MAKE YOUR BOOK
DISCOVERABLE

By Carla King

IngramSpark

Make Your Book Discoverable
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INTRODUCTION

Making readers aware of you and your book means making search engines aware of you and your book. To do this you use words, phrases, and paragraphs, which computer systems consider metadata. Metadata determines how your book is indexed by search engines and helps them to present it to readers who are looking for it. In this way, metadata provides reliable and continuous "passive marketing" throughout the life of your book and is the cornerstone of your author and book marketing, setting the stage for all of your marketing efforts. It could even be said that metadata is the platform on which your author platform is built.

Discoverability depends on search engines to disseminate the information we provide. Most of us think of Google as the most important search engine, but in 2016 the Amazon search engine caught up with Google as the preferred search engine for people looking to buy products. Since books are products, it's especially important to be visible to shoppers in this very important store. Amazon shoppers are ready to buy and the way to get their attention is through metadata.

The information in this booklet will walk you through the process of creating the right words to sell your book. It will also show you how to leverage your metadata to help readers discover you and your book in online retailer sites and via your website and blog. The process is easier than you might think, especially for a wordsmith like you!

METADATA AND KEYWORDS BASICS

Metadata might seem an intimidating technical concept, but it's really only the words and phrases that you use to describe yourself and your book. Search engines use metadata to automate a formerly labor-intensive task to connect readers, curators, and distributors with books more efficiently than ever before. Self-publishers with well-written, well-edited, beautifully-designed books who understand their market can use metadata to level the playing field so that their books compete alongside books from big traditional publishers.

So our job as authors marketing our books is to attract the search engines. To do that, we give them words. To search engines, all words have a value, and keywords and phrases have even more value still. Your task is to strategically select keywords that best describe your book and place them in the right spots around the web.

When you realize that metadata is everywhere—in your website, in the Bowker ISBN record for your book, in your social media sites, even in the documents, audio, and video files you upload to the web—you begin to realize how powerful metadata can be as a marketing tool.

HOW TO CREATE GOOD METADATA

Creating good metadata takes a little time but once it's done you'll have a great marketing tool that helps you sell your books in your sleep. Once you've created a list of relevant and targeted keywords and phrases, you can create your author bio and book description to give the search engines even more reason to bring attention to your book. You may also want to consider rethinking the title and subtitle of your book based on your findings.

To summarize, the metadata you'll need to craft are:
- Keywords and key phrases
- Book description using those keywords
- Author bio, also using keywords

Once you create a master document with this data you can use it to disseminate your book information in all kinds of places:
- Your ISBN record
- Your IngramSpark book record, to be disseminated to online retailers
- Any online retailer where you're selling direct
- Your website author page and book pages
- Your Amazon Central author page
- Your Goodreads profile
- Social media profile pages
- For interviews, guest blog posts, and other promotional appearances

Creating a master document for your metadata is a huge time saver when you realize how many places this data will be placed. Keep this worksheet handy and refine it over time. Revisit it every few months, to make sure it remains relevant.

Create a Keywords and Key Phrases List

Record words and short phrases you think your readers might enter into a search engine to find you and your book. Eliminate the less important and more generic words and phrases from your list.

Enter your keywords and phrases to find books like yours on Amazon, and if those terms do not return books that are like yours, try again. Then use the Google Keyword Search tool to help you think of other keywords for your book. Google Keyword Search will show you how popular those keywords are (volume data) and help you find keywords with lower competition. Try to keep the number of repeated keywords to a maximum of three. Work on this task until you have a final list of no more than 10 to 20 words, with a 900-character maximum for your entire list.

Enter the most important keywords and phrases first. Different distributors allow different numbers of keywords and phrases. Settle on 10 keywords and list them in descending importance. Then make another list of keywords and phrases, separated by commas, of 60 characters, including spaces.

Return to Google Keyword Search every few months to evaluate new trends, check popularity and volume, and to improve your keywords list. These same top keywords and phrases should appear in your book descriptions wherever possible.

Create Your Book Description

Considering both your keywords and your title, draft a succinct but keyword-rich description of your book. Make the description informative to users first and search engines second. Keep it to a maximum of 150 characters, including spaces.

It's better to go narrow than wide, more specific than general. As a travel writer, I cannot possibly compete with bestselling titles in my category—Elizabeth Gilbert's Eat, Pray, Love or Cheryl Strayed's Wild—so I'm better off mentioning my motorcycle as my key differentiator. I want my "conversion" rate to be high. That is, when buyers come to my book sales page they should be compelled to buy—not click off because they were lured in falsely or in too general a way.

Your book descriptions should be attention-grabbing, keyword-rich copy that sells your books. Note these word count limits:
- Short book description of 350 words maximum
- Long book description of 4,000 characters maximum

Create Your Author Bio

Your author bio, like your book description, should be succinct and keyword-rich. You are aiming for a "know-like-trust" relationship with your potential readers and this is your first opportunity. I recommend you keep your word count between 50 and 150 words, no more than 350 words.

Now that you've created your basic metadata, you can start to populate it on the reseller sites.

METADATA ON RESELLER SITES

Every company you use to distribute your books to the online retailers wants you to succeed. Because they make money when you make money, they make it very easy for you to insert metadata. When you sell direct to the online retailers like Amazon, Kobo, Apple and B&N (the four major retailers), you'll add metadata about you and your book on each site.

Metadata includes your book title, subtitle, description, author name, author bio, date published, your biographical materials, keywords, reviews and endorsements, and pricing. It also includes BISAC codes and categories that group your book with other, like books.

If you use IngramSpark to distribute your book you will update your metadata in your dashboard. You don't have to duplicate your efforts on each retailer's site. Take a look at your metadata every few months, and update it with any new information, reviews, or keyword changes.

For example, imagine that you get an important endorsement that will help you sell your book. You can simply go into your IngramSpark account, click the edit button, and update. If you want to change the price of your book, you just do it one time through your account. Ingram then sends out the updated information to the retailers. Be aware that when you update metadata, it doesn't update on retailer sites immediately but can take days and even weeks.

BISAC Subject Heading Codes

A set of industry-approved BISAC codes helps sellers categorize your book correctly into topics and subtopics so they know what section of their store to place (or list) your book. Create a list of the top three subject headings along with secondary and tertiary topics. If you can, choose three different main (or secondary) subject headings, instead of one main subject heading three times, so your book will show up in three different sections of a virtual store. IngramSpark allows the full three BISAC subject headings, while Amazon CreateSpace only allows one category. Amazon KDP allows two categories.

METADATA ON YOUR WEBSITE

Also of great importance are the actual words on each web page and, more specifically, the words used in the headers and opening paragraphs on each page, which need to indicate exactly what that page is about. So be sure to use keyword-rich headlines and sentences in your opening sections. For this reason, it is wise to begin each page of your website and blog posts with a header that describes the content of the entire page or specific paragraphs. Using a header meta tag will let search engines know that these are important keywords that describe the page content.

For example: The following is the structure of HTML on your website pages and blog.

```
<ARTICLE>
    <H1>Most important heading here</H1>
    <P>Some additional information here</P>
<BR>
    <H2>Less important heading here</H2>
    <P>Some additional information here</P>
</ARTICLE>
```

The smaller the number in the header tag the more important it is to search engines and the larger the font is. The <H1> tag will be the first header on your page and the one search engines will give the most importance in determining the content of your post. When you break up your page content in paragraphs with additional headlines, use a smaller header tag like <H3> or below as you move further down the content. Search engines read header tags, so it's important to put your most important or clarifying information as a header, but the higher the number that's associated with the tag, the less weight the search engines will give it in comparison to headers with lower numbers: <H1>, <H2>, <H3>, etc.

Smart authors centralize all of their activities on a website branded with their author name. Your website is "you, central." Your website should direct readers to your book sales pages on the retailer sites, interviews, your other writing, blog posts, and show them where they can connect with you on social media.

Most major search engines no longer read keyword meta tags in search results, so create effective title and description tags for each of your web pages. Similarly, your file names should be descriptive. You never know when Google will change their search strategy, so cover all your bases!

Many website creation software programs and blogging platforms like WordPress provide obvious places where you can insert these various meta tags, which are then inserted for you into the page's HTML source code, so it's easy to insert these tags yourself.

Metadata isn't the only way you get to the top of search engines. Other factors are the popularity of your book with the online retailers, the number of books you have for sale, the length of time you have owned your domain name, how often you post blogs, how active you are on social media sites, and the number of incoming links to your website and blog, to name just a few. But metadata is your first and most important step in beginning a cycle of "know-like-trust" that will attract more and more readers to your books.

Your Blog and Metadata

Blogging can be a huge boon to discovery. Because you can blog on any topic you like, you can reach audiences who might not find your books because they haven't used particular keywords to search for it. But that doesn't necessarily mean they wouldn't be interested in your book, or know someone who would be. (Which is why it's important to include social media share buttons at the bottom of each blog post.)

For example, one of my most successful blog posts is a detailed review of dual-sport motorcycle boots. In the metadata for that blog post, I added brand names of the boots along with the words "adventure," "touring," "boots," and "review." The title and description tags also include those words. Because the content of the post matches those words, search engines figure out that the post is really and truly a good resource for people looking for that information and place it very high in the search results for those terms.

Therefore, this particular post consistently drives traffic to my site, and my book is advertised in a sidebar widget on every page. As it turns out, many people who visit for information on adventure motorcycle touring boots actually go on to buy my books. Well duh…these people are very interested in the topic, so if they like to read at all, they are compelled. Why? Because I've given them some incredibly useful information. This gives them confidence that I am an authority and they've also got a taste of my writing style. This accelerates the required "know-like-trust" feeling buyers need to be convinced to purchase. What have I learned from this? Blog more.

Categories

On each blog post you write you'll create a title and specify a list of keywords and, unlike on web pages, you can also group blog posts in categories. Categories are broader than tags and group posts together under a common theme. Think of categories as themes, or as sections in a book. You may even export all the posts in a particular category to create a book. Authors often use blogs to beta publish and test out ideas for books.

Where Does Metadata Live?

I'll give you a geeky peek at metadata on my own website in its raw form, that is, in the HTML code where it sits between the HEAD tags. You can view this code on any website by using your tool bar to View > Developer > Source Code or right click in the content of the web page for the option box and click "View Page Source". (This is a great way to do a little competitive analysis of other authors in your genre.) You might notice that not everyone uses meta tags, and they're missing a great marketing opportunity.

If you navigate to my CarlaKing.com author website and view the source code you'll see the three meta nametags: Title, Description, and Keywords that lie between the <HEAD> tags. (You may see different metadata as I change them often to reflect my most current writing and to take advantage of trends.)

```
<HTML>
<HEAD>
    <META name="Title" content="Carla King:  Motorcycle Adventure Travler." />
    <META name="Description" content="Carla King authors books and travelogues
    about her mostly solo motorcycle adventures in America, China, India, Africa,
    and Europe." />
    <META name="keywords" content="carla king, motorcycle adventure, women
    adventure travel writing, motorcycle touring, american borders, china road,
    indian sunset, morocco, africa, europe, moto guzzi, harley-davidson, kawasaki,
    suzuki, ural, royal enfield bullet" />
</HEAD>
</HTML>
```

Each meta tag or name can be edited in your website editing tool. I use WordPress. Each page needs its own Title tag, Description, and Keywords. What search engines like Google and Amazon are looking for is "relevancy." Their goal is to return the results the customer wants. They do not want to direct customers to irrelevant pages and they will punish you if you try to fool them.

Title Tag

Your Title tag should describe that one particular page and not the whole website. My home page Title tag is "Carla King: Motorcycle Adventure Traveler." Visitors to my home page will see this title displayed at the top of the page, and the search engines will pick up that tag and compare it to the text in the body of the page to make sure it matches. Don't make it too long or it may be truncated. If you don't use this tag, the web browser may simply display your

page title as "Home" which would be an unfortunate missed marketing opportunity.

Create a good, descriptive Title meta tag for each separate page of your website that describes that particular page in a nutshell. You don't have to get creative, just reflect what the page is about. The Title tag for my book page is "Carla King's Motorcycle Adventure Travel Books." My bio page is titled "About Carla King, Motorcycle Adventure Traveler." My calendar page Title tag is "Carla King's Motorcycle Travel Events Calendar."

Description Tag

Your Description tag is a short, friendly sentence that should describe only the information on a single web page or blog post. This description should be compelling enough to the readers you're targeting that they will not be able to resist clicking on it. Google sometimes uses this content in search result snippets.

Alt Tag for Images

Metadata also includes the Alt tags that offer short text descriptions for images. When you insert an image (or any media) on a web page, you have the opportunity to provide the Title and Alt Text. You may also specify a Caption (optional) and a Description (to help you find the image when you're searching for it inside your site).

- Tag the image of your book cover with ALT =["Your book title: Book description with keywords"]
- Tag your author photo with ALT =["Your name: short, keyword-rich description of author"]
- Tag all other photos on your web pages with a thorough description of the person, object, place, and other descriptive words.

You can ask your webmaster to help you do this, but WordPress and other systems these days make it easy for you to do it yourself. Search engines collect these Alt tags, like other metadata, to identify and rank your pages. They always judge relevancy by comparing these words against the other words associated with the page. But they can help you broaden your audience, as well.

For example, there's a photo of me on a Moto Guzzi in Lake Como, Italy that's tagged with "Carla King, Moto Guzzi, Motorcycle, Lake Como, Italy." People who are searching for information on traveling in Italy on a Moto Guzzi (a company that's based in Lake Como), are likely to find the image in my blog post, read the post, see the book, and buy it, or at least sign up for my e-mail newsletter so I can cultivate a "know-like-trust" relationship with them so that they will eventually buy my books.

Keywords Tag

The Keywords tag helps search engines put each particular web page in a category. This is why it's so important to customize the metadata for each page on your site and each blog post. This is not the keywords list you created for your book but is specific to the page.

In my keywords list, I've tried to imagine the words that readers will use to find my writing. I've used brand names of popular motorcycles as well as countries that people may be interested in learning more about. I have a strong niche audience who are interested in motorcycle adventure travel. But I also strive to branch out and appeal to the general market who want to buy travel writing or, a little more specifically, women's solo travel books.
So, sometimes I also use the keywords "solo" and "women" to appear in search results for women who are researching solo motorcycle travel. I also use the titles of my books and online travelogue series. I experiment with keywords all the time to try for better results. I check volume and trends using the Google Keyword Planner, which helps me to find new low-competition keywords and reach new audiences.

MAKE METADATA SPECIFIC

Consider how keyword-rich and specific this sentence is: "Carla King is a motorcycle adventure travel writer based in San Diego and Baja, California."

My bio goes on to mention that I've traveled in the USA, Mexico, China, Europe, India, and Africa, and sometimes I customize it to mention particular motorcycle brands, such as Royal Enfield Bullet, Ural, and Moto Guzzi. Sometimes I also include the keywords "dual-sport" or "touring" or "sidecar." As noted before, other times I add "solo" and "woman."

It is important to stay focused. Note that my core keywords are "motorcycle" and "travel" and "adventure," which consistently show up on my website, book descriptions, social media profiles, and bios. Search engines pick up on that, and my content rises to the top when people search for those terms. When people search for those terms in parallel with keywords like China, India, Moto Guzzi, or Ural, the search engines return specific blog posts, which leads them to my website and my books.

The more specific you can be about you, your book, and your area of expertise, the less competition you'll have. That means you'll reach exactly the people who want your book. So go narrow, not wide. If I simply specified "adventure travel," for example, I may get a lot of hits but not a lot of buyers.

METADATA IN YOUR ISBN RECORD

It's very important to remember that whoever buys your ISBN controls the metadata for that book—so it should be you. Once you've bought your ISBNs (in the United States you purchase from Bowker, in Australia from THORPE-Bowker, and in the United Kingdom from Nielsen), and your book is ready to publish, simply log in to your account, click the ISBN number, and fill out the data in the full title detail form. IngramSpark offers a discount if you purchase your ISBNs through Bowker when you set up a new title in your account.

You have the opportunity to insert lots of data in your ISBN record—title, author, description, number of pages, size, language, copyright year, date of publication, contributors, category, title status (out-of-print, active, etc.), price, currency, book cover, and interior (to index keywords). All this information is disseminated to distributors, wholesalers, libraries, and retailers (online and brick-and-mortar) so that they can convey it to readers.

The ability to control and edit the metadata for your book is a key reason you need to buy direct from your ISBN agency and not let someone else buy it for you. You'll need a block of 10 ISBN numbers. Ten numbers only cost twice as much as one, and you'll most likely need at least two: one for your print book and one for your e-book. You may also use one for your hardback, your audiobook, and yet another for a multimedia version of your e-book.

When your book is ready to publish, log in to your ISBN account and fill out the metadata for your book. Most authors create books in two formats: print (PDF) and EPUB. Once you enter the information into one ISBN record you can clone it and modify it for the other formats.

Depending on where you are located in the world, there are a few agencies that sell barcodes. Bowker (US), Thorpe-Bowker (AUS) and Nielsen (UK) sell barcodes, but you don't need to buy one. Use IngramSpark's free book cover template generator. It takes just minutes and you'll get a cover template via e-mail, including a bar code placed correctly for printing.

IngramSpark's Cover Template Generator creates a cover design that can be used for all book formats like print, EPUB or MOBI.

GENERATE MY COVER

METADATA IN DOCUMENTS AND OTHER MEDIA

Most people are surprised to learn that search engines take a peek inside all of the documents and applications you publish on the web for clues about their content. Sometimes this can cause some embarrassment. For example, let's say your Aunt Maude in Peoria has let you install her license of Microsoft Word on your computer. Then you use Word to write and create a sample chapter of your book, which you print as a PDF and offer on your website for free. When you search for it on Google you may see that it names Aunt Maude of Peoria Knitting School as the author. Oops!

But don't worry. Almost all applications let you edit the metadata associated with the document, though they might not call it metadata. For example, the registration information that automatically identifies Aunt Maude as being the author of any Word document created using her registered copy of the program can be changed. Simply open the document and click File > Properties and edit the data.

Here's what the metadata looks like in a document I uploaded to the web on this very topic, the importance of metadata for authors.
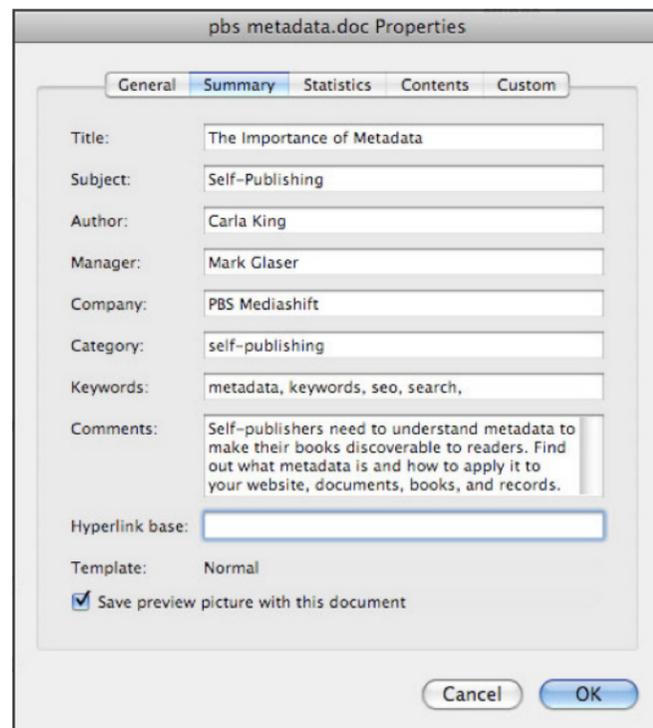
If you're publishing audio, video, or any other media, you can edit the metadata inside that application, too. For example, Audacity is a free audio editing program I like for recording

music, podcasts, and audiobooks. Audacity calls metadata "ID3" tags. In addition to marking the file as owned by me, these tags identify the file as an audio recording to search engines and to services like iTunes and Windows Media Player. So when someone enters the term "motorcycle adventure travel podcast" my recording is more likely to appear near the top of the search engine results.

Here's the metadata in the Audacity program from my interview with Ted Simon, a famous author in the motorcycle adventure travel genre. Lots of people search for Ted Simon's name, and so that's an important meta tag, along with the word "interview." This brought a lot of book buyers to my site and yes, I saw a spike in sales after that podcast went live.
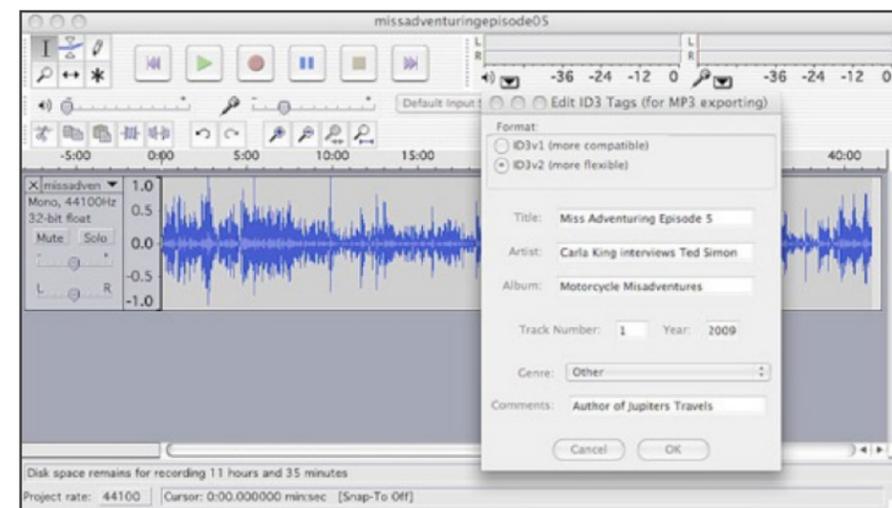
METADATA IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Never leave a social media profile field empty! Use all available information spaces on social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, LinkedIn, AboutMe, and YouTube to increase discoverability and create incoming links to your book's web presence. Any keyword-rich author bio you can place anywhere on the web (including at the end of guest blogs and articles) is valuable real estate. Facebook pages give you an opportunity to create even more metadata that creates incoming links to your website. Use the same keywords you've used on your website and book pages, and the search engines (your best marketing partner!) will begin to trust you.

CREATE A GRAVATAR

A Gravatar is a Globally Recognized Avatar. You create your profile just once, and then when you participate in any Gravatar-enabled site, your Gravatar image will automatically follow you there.

In this way, your participation in conversations around the web can improve your discoverability. Many news and blog sites use gravatar plugins. When you comment on blog posts and news items (and you should!), the site automatically draws information from the central gravatar database to spread your biographical data (metadata) around the web.

Register an account with gravatar.com based on the e-mail address you use as an author, and upload an avatar to be associated with the account. This should be your professional author profile photo.

Some people register more than one gravatar—one for professional and one for personal use. If you're writing under a pseudonym, create a different e-mail address to associate with that alias so that you can register a separate gravatar.

Gravatars are critical in book promotion activities such as guest blogging and commenting on blog posts. People who read your comments can find out more about you in one click.

MARKET YOUR BOOKS WITH METADATA

By now you've seen how metadata can be your best passive marketing partner, quietly working in the background to send customers from all around the world your way. Once your book is discovered your job is to continue cultivating your relationship with readers. Readers who are enthusiastic about your writing are your most valuable assets. They join your e-mail newsletter to find out when you'll be online, when you've written a blog post, contributed an article, been interviewed, and to hear news about your next book. They follow you on social media. And guess what? These readers will help other readers discover your book, recommending them to friends through social media. There is nothing more powerful than a friend telling another friend, "You must read this book!"
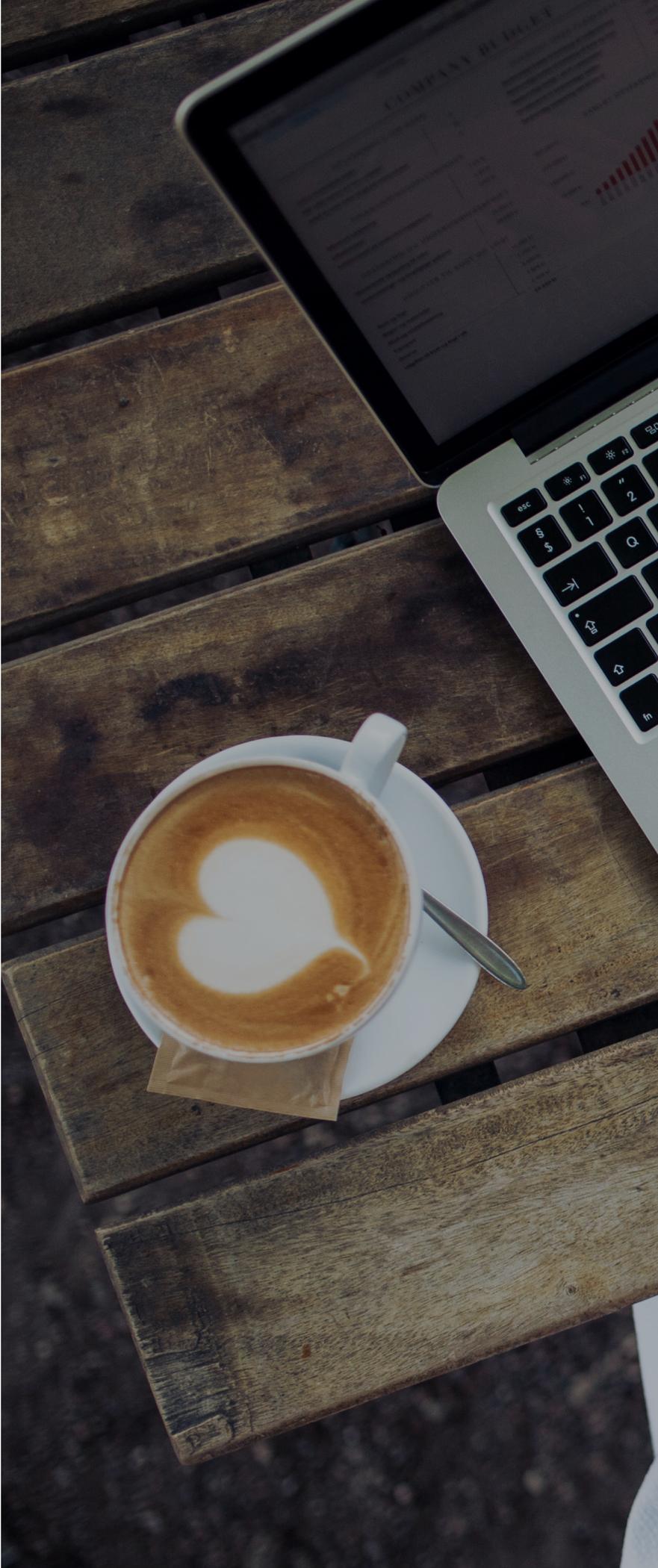
Book discovery is an ongoing process of cultivating your fan base to get word-of-mouth recommendations going. Initial careful attention to metadata is the easiest way to get the book discovery process started with your best marketing partners, the search engines.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Carla King is an adventure travel author and technology journalist who has been self-publishing since 1994. In 2010 she founded the Self-Pub Boot Camp series of books and workshops to help authors make good publishing decisions. In 2016 she founded Author Friendly with consulting, coaching, and do-it-for-you services so that you can concentrate on writing. Carla also runs Misadventures Media, a small press that curates and publishes adventure travel books. Find out more at CarlaKing.com, MisadventuresMedia.com, and AuthorFriendly.com.

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