

Positive Publishing Perspectives

Your Guide to Getting the Most Out of Your Publishing Business

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Volume I, Issue III

Why You MUST Define Your Market

It's a phrase that makes the marketer in me cringe when I hear it from a new publisher. "My book is hard to categorize." Some authors even say it was some strange level of pride, as if being unable to define the book's category somehow grants some mystical credibility.

The fact is, all books can be categorized. And if you are having a hard time doing so, you just aren't trying. Categorizing is vital to marketing your book. A category is not a judgment as to the value of your book. It is merely a means to identify the book's core audience so as to determine how to reach them. If you don't do this, you will spin your wheels with your marketing and never reach the very readers most likely to buy your book.

"But I don't want to limit myself!" Again, categorizing your book is not about setting limits. You are defining your focus in order to target your marketing. There is a difference.

The typical consumer is inundated with hundreds of ads every day. Most of them are completely ignored. Most of us have learned to block out most advertising that does not meet certain parameters we have set for ourselves. Quite frankly, you can shove a hundred romance novel ads in my face...I probably won't even notice them because I don't read romance novels. By the same token, it really doesn't matter how brilliant your horror novel is. If the person forced to view your ad doesn't read horror, she isn't going to even notice.

The word "innovative" means very little to the typical book reader, because the word is overused. Same goes for the word "experimental." While you may be enamored with the notion that your book is "an

innovative, experimental story," that phrase means nothing to a customer at first glance.

And that first glance is your first, and maybe only, chance to get the customer's attention. So don't confuse or alienate the customer by using cute buzzwords or being vague. You've got one shot at their attention. Make sure you are telling them what they want to know.

An Example:

Jane Doe's newest book, *The Master of Chaos*, is "a little fantasy but also some sci-fi and romance mixed in with a mystery but nothing erotic and it would appeal to children and adults..."

Stop right there.

Believe it or not, I've actually read descriptions like this from authors. And then they wonder why they can't find their market! The author suffers from the "trying to be all things to all readers" syndrome. It doesn't work.

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Narrow Your Focus

So Jane's story is actually about a young mage apprentice living in Arthurian England who accidentally breaks Merlin's Staff and gets transported to the year 2430 A.D. He falls in love with a computer engineer, whose father is kidnapped by cyber terrorists. The two combine their abilities, his magical powers and her technological know-how, to find out what happened.

That is the plot, but what is the story's focus? Just because the book involves two teenagers doesn't by default make it young adult or children's literature. YA fiction is generally written for children ages 13-17, and focuses on teen concerns. While the protagonists might fit in the age category, their concerns aren't necessarily focused on teen concerns.

Is it truly a mystery? Not really. In mysteries, the focus is on the crime itself, and the resolution to solving the crime. The crime and the process used to solve the crime are the primary focus of a mystery. Just because there is crime-solving doesn't make it a mystery.

In Jane's book, only the prologue and first half of chapter one actually occur in Arthurian England. The rest of the book occurs in the future. While the protagonist uses some magical powers, the bulk of the book surrounds the futuristic world created by the author, and how the two protagonists have different views of the technology available.

Ultimately, this is a science fiction book. What romantic feelings there are between the two characters are secondary to the overall theme, and are merely part of the character development.

Want more information on genres?
[Read this article.](#)

Designing Your Marketing

Once you have identified your market, you can now design your marketing to get their attention. Jane has decided to use Google AdWords as her primary advertising medium, and sets up her ad to target science fiction sites.

Google AdWords, while highly effective and inexpensive, is also extremely limited in how many words you can include in your ad. Because of this, targeting is vital. Jane needs to boil down her plot to two 35-character lines, because the first line of her ad is the headline and the last line in the link.

The Master of Chaos

In the 25th Century, can magic and science stop a madman?

The ad provides a snippet that immediately tells the viewer that this is a science fiction novel that also contains some magical elements.

But Jane feels strongly that she would like to specifically target young readers, not because she feels the book qualifies as a YA title, but because initial feedback in various writer forums indicated that young people related to the characters. She can decide to allot a percentage of her marketing budget to reach this audience.

But in order to be effective, she needs to create a specific ad geared toward that audience. After spending some time visiting sites that her potential market visits, she comes up with an ad.

Rockets and Magic Collide

Can a young mage adjust to the 25th century in time to save the world?

The headline uses buzzwords to immediately convey the message. Rockets (futuristic) Magic (supernatural element) Collide (conflict and action). The focus of the ad is on the protagonist, and the message is positioned in such a way as to focus on the potential market's interests (young person's feelings of alienation, coming of age, etc.)

By determining her primary category, Jane is able to clearly design marketing material that can quickly convey a message to the reader. Once they are on her website, readers can learn more about the book and discover the different elements that are present.

Make Money off of Amazon Sales

Often, writers wonder if they should drive traffic to their own storefront and handle transactions manually, or drive traffic to Amazon. To be sure, most independent authors make more money on the individual sale if the sale happens on their own site. While you may make a \$4 profit if you handle the sale directly, you might only get a \$1 profit on an Amazon sale.

But as an independent publisher, you will make your money on volume, and so you need to drive traffic to where you can achieve the most volume.

There are two seemingly conflicting issues at work. The first is that consumers are creatures of habit. We tend to shop at the same places, and buy the same type of items. Anything that forces us to change those habits will often be avoided. Even if you have someone interested in your book, if she can't buy it at Amazon or her favorite seller, she may decide it is not worth the effort to create a new account at your personal storefront just to buy one book.

At the same time, consumers claim they value variety. Consumers want choices, even if they ultimately chose the same thing over and over. By making both your own storefront and an Amazon link available to consumers, you allow them to make a choice in the process. And if they have a choice, they are more likely to act upon the choice and buy.

If your book is on Amazon, then you should have an Amazon Associates account. With an associates account, you can earn up to a 10% commission on all sales that originate from your own links. That means when you create an Amazon link for your book, not only do you collect your normal royalty from the

sale, but you can also get a commission on the sale as well. So let's say your book sells for \$11, and of that you normally get only a \$1.50 royalty from sales through Amazon. If that sale was generated from your own affiliate link, your commission would be .66 cents at a 6% rate. Now your profit on the sale goes to \$2.16.

Moreover, since many people don't stop shopping when they have added your book to their carts, you can earn a commission on the entire order. So if that same customer decided to buy \$50 in books, you would make a \$3 commission. Now your profit from the sale is \$4.50.

Learn more about the Amazon Associates Program [here](#).

AR-TIC-U-LATE!

Nobody wants to listen to someone stutter, fumble, or mumble through a presentation. Nobody wants to read your stuttering, fumbling, and mumbling either! In the internet age, forums, blogs, and social networking are an increasingly important...but mishandled...form of marketing. Such resources allow a more personal relationship with your consumer. But sometimes, independent authors are a bit too complacent in their communication.

A good habit to get into is to read your post out loud before hitting the *post* button. Forcing yourself to listen to what you just wrote will help you understand how your post will sound in the head of the reader. Does your post sound rambling and convoluted? Or does it sound natural and clear? For good or ill, people will judge the quality of your book or service based on the quality of your posts and blogs.

If you are in a hurry, don't post! Being in a hurry is never an excuse. If you are so busy that you can't spend two minutes rereading your post, are you really sharing anything of importance? Have you even spent the time to think about what you are saying? It's better to delay comments for a bit and insure you are communicating clearly than to rush to post and not be understood.

[Oncewritten.com](#)

Looking for free or low cost advertising? This is one of the best sites to find it. Well-designed to cater to both readers and writers, Oncewritten's constantly updated content attracts people interested in independent titles.

Their [Basic Author package](#) of \$25 gets you a two-week listing on their home page, a 100-word ad in their opt-in newsletter, and the first chapter of your book listed in their searchable "First Chapters" archive. The newsletter ad alone reaches 7,000 subscribers, working out to less than half a penny per person.

Do you have an interesting story regarding your first publication experience? Get free publicity with their "[Meet the Authors](#)" section. Your 500-word essay is added to their growing library. The catch is that these should be human-interest stories. Read some of the essays to get an idea of what they accept. Not all submissions will be published.

[Novelspot.net](#)

An interactive site where readers and authors are encouraged to interact, the site attracts an eclectic bunch of readers and writers interested in independent titles and new authors.

They sponsor free "Author Days" and chats that allow you to promote your book and interact with members. They also do author interviews via e-mail and offer book and e-book reviews.

They also have very inexpensive advertising, with banners starting as low as \$10/month. Don't have a banner? They will create one for you for an additional \$10 (starting cost, more complex banners cost more).

Bards and Sages has received no compensation from any sites mentioned or recommended in this issue. These are independent recommendations based on our own experiences with the sites, and research we have done.

[Myshelf.com](#)

While a lot of sites offer banner rotation spots for sale, Myshelf.com offers book cover rotation for only \$5 a month. The cover is hyperlinked to whatever site you wish. Covers rotate on almost all pages of the site. They also have a section called "Book Briefs" that allows you to share more detailed information for only \$7/month.

Share your Contacts

Do you know of a low cost marketing opportunity for independent publishers? Please feel free to [contact us](#) and share the information. We'll review the site and, if we believe it would be of value, we'll include it in an upcoming issue.

Pitfalls of Banner Exchanges

Banner exchanges can be a cheap and effective method of driving traffic to your site, but they can also drive traffic away.

Before joining any banner exchange program, make sure you understand what types of businesses are using it. Many of the largest systems are geared toward click schemes, get-rich-quick scams, and a hundred other things that have nothing to do with books. And if you join these exchanges, those ads are going to appear on your site.

Remember, banners are part of your site's content. You are ultimately responsible for them. So make sure you are comfortable with whatever potential content may be there.

If you are unsure, add the code to your page and see what banner comes up. Then refresh the page several times to get a good idea of what kinds of banners are in the rotation.

It's important to balance the potential traffic of multiple banner exchanges with how all those banner will impact the appearance of your site. Sure, seven banner exchanges will potentially give you 7 times the traffic, but how long are people going to actually stay on your site if all they see are ads?

Google AdSense

If you have Google AdSense ads on your site, remember that you can block undesirable sites in your filters. We encourage you to block ads by vanity presses and known scam companies like poetry.com, the National Library of Poetry, and others. Remember, you are responsible for the content on your site. Protect your customers by disassociating yourself with companies like these.

Earning Trust

As more and more business transactions occur exclusively online, the ability to trust your business partner becomes even more important. I have business associates I have worked with for years, but never met face-to-face or even spoken with over the phone. If people do not consider you trustworthy, they will not work with you. This could lead to everything from not being able to get cover art for a project to losing sales. Trust is not assumed. It must be earned.

A successful businessperson once told me "pay your people first, your bills second, and yourself last." If that means you need to cancel a dinner date with your girlfriend to have the money to pay the freelancer who designed your cover, then that is what you do. Without your people, you don't have a business. Without freelancers willing to trust you, you won't get the quality of work you need to create professional books.

Be proactive to insure you meet your obligations. For example, we use PayPal to handle most transactions. One of our payments to a freelancer was bounced because the recipient was having problems with his account. I sent him an e-mail informing him of the payment failure, and gave him the option of either having me roll over his payment until the situation was resolved, or sending him an Amazon Gift Certificate in the same amount. Instead of adding to the freelancer's frustration of not being able to access his money, I gave him an alternative that he happily accepted.

Get everything in writing before any work is started. Don't ask a freelancer to start doing work before you have hammered out all of the details. A written contract is the best way to protect all parties in a business venture.

Make sure the contract is not one sided. Include clauses that protect both parties. A positive way to earn trust is the inclusion of a "Kill Fee" in a contract. This is an important part of any contract that is a "pay upon publication" arrangement. This tells the freelancer that, if for some reason the project is not published after the freelancer has completed the work, that the freelancer will still receive compensation.

For example, if you have a freelancer design a customer book cover for you, and then decide to not publish the book, the freelancer would still get some sort of compensation for his work. The amount does not have to be a lot; merely the existence of the clause will show the freelancer that you have placed a value on their time and are taking their interests into account.

Communicate often and clearly. If for some reason there is a problem, don't sit on it. Get it out in the open as soon as possible. For example, if a vendor is late paying you and this is going to force you to be late with a payment, tell the freelancer that before the payment due date. Everyone knows that things can happen, and communicating problems quickly and honestly allows you to work to resolve the issue.

Go above and beyond your legal responsibilities. Did a freelancer do exceptional work for you? Let other publishers know it. Publicly thank the freelancer in the forum. Recommend her to other publishers. Offer to write a letter of recommendation for the freelancer's portfolio. Little things mean a great deal, and they help you build a positive reputation.

Avoid public flaming. Unless a freelancer has actually done something illegal, blasting him in the forum is not going to help you. Such public arguments make all parties look bad. If the work is sub-par or

late, your contract should already have remedies spelled out to handle the situation. Handle the situation privately and professionally.

This includes tempering your communication with others regarding the person in question. I'm often contacted by others about freelancers we've used in the past. If you are contacted by someone asking for information on your experience with a freelancer, carefully word your reply. Assume the freelancer will read the e-mail, and this will insure that you do not speak out of turn.

"Oh, that guy? Don't work with him! He was constantly late. And when I asked questions, he'd get obnoxious with me. And then he wouldn't turn over the art until I agreed to pay him additional money!"

Even if the above is 100% true, it's not professional and doesn't necessarily convey anything other than pettiness. The language is inflammatory and combative, and may do more to make you appear difficult to deal with than actually communicate the problems you had.

"Well, unfortunately we had some serious communication issues that delayed our release. While the finished work was well done and did meet our specifications, I can't honestly say the process went smoothly. In the end, the work cost more than was originally contracted."

The above says the same thing, but tempers it by sticking to actual facts instead of inflammatory language. A levelheaded, neutral tone presents you as being fair and honest without resorting to name-calling and bad-mouthing. You aren't obligated to go into details, and the above comments are enough for a publisher to identify potential problems.

Create a privacy policy for your website. As consumers become more and more concerned about how their information is being used, a privacy policy shows them that you are aware

of their concerns and are addressing them. Even if your website doesn't collect any information, state that in your privacy policy.

A good privacy policy should include the following points:

*Clearly explain what information, if any, you collect. And more importantly, explain what you do with it.

*a link to the privacy policy of your web host. Many web-hosting services have their own privacy policies, and they should be mentioned on your site.

*If you are accepting PayPal payments or payments from similar services, include a link to the service provider's privacy policy.

Insure that the privacy policy is linked on your home page and any other page that is appropriate. For example, the Bards and Sages privacy policy is linked on both our home page and our submission guidelines page.

Follow your own policies. If your policies state you do not share e-mail addresses, don't share them! If your policies say you won't send unsolicited e-mails, don't send them.

Security Tips

If you are processing sales yourself and accept checks in the mail, it is vital that your mail is secure. Either get a PO Box or, if that is impractical, have a locked mailbox.

If you are working with freelancers and are required to issue 1099s, make sure you guard their private information. Keep all paperwork with social security numbers in a fireproof safe. If you don't have a safe, get one. Don't leave these papers lying around the house where your children's friends or visitors can find them.

If you have to send e-mail to multiple people, use the BCC option instead of CC. BCC prevents the recipients from seeing all of the other e-mail addresses the correspondence has been sent to.