family talk about your upcoming release, it's more effective to turn to social media and book bloggers to make up your team. The community on #bookstagram or Goodreads are great options to find strangers who would be willing to promote your book. Ideally, you should choose reviewers or readers that fit your target audience and have a healthy following on social media platforms. That doesn't mean, however, your team has to have thousands of followers. Small but engaged followings that see a lot of interaction can often drive even better traction.

Don't be afraid to reach out to other indie authors in your genre either. It's like the idiom, "A rising tide lifts all boats." Networking and building connections with other authors is another way to bring awareness to your brand and expand your market. It can also lead to more partnerships down the line.

Getting the most out of a street team

It's hard to convince someone to do something for free. Everyone has their own lives and as interested as they may be in your book, that

might not be enough. Offering incentives to join a street team is more likely to yield results than asking for blind promotion. Sharing Advanced Reader Copies (ARCs) of your book is one of the best ways to execute a successful campaign because your team will be invested and familiar with the product ahead of time, and a free book is great motivation. ARCs will also help jumpstart more reviews for your book, which will give you more attention. Some authors even include swag like bookmarks or merch discount codes as an extra thank you.

You will want to make it as easy as possible for your street team to participate in promotions. Remember your team is busy too, and sharing pre-made photos with captions cuts down on the effort the street team has to put in. It also gives you more control over the content.

Despite all your best efforts, there may still be team members who forget to post or don't participate as much as you would like. Building a team of 10-15 members keeps you from being disappointed if someone is unresponsive.

Writing is a solitary and sometimes lonely profession, but marketing is all about connecting with people. By having cheerleaders supporting your endeavors, pre-release marketing becomes a breeze and you can focus on getting your book into the world.

How to maximize your book sales using pre-orders

Preorders are an integral part of the publishing process, whether you're publishing traditionally or indie. That said, it can be a challenge to encourage readers to order your book early instead of waiting until after its release.

Preorder incentives are one way to draw not only more hype around your book but push more traction around a preorder campaign. Authors commonly use a host of different options to pique readers interest, from including promotional material with each purchase to holding preorder giveaways. Regardless of your marketing budget, there are special bonuses authors can include to successfully boost their preorder numbers.

Promotional items and merch

One of the most common incentives authors use to attract readers is through promotional merch, such as specialty bookmarks, enamel pins, or character art. It's easy for authors to open a submission form where readers can provide proof of purchase and include their shipping information to receive something unique to accompany your book. Even if

a reader is already interested in your book, this little treat encourages them to buy it early and makes them feel like they got an extra reward for doing it. These items are also smaller and easier to buy in bulk, which can help cut down on costs.

Giveaways and discounts

Another way to entice readers to preorder is by offering a giveaway specifically for readers who have bought the book. Most often these giveaways are centered around merch, but it also gives you another creative opportunity to craft specialty items to enhance your readers' experience with the book.

Giveaways can also be more flexible. If you're an author that has a merch shop open already, those items are easy to incorporate into a giveaway. A collection of smaller promotional items, signed book plates or an annotated section of the book are also exciting and affordable incentives that would draw readers in.

You can also custom order specialty items like candles, notebooks or a collectors item inspired by your novel, and there are many micro-businesses on Instagram that specialize in custom bookish swag who you could work with if you don't have the means to create that merch yourself.

Even offering a discount for preorders through a specific period of time could be enough for some readers to prioritize buying a copy. Offering a deal will always catch readers' eyes and is one way to make your book more accessible to a wider audience.

Bonus content and signed book plates

If book merch isn't of interest or out of budget, there are still other value-added touches an author can share with a reader. Offering signed book plates is an easy and low-cost way as an author to prompt readers to preorder. That personal touch from an author is something many readers treasure, and it enhances the sentimental value of your book.

This is also an opportunity for you to provide exclusive bonus content to readers as well. An added short story or a scene that didn't make the cut are all perks that you can repurpose for preorders, and it's something that the reader can't get anywhere else. It also establishes a deeper connection to your preorder readers and gives them more of the story they're already invested in.

Promoting preorders with incentives is not a bribe to push readers into buying your book. For readers who are already interested in your book, an incentive is thanking them for the early support and

commitment. For other potential readers, it motivates them to check out your book and take advantage of a great opportunity. Preorder incentives are a win-win for both readers and authors alike.

Special editions

Offering readers eye-catching special editions is another way to bolster book sales and make your book a collector's item. Limited edition versions of books are extremely popular on Bookstagram and drum up attention and interest.

Although many special editions are done in collaboration with a subscription box or anniversary date, there are many opportunities for authors — indies in particular — to sell exclusive versions of their book for readers to enjoy.

By printing a set number of special editions along with your standard copies, you're adding desirability and intrigue to your work. For the same reason that first editions are sought after, dedicated readers are willing to spend more money on a book if they know there is an added value for them. Depending on your budget and reach, many indie authors stick around either 50 or 100 specialty books, and the options for customization are limitless and can even be used in tandem.

Sprayed and stenciled edges

Adding art or color to the edges of your book pages is one striking way to embellish your book. Painting the pages adds a pop of color that complements the cover art and gives the book a cohesive look that will stand out on a reader's shelf. Including a stencil design either on top of the sprayed edges or on the pages itself is another way to turn your book into a piece of art that readers are going to want to display. Sprayed and stenciled edges also enhance the reading experience, as each page you turn reveals more of the artwork.

Reversible book jacket art

Including artwork on the back of the dust jacket is a one of a kind way for readers to experience your book. The artwork serves as a richer visual into the story, showcasing the environment or character sketches, while adding another dimension to the story. It also makes a beautiful display for readers on their shelves or even on their walls.

Alternate covers or naked covers

Playing around with covers is one of the most traditional options for special editions. The changes could be as slight as a background color change, or as dramatic as a brand new design. Although it will depend on your budget, if you have two cover ideas that you can't choose between, consider using one as an alternate cover.

Naked covers are another unique way to create a vastly different special edition. Etching the design of the dust jacket onto the hardcover book takes foil design to the next level and truly sets apart your standard edition from your special edition.

Despite the idiom “never judge a book by its cover,” we know that covers do matter, and giving readers options to choose between what cover edition they prefer makes them more likely to buy one of them. Having alternate covers also makes your book a collectible, and some of your readers are going to want to have them both.

Foil design on hardback cover

Foil designs can range from small detail work, like a symbol, to a full cover design and make a beautiful reveal to readers when they remove the dust jacket. These special editions are a hidden treat for readers, especially those who read without a dust jacket to keep from damaging it.

Having a foil design is an elegant and subtle way to set your special edition apart.

Signed editions

Nothing says collectible more than a signed edition of a book, and there are many ways an author can integrate their signature in their copy. Signed bookplates are the easiest and most effective option, but some readers are still going to prefer a tangible autograph on their book. While you can always hand sign each book, it is also possible to design a specific autograph page that is later added during the printing of the special edition. This is a common solution book boxes will use to keep the author from signing each physical book and is more personalized than a book plate. Regardless of method, readers are more likely to preorder or buy a book if they know that it has been signed by the author.

Special editions entice potential readers when they come across the pre-order campaign for your book. It drives them to invest in your story right off the bat because they are getting something unique, and for your biggest fans — having multiple copies of your work on their shelves is money well spent.

Chapter Four

Post-Publishing Promotions

Selling merchandise to promote your book

Including a merch store on your website is one way to promote your books post-publication, engage your audience, and bring in extra income. Fans of your work will always look for more ways to connect with the world you created and offering merch is one way for them to showcase their allegiance.

Although the type of products you offer will depend on your audience, author swag can come in a variety of forms that will appeal to a vast swath of readers.

Building the store

Most websites have the option to create an online store where readers can purchase directly from the author. These features are easy to integrate and it's more convenient for readers who visit your website to discover you sell merch.

Hosting the store through your website also gives you full control over the items you choose to sell in your shop. You can design the merch yourself or hire a graphic freelance artist to help bring your vision to life. There are also third party businesses, like Printify or Printful, that can help print and deliver your merch too.

For authors who don't want their merch shop on their website, there are other options for hosting the store. Redbubble provides an array of different merch options, and all you have to do is upload the designs you want and pick what merch you'd like that design to be featured on — Redbubble does the rest. Etsy is another site that authors have utilized to support their merch store. Although Etsy is best known for selling home-made goods, it will also support the books and merch you're selling too.

When choosing the best platform to host the store on, there are some important factors to consider. While adding a merch store to your website or Etsy makes it easier for you to sell signed or personalized copies of your books, it also means you're in charge of shipping out these items to readers. If shipping is too much of a hassle, hosting a shop through a third party business like Redbubble manages that for you. It is also important to consider when using a third party platform, that the company takes a slice of each sale's profit. While the exact percentage

ranges based on what site you use, make sure you read the fine print to ensure that you understand those terms.

Paper Products and books

Naturally, an author's merch store should include their books, but it also makes it easier for you to carry both signed and special edition versions of your novels. Promoting your books through your online store also helps readers support you directly, as authors generally receive a higher sales percentage through their website than through a bookseller. Many readers want to find ways to support their favorite authors directly, and selling your books through your website is the most effective way to do that.

Along with books, other paper products such as bookmarks, art prints and stickers are popular merch items that are relatively cheap to produce and ship. Bookmarks are pragmatic and easy to design, and art prints are a beautiful way to bring your characters and enhance your story. These items are also versatile and eye catching to a large demographic of readers.

Textiles

Your fans may also want to wear their fandom with pride. Clothing items such as T-shirts, sweatshirts or hats with memorable quotes or artwork from your book is the perfect way for readers to connect over your work. After you have created the design or hire someone to make it for you, it's easy to utilize a company that creates textiles, like Printify or Printful, to produce your products.

Beyond wearable garments, book sleeves are also a creative and practical merch that your readers can use in their day to day while still repping your work. Book sleeves help protect whatever book your readers are currently in the middle of, while also giving them the opportunity to showcase their love for your story as well.

Candles or mugs

Home goods are another item that perform well in merch stores. There's a reason so many book boxes and indie bookstores carry mugs and candles. Snuggling up to read with a scented candle inspired by a character or a setting in your book is an atmospheric experience you can share with your readers. In the same way that a candle helps set the mood, a mug filled with a reader's favorite hot beverage is a comforting and

practical bookish goody. Even when they aren't in use, home goods help make your story a part of your reader's world.

One of the goals with merch is to remind your readers about your work and all the reasons they have fallen in love with your story. These visible and tangible reminders help strengthen the connection to your reader, and helps fans of your work find each other in the wild and build community.

Partnering with subscription box companies

Bookish subscription boxes have gained popularity over the years as a way for readers to be introduced to new and highly anticipated books. This is a marketing strategy that can help you capture an untapped audience and spread awareness about your work as a debut author or whenever you're publishing a new book.

Book Boxes are monthly or quarterly curated subscription packages that highlight a book by printing a special edition version of the story and including small, bookish items that accompany the boxes' theme — which is based on the book — or items that complement the book's fandom.

While these partnerships are commonly associated with traditionally published books, there are a host of boxes that highlight specifically indie books or have a hybrid model. No matter what road you take to publish your story, book boxes are a viable option for marketing your work.

Finding the right box for you

To set themselves apart as a business, most subscription boxes have a specialized niche to corner a specific segment of the market. Some boxes focus on a specific genre of book, such as romance or fantasy, or an age range, like YA or MG. There are also book boxes that are specifically designed for diverse books in mind, such as LGBTQ+ books or books written by BIPOC authors. This range of book subscription boxes also means that e-books and indie books can also be prioritized.

Plus, more book box subscription businesses are opening up too. This also gives you a chance to research what book box will be the best fit for your story and choose who you want your prospective audience to be. While you might want to get your book in front of as many eyes as possible, you will have the best chance being featured in a book box with a tailored audience that overlaps with your targeted audience. If you want

to go broader, there's opportunities for that as well, but it also means there's more competition for being featured.

Getting in touch

After you've researched what companies you'd like to try and work with, it's now time to establish that connection. Depending on how large the business is, you may have to fill out a prospective author form or reach out through the company email. This information should be located on their website, and be sure to follow their instructions.

Whether you're introducing yourself or filling out a form, the details you are likely to share include: A synopsis of your book, the genre, the published date, your website and social media profiles, whole cost sale of your book in paperback and hardcover format, as well as options for exclusive covers and merchandise to accompany the book.

Be patient while awaiting a response. Book boxes are a popular commodity that many authors want to be featured in, and it takes time to parse through all of the applicants.

Creating your own

If you like the idea of a book box, but want to have full ownership control, you could also create your own book box that you sell in your merch store. Book boxes could be offered as a new release exclusive or as a “Welcome to the Fandom” package. Along with including a signed copy of your book, most author book boxes include fun, specialized items that are inspired by your world. These could be items you already include in your merch store or items that readers can only get if they purchase a box. Either way, creating an author-created book box ensures that the items included are everything you want.

Keep in mind...

The biggest challenge that you’re going to come up against with subscription book box companies is limited space. If a book box is quarterly or monthly, there are a swath of eager authors looking to be involved and only so many books these businesses can pick. That doesn’t mean you need to give up hope! Like everything else in publishing, these partnerships take time and a pass doesn’t necessarily mean that your book will never be featured. Sometimes the reality of the situation is simply that your book wasn’t the right fit this time around. Thankfully, there’s

multiple book boxes out there and many opportunities to apply with every book you publish.

Be your own advocate

There's a stereotype that the only thing writers want to do is create, release their work into the ether and never talk about it again. While this may not be true for all authors, the idea of letting your work speak for itself can only get you so far — especially if people don't even realize that your book exists.

Throughout this ebook, you've learned the different tools to upgrade your marketing strategies, but this last lesson is more focused on the internal work.

As an author, you cannot be afraid to **advocate for yourself**.

Even though it takes a team to get a book published, once it is out there in the world, the bulk (if not all) of marketing will fall to you. Advocating for yourself is all about seeking opportunities to get your work out there and saying yes to things that may push you outside of your comfort zone.

It's scary to put yourself out there, but you've already done it by publishing a book. Now you just have to follow through.

Don't be afraid to ask

Especially for indie authors who are taking on everything themselves, you have to ask for what you want. While certain opportunities will come your way, most of them come after you have initiated contact. Whether it's working with Barnes and Noble or your local bookstore to get your book on the shelves or setting up author events. Whatever ideas you have for promoting your book that you want to bring to fruition are more likely to happen the moment you put yourself out there and ask to be a part of more things.

Author Events

Although in-person events have fluctuated over the course of the pandemic, having an event where you can meet with the public is one of the best ways to promote your work. Especially if you focus on local spaces. Most booksellers have a “local authors” section, and partnering with them or a neighborhood coffee shop for a special event is a great way to build a regional readership. You will also strengthen the ties to your community, which helps strengthen your platform's visibility locally.

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There's a perception in publishing that other writers are your competition, but a more apt — and healthier— way to view fellow writers is as colleagues. Even though writing is a solitary act, whenever there is a conference or a panel, you will still need to interact with other writers. These networking opportunities are great opportunities for you to learn something new from your peers and could even foster the future possibility of collaboration or friendship.

At the end of the day, you are the biggest advocate for your books, and marketing is just one of the ways of showing love for the art you worked so hard on. It took time and effort to put your book into the world — get it into as many hands as possible.

About the Author

[Aliya Bree Hall](#) is a freelance journalist and writer based in Portland, Ore. She is currently editing her first [novel](#), an adult F|F science fantasy. When she's not writing, she's hosting [Sapphic Stories Bookclub \(and Other Queer Tales\)](#) or cohosting the podcast [Shit We Wrote](#).