



IngramSpark

The Indie Author's Guide to Digital Book Marketing

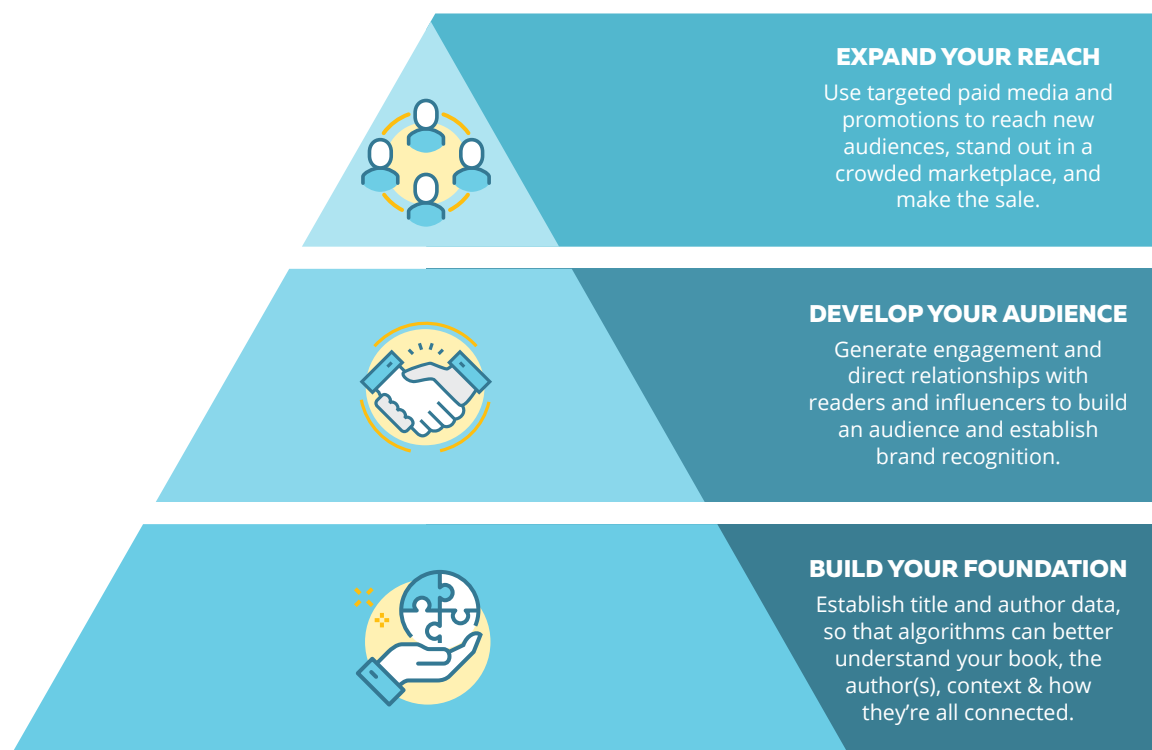
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There's an online audience for every book. Connecting those booklovers with your content, the content they want and may not yet be aware of, may not be as simple as knowing the content exists.

For authors and book marketers looking to drive online book sales, a little insight into how certain online platforms steer the customer journey, reveal titles, and enable discoverability and purchases, can make a world of difference.

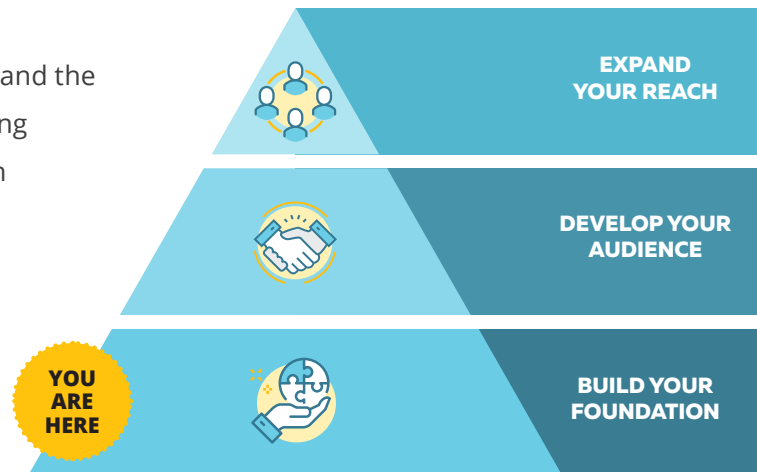
This guide will help unlock some online book marketing knowledge designed to help you turn “ifs” and “buts” into actionable data you can use to optimize messaging, build your online audience, improve your marketing results, and grow sales.



Step 1

How Indie Authors Can Get More From Their Data

You can't build a house without a foundation, and the same is true for marketing a book. It is tempting to start with outbound marketing tactics, such as email, social posting, or price promotions – but the way to ensure the greatest likelihood of success of any tactic is to have a solid foundation in place first.



Your Marketing Strategy Structure

Building Your Foundation: Content + Context

There are a number of things that go into planning, designing, and executing a successful book marketing campaign—and it all starts with a solid foundation made up of informative and relevant book and author data.

Algorithms and search engines are intuitive, but only to a certain degree. You need to give algorithms (and potential readers!) rich, detailed information in the right places to make sure they understand what your book is, what it's about, who the author is, how they are related to each other and all of the things that audiences care about. This data is critical for online discovery and will strengthen and support all other marketing efforts.

There are three key areas to focus on:

1. **Book Metadata:** Feeding accurate and robust product data out to retailers and other channels
2. **Book and Author Profiles:** Placing and managing information about the book and author on authoritative sites and networks—eventually creating connections
3. **Author Website:** Owning and controlling your information

How do these three foundational elements function?

Book Metadata

Your book metadata powers online discovery and sales. It's used by algorithms to understand what the book is about. Your audience experiences metadata in many different ways.

Keep in mind that your title metadata is often the first discovery mechanism for any book online—whether print or digital—and it is also frequently the last thing potential buyers see when they are deciding whether to buy the book.

What metadata matters for book marketing?

Your book title and description, cover image, and other key consumer-facing (and algorithm-driving) metadata elements are fundamental to your marketing foundation. Each should provide rich, detailed, and accurate information optimized for both machines and humans in general search and at point-of-sale.

Title, Subtitle, & Series Information

Distinctive yet descriptive title and series data helps your book stand out in search (and in consumers' minds).

Cover Image

Make sure the cover image is clear and legible as a thumbnail and larger sizes. Consumers often only see the cover of your book in search results or retail pages before making a decision about whether or not to learn more.

Product Description

Provide detailed information about your book. This helps potential buyers find your book and aids in the decision-making process.

- What it is about?
- Who is it for?
- What are the key topics and themes?
- Are there any special features to note?

Start with a bold headline to capture consumers' attention, and use structural elements such as paragraph breaks, unique formatting, and bullet points to highlight key aspects of the book.

Keywords, Topics, & Phrases

Use language that speaks to your target audience in ways that they will understand. (How do potential buyers talk about and search for books like this?)

Incorporate this language into the product description and keywords metadata field.

Subject Codes & Categories

BISAC and Thema subject codes are essentially genre codes. These codes are intended to guide shelving, categorization, merchandising, and marketing efforts. They also help signal to potential buyers, retailers, distributors, and search engines what your book is about—the primary genre(s), topic(s), and theme(s) that matter in regard to your book. A good rule of thumb is to specify three subject codes. These should be precise, and when possible, they should come from more than one top-level category.

Look Inside & Equivalentents

This allows buyers to get a sneak peek of your book on retail sites like Amazon and Barnes & Noble. Previews power book search. Consumers are more likely to purchase if they can ‘see’ the book content before they buy. (This is especially true for illustrated print books or graphic novels.)

Professional Book Reviews

Include high-quality review excerpts highlighting diverse perspectives on the book when possible.

Author/Contributor Information

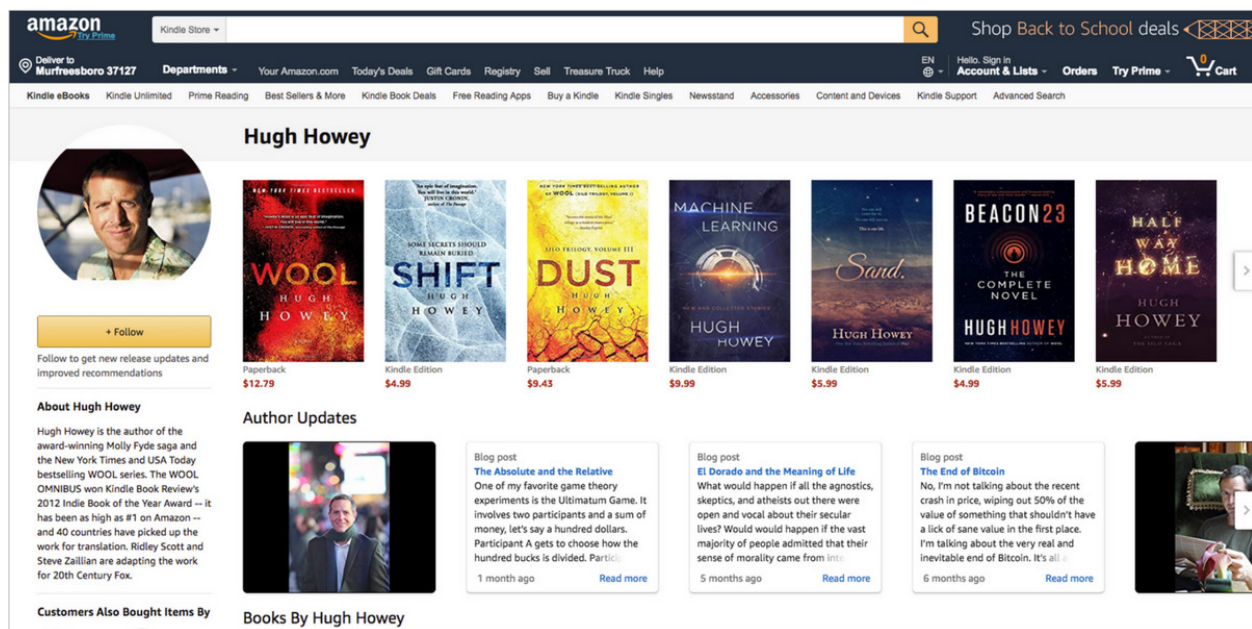
Provide as much detail as possible for each relevant contributor. Include names and roles as well as a brief biography.

Book & Author Profiles on Authoritative Websites

One way search engines—and readers for that matter—make meaningful connections with book content is by looking to authors, those behind the pages.

Where to Start with Online Profiles

Develop a detailed presence on leading consumer-facing sites and authority platforms. Fill these profiles out as completely as possible, and make sure to link between them whenever you can.



Amazon Author Page

An Amazon author page helps connect an author to all their titles within the Amazon universe. It also provides readers with the opportunity to follow authors for updates on events, new books, and new blog posts.

Book & Author Pages on Goodreads & Other Book Communities

- Goodreads is owned by Amazon and is an authoritative source of information on authors and books. It's used by readers to track, rate, and review what they're reading. Activity within Goodreads (content, links, user reviews, followers, etc.) is good for author branding and search engine optimization on both Amazon, Google, and elsewhere.
- Also consider adding and updating information on LibraryThing, which enables rich, structured book and author data.

Wikipedia (Typically Only for the Author, but Major Books can Qualify as Well)

- Wikipedia is a primary source of authoritative information for search engines like Google.
- Wikipedia author page views are a good indicator of potential online book sales.
- Authors with published works usually qualify for a Wikipedia listing.
- Make sure information is accurate and up-to-date, including a complete bibliography.

Social Profiles

- Social media profiles can help round out an author's web presence, even if they're not frequently used. Choose social networks your target audiences actively use and post engaging content.
- Be sure to provide complete information on any social profile and to link to any and all other online presence.

Author Websites

On your own website, you control everything. Your website should be a central hub for the most up-to-date, authoritative information about any book or series you manage.

Author Information

- Include a detailed biography and photo along with supporting info. This can (and should!) be different than what is found in other places online.
- Link to external author profiles and social networks.

Book & Series Details

- Provide complete title information, including detailed descriptions, reviews, and a cover image.
- Create landing pages for book series as appropriate and provide clear chronological information like pub dates for each title in a given series.
- Help simplify the customer's buying experience by linking to retail channels.

Press & Events

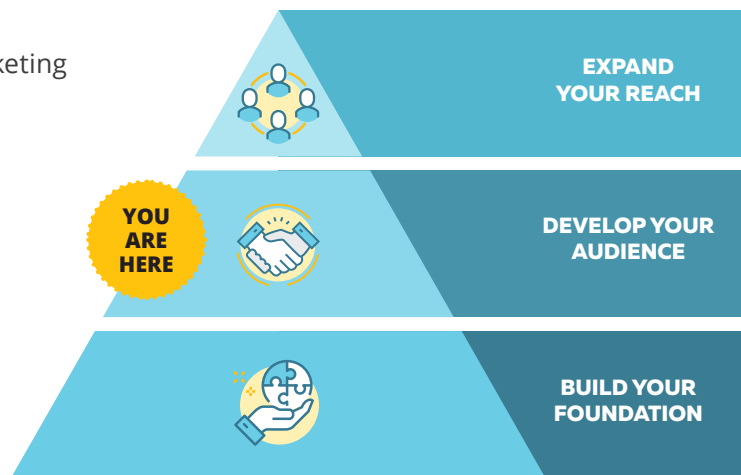
- Include links to interviews, related news, and tour/speaking/event schedules if appropriate.

Once you have these foundational elements in place—book metadata, profiles, and websites—you can start attacking other parts of your book marketing strategy with confidence—like forming a mutually beneficial relationship with your audience.

Step 2

How to Create Meaningful Marketing Content to Engage the Right Audience

With a strategic approach to digital book marketing that begins with some core foundational elements, you can ensure you have all of the right groundwork in place for successful book marketing campaigns. Now you're ready to start engaging with readers, building deeper relationships, and growing your online platform.



Smart book marketing starts with understanding your audience—who your likely buyers and readers are, as well as how and where to best reach them. These key tenets of audience development will help you build a meaningful author brand and will ensure that your marketing efforts are relevant and valuable to your target readership.

Understanding Your Book Audience

Core audience research is a critical first step to inform all book marketing activities both online and off. Avoid assumptions about your audience; do the research to find out who is interested in your book (or books like it) and what marketing platforms and tactics are most likely to work.

There are a few questions you want to answer to best define the audience that matters for you:

WHO are they? (Demographics)

You'll want some basic demographic information about your potential readers—age, gender, marital/family status, perhaps income or education. While not particularly nuanced, this data can begin to paint a picture of who your readers are and can help guide and direct your efforts. (For instance, if your book appeals primarily to older parents, you probably don't need to develop a Snapchat presence.)

WHERE are they? (Geographics)

Where do they live? Work? Travel? Are there specific cities, states, or regions your audience is likely to be? Are they typically rural or suburban? What languages are spoken in their communities? This data can inform geo-targeted ad campaigns, what websites or bookstores you send potential buyers to, and more.

WHAT do they do? (Behaviors)

Understand what people are doing in their lives and how that connects to your book and brand. What do they need? Where and how do they shop? What are they searching for, reading about, or commenting on? Your audience is full of real people going about their days. You want to have an idea about how your audience is likely to look for, find, and ultimately engage with you, so you have a better chance of being there when they do.

WHY do they do it? (Psychographics)

To build a richer view of your audience, look to understand their lifestyles, beliefs, and values. If you have an idea of what they care about, then you can better understand why they might want your book and how to engage with them in the right ways.

And remember: you can have multiple audiences. The same book or brand might appeal to different audience groups for different reasons. You'll want to keep that in mind, as you may want to segment your marketing activity to differentiate your messaging for distinct audiences. For example, a series of health-conscious cookbooks might appeal to dieters, parents looking for healthy family-friendly meals, and fitness buffs for very different reasons.

Doing the Research

The best way to understand your readers is to go where your readers are. You can use leading consumer-facing platforms (and tools built on top of them) to learn more about your audience:

Search

Learn how people search for books, authors, and related topics.

Key Questions:

- What keywords and phrases do they use?
- What topics and categories are most popular?
- What other things are they searching for?
- What sites are influential and relevant for this audience?
- How do search patterns change by region or season?

Quick Tools: Use Soovle to see auto-complete search suggestions across major search engines like Google, Amazon, Walmart, YouTube, Bing, Yahoo, and more. You'll see related search suggestions for a fast look into what consumers across different channels are looking for.

Conduct searches yourself on Google or other search engines to see more related searches, top search results, and who is advertising for those search terms. Look at top-ranking websites for potential influencers and popular platforms among your audience.



Enter search terms or topics into Google Trends to see relative search volume and popularity, seasonal shifts and trends, regional interest, and more related topics and searches.

Use deeper keyword research tools if you're looking for more extensive keyword ideas or more detailed search volume trends and competition data.

- Google Keyword Planner
- Keywords Everywhere
- Uber suggest
- Answer the Public
- Keyword Explorer

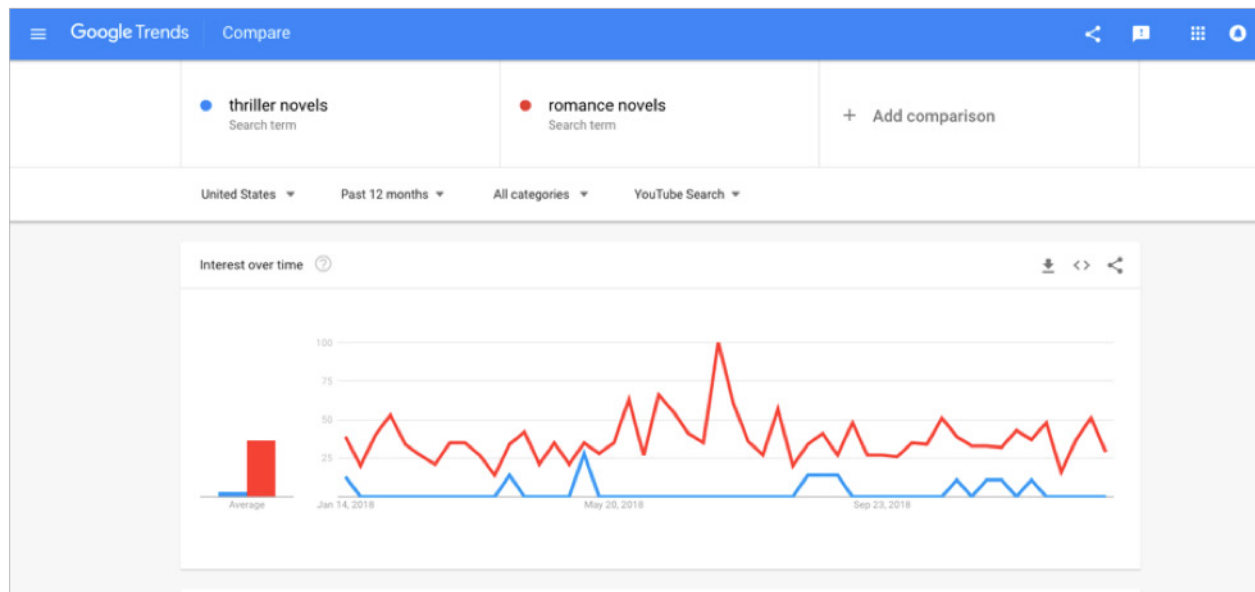
Book Retail & Community Sites

Learn how readers engage with, discuss, and describe books and authors, and understand the competitive landscape.

Key Questions:

- What other books and authors is this audience interested in?
- What genres and categories do they like?
- What words and phrases do they use when reviewing, tagging, talking about, and looking for books?

Quick Tools: Look at Amazon and other retailers like Barnes & Noble and Kobo for your books or comparison titles to read buyer reviews, see similar and competitive books and authors (via “Customers who bought...”, “Frequently bought together...”, etc.), and see what categories titles are ranking in.



Look at any book or author on Goodreads to see reader reviews, shelves, and lists; get suggested books and authors; and see Goodreads member engagement. From any Goodreads author page, look for the “Similar authors” link just above the author’s book list to see related authors based on Goodreads likes. Check out detailed history and stats for any book (found at the top of the right-hand sidebar on any book page, next to the book title and below sharing links).

Social

Understand your audience (and potential audience), and find influencers, brand affinities, hashtags, topics, and more.

Key Questions:

- Who is interested in my book, series, or brand?
- Who is interested in other comparable/competitive books?
- What do those audiences look like?
- What else do they like (other brands, media, influencers, platforms, topics)?
- Where and when are they active?
- How do they engage?

Quick Tools

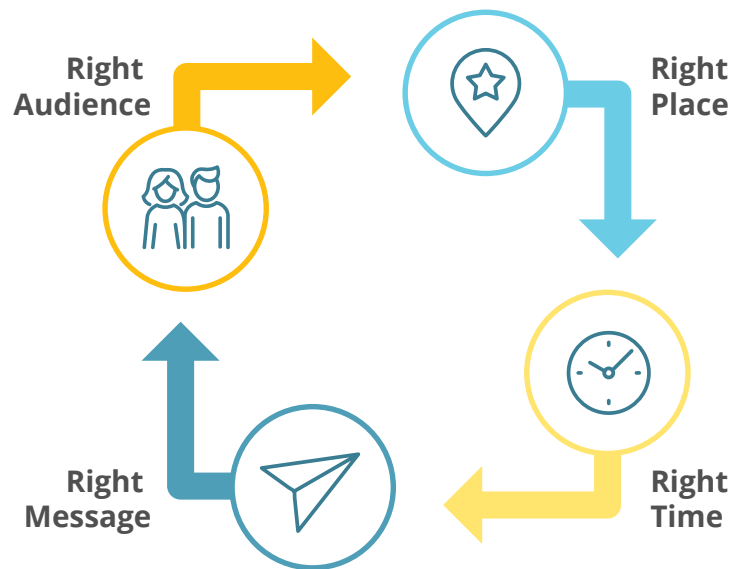
- **Facebook Audience Insights:** get audience sizing, demographics, geography, and related brand affinities and interests (e.g. subjects, celebrities, other books and media) for audiences. You can filter by location, age and gender, interest areas, and other market segments and demographic groups. (Facebook page and ad account set-up required.)
- **Twitter:** view an insights dashboard to let you track engagement and see demographic and interest data about your own followers. Using the Twitter Ad Manager tool, you can see rich lifestyle and behavioral data about additional audiences based on their interest. A Twitter ad account is required, though you do not need to run a campaign.
- **FollowerWonk:** see high-level demographic and location information, when users are active, how they describe themselves, and influential accounts they follow. You can opt to analyze either the followers of an account (Who is their audience? What do they look like? How do they behave?) or users a given account follows (look for new potential influencers or accounts to follow yourself). You can also compare up to three accounts to identify overlaps and new potential influencers and audiences.
- **CrowdTangle:** browser extension on any link (your own website, blog posts, retail product pages, or those of your competitors or influencers) to see public Facebook engagement data as well as top referrers from Twitter, Facebook, and Reddit. This is great to understand social reach (How much social activity has a link generated?) and identify potential influencers (Who were the most influential people or accounts that shared it?).
- **Right Relevance:** identify related topics, popular content and articles, and top influencers for any topic or Twitter user. See what's trending in your niche and find active topical conversations you might join on Twitter. Explore and filter influencers by type (person or organization), by location (Where are influencers in a given topic concentrated?), and by Topic Score (Right Relevance's author metric for identified topic areas).

And there are tons of other tools to help you see more about how audiences are engaging on social media.

Audience research is the foundation for successful marketing of any kind. Without understanding your audience, you won't be able to meet their needs, engage with them and ultimately influence their book purchasing decisions.

Putting It in Practice

You can use all of this data to better understand who your book audience is, how they talk, what they like, what they look for, and why they want it—all to better position your book and marketing content to find the right audiences.



Right audience: Research and understand your audience

Right message: Develop and share quality content to interest and engage readers

Right place: Select the right platforms and channels to best reach your audience

Right time: Engage consistently and authentically with your readers throughout their book-buying journey

Develop Relevant & Useful Content

Create and/or share relevant content that will interest and engage your audience. Focus on delivering information and entertainment that your readers will find compelling. A key here is to maintain a voice and engagement style that is on-brand, meaning it serves to define and reinforce what your publishing imprint, website, blog, book series, or title has to offer and why it is of value.

Quality content has many carry-on benefits:

- Attracts traffic to your site or other channel
- Helps increase social sharing
- Improves leading search, social, and retail algorithms' understanding of you
- Supports and strengthens your online brand authority, including things like your website's ranking and your social influence

When developing content, write it based on the way your audience talks, who they are, and how they behave. In other words, speak their language.

Keeping up with content development can be a challenge. A couple reminders:

- You don't always have to generate new content from scratch; often, sharing excellent content from others is nearly as helpful and interesting—and takes advantage of the social aspect of the Internet and social media.
- Think “easy” content—sometimes just saying what you're reading right now and how you feel about it is plenty.
- Don't forget to periodically market. Mention your books, lists, imprints—especially when you've got something of particular interest to say.
- Measure what you're doing so that you can stop doing things that aren't working and use your time wisely.

Choose Channels that Matter & Be Flexible

Understanding how and where your audience consumes information will help you identify which channels are right for your brand. Properly managing multiple channels can be time-consuming, so it makes sense to start small and add on as necessary.

And though all audiences are different, there are some channels that tend to matter more than others regardless.

1. Email

Email can be your most powerful channel. Subscribers have opted in to a direct relationship with you and should be considered GOLD! Treat them accordingly. Offer ebooks, promotions, and exclusive content through your blog and other channels to continue to grow your email list.

Email To-Dos:

- Make opting-in simple. Make opting-out just as simple.
- Make opting-in attractive. Give subscribers incentives for signing up to hear more from you (think giveaways, excerpts, discounts, exclusive sneak peeks, and more).
- Review email analytics—open rates, click-through rates, and more—and always be tweaking to improve engagement. Try A/B testing to see what design, images, or subject lines your audience best responds to.
- Don't email too often and don't sell your email list. Let subscribers know what to expect (things like frequency and types of content), and most importantly, respect the list!
- Always include at least one Call-to-Action. Basically, ask your audience to do something.

2. Social Media

Billions (yes, billions!) of consumers use social media daily. Your brand cannot afford to ignore it. Whether it's Twitter, Facebook, Goodreads, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, or LinkedIn, understanding your audience and having clear objectives will help you determine which platforms make sense.

Social Media To-Dos:

- Choose platforms that align with what you have and what you're capable of providing. For example: a portion of your audience may be on YouTube, but unless you can consistently create engaging videos, you may wish to reach them another way.
- Mix up your content, using images, text, quizzes, polls, charts, videos, and so on to engage people in different ways.
- Use scheduling tools to streamline posting across your social channels. Good examples of these include Sprout and HootSuite.
- Do more than just post. ENGAGE by commenting, sharing, and liking. It's called "social" media for a reason.
- Include publisher or author name in all account bios, including most recent book or series name.
- Use best practices tools for properly sizing images for each network.
- Stay in the loop with your influencers and competitor channels. Notice which posts are working for them.
- Keep all channels in line with your brand standards.
- If you have something you really want to blow out, consider paid social media ads. They're affordable and effective. We'll cover ads more in a later section!

3. Website / Blog

Your own site (or sites) should always be acting as a hub for all of the spokes of your online brand.

Website To-Dos:

- Keep your site fresh and up-to-date. Site visitors should know that the site is active and “lived-in.” Develop a schedule for refreshing content that makes sense for you and your audience.
- Create landing pages and blog posts that can help improve search engine optimization and bring new visitors in.
- Include prominent email sign-up throughout the site. If someone is on your site, don’t lose the opportunity to try to convert them to a subscriber.
- Also link to your social channels and invite people to follow or like you there. (And vice versa: share blog posts and other website content on social media and invite those fans to visit your site.)

Don’t forget to link to retailers who offer your books for sale.

4. Community Engagement

Engagement is key. As you build relationships with readers, try to be consistent. The goal is ongoing relationships that offer mutual value beyond just one interaction/transaction.

Engagement To-Dos:

- Participate in relevant online communities and submit your posts.
- Give your fans an opportunity to contribute—ask them to weigh in on a book cover design, caption an image, or ask, “what are you reading this weekend?”
- Note the insights for each platform and when your fans are online. Engage with them in real-time.
- Make yourself available as an expert for new sources.
- Shine the spotlight on others—mention followers or influencers and share their posts.
- To save time, create lists of ready-to-use replies to common questions, or encouraging gifs or emojis to have handy. Stay engaged even when you’re short of time!
- Have a special announcement? Try Facebook Live or Instagram stories.

Step 3

How To Reach Untapped Readers Who Want What You Are Selling

Now that you better understand your audience and have built out your online platform, you can reach those untapped readers who want what you're selling. This can feel challenging at first, but running ads can be effective and inexpensive.



When to Advertise

Your organic and earned media efforts alone are unlikely to cut through the noise—advertising can amplify your message to a targeted audience and expand your reach to the precise consumer. The key to executing a successful—and cost-effective—digital advertising campaign is knowing when, where, and if it makes sense to spend.

In particular, social ads are great for narrow and multidimensional targeting (combining demographics, psychographics, and behavioral traits to form a target audience).

Key Questions You Need to Answer Before You Decide to Advertise:

1. What is my goal?

The most common ways advertising can impact your book marketing efforts are driving pre-order awareness, purchase (before other marketing and publicity efforts have had time to reach likely buyers), and momentum on a successful book (where there is likely to be greater untapped sales potential in new audiences).

Advertising can also give you a relatively low-risk way of testing a hypothesis. If you believe a book will resonate with a certain audience, it is worth testing your theory with a small advertising spend before launching a more resource-intensive campaign.

2. Will it be difficult to reach this audience without advertising?

You may wish to advertise if you are competing against other big books, online media (blog posts, articles, videos), or products. You can help your book break through the noise by making sure your ad targets a specific audience segment with attractive, targeted messaging.

3. Can you, with any degree of certainty, reach this audience with advertising?

Based on the criteria for creating a targetable audience, you can construct an advertising campaign in correlation to a book or series. The key here is specificity and granularity of consumer attributes. For advertising to be cost-effective, the ad needs to be narrowly aimed at a very specific audience.

Be aware of competitors advertising in the same space, especially if they have deep pockets. Keep in mind that these competitors may not necessarily be other authors, but could be travel companies, media companies, or others in the same general topic area.

4. Do you have adequate resources to effectively launch and manage a campaign?

You don't necessarily need to spend a lot to run an effective ad campaign. However, spending is directly proportionate to human resource requirements. Time and effort to choose the right platform, develop the target audience, create the ad units, monitor performance, manage your budget, and react to engagement are what make campaigns effective and efficient. It is necessary to go into an advertising campaign with a clear view of all the resources required. Advertising can help greatly, but it does demand time and attention to execute successfully.

Examples of When to Advertise:

- **Pre-order sales:** If early buzz is not picking up as expected, that could be a sign other marketing and publicity efforts have not yet had time to reach likely buyers. Consider a campaign to drive pre-order awareness and purchase.
- **Maintain (or regain) momentum:** For successful titles past their peak, you may find untapped sales potential among price-sensitive buyers (a promotional offer could get them to finally buy) and other adjacent audiences who may not have been the primary targets for your launch campaign (perhaps fans of similarly-themed TV or movies who also shop at a specific store).
- **Break through the noise:** Targeted keyword ads in Google and Amazon can improve discoverability in a crowded field—and if successful will improve your organic rankings as well.
- **Make some noise:** It is also important to pay attention to the absence of certain leading indicators. These indicators will tell you people are becoming aware of the book—media attention, reviews and ratings, search interest, and website traffic. If any or all of these are low, advertising may be a good idea.

Where to Advertise

Use targeted paid media and promotions to reach new audiences, boost your signal in a crowded marketplace, and make the sale.

Using Social Media

The key is to target by demographic and psychographic. Narrow down your audience to their applied values, opinions, attitudes, and interests. All of these attributes are available to you through Facebook Ads Manager, Pinterest Ads, LinkedIn Marketing Solutions, and Bookbub Partners.

A sample audience may resemble this:

	Location:	New York City
	Age:	45-60
	Gender:	Male
	Language:	English
	Interest:	Netflix, Barnes & Noble, Reading, and Stranger Things (TV Series)

Who to Target

Ads can and should be targeted, controllable, and measurable. For all ads, make sure you can create a targetable audience that is a fit for your book, author brand, or series.

Expand Your Reach

You should consider investing more dollars or resources to reach untapped sales potential among broader audiences. Larger affinity groups who are interested in other forms of related media—movies, television, music, games, news outlets, podcasts—are highly attractive if they're a good fit. They tend to be much larger than typical book and author audiences and capturing just a small percentage of that larger group can equal very meaningful sales for a book.

- Target broader adjacent audiences to reach many new potential readers.
- Target consumers generally interested in your categories, topics, or genres.
- Target fans/followers of well-known media and influencers who have reviewed the book.
(Creative should include a quote.)

- You may want to narrow your targeting to improve conversion by layering in other “book” affinities (for example: you might target fans of *Stranger Things* who also buy on Kindle).
- Be sure to use compelling creative (quotes from known influencers, eye-catching visuals) and a strong call-to-action (e.g. discounted price for a limited time).

How to Measure Potential Return

How to Measure at the Moment of the Ad

Knowing your goals will provide a sense of hope for your outcome. Do you want to drive pre-order awareness? Increase sales? Maintain momentum on a successful book? Knowing your goals will help you determine key performance indicators (KPIs) that are directly related.

Initial descriptive KPIs to focus on:

- **Click-through-rate:** the number of people who click on your ad compared to how many people see it on their feed
- **Cost-per-click:** this refers to the actual price you pay for each click on your ad. The goal here is to not be spending an outrageous amount of money on clicks. For example, \$12 per click is high.
- **Measure of success:** is the money I am spending selling books?

The end goal is to have a sense of what everything is worth to you. For example:

- Email address: \$1
- 1 book sold

How to Holistically Measure Your Ad

Do not stop your analysis! Continue to measure results after your ad has finished its run. Your KPIs will not be as directly attributable as time goes on, but you will almost always see a knock-on effect of paid advertising, with a lot of the value being captured after the ad finishes its run.

KPIs to measure holistically:

- Rise in sales and increased search rank on Amazon
- Increased Amazon author reviews
- Sales lift across other books you’ve published
- Increased search rank for your book’s product page (growth made during a paid ad campaign does not disappear when the ad is finished but translates to positive organic growth)

Learning how to advertise online is part of your return on investment (ROI). This is a key holistic measure for your online strategy. As you become a savvier online advertiser, you will notice a well-targeted ad campaign does not need to be resource-intensive and will elicit tremendous ROI.

So, how much should you spend?

This is an oft-asked question. Our suggestion is to begin with “small bets” and measure the KPIs closely. As you begin to see what is working, stop small spends where the ROI is not there or where ways to improve the ROI aren’t clear. Any time something is working, double down and continue to monitor. Ideally, as you learn, you will develop a sense of a reasonable opening budget and what types of initial KPIs you’ll need to see before you are able to make the go/no-go decision.

| The Wrap-Up

This is a high-level view of the opportunities available for expanding your reach. The information above should help you develop a feel for the game and encourage you to take a stab at advertising to your target audience. Remember, you do not have to spend a lot to be effective. Small spends can provide impressive movement on your titles.

The information provided in this guide is intended to help turn your “ifs” and “buts” into actionable data you can use to optimize messaging, build your online audience, improve your marketing results, and grow sales.

We wish you the best of luck!

IngramSpark® is an award-winning independent publishing platform, offering indie authors and publishers the ability to create professional print books and ebooks. Access to IngramSpark’s global distribution network allows you to self-publish a book and make it available to 40,000+ retailers and libraries—both in stores and online. To learn more about how you can share your story with the world, visit www.ingramspark.com.