

12 Top Tips from the founder
of an Indie Press —
on
Writing, Publishing,
and
Marketing
for the
Self-Published Author



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Write What You Want

There is a lot to be said about writing for your market and listening to the advice of experts. This will not be my addition to that comprehensive set of established advice from those who have and have not succeeded within the industry.

I am going to start off by saying that you should write from your heart, reach deep down and smear your soul over every page. Make every character embody every bit of what makes you flawed and human. Put them into scenarios that elicit the types of emotions you want to feel.

Why?

Why would I tell you to ignore all the advice about what is, and is not readable... or marketable? Simple. You are one in more than seven billion people and there are more people out there just like you. Now, here is the hard part. Once you have written your truly unique piece that comes from the deepest parts of your soul, you have to find your kindred spirits and convince them that your story is what they want. That is marketing and this is the reason the publishing industry has genres, and why the big houses have editors that specialize in their genres. They have mastered the market, found out how to reach those kindred spirits, and know what to give them to keep them happy.

As a writer, who hopefully has the goal of selling his/her books, you need to find your target audience and reach them. Remember: first and foremost, you need to reach readers. Readers buy books. Authors do tend to be voracious readers, but they aren't your target audience most of the time. I can't stress that enough. As you develop your marketing plan, you need to understand your target audience and where they look for the books they buy. If your book is so incredibly unique that only three other people on the planet will like it, then your task is to set out to find them. Maybe your entire market is so unique that it is unusually small, whatever your target market is, your task is to find it and let them know about your book.

A genre such as romance is a well-established market. There are hundreds, if not thousands of trusted reviewers, and a readership that has an insatiable lust for books. Non-fiction, war, and history books are also well-established. Those readers love books about war—any war—or a specific war. They know their favorite authors, and they can be easily reached through specific channels. But you wouldn't advertise your contemporary romance about a detective and his new beautiful client on the history channel. Nor would you market your non-fiction work on the history of submarines used in WWI through a romance magazine.

Finding your target audience is your first step, followed by how to get them. These aren't arbitrary simple questions. These are the major million-dollar questions that even big houses fight to answer. Who is my market? How do I reach them? And the most important question: How do I convince them to buy my book?

How do you convince someone to buy your book? In a market saturated with authors and books... people are beginning to be overloaded with options, and are beginning to resort to purchase

only from their most trusted authors or reviewers and stores/websites. This is what economists call “Choice Overload.” Simply put, if a person is provided with too many choices, they shut down and go only with what they know. That is what could be happening with the self-publishing—everyone is an author/publisher--market. We may be providing too many options to the consumer. Choice Overload is the result.

How can we mere mortals overcome that? We need to begin the same way that every other successful author did, by reaching out and gaining the trust of those around us. Start small. Convince your friends and family that your story is worth reading. Turn them into your advocates, and have them start reaching out. Now, don't limit yourself. The giants of the industry don't stop with who they know. They reach out further, slowly, over time to markets and niches that they didn't know. It will take time to develop.

All the while you are doing this, keep writing. Keep writing what you love. Every book you sell will extend your reach. It will put your name in front of people who already loved your previous work, and remind them to keep advocating on your behalf. The new book will find more readers, further extending your readership. Those new readers will look back on what you have already written and pick up your backlist. This effect snowballs. And where you started off, physically handing out a copy of your book to each new reader, happy to have sold ten a month, you will find your numbers increasing exponentially.

A final important word on this--continue to develop your current readership. Take those that are already buying your books and learn what they like and dislike. Maintain that conversation in whatever platform suits you best, whether it be Facebook, Twitter, or a means you find most efficient.

Grab your readers with a story they love, and keep giving them what they want.

Who is my target market?

How do I reach them?

How do I convince them to buy my book?

Once you have answered these three questions, don't quit. Hold onto those people. Develop them as your advocates, and they will begin advertising your books for you. They will extend your reach on your behalf. Then you can focus on writing more of what you love.

Write, Right For You

I've always been interested in how other writers write. Not the mechanical aspects, such as using longhand or a computer, or speaking the words into a word processing program, I'm more interested in the first draft process.

Some of the folks in the writing group which I belong to are fastidious about a perfectly clean first draft, where every comma and period are in their respective places. I, on the other hand kind of "dump" everything onto the page. Admittedly, my first drafts are a bit of mess as I take the thoughts from my brain and place them onto the page, this creates some work for me as I go back to clean up that first draft, but that's when the "magic" happens for me.

I wrote a screenplay with a good friend some time ago. We were optioned for a couple of years, but the screenplay didn't make it to the silver screen. It was a good overall experience and I'm very proud of the screenplay, but the learning curve of working with him was difficult. At first, he wanted to make each page as good as it could be before moving on, and I wanted to get the ideas on the page and come back later to fix it. In the end, we compromised by first writing a complete scene filled with errors and then going back to clean it up. It took us longer, in my opinion, to get the first draft onto the page, but yes, we did have a clean first draft when we were done. But at what creative expense?

Have you ever looked up from your keyboard to find a page filled with characters doing things you hadn't thought of them doing? Isn't that awesome? When working on my thriller *The Third Hour* (13Thirty Books,) I found that the main character, who is a priest, was an atheist! How did that happen? The character just took over, then one day, I'm writing, and there it was. Would that have happened to me (and the character) if I had been all too consumed with a clean first draft?

For me?

No.

With *Ripper- A Love Story*, (13Thirty Books) I wrote the first draft, and then, Lance Taubold, my writing partner on the book, came in and re-wrote the first draft adding his point of view and characters. It was a great process to watch as another writer took the words I had written and filled them in, giving them more life. It's almost like Frankenstein's monster; alive, but barely and then another strike of lightning, in this case, words, and the creature becomes more alive.

I tried once, while taking a writing class, to put down a really clean first draft. It drove me crazy, but that is what the professor wanted, so I did it.

Never again.

Write the way that is right for you. The method to the madness doesn't really matter. Get the words down. Build the story. Let the characters grow in the manner that most befits your style.

Got A Minute? You've Got Time To Write

I'm constantly lamenting to my friends about my lack of writing time. I get up early and go to bed very late, with about five to six hours of sleep a night and I find it difficult most days to get in even one solid hour of writing. Then, a thought struck me the other day when I was at the office: I don't have hours to write, but I do have minutes.

I was leaning back in my office chair waiting for a couple of my colleagues to gather before we departed for a meeting. I had about seven minutes. Seven minutes is not enough time for me to accomplish anything at work, but it's plenty of time for me to write. I'm not talking about flipping open the laptop or powering up the computer—but those are options. I'm suggesting old-fashioned pen and paper. In the seven minutes I had before my colleagues and I need to depart for our meeting, I grabbed a notebook and threw down a couple of sentences of dialogue and an idea for a scene that had been percolating in my head for the last day or so. That simple act of jotting down a few words and ideas, inspired me to find more minutes in that day to put down a few more sentences, ideas, thoughts and questions. Voila, I was writing!

I came home from work that night hyped about the possibilities. I immediately went into my home office and found a spiral notebook and put these words at the top of the cover: **Got a minute? You've got time to write.** That notebook can be spotted all around my house. Every time I get an idea, I reach for the notebook and put that idea to paper. A word or phrase that I want to use pops into my thoughts and I grab my trusty notebook. A description of a character... notebook. An idea for the cover of the book... notebook. Future story ideas... notebook.

Even though I only have one or two days a week with real hours to dedicate to writing, I've found that I have minutes to write everywhere... everyday.

The Value Of One Hour

There are two incredibly difficult things about writing:

The first, is sitting down—dedicating oneself to sitting down in front of a computer and beginning to write.

Second, is editing. After all your hard work, now it is time to rip it apart and turn it into something readable—and potentially marketable.

Here, I am going to talk about a simple rule to help create a steady output of written works: in one hour. No matter how bad, or how busy my day is, I find one hour. Let's begin by doing some simple math to demonstrate the value of one hour.

I write at an average of about 1,000 words an hour. They may not be good words, but they are words on paper. I am going to take that one hour—1,000 words and show how that can be converted into real output.

$1 \text{ hour} \times 1,000 \text{ words} = 1,000 \text{ words per day.}$

Easy enough so far.

There is an average of 30 days in a month.

$30 \text{ days} \times 1,000 \text{ words per day} = 30,000 \text{ words per month.}$

Let us also assume that the average novel is 90,000 words. I'll also assume that the majority of you can see where we are going with this.

$90,000 \text{ words} / 30,000 \text{ words per month} = 3 \text{ months.}$

In 3 months I can potentially write the rough draft of a full length novel. Now, of course, I use the word rough as it is intended. I'm not sending my rough draft to my agent or publisher as is. It needs to be edited. A lot. But it is a start.

I'm going to offer some general rules to think about when sitting down for that one hour.

1. Don't spend your time going over and editing your previous work. This isn't the time for that. Take a glance at what you last wrote and keep moving. You can edit later. If you spend thirty minutes editing now, then that is thirty potential minutes of output that you have lost. And just know, after that last period of punctuation is typed, and you finally get to hold that completed manuscript in your hands for the first time... the hard work has only just begun.

2. Establish something habitual. This is a broad statement. What I mean is, do something the same way every time to let your body and your brain know it is time to write. Signal to your muses, "Let's do this." This takes time and a bit of training. For me and many of my fellow writers, it involves a favorite spot in the house, and a glass or some spirited drink.

3. Don't be beaten by change. For a length of time, I've been happy with my beer at the dining room table, in my quiet house, listening to the hum of the refrigerator. But in-the-near-future, I may have to find my one hour while in bed after everyone has fallen asleep. Don't allow yourself to make excuses. Life happens, don't duck out on your hour because you had a bad day at work. One hour a day could be the difference between taking four years to write a manuscript or months. Accomplishing this is all a part of prioritizing and time management.

4. Just write! If you get stuck on the perfect way for your character to enter the scene, that's okay. Write something simple which gets the job done, and move on. **An acceptable solution now, followed by forward progress, is better than a brick wall and no progress.** If your dialogue is crummy and bland, keep writing. Moral of the story: just write.

How To Self-Edit By Ignoring Your Manuscript

I am going to open this up by saying that my grammar is poor-at best. I think in run-on sentences and I rely heavily on crutch words. What does this mean for me when it is time to edit? Pain and self-loathing. It wasn't until I had completed my first manuscript, and was faced with my pre-agent barrage of edits, that I learned the true meaning of "writing is rewriting."

My biggest problem upon reviewing and editing my own work is that I simply can't see my own errors. I can't even see them when I read the story aloud. But I have figured out a few tricks through trial and error and the advice of friends.

1. Let your work settle. Step away from it and work on something else.
2. Return to it when you are ready and come at it with a fresh mind, almost as though you are looking at a different author's work. I assure you, if you do this, you will dive into your edits and be chastising yourself for the simple errors you committed.
3. Read your work aloud as it is written. I find this difficult because I naturally fill in the blanks, but this is still important and you may need to have a little more discipline about it, but you will find it all worth the while when you are reading your story aloud and find yourself running out of breath on a ten-line run-on sentence!

Remember that no matter how hard and how well you edit, it will never be perfect, and nothing works as well as a fresh set of eyes. Dig deep into your pool of resources to find those grammar fiend friends, or a mom who loves to read, or maybe a friend who just likes to point out all the things you do wrong, and have them go over it. But there is nothing fun about editing. No one likes it, but it is a necessary evil. It is also the type of thing, that when done properly, no one will notice, but when done poorly, will draw the attention of everyone.

The Power Of Positive Marketing

Every time we—as authors—post, blog or comment we are marketing. As an author you should keep that in mind and make sure that what others see and how they may perceive that marketing is being controlled and directed by you.

Publishers strongly suggest to the authors to maintain a separate Facebook page, website, Google+, Twitter account etc. from their personal pages and accounts. And what is posted on those author pages must be always their (as in the author's) best interest. What an author desires to do with any post, blog or comment is to effect Positive Marketing, that is, to impress those who visit your website or Facebook page or check out your Tweets with positive reinforcement of your brand... you!

Here's a great example of marketing that isn't in the best interest of the author—even though the author posted it about himself. In reference to a book signing that this particular author participated in—he wrote:

“Unfortunately, we were scheduled at the same time as the lunch break so turn out wasn't as great as expected...”

If that happened to be the case, why would any author want to tell everyone about that? How would anyone ever know—unless they were attending—or you post it! Simply saying you had a great book signing without the negative words used to describe it would have been Neutral Marketing and would have left the reader of this post with a Positive or Neutral impression of the event. With the wording of this post, the reader's mind is filled with images of an empty book signing with the author stuck behind a table, playing on his smart phone trying to pass the time. Is that what you would want your readers to imagine? This is a perfect example of Negative Marketing.

Another author posted this on Facebook:

“We have some exciting events with local authors for the upcoming B-Fest! Hope to see you :)”

This post leaves the reader of the comment to fill in his/her own mind with an image of “exciting events.” Positive Marketing.

In this post:

“I was tagged by [name of NYTimes Bestselling author] still can't believe I made her list. Made my day!”

Did the author write “still can't believe I made her list...” because the author doesn't think that she's good enough to be this list of great reads by the NYTimes Bestselling author? I don't know and neither will anyone else. The author could have directed the marketing of this post by writing: **“I'm so proud to be on this list of other wonderful authors.”** And in doing so,

associated herself with positive images of bestselling and award-winning authors... Positive Marketing.

It only takes a moment to misdirect the reader of your posts, blogs or comments into the negative zone. Reread what you are writing about your brand making sure to place it in the Positive Marketing zone.

A Tale Of Two Book Signings: 5 Tips To Better Book Signings And Book Signing Sales

Most of us who write books occasionally dabble in thoughts of book signings; lines of adoring fans stretched far out from the front doors of the store, paparazzi angling to get the best shots of us and the incredible work that we produced which can now be purchased with real money at a real bookstore. We imagine the big grins on the faces of the store owner, manager, or director as your books fly off the shelves prompting calls to the warehouse to get more books to the store immediately. Yeah, well I just had the great pleasure of back to back to back book signings and... they didn't quite go like that.

We were scheduled to have a four-stop book signing event. My co-author and I put much of the leg work in arranging the signings and I must admit, every store that we approached was very open to the idea and scheduled us right in. We actually signed at two stores, a library and then at an invitation only event hosted by one of the large casinos on the Las Vegas strip.

1. Getting a book signing at book stores is not a difficult thing to do at all. You just need to approach the marketing director or manager and tell them about your book and ask for a date. Really, it's pretty simple. Of course, you need to have your book presented in a professional manner and you need to have distribution. None of that is difficult with the great advent of the internet and indie book publishing. Start with stores in your local market. Then call stores just outside your market within driving distance, then think about your hometown or some other cities you may have lived in. Keep it simple and easy on yourself. You can create great "buzz" just by hitting several stores. We got a newspaper article and two radio interviews this way.

2. Libraries are a great source for signings. Even if they don't sell books, many Librarians will allow you to bring in your own and books and sell them. The library didn't ask for a share of the sales or any donation, but we did ask if they would like copies of the book for their shelves and they happily took them. If you're going to sell your own books, bring cash to make change or be prepared with a credit card processing app. We priced our book at an even number to make it easier and then we could tell people that it was a special price just for library patrons. Also, sign up for one of the many free credit card readers that are out there. We used, PayPal and Square, with them, you can take credit cards right over your cell phone. We had quite a few sales that we would have missed if we didn't have the card readers.

3. Bring along pens and promo material no matter where you're signing. If folks couldn't buy right then and there we asked them to go online to Barnes and Noble or Amazon and buy the book when they got home. And guess what... it worked. I checked our Kindle sales at Kindle Direct Publishing and we sold quite a few eBooks that night and next day.

4. Do guerrilla marketing. We had friends come along and I put them to work right away. One stood at the door handing out bookmarks and business cards with all of our book's information printed on them. It gave the customer something to take with them, just in case they didn't buy the book at the store. I also had another friend work the book store aisles. Our book *Ripper— A Love Story* is an historical romance, so we worked the romance aisles directing people in those aisles to check out *Ripper* and us at the book signing table set up in the store. We also had some wonderful quotes given to us for *Ripper*, so we made sure to stake out the shelves of books by each of the authors who gave us quotes and let anyone looking at one of their books know about *Ripper*. Even if you don't have people with you— you can do this. I often left the book signing area to approach people in the store and introduce myself as a new author and asked them to stop by the table. People respond to you when you reach out to them.

5. Thank everyone who works in the store/library. We walked around the store (It happened to be a Barnes and Noble) with copies of our book and bookmarks in hand, stopping to thank every employee of that store, even if they worked the Children's section or the Starbucks counter, it didn't matter, we made sure that they understood how important this signing was to us and how great they've been to support us.

We sold out of books at Barnes and Noble!

How To Sell More Books At Conventions And Conferences

I attended Heather Graham's Writers for New Orleans Workshop in New Orleans. The workshop is really a benefit; money raised during the dinner show and silent auction go to the public library system of New Orleans to replace the books that were lost during Hurricane Katrina. New York Times Bestseller author, Heather Graham—a big fan of the Big Easy, with several of her books set there—established the benefit and workshop as a way to bring people back to New Orleans after the devastation from Katrina.

The workshop is a “boutique” conference. It's quite easy to walk up to any of the wonderful authors attending and strike up a conversation, or to join them in the Carousel Bar for a true “round” of drinks. If you go, be sure to try a Pimms Cup. Simon and Schuster editor, Adam Wilson, introduced me to these wonderful concoctions at the very first Writers for New Orleans Workshop and the drink has become a favorite of mine and of most of the attendees.

Graham has done a great job of establishing a workshop that is user-friendly and informal, and best of all: very educational. Panels range from: Booksellers, Readers, Editors and Agents, and New and Upcoming Authors, covering everything from sex to negotiations.

In one particular panel, of great interest to all, the subject was “What Do Readers Want?” The panel was made up of readers from all walks of life. The room was packed with everyone from publishers and agents to editors and authors, as well as many fans. Everyone wanted to hear what the panel and the other readers in the room wanted from authors and what trends the readers were looking for in the books they purchased. One question that piqued every author, agent and publisher's interest was: “How do you, as a reader, find new and unknown authors?” The answers included many of the sources that one might expect: Facebook, Goodreads, Amazon. Not one of the readers said that reviews or book blurbs got them to purchase a book from an unknown author. Interestingly, one reader on the panel said that a new book with all “good” reviews turned them off. The room roared in agreement on that one.

One way that readers discover new and upcoming authors caused a “light bulb” moment for me and others. To stand out, the readers' agreed, was for authors—especially new authors—to attend conventions, workshops or conferences. The readers almost unanimously agreed that they would be more likely to buy a book from a new author at a conference or convention if they had met that author while at the convention or had had some interaction via a panel or reading with the author, during the convention.

At the book fair during this conference — which took place on Sunday morning after a two-hour informative and entertaining presentation from “Rambo” creator, David Morrell — I wandered around the large ballroom in which the book fair was being held, taking note of the authors that were selling books and... those that were not. Graham, F. Paul Wilson, David Morrell and other name authors were, of course, selling well and each had a nice line in front of their tables. But what I found most interesting, was who else was selling. Just one stroll around the room, and it was clear to me that the newer authors who had actively engaged the readers, writers and publishing

professionals who had attended the panels prior to the book fair, were far outselling those who did not engage the attendees.

I sat right next to David Morrell, who, of course, had a line at his table long before the doors “officially” opened. To tell the truth, I was a bit concerned by the placing of my table, thinking that the line of fans would be only interested in David Morrell and once they had a signed copy of his newest book they would meander off and I would never see them again. Well, that didn’t happen. They were buying from Morrell and many stepped away from his table and moved straight to me. I had two books at the book fair, I had participated in a panel on negotiations and one other on writing with a partner. Both, were great fun and I learned quite a bit, all while passing along a tidbit of my own wisdom. I had also taken the time during the workshop to visit with most of those attending. Pimms Cups came in handy when breaking the ice and so did talking about my horse. I found that talking about me as a person-not just as a writer—and then asking the fans about themselves, and not just about what books they read, had a way of bonding us. That bonding made it easier for the fan to make the decision to try (buy) my books over those of other authors who did not extend themselves during the workshop. This time spent “socializing,” with the people attending the conference paid off as I nearly sold out of books, while other authors barely sold one or two copies.

The conclusion is clear. Authors who socialized and met readers sold better-much better-than those authors who did not. I understand that it is not easy for everyone to socialize at conferences; some folks are just better at it. But if you want to sell, and you’re new and unknown, it’s a skill set you must learn and develop.

Here’s a suggestion: sponsor a panel on socializing and networking at the next workshop you’re attending, and help others who may also have a difficult time making the most of the “social factor” when selling books.

My advice: go to conferences and workshops, and network, but not solely with the publishing pros. Instead, spend a good deal of time with the fans and the readers. You will probably make some new friends and I’m certain you will find that the “socialization” will pay off at the book signing-and beyond.

The 5 Minute Makeover To Sell More Books At Your Next Book Signing

Barnes and Noble recently hosted an author meet and greet, and book signing that I was invited to. It was a warm sunny Saturday afternoon with customers streaming in. Barnes and Noble had the publisher's tables set up perfectly, right inside the front door adjacent to the check out and close to the cafe. People could not miss us.

I was there signing my books and had made sure to hit the social sites with news of the signing and I Tweeted about it at regular intervals. I arrived just a few minutes before the event was scheduled to start. I was very happy with the placement of the table. It was tastefully covered with a nice tablecloth that hung about halfway down the table. Stacks of books that Barnes and Noble had ordered were placed on the table. It was a great start, but from my perspective, the table setting wasn't quite ready to receive customers.

To the casual observer, everything was in place and ready to go. For me... there was a bunch of work to do. I work for the world's largest gaming company, in marketing, so I cannot help but to look at every opportunity to sell from a marketing professional's viewpoint. Now, I like writing books, and I do like to do book signings, but I love marketing. So, before I even greeted one customer, I set out to make a few simple changes that would guarantee that I presented myself and my books at our best. The goal was to sell as many books as possible. And to do that effectively... I needed to market them.

And you too, can take on these simple marketing maneuvers to maximize sales at your next signing.

1. Ensure that your table is in a great location. Not hidden behind rows and rows of boxes or shelves, or in some far-off corner of the store. I had a table in a great location, but the table itself wasn't inviting. It needed to be merchandised. The first thing I did was clear off the table and start with a clean slate. The table cloth that Barnes and Noble had provided was fine, but it was hung in such a way that anyone walking in the door to the store could see under the table. When an author was sitting down, a customer would be looking at their feet and the boxes stored underneath. It just looked sloppy. I pulled the table cloth off the table and then re-hung it so that it completely fell to the floor at the front of the table. Then, I leaned a couple of large foam backed posters of book covers from my books. Now, I was not only "selling" the books that Barnes and Noble had ordered for the signing, but many of my other books and the front of the table looked clean and neat.

2. Next, I "merchandised" the table with books, signage and marketing material. My books had been stacked and fronted when I arrived—that was ok, but it made the layout look a little too messy, so I moved the books back from the table front, stacking them strategically around the sides of the table, allowing plenty of room for me to sign book and engage with the readers. Then I placed several books in table-top stands so that they were clearly visible to anyone even glancing our way. In between the stands I placed a few bookmarks, small foam board backed book covers, and other

marketing material so that people waiting for their book to be signed would have something to pick up and handle and learn more about my upcoming books. What I didn't have on the table were cell phones, water bottles, coffee cups, food or anything else that would distract from the task at hand—selling books! We all have cell phones. And during a long day of signing, we need coffee or water or a bite to eat, but it does not all need to be displayed along with the books that you're there to sell. Keep them off to the side, behind you, or under the table.

3. I stood behind the table. I only sat down when I was in the process of signing a book. That's right, the rest of the time I stood. Why? Because you don't greet company sitting down. You stand up, invite them in and provide a warm welcome. People are much more apt to come to you if you are up and welcoming them. Sitting down behind your table puts a wall up between you and your potential future readers.

4. I got to work. It wasn't enough to have a clean well merchandised table, and authors at the ready. I needed to let people know who I was, so I worked the door. As every customer walked in, I greeted them with a "Hello, Barnes and Noble has some new and exciting authors signing today. I didn't just announce that I was signing. I said that the store had some new and exciting authors signing today. I was not only working for my benefit but for the other authors also. At the same time, I handed each person walking in a business card of each of the books I was signing and some from the other authors. Note that I use business cards instead of bookmarks to pass out as they are much cheaper and easier for people to carry around. And I just didn't hand out the cards in a random fashion. I made sure that the cards were face up in the correct position so that the customers coming in could easily read them at a glance. And I placed the card for a romance on top when a woman was entering, and the card for a non-fiction on top when a man was entering. Yes—I know, that's profiling. And that's exactly what marketers do. Now, with business cards in hand, customers would look to the tables where the other authors were and they invited customer to browse.

By following these simple steps I made the environment of "selling" more inviting, and in the end... I sold books and so did the other authors. In less than the three hours that I was scheduled to sign, I sold out of all the books Barnes and Noble had in stock.

Think of your next book signing as if you were a "store front" or a "display counter" and merchandise your space so that you maximize your sales position, and like us, you too will be invited back.

Making Reading Interactive

Making Reading Interactive In the days of yore, one would pick up a book read through the pages and let his or her mind wander and imagine the world the author had created. It's an old model that still works for the thousands of books printed each year. When digital books came along, reading stayed pretty much the same, initially. At first, digital was little more than an electronic book, black and white electronic pages on a screen that one flipped through. Now, however, digital offers a wide array of "gadgetry" but most publishers and authors don't take advantage of this wonderful world of digital books in the Wi-Fi age.

One book that has taken advantage of the Wi-Fi age is an exceptional new book—*On Two Fronts* by Sgt Adam Fenner and Lance Taubold. In both the print and the digital versions of the book, the publisher/authors' have incorporated hyper-links and Quick Response (QR) codes into the pages, which allow the reader to connect instantly, via Wi-Fi, and/or a QR code reader, to pictures, sounds and video of events that are taking place throughout the pages of the book.

In the print version, QR codes are strategically placed. All one needs is a "smart phone" and a QR code reader (which can be downloaded for free) and the reader of the print version of the book is taken to a website or linked directly to the pictures and videos. Think about the value added to any book, digital or print, which "interactive reading" brings to the publisher and reader alike: Children's books: where the characters come alive via video. Non-fiction books: where the author conducts a seminar or speaks directly to the reader. Thrillers: where the reader is taken right to the location, and instead of "envisioning" the scene--see's the actual locale.

Several publishers have incorporated multimedia into their ebooks in recent years; *HarperCollins* has a line of EEB's - Enhanced E-books. Here's how their website describes EEB's.

An EEB is an Enhanced E-Book — or, as we like to call it, a book with a bonus! Enhanced e-books* include multimedia and bonus content not found in standard e-book editions. Each of these unique e-book editions offers special features, from behind-the-scenes video to exclusive interviews; maps, music, timelines, photographs, ephemera, and illustrations. *HarperCollins* publishes a wide range of enhanced e-books for adults and teens on a variety of subjects: biography, memoir, sports, business, classic and contemporary fiction, humor, and cooking.

This limited line of E-books offers the digital version as an E-book and as an EEB. The EEB has an added cost to it and that added cost may outweigh the benefit for most readers.

UX magazine has a great article, Interactive e-book Apps: The Reinvention of Reading and Interactivity- that is also interactive - on the advancement of "apps" for e-readers and is well worth reading.

The brilliance of "interactive e-books" is that the publishers have added value to both the print and digital book and made it simple to use. Check it out for yourself and then rethink your next book and how you might engage your readers like you've never done before, by taking them into "interactive reading." Try adding hyper-links to your digital books, or include a QR code or web

address that can be accessed while your fans are reading your works. In doing so, you'll truly engage them.

The Economics of Writing

Writing is an act of love. Selling what you write is the exact opposite.

But it is so hard to divorce oneself from the act of pouring our heart and soul into a piece of literary work, and the very black and white business side of selling books. However, if you want to be a success, or at the very least break even, it is necessary. What I am going to lay out is a simple set of guidelines to help you as an author, selling your written work, to make better business decisions.

1. Identify each sale for what it is.

Understand that each sale may not really be a sale for its own sake. I consider my point of sales, the books I sell to people through a direct conversation, and on point sale as marketing. As a result, I don't mind so much charging less for books or not charging at all. I'll use my first book *On Two Fronts* as an example.

On Two Fronts focuses on my platoon in Afghanistan. That platoon had about 20 guys. Depending on the guy (and his willingness to pay, I am running a business after all) I charged them different rates, or gave the book away. That was 20 sales approximately. These were for marketing.

Each of those 20 guys told their family and friends about the book. I'll approximate that 3 people per soldier bought a book. Now, these are sales. That is 60 sales because their son, husband, or boyfriend was in the book. These 60 people tell their friends, that their loved one was in a book, potentially resulting in 3 more sales per person. That is 180 sales. These 260 (20+60+180) initial sales are important, because of the algorithms on Amazon, and for general book marketing. At this point, only three levels of people away from me, I have turned 20 books into 260. If 5% comment on Amazon about the book, that is 13 comments.

All of this is important because it will put the book onto lists which people browse on Amazon, and the comments will encourage them to buy a book. An important thing to remember as an author is that no matter how good your cover, blurb, or book is, it is the word of mouth that really sells. People trust each other. You are just a person selling something, of course you think it is great, and you benefit from its sales.

Now, that is one scenario. I had several advantages, one being: my book came with built in advocates before the book was written. I had a marketing team. My fiction won't have this advantage. I will need to develop my advocates, but that was another blog. (Write What You Want).

2. Always consider the amount of units you need to sell to offset an expense.

Here is a simple example:

A \$250 piece of advertising.

Your book brings you approximately \$5 in revenue per unit.

$\$250/\$5 = 50$ units

This \$250 piece of advertising will need to sell at a minimum 50 units on its own to simply offset its cost.

Now, please don't misunderstand. I'm not saying it can't. This is just something you need to consider.

3. Focus on where you get the biggest bang for your buck.

Here are some basic numbers:

\$80 revenue from a book purchased through a brick and mortar store.

\$2 revenue from an electronic copy sold online.

\$4 revenue from a print copy sold online.

\$8 revenue from a copy I sell myself from my stock purchased directly from the publisher.

A quick look at these numbers. and we can see that selling from my own stock has some serious potential for returns. In fact, that is ten times the returns of selling through brick and mortar stores. Now, I'm going to break it down by venue - the pros and cons of each.

Brick and Mortar stores: Without a doubt, that is the least bang for my buck. My co-author drives a big truck (I drive a motorcycle, much more fuel efficient). If he drives across town to do a signing, approximately forty miles round trip, he uses three gallons of fuel. At \$3.50 a gallon, that is \$10.50 in fuel. If he was the only one receiving these revenues. it would take over thirteen books just to make up for his fuel expenses, but he is not solo on this project, so it would take twenty-six books sold to make up his costs. Now, don't disregard the brick and mortar yet. There are additional benefits. First, you are marketing your book, and the book store is marketing your book signing. It isn't always about the person who buys your book in the store. It is all those people who you interacted with who you otherwise would not have, and all the people who saw your book standing apart from the others. It is all about marketing, not sales on point.

Online sales: It is quick, easy, and you don't even have to be there. This is one of my favorites for its efficiency--and because I don't have to shave. E-books offer instant gratification, as well as a lower cost per unit, and for print, the reader doesn't even need to put pants on to order. Here is the problem: as an author you need to market your books to people. Just like in the bookstore, somehow you need to find them and convince them to buy your book. This is the efficiency I like to talk about. Unlike the bookstore where you have one conversation with one person at a time to sell your book (Some of mine have been several minutes, other times I spend thirty minutes talking to a person before they buy my book). The internet allows you to have one conversation with hundreds of people (if not more). Same effort, exponential results.

Personal stock:

For 1/10 the amount of sales, I get the same amount of revenue per unit at the bookstore, but it is so limiting. Again, one conversation = one sale. That doesn't include the cost/effort of carrying those books with me, or transporting them when a friend wants to buy one--let alone getting the money from them.

Remember those important guidelines for making better decisions while you are selling your book.

1. Identify each sale for what it is.

2. Always consider the amount of units you need to sell to offset an expense.
3. Focus on where you get the biggest bang for your buck.

And the final guideline:

You can't place a price tag on something you love, whether it be the act of writing, or experiencing the interaction with a reader who loves your work, those are the types of things money can't buy.

How Dinner Turned Into A Bestseller

About a year or so ago a few authors got together for dinner, it was a friendly dinner filled with great conversation between writers who had met at a conference years before, and who are now wonderful friends. Of course, the conversation turned to writing, publishing, selling, marketing and upcoming works. One of the authors, USA and NYT Bestselling Author Erin McCarthy mentioned a horror anthology that she had been invited to be a part of. Erin doesn't generally write in the horror genre so of course she jumped at the opportunity to participate and work in a genre that would be fun and a challenge. "Headlining" to use a Vegas term, the book, was F. Paul Wilson, NYT Bestselling Author of the Repairman Jack series. Erin explained the concept of the then untitled anthology and suggested to Lance Taubold and Rich Devin, who Erin had met at the Romantic Times Booklovers' Convention, that they might want to consider writing for the anthology also. The two immediately agreed and a few ideas were bantered about.

About a month later, Taubold and Devin were both invited into a "secret group" on Facebook. The group had been formed to communicate everything for the "horror anthology" as it was called at the time—to all ten writers now contributing to the book. In addition to F. Paul Wilson, Erin McCarthy, Lance Taubold and Richard Devin—Rachel Aukes, Michael Koogler, Patrick Frievald, Kathy Love, Paul Mannering and Elli J. Rossi were also participating with great tales of horror in the anthology. The roster of authors consisted of NYT, USA Today and Amazon Bestselling authors, a Bram Stoker Award nominated author and IBPA Benjamin Franklin Award winning author, and several "up and coming" authors. It was a great mix sure to produce a wonderful collection of stories.

The secret Facebook group was the perfect way for the group to communicate. Every detail was proposed and ironed out utilizing the Facebook group: Ideas were submitted, critiques given, cover details, print and digital details and suggestions, marketing, royalties, taxes, signings and swag. "Never Fear" was born from this Facebook group. Because of the relationship both Taubold and Devin had with 13Thirty Books, LLP and the publication of several of their previous titles—when it came to marketing, distribution and production, 13Thirty Books, LLP was asked to publish *Never Fear*.

Never Fear was published on April 15, 2015 and hit the Amazon top 10 in Horror shortly thereafter.

Opportunities are everywhere. As a writer build relationships early on in your career. Build your community. Be honest with yourself about your abilities but don't hesitate to take chances. Don't be the "outlier."

Never Fear – Phobias, is now in the works with several new authors added to the collection. As well as *Never Fear — The Tarot*, and *Never Fear — Christmas Terrors...* not only did the dinner produce one Amazon Bestseller... it produced three!