

Marketing Matters

You've written a finely crafted story. Now what?

1 Catch'em in the Web

You will need a Website. If you are not technically-inclined, consider someone to develop it for you. You want it to look as professional as possible because it is a reflection of your work. A Website is a necessary tool to promote your work and cultivate a fan base. In developing your Website, consider using a color scheme where the body of your text displays in black on a white or light background. This isn't a general rule in Website design, but important for authors, as you will want to post large amounts of text such as book excerpts. Black text on a light background will make it easier for your readers. Make the "where to buy" links as visible as possible. Include links to your profiles on social media and place them near the top of the home page (even better if it can appear on every page of your site). Consider starting a blog and make it part of your site. Many independent authors have successfully used WordPress or Blogger to easily create a complete site with blog. A blog with multiple posts per month can boost your site's visibility substantially within online search engines such as Google and Yahoo.

2 Get Social

Create social media profiles as an author. Keep your author profile separate from your personal profile. Avoid posting personal items such as pictures of kids, vacation plans, general rants, and controversial opinions (unless being controversial is your angle as an author). Choose one or two social media platforms to start. If you feel comfortable with those, you can always expand to others. Every platform has its pros and cons. Instagram is great for attracting a younger audience, but posts must include a photo. Google Plus is great for boosting your visibility in Google searches, but posts reach a limited audience. Facebook has one of the largest audiences, but pages often get pushed out of the news feed in favor of status updates from personal profiles. Twitter is great for conversations and connecting, but is very limited in characters per post. Also, there are social networks just for readers such as Goodreads and Shelfari. Keep your posts creative, engaging and valuable. Keep the number of direct selling posts to 20% or less of all your posts. Create the social media mix that is right for you.

3 Bloggers Are an Author's Best Friends

Did you know there is a whole industry of people who blog about books? Who knew? The key to getting your book promoted and reviewed by a book blog is respect. Most book bloggers will post a Review Policy. Read the policy before reaching out. If a blogger says no, thank them for their consideration and move on. It also helps to make a genuine connection with the blog/blogger before approaching them. Pay it forward. Follow the blog. Comment on posts and share their hard work. Then when it comes time to ask, they will remember you as a supporter. Especially on Amazon, reviews will boost the visibility of your book. The more reviews you have, the more visible your book becomes. Some believe there is a sweet spot around 50 reviews where the legendary Amazon algorithm kicks in and starts promoting your book like crazy. So, offer free copies to bloggers in exchange for an honest review. "Honest" being the key word here. Never lower yourself to asking a blogger (or anyone) to only write a good review.

4 Everyone Judges a Book by its Cover

It's true. You must have a professional-looking, attractive cover to succeed. Think about it. Your cover is the most visible piece in your marketing toolbox. With hundreds of thousands of choices out there, the casual shopper decides within seconds if your book is worth a look. The cover is the potential reader's first impression of your work. Make them stop in their tracks and take notice.

5 Envision the Virtual Shelf

A well planned category and keyword strategy can also greatly boost visibility in online stores. Think of the category as the section your book would be placed in if it was in a physical store. It is your Virtual Shelf. While the Fiction section is vast, the Pirate Fiction section is substantially smaller and books are easier to find in that sub-category. And, best of all, the people looking in the Pirate Fiction section are looking for Pirate Fiction books, not Horror Fiction. You want your ebook to be just as easily found by the right readers, so narrow down the category as much as your distributor will allow, keeping in a category that best fits your book.

As for keywords, they can be equally powerful. Think about how readers search for books like yours and choose your keywords accordingly. Use keywords that actually apply to your work and not just ones that are popular. A misleading keyword can lead to a reader buying your book and being unhappy with it because they thought it was something it wasn't. Unhappy readers lead to bad reviews.

Additionally, keywords can be used to enhance your category strategy. On Amazon, you are limited to two categories, but a little known fact (although it is posted openly in Amazon's tutorials) is that certain keywords can trigger additional categories to be added for your book giving it greater access to readers.