

Creating a Successful Book

By Levi Samuel

There are three phases any book must go through in order to become successful. Some of these will need to happen simultaneously, while others can be performed linear. I'll try to give enough detail to express my points, but this remains little more than an outline. If you experience any confusion, or have any questions with any part of this outline, feel free to contact me at author@levisamuel.com. I'll get back to you as soon as possible.

Phase 1 – Being Discovered (Scouting the Grounds)

Regardless of how good your book may be, it doesn't mean anything if new readers can't find it. There are a number of things involved in this step, and many of them are crucial if you're to find success. In short, these are the tools you'll need to market your product successfully. In addition, much of this requires you to have a finished product, but it's the first step to success. Therefore, you're going to have to put a lot of work in before you release your finished product.

There are numerous elements you'll need to make many of these steps happen, but it all begins by knowing who your audience is. Without knowing how to speak to them, you can't develop the skills needed to make much of this work.

- **Groupings**

In the publishing world, Genre, Category, and Niche mean almost the same thing. They label where your book belongs. But to simplify it, they're different stages of a classification group. When you say you write romance, you're speaking to the genre as a whole. When you specify and say you write paranormal romance, you're indicating the category. And when you proclaim you write vampire porn, you've just identified your niche.

But why would you want to narrow down where you belong so much? Well, the reason is simple. You want to be listed in as small a group as possible. That way, when your book starts getting attention, you can easily become the biggest fish in a much smaller pond. When you become the top book in a small niche, you're awarded best seller status. From there, you'll bracket into a bigger category, with all the other best sellers of their niche, and begin to compete with the other big fish in a slightly larger pond. If you continue to grow, and claim the top spot in that category, you scale again. This process repeats until you eventually become the biggest fish in the ocean.

You want the smallest category you can find, but you also want to make sure your book relates to it. People tend to get pissed when they're searching for baby books and your book titled, *Give it to me Baby* keeps contaminating their results.

Finding a good niche is no easy task. You don't want it to be over-populated. I'd recommend finding one that has less than 500 books in it. You also want to make sure people are searching for and buying books in that niche. To go back into the fish analogy, it doesn't do any good to be the biggest fish if there's not enough food to survive. Additionally, you won't catch anything in an empty pond. You also want to find a

different niche for each book you have, even if they're all of a similar concept or series. The reason for this is, if every book in your fantasy series is located in Dragons and Mythical Creatures, you may own that niche, but you're competing with yourself. By expanding, you'll claim more territory, which will ultimately provide you with a larger audience and direct attention back to your other books.

Keep in mind, Amazon doesn't display all of their categories. You'll have to do the research to find the exact ones you want. From there, you'll have to contact Amazon to have your book directly added to it. Each book can be listed in up to 10 different categories, but it will only display your top 3.

- **Keywords**

Most new authors don't know what keywords are. I certainly didn't. I knew the basics. They were words you associate with your book in order to be found. And in many ways, that's an accurate assessment. Overly simplified, but accurate.

It helps if you think of them more as search words, or search phrases, as most of the time you'll have a phrase rather than a single word. What would someone type into Amazon if they wanted to find your book? But you need to remember just because a keyword makes sense, doesn't make it a good fit.

When I'm shopping for keywords, I take into account three distinct factors before I choose one. How many times has that keyword been searched on Amazon? How much money has it made? And how many books are using that keyword. If the first two are high, and the last is low, it qualifies to be added to my list. But keep in mind, these statistics are always changing. Amazon is updated hourly. With such a fast turnover, you can get one set of results one week and have an entirely different set the next. That's always frustrating, especially after you've spent several hours making sure everything is good to go.

You're also going to want to use different keywords for each book, as was the case when selecting your niche. If everything you have is using the same words or phrases, you're limiting your reach, and therefore competing with yourself.

Researching keywords is a time consuming and complex task. Everything can be done simply by using the Amazon or Google search bar, or any other search engine for that matter. But you have to keep in mind, each search engine is tailored a bit differently. Results on one, will not mean the results are the same on all engines. And at best, your results are going to little more than estimates. I've found it's much faster to use a keyword program to help with this stage. There are several on the market, which will reduce much of the leg work here.

- **Ads**

We live in a technological age, an age of communication. Yet, in a world where everyone is connected, we've never been more disconnected than we are now. There's so much crap being filtered through social media, Google, Amazon, and all of the other online platforms that it feels next to impossible to have your voice heard. But we can fix that, for a price! That's where advertisements come in. And depending on what

you hope to achieve, or how much you plan to spend, you'll receive a wide variety of results. Though don't be confused about how ads work. They still require their own set of skills to be used effectively. You'd think they could have at least retracted that need since you're having to spend money on them.

There are numerous places where you can advertise, and each one is intended to make money. Always remember that. Though some are more honest about it than others. Here, I'll discuss a general overview of Amazon Ads. Much of their process was revised or altered near the beginning of 2019, which made much of my knowledge on the subject obsolete, but the core elements remain relevant.

Keyword Lists –

Rather than a small list of words that associate to your book, like those in the meta data, you're going to want to gather a large list. Amazon Ads work best when you're using around a thousand words or phrases that compare to my book. This could be the titles of similar books, the authors of those books, the name of the category or niche it falls into, or many other related factors. The objective of these search phrases is to cast as wide a net as possible. The way this process works is simply in nature, but complex in application.

Anytime a potential customer types a keyword, phrase, or part of a keyword phrase into the Amazon search bar, your ad will go through a series of micro transactions, and a bidding auction will begin. The winner, and corresponding results will be populated, and the potential customer will see those results. From there, you want the customer to click your listing and buy your book.

As you see, the keywords are the bait. When the fish nibbles the bait, it's the job of your marketing to set the hook. If you scatter as much bait as possibly, you're going to have more bites than if you only threw out a few pieces.

Once you've compiled a list of keywords, you need to go through and clean it up. Remove any duplicates and ensure there aren't any keywords that don't belong. For instance, if you're marketing a science fiction thriller, you don't want a bunch of romance titles and author as your keywords. With careful consideration of your initial list, this won't be much of an issue. But if you're using a keyword generator, will can be a major concern as romance authors in specific have overpopulated their own categories, so they've been encroaching on ours. And considering most never take the time to learn how to efficiently select their meta data, this problem is only likely to get worse. However, with Amazon's recent changes, they've included a new element called Negative Keywords. It works just like the targeting keywords, but instead acts as a repellent to keep searchers of those words from seeing your ad. Since its inception, I include a complete list of romance keywords to the negative keyword list in order to minimize this problem.

Buyer Types –

Every Amazon user is set to a buyer type. The algorithms track every item they look at, purchase, or consider. This is why it's so important to target the correct type of buyer. Not only is it harder to make a sale to the wrong type, but if you manage to hook them, their type will be linked to your book, which is going to contaminate the meta data and cause some problems. How well do you think your sci-fi book is going to do when Amazon keeps showing it to people who are interested in gardening? What if its being shown to a whole assortment of types that don't match up? This is what happens when your friends and family buy your book online, when it's outside their usual interest. This is also one of the reasons most books disappear into the void. When the wrong type of buyer is being shown your book, and it continues not to sale, the algorithms will stop displaying it altogether.

When you've identified your target audience and assembled a list of buyer types for your books, you want to catalogue your collection of keywords. Split them into several groups, but remember to use as many as possible. These new groups of keywords should be targeted to each buyer type. I look for similarities between each keyword. If I keep seeing keywords dealing with vampires, they'll all go into one group. Cyber elements can go into another. And so on, until you've created 7 to 10 groups, targeted to a specific type of buyer. And each list should still have 700 to 1000 keywords being used. Keep in mind that some keywords fit into multiple groups. Don't be afraid to use the same word in multiple places.

With your individual lists and buyer types identified, you now want to write a hook for each one. What you're doing is creating a different ad for each buyer type. And you want your hook to appeal to that particular group. This is also a good way to test and see which elements are working better than others. Once you have the data, you can fine tune your book for maximum success.

Writing Ad Copy –

Now that you have your buyer types, you get to the point where some actual skill is required. For each group you identified, you need to write an advertisement that is compelling to that particular audience. This means each group will have its own ad that is tailored to them. And while that sounds a little intimidating, running 7-10 ads for the same book is really the only way to address your complete audience.

Pricing –

When you created the ad, you had to select how much of a budget it will receive. It's going to ask for a dollar amount per day. That can be scary, especially when you don't have a lot of money to be throwing at advertisements. But let me put your mind at ease. When I started learning AMS, I was terrified of that "per day" bar. I'd had some bad experience with other platforms, and I was afraid they'd rob me blind, as the others had. Amazon is not like that. In fact, most days I want them to take more money than they do. The amount you list here is simply the maximum amount you're willing to pay.

Amazon ads run on a cost per click (CPC) method. That means you only get charged when someone clicks the ad to view your product page. It doesn't matter how many times your ad is shown, whether its once or a million times, you only get charged if they click. The default CPC is 75 cents. Not long ago it was 25 cents, but they upped it. But fear not, you can set it to whatever you want. Regardless of the CPC, it doesn't mean you're being charged that amount for each click. In fact, my clicks rarely ever hit the maximum. Most seem to average about half.

The entire platform is run as a micro auction. That means each time a keyword is targeted, all of the ads using that particular keyword enter into a digital contest. Whichever ad wins the auction, by having the highest CPC amount, is displayed first. The runner up is displayed second, and so on. Now, you still aren't being charged. This just decides the lineup of where your ad falls in the lineup. But let's say you win the auction and someone decides to click on your ad. You are then charged one penny higher than the second-place holder's bid. So, if they lost to you and their bid was 15 cents, you'll be charged 16 cents, rather than whatever your maximum is currently set at. Moreover, if you experience a click heavy day, you will never be charged more than your set maximum per day. So, don't be afraid of setting your daily maximum to 10, 20, or even 50 dollars. Most people never come close to reaching their daily maximum.

Maintaining It –

You have your multiple ads set up, keywords are grouped, your CPC and daily maximums are set, and you've written a compelling hook to draw people in. Now you get to sit back and wait for the money to start rolling in, right? Wrong! AMS is not a set it and forget it platform. You're going to want to give it 5 to 7 days before you do anything other than look. It takes the algorithm that long to get things rolling properly. After your week of watching and your waiting is up, you need to open the ad, view your keywords, and see exactly which ones are spending money and which ones are making money. If you have a few that are spending heavily but not resulting in sales, you want to pause those keywords. But don't be

too overzealous. Amazon is slow to report sales. It's possible it's made more money than it's showing. That's why you use the percentage stat. Depending on where your book is priced, you'll need to have your percentage at either 35% or 70% in order to be profitable in a particular keyword. This is figured by the spent/earned ratio. If that number is higher than 300%, I recommend pausing that keyword. If it's lower, let it slide and see what happens. You don't have to make major changes. Basically, what's happening is Amazon saw people were reacting to your ad with that particular keyword, so it kept showing it to those people. But they weren't buying. So, it wasn't a good keyword for you. By pausing it, the algorithm realizes it made a mistake and will reevaluate. Once you've made your first adjustments, give it about another week to reset and do it again. And a week after that. If your ad is not starting to show profit within the first month, you have a problem somewhere. It could be with the hook you wrote, but if you're getting clicks that's unlikely the case. More likely, there was something about the product page that turned them off. It could be description, reviews, or they simply thought your book was something else entirely.

- **Launch Team**

When it comes to releasing your book, the most important thing you can do is have a good launch. This will allow it to travel further without your guidance, and ultimately, is the biggest contributing factor to whether a book is successful or not. If you have a poor launch, you're going to struggle with that book for years to come.

One of the best ways to ensure a successful launch is to have a launch team. This is a group of people who have volunteered to help you get your book off the ground. But not just anyone can be a part of the team. You need people who are reliable, trustworthy, and able to do what you need when you need it. The larger your launch team, the better your book will do.

What does a launch team do? –

In short, they help you by purchasing your book at specific intervals, reviewing it as soon as possible, and sharing its existence to anyone willing to listen. But I urge you to be careful about the last one. This is a note to abide yourself. Do not beg or push people into buying your book. And don't let your launch team do it either. You only want sales and reviews from people who are legitimately interested. Others, such as your grandma, or your best friend's dad who couldn't care less about the details will only hurt your sales in the long run.

Why do they Help? –

People are social creatures. We enjoy helping each other when we can. It makes up feel like we belong to something larger than ourselves. Different authors reward their team by different means, but usually it's in the form of behind the scenes access to your work, as well as first release perks. It makes them feel like they were a part of the process, and in truth, you're book could not become successful without them. Building a lunch team is a difficult task. And not everyone is cut out for, or willing to go the distance with you. If you've found an amazing group of people that are both willing and able to help you with this, hang on to them. Not everyone has that.

- **Drip Sales**

When eBooks began their rise to popularity, there was a fair amount of cheating the system to artificially inflate reported sales. This caused the books to rank higher, and therefore appear more popular than they really were. In response, Amazon created a glass ceiling. When a book has a surge of sales all at

once Amazon will monitor that title and cap the sales rank. They figure it's one of the artificial spikes and therefore will not allow your book to grow beyond their cap. In order to get around the glass ceiling a new technique was devised called, Drip Sales.

How does it work? –

This is where your launch team comes into play. By having a large and dedicated team, you can assign them into small groups of 5 to 10 people. When the book goes live, Team A will purchase and review the book. The next day Team B will step up to the plate. Over the course of 10 days, each team will perform their various tasks and thereby subtly boost your sales rank. If you've selected your niche and keywords carefully, this technique will pretty much guarantee you a bestseller status. And that's what you're aiming for. By reaching the #1 spot you become visible to thousands of other people which will carry your book far beyond what your launch team could have done alone. Also, as a word of advice, when you hit the bestseller status you want to screenshot it. The tag is temporary unless you hold that position for longer than a month. You never know when that little orange bar is going to boost your marketing.

- **Email List**

Of the various tools you'll find at your disposal while online marketing having an email list is by far the most valuable. I used to scoff at the idea. I was already so busy doing everything else I couldn't conceive how was I going to make time to manage an email list, much less write a regular newsletter. What eventually changed my tune was a simple scenario.

Right now, my business is entirely dependent on Amazon. That means any time they make a change I either have to adapt fast or fall behind. And if you're already behind, you're never going to catch up. But what happens in the unlikely event that Amazon goes under? The majority of my readers were obtained through Amazon. I don't know their names. I don't know their locations. I don't know anything about them. So, if Amazon were to disappear, I would effectively be out of business. But by building an email list not only do I have a way to contact those people, I also have control of my future. With simple communication I can let them know when new book comes out. I can get a jumpstart on any promotions I run. And in many cases the people on your email list are your most loyal fans. After all, they cared enough to sign up in the first place. It's also a great place to remind people to leave reviews and to grow your launch team. But first you have to build your email list.

How do I grow a list? –

Most marketers recommend growing your list to around 1000 emails. That seems to be the sweet spot where things start to unfold. It's enough people seeing the message to elicit a response, but not so much that you become overburdened with its maintenance. But how do you get there?

The best method I've found is by offering a free book. But it can't be just any free book. These people have joined you because they're interested in what you're doing. You want to give them the very best, something nobody else can get. I recommend writing a novella that ties into your other work as a supplement, rather than a continuation. It needs to be able to stand alone. It could tell the back story of one of your characters. Or, if your main series follows the perspective of one character, perhaps follow an equally important, but less active character. Regardless of how you present this story, there is one thing you need to remember. Don't make it cheap. These people are the key to your success. They're worth your best effort. Plus, if you give them a cheap book that hasn't been edited or completed, some of them may assume your full-length books are written that way as well and you're likely to lose readers.

There are many ways to sign up for an email list. You can have a signup form on almost every website you have creative control over. Even Facebook will allow this if you meet their restrictions. (You have to

have over 2000 followers and be certified.) If you find the online signups to be troublesome, you can always manually collect emails at any book signing you attend. A simple sheet of paper with lines and the words Email List Signup will take you far. In fact, most of my current list was collected this way. But probably the most effective form of gathering emails is by including a link in the front and back of your book.

What you Gain –

By asking them to sign up, whether you offer the free book or not, your list will begin to grow. But don't get discouraged. Not everyone is going to bite. But I promise you'll have more success than if you never asked. In the end by constantly growing your email list and by making it fun and entertaining your books will be on the path to success.

- **New Releases and Pre-Order**

When you release a new book, you become eligible for Amazon's New Release list for the first 30 days. This puts your book into a much smaller list than it would normally reside. It's kind of like starting in the kiddie pool before you jump into the deep end. It is possible to prolong your stay on this list for up to 60 additional days if you use the pre-order feature to its fullest extent but there are a few things you need to consider. First, by using the pre-order feature, you're basically telling the world, "Hey, this book is coming!" And while that sounds well and good, there are some concerns you need to take into consideration.

The Problems with Pre-Order –

When someone purchases your pre-order the sales rank will increase immediately, but you won't receive payment for that sale until the book goes live. This means, while the book is made more visible by having a higher sales rank, you're also losing momentum in the warmup rather than during the actual game. By riding the pre-order list, you're robbing sales that could escalate your launch to a more favorable position.

Your book is not eligible for reviews during this period. People can see the cover and read the description, but they can't view the book itself. And they can't review it. This is a problem for growing authors. You're trying to build a fan base. So unless you already have a few hundred people who are waiting for your book to drop, pre-order is not going to help you.

Another thing you have to take into consideration is the deadline. Your completed manuscript must be uploaded within three days of the official launch. If you miss it, not only will you be penalized by Amazon and excluded from using their services for a year, but you're going to have a lot of unhappy readers who didn't get what they paid for. Which brings up another good point. I've seen multiple encounters where an author uploaded the completed manuscript but Amazon neglected to send out the correct file. That's the problem with automated systems. They occasionally mess up. And if you're unlucky enough to be the focus of that mistake, I can promise you that Amazon is not the one who will suffer the consequences.

What's the purpose then? –

The purpose of setting up a pre-order is to build anticipation. But that requires you to have a fair number of people that actually care about your work. Sadly, most people don't. At least not yet. But eventually they could. And until you get there building anticipation is next to pointless.

So, what's good about it? –

About the only beneficial aspect I've found to using pre-order is a small window where the algorithms align before the book goes live. If you launch a pre-order campaign one week before launch, Amazon will spend that time tailoring your book to their system. This gives you a full 30 days on the New Release list

with the book already aligned, rather than trying to do so during the initial launch. You need to realize, you are not using pre-order to generate sales. You're using it as an incubation period so everything is ready when the book actually launches. When that happens, that's when your launch team goes to work. Though a word of caution. If you attempt this method, be certain to upload the final files when you set it up. Once it goes live there is no easy way to fix it.

Phase 2 – Hooking the Reader (Baiting the Hook)

Once your book has been found you now have the trying tasks of getting people to pay for it. We're still dealing with marketing, only this time we're targeting specific people opposed to in Phase One where we were all about being discovered and getting people to pay attention to us. In this phase you'll have to peak their interest, make them want more, and simultaneously control their emotions.

- **Cover**

The easiest way for your book to fail is by having a bad cover. But how do you identify a bad cover? Sadly, I can't say. I know what a good cover looks like, which means everything else is bad.

Research –

A while back I did some research on covers. I compiled a list of over 40 thumbnail sized cover images, each one found within the Top 100 Bestseller lists on Amazon, though I didn't bother with any book that was ranked lower than Top 40. In most cases they were a Top 10 rank.

Each book was of the science fiction and fantasy categories, being that's my core audience. With each image side by side, I was able to identify key elements that each one was using. From that data I made a list that I called, The 10 Elements of a Bestselling Book Cover. It covered primary colors, font style, font color, positioning of title and author name, and multiple other similarities. Each cover had a central figure. In many cases it was a depiction of supposedly the main character, but occasionally it was kind of plain, but in an elegant fashion. With this list of elements, I was able to learn what a good cover entails. And I'm happy to say, it was time well spent. But it also showed me how many bad covers are out there. Fortunate for us, we now know what we're looking for.

Why Does Cover Matter? –

The details of a good cover aside, your book needs a cover. It doesn't matter if you're marketing a print book or an eBook. The cover must be present to have a finished product. Some could argue that a book is still a book without the cover, and speaking from a reader standpoint, I could agree. In fact, I wish covers didn't exist. It would make finding quality books much easier than it is today. But that's simply not the case. A book cover serves two purposes. (Other than protecting the pages.)

Grabbing Attention –

The first job is to grab attention. A good cover is the eye candy of the publishing world. If it looks good and draws attention, it's done its first job. Some people attempt the opposite effect, thinking that if the cover is ugly enough, it will equally draw attention. Sadly, this tends to backfire, as a poor looking cover translated in the reader's mind to a poor-quality book. People judge books by their cover all the time. Their first glance upon your cover should make them feel like the pages within are pure gold

Tell a Story –

The second job of a cover is to tell a story. Now, wait a minute. Isn't it the book's job to tell the story? To a degree, yes. But your cover has to do that before your book can. The cover image will tell any potential reader what the story is about, long before they consider opening the pages. If it's an epic sword and sorcery tale, they want to see a warrior wielding a sword in one hand and throwing a fireball in the other. Or possibly a dragon flying overhead, breathing fire over a village. If it's a romance, you'll see the same concept again and again. A shirtless man with toned abs, usually with an attractive woman in his embrace. Everything else in that cover is simply an attempt to make it unique from the millions of other books doing the exact same thing.

An Overview –

Your cover tells the skin and bones of what kind of story it is, while grabbing the attention of a possible reader. If it fails in either of these, or if it tells the wrong story, you're either going to confuse and possibly lose the reader, or you're going to gain some bad reviews. But hey, bad reviews are better than no reviews. Though I'd prefer to have a positive stigma around my work. In the end, if you have a good cover, you're going to pull people to your page. That gets them much closer to buying than if they simply glaze over your hastily throw together copy and paste job when they're searching for their next literary experience.

- **Title**

A book title is like the cover in many ways. It takes on a persona, representing the entire story within a few hundred pages. It needs to be easily remembered, but have a significance to the overall book. And more importantly, it needs to be marketable.

Using Psychology –

The world of marketing in general is filled with psychology. In fact, some sales or marketing institutions teach certified courses on psychology in order to manipulate buyers into making a purchase. Once you understand this, you can begin to grasp much of what marketing is all about. In the case of a book title, much like your cover, it has two jobs.

Tell a story –

When someone reads your book title, whether they've seen the cover or not, their mind automatically starts to guess what the story is about. When their guess is correct, you've titled the book correctly. Let me give a few examples.

Let's say you have a horror thriller, and you named it Lollipops and Rainbows. You're either much more twisted than I originally thought, or you've done a horrible job titling your book.

On the other hand, let's take that same book and name it, Strangers in the Dark. This title now places the reader in a dark setting, and they're surrounded by people they don't know. It can be outside, in a house, in a parking garage, it doesn't matter. The fact is, your reader has already placed themselves into the story, and they're feeling some anxiety from the unknown people around them. This gives you an emotional connection, one that can be exploited in order to make the sale. That's the beauty of a descriptive title. It builds a connection. But we still lack a specific theme. One person could

fall into the trap you've set, imagining exactly what the book details. Another could read it and jump to a crowded theme park. In some ways, that could be scarier as many people have a deep fear of clowns. Throw that environment in with the fading glow of string lights and slowing rides. You're walking down an alley, between a row of carnie booths and a carousel. Suddenly the circus music starts to play and you're seeing dark figures of clowns at the edge of your vision. But each time you look directly, they aren't there. This is why your title and cover need to compliment each other. The title alone can leave room for misinterpretation. If you have the cover image of a frightened woman, wearing a torn shirt, holding a kitchen knife, while sneaking through a dark house, your reader automatically knows that it's a thriller home invasion type of story.

Here's another example. A book called, *The Dark Mage*, is obviously going to be something about a magic user, and therefore will fall into a fantasy genre. Pair it with the cover image and you'll know if its urban, epic, or somewhere in between. It will also insinuate that the story takes a darker tone. Which makes you imagine the cover to be a night scene, rather than in broad daylight. If these details don't add up, the reader won't take a chance.

Identification –

A title will also make your book easier to find. That's why we use titles in the first place. Can you imagine how hard it would be to identify the correct book if all you had to go by was a summary and what the cover looked like? Hell, even with titles, it can be hard to find the right book. There are so many things out there using the same name that it's easy to get confused. And it's not just books. Music and movies are pretty heavy on that issue as well.

Think about the Search –

Choosing a title is a time consuming and fairly frustrating task. It's not something to be rushed into. Your title is as much of a marketing tool as everything else. You want to be descriptive. You want to tell a story. But you also need to think about how a reader is going to find your book. This is another place where your best option is going to be using a popular keyword. But that's a little harder to achieve in fiction. Nonfiction, on the other hand, is nearly tailored for keyword stuffing. But they have their own set of rules. Rules I don't wish to get into.

How is a reader going to find your book if they don't know the title? That's where marketing does its job. And once they've found it, it's your job to ensure the title is catchy, easy to remember, and not over populated. And if you're able to slip a keyword in there, more power to you.

- **Description**

Your marketing has done its job by bringing people to your page. Your cover and title have done their job by catching attention and making the potential reader curious. Now it's time for your description to play its part and seal the deal. This is the moment of truth. If your description works, you'll have a new reader. If it doesn't? Well, that's one less person to brag about your story to all of their friends.

A New Hat -

All it takes to find the formula to a good book description is a little research. But you'll quickly discover that even the bestselling authors are lacking in this department. You see, knowing the formula is easy. Applying it is the hard part. It's a skill set of its own, much different than that of writing a book. When you write creatively, you're building a world, full of individual characters, passions, and life. When

you write a book description, you're no longer the author. You've become something else. You're now the publisher. And it's the publisher's job to ensure the description is specific enough to make the reader connect, broad enough to leave them wanting more, and designed to include your keywords and search parameters.

The Hook –

You want to lead with a hook, also called a tag line. That's your introduction, the first thing any reader will see after they've looked at your cover and title. You want it to stand out, usually by being bolded and of a slightly larger font. It needs to contain one of your bigger keywords. Back to the fishing analogies, you've baited the hook with interesting and easy to read words that make them want more. If they bite, they'll keep reading. If they don't, you've lost them.

There are a few ways to format your description, though all of them are difficult to navigate. CreateSpace (where paperbacks are made) allows minor HTML code, but good luck getting it to take. Even if you follow their specifications exactly, their system will throw error codes. KDP (where Kindle eBooks are made) is a bit more lenient with their HTML allowance, but the live view is glitchy and you end up having to guess on most of it.

Once you've gotten fed up trying to format the source data, you have a third option that's somewhere easier, but has some problem of its own. Amazon's Author Central is a place where all of your books live. You can view your sales ranking as an author, as well as your individual books in all formats. And more importantly, you can edit your book descriptions and details so that they override the source data. But be warned, any change made to the source file will result in resetting of data here. So be prepared to redo your changes if you have to touch the source data.

Warning notes aside, Author Central has its own fair share of problems. And Amazon doesn't seem to have any interest in fixing them. The description editor for your book has two tabs in the upper right of the window. One is Text. The other is HTML. And both are linked to update. So, if you build and format your description in an outside writing program, such as Microsoft Office, you can copy and paste to the text window. This will generate an HTML code in the HTML tab. But you don't have to change anything in there. It's simply a way to save the HTML code if you wish.

The description will appear as it needs to be in the preview window. You'll submit, and it will give a message saying your product page will be updated within the next 3-5 days. But, when you go back to the book overview page, oftentimes, the changes you just made do not show up. In fact, I've had to upload the change upwards of thirty times, and contact Amazon to find out what was going on. They say it's a delay and will sometimes take 15 minutes to display. Sometimes they're correct. Other times it never displays. So if you do this, be aware of that issue. Additionally, if you're lucky enough for the change to take effect, you're going to notice that every few 10-15 words, two words have been squished together. This can be fixed by simply going back in and re-editing to add the space back in. However, any formatting, as far as font size, unique spacing, or anything other than bold or italics will not show up, even if that data is still present in the HTML code. As of yet, I have not found a solution to this problem. And Amazon has been less than forthcoming with answers.

Description –

After the hook you need your actual description. This is where you tell some specific details about the story. You don't want to give too much away, but you also don't want it to feel generic. And to complicate this even further, you want to use as many keywords as possible without sacrificing readability. You'll want roughly three short paragraphs, one to two sentences each. You need the reader to bond with the character. Emotional connections are key. The first paragraph, following the tag line, will be the main focus. It could be the main character, or it could be a mundane life. Some people also present the problem here, which shows the conflict right up front. However you decide to go, remember to make the reader connect, and make them want more. Each line should be designed to push the reader toward the next one.

The second paragraph will usually include the problem. What changed to make the character take action? How does this impact the world? Does it make the reader feel vulnerable? Does it drive them to the next line?

The third, and what is usually the final paragraph, you're simply asking a question. Will the young blacksmith give up everything to rescue his love? Can our hero stand against such a force? Or will he be cut down for his daring? You need the reader to be invested. If they want to know what happens, you've done your job.

Call to Action –

Immediately following your description, you'll want a call to action (CTA). Sometimes, you'll find the CTA included in the last paragraph. "Can our hero stand against such a force? Buy now to find out!" This is where you tell the reader what to do. In this case, it's buy the book. You could also go so far as to ask them to leave a review. This part can be intimidating for most people. It's easy to feel like you're being rude by asking them to spend money. But if they've made it this far, they're clearly interested. They just need that little shove to complete the transaction.

I inadvertently learned about call to action by accident. I was once a paramedic. But before that, I was a first responder. When an accident happened, it was my duty to take command of the situation until more advanced medical help could arrive. There's quite a bit that goes into that, but the part I want to mention is when you arrive on a scene and someone is injured with a crowd gathered round, the first thing you do, after assessing the situation and reaching the victim is to point at a specific person and say, "You, call 911!" Most of the time they'd do it because you addressed them specifically. If you say, "Someone, call 911!" It's unlikely to happen because everyone assumes someone else will do it. Whereas, by addressing a specific person and giving the order, you ensure it happens. A CTA is no different. People need direction. Therefore, you need to give them direction, regardless of how uneasy it makes you feel.

Editorial Reviews -

The last thing your description needs is a couple of positive reviews. If you've been marketing properly, you should have already received a few. And while they show up on your page, they're all the way down at the bottom. No one wants to wait for the page to load, just so they can scroll to the bottom to check out reviews. They want them at the top where all the action is. This is what editorial reviews are for.

When you build your description, you'll be faced with a choice. There's a fair amount of controversy about using reviews in your description. Some say you shouldn't use them at all. Other say, "Do it, but only if they're good sources." And most people that just kind of wing it say, "It's okay to use them, but be selective where you put them." I feel the smartest choice is to do what the big names are doing. I mean, if you can't beat 'em, join 'em, right?

The trick to using editorial reviews is their placement. There are two places they typically appear. One is between the tag line and the description itself. And the other is at the very bottom of the description, beneath the call to action. The location is entirely up to you, but I'd recommend a few simple things.

First, if you're going to use editorial reviews, don't overdo it. You need no more than three one-line statements that give the reader an idea as to what your book is about. The beauty of reviews, you don't have to use the whole thing. You can always crop out the section you need.

Secondly, make sure you label who the reviewer is. Even if all it says is, "- Amazon Customer". At least people know where it came from. And that's far more important than a random collection of words that could have been written by anybody. But I urge you, if you're going to use reviews, to be selective of which ones you post. Try to find people with some credibility. People place no value in a random statement from someone they've never heard of. So using a review from a nobody isn't going to get you far. Try to use reviews from people with some stature. It could be another author. Radio hosts are good. Even models. The trick is to find someone with a decent following. The larger they are, the more valuable their word becomes.

Which brings me to the meat and potatoes. The location of where you should post these editorial reviews should be entirely dependent on the source of the review. When it comes to Amazon, there are two different types of reviews. Verified, and not. Verified reviews are from people whom Amazon can confirm have purchased the product they're reviewing. These hold the most weight, and can open doors to other marketing opportunities. But I'll get to that later. When it comes to your editorial reviews, they do not have to be Amazon exclusive. They can come from anywhere, though the need to be legitimate.

Regardless of where a review comes from, some will have more value than others. We, as a people, tend to revere celebrities as demigods. And therefore, society tells us, their word is more valuable than the common man. That's why some people are willing to pay over a hundred dollars for a scribble on a piece of paper. At the end of the day, it doesn't mean anything. It's no more, or less valuable than a scribble from your neighbor. But society has deemed a higher value because of the popularity one person has over another. It is for this reason that reviews from a big named celebrity, such as an author in your genre would be worthy of being posted beneath the tag line of your description. Likewise, a review from a big house, such as The New York Times would be equally welcome here, provided it relates to your book. Though a study done in 2012 found that a review from a well know author is over 50% more effective in sales than any house review.

If your chosen reviews did not come from a known celebrity, or a big house, (Not a prison. Those don't count) then they need to be posted beneath the CTA.

- **Reviews**

Once upon a time the best marketing was known as Word of Mouth. And by far, it's still the best form. Except that people don't converse like they used to. With all this technology, our conversations have become less face to face, and more through text and instant message. This has led to a drastic shift in power, especially when it comes to buying stuff. We all want to get the best deal for our money, and that means we want to know exactly what we're buying. If you're anything like me, whenever I'm on the fence about making a purchase, I scroll to the bottom of the page and check out the reviews. If I see a bunch on poor reviews, I look somewhere else for my desired purchase. But if the reviews are mostly positive, I'm more willing to give it a chance. Though I still want to see what those bad reviews have to say. After all, money ain't cheap.

Why They're Important –

The trouble is, it takes time to generate reviews. In fact, it's much easier to sell a book than it is to get someone to take five minutes to leave a review. This is why your launch team is so important. If they review the book, it shows other readers that there's something of value here. And being the social creatures we are, if a few people are doing it, we pretty much all want to do it. (Yay, more psychology!) Additionally, once you've reached enough verified reviews, Amazon will start emailing your book to readers on your behalf. After all, if you're making money, they're making money. If it continues to grow, and you climb your way into the major league of categories, they'll even start texting about it to those who have signed up for text notifications.

Reviews are a communication between readers. It's a way for them to tell others what they did, or didn't like about a product. It can drive, or destroy sales. But when you don't have them, you're missing out on a major part of the business. Just remember, reviews are one of the hardest things to get. And it requires multiple prompts and requests. And when you have them, your book will stand far above those who don't.

Phase 3 – Generate Return (Stocking the Pond)

It's important to have a good product. This was one of the things I struggled with for a long time. I wanted to be a better writer. I knew what I can capable of, but I wanted to be better than that. I wanted to be listed among the greats of our time. In fact, I still do. And I believe I'm of a comparable skill to compete with them. But I didn't know how to market. I didn't know all the steps involved. And I still don't have the readership to carry me to their doors, where I fully intend to batter it with a ram and demand a seat at the table. Once there I'll partake of a juicy turkey leg and swap story ideas with Brandon Sanderson. Or share a pitcher of mead with R.A. Salvatore.

I seem to have gotten a little off track there... I didn't know how to market, which means I have a way to go before I'm of a proverbial status to make any such demands of battering doors, or sitting at tables. But I'm constantly learning. And I'm getting closer every day. When I started, I was all about skill. I thought that if I was a good enough writer, my books would circulate, and I'd climb the ladder. I clung to this delusion far longer than I should have.

What I didn't take time to realize was that I can't sell a good book if I can't get the book in front of people. That's where all of this started. I wasn't able to reach people. So I started learning different way to make my voice heard. I quickly came to the realization that, it doesn't matter how good your book is. If no one reads it, it's no different than the worst book ever written.

- **Quality over Quantity**

You need marketing to reach people. You need marketing to sell to people. You can run a successful business with those two aspects alone. But it's not efficient. Without having a good, quality product, you're always going to struggle to find new readers. And that's simply because a poorly written book will not bring return readers. You need those returns to be efficient. And by being efficient, you'll grow twice as fast. Take a moment to think about Twilight and 50 Shades of Grey. You don't have to know, or even care about the stories. This is an example of principles. These two books, before they became movies, are poorly written. In fact, they're often the go to examples of poorly written books that made it big, which I've added to by doing it here. They made it big because they were marketed exceptionally well. Every item listed during Phase 1 & 2 was achieved, and that's what pushed them into the spotlight. You're fully capable of doing the same, but this will be problematic for your career in the grand scheme of things.

By marketing hard, you're going to make money. I can't deny that. But you also need to have a quality product. Your book needs to be edited properly. And it needs to be written with skill. Words have a beauty to them when written correctly. It allows a reader to fly through the pages. It allows them to bond with your characters. They become fully immerse into your creations, feeling what you desire, hating what you hate, loving who you love. By developing your skill, you're able to control the emotional state of every person who reads your work. And that's what brings them back for seconds. People want to relinquish limited control. And they want to escape from a life they feel trapped in. If you forsake the skill required to become a good author, you'll never achieve their desires.

The trouble with marketing well, but lacking creative skill is, your platform will become fully dependent on new readers and a constant chain of new books. If you ever stop writing, your readership will dry up. Sure, you may find the occasional reader that is willing to overlook editorial problems if they get to enjoy a good story. But not every story is good. And a poorly written story, that hasn't been edited properly is going to die quickly. With this quality of book, most of your readership will be one shot customers. That means you'll spend the rest of your career struggling to find new readers, cranking out another poorly written book every month or two, only for it to drop off a few months after release. This is a chain cycle you'll be trapped in until you develop the skill required to weave a good story. Once that happens, you'll start to gain repeat readers. But it will be of a new pool that where you began. Those people

will likely never pick up a book with your name again. And in the event that skill never comes, you're going to have to be on your game at all times. If you make a mistake, if you forget to release on a specific date, if Amazon decided to make a major change without telling anyone. (Gods know that never happens.) If any of these things happen, your readership drops off, leaving you to try and piece up the pieces, while struggling to stay on schedule. Or you could spend some time and sharpen your skill. By having a quality product, you'll gain return readers, while constantly generating new one through previous methods and word of mouth.

- **Manuscript**

It's a big decision, to become an author. Some people think about it, create a plan of action, research how they're going to do it, and finally, start writing. I was not that person. In fact, I'm not entirely sure that person exist. But I've heard tale. I believe, in most cases, those of us who decide to become authors are naive. I certainly was. I did the research. But not the right kind of research. I already knew what my story was going to be, and who my audience was, and even who would have to publish it. Because, let's face it, I couldn't leave myself room to be considered my multiple publishers. Nope, I locked it down by writing the first 100,000 words of my professional career in a story that I didn't own. Not the characters or world anyway. Everything else was mine. But that locked my out of options. There was only one place it could legally be published. And for legality purposes, they couldn't even look at it.

My list of mistakes goes far beyond that. It simply happened to be my first. For most of us, when we decided to become authors, we enter under the delusion that all we have to do is write. Most of us think it will be easy. And then we struggle when we realize that neither are true. Writers have a lot more to do than write. At least those of us who self-publish. In fact, most modern-aged traditionally-published authors are having to do a lot more than just write. But that problem comes from most modern-day publishers not knowing how to market properly. I wish all we had to do was write. But sadly, that's not the case. In fact, the writing portion of a book is probably one of the easiest aspect of the whole project. But that doesn't mean it doesn't have to right.

Writing to Market –

Everything prior to this point has been marketing based. And there's a fair amount to it. This is the first stage where you don't have to focus every angle on marketing, but you'd be wise keep it in the back of your mind. When you write to market, your word will be easier to market. It's like putting a circle shaped peg into a circle shaped hole, opposed to a square peg into the same hole. You need consider what you're writing. If it's a story no one wants to read, you're going to have a hard time marketing it. Moreover, if your story is hard to read, you're unlikely to have readers make it to the end, or even consider you for future books. Your quality of work will generate your quality of reviews.

Slowing Down –

The trick to having a good book that brings readers back for more is, patience. I've made this mistake myself, on more than one occasion. The manuscript is finished. I give it a quick once over, send it to the editor, and I get ready to launch. The edited book returns, and I throw it out without reading first. It takes a month or two, but I start hearing about multiple errors that were missed. Or I read a section myself and I ask why I chose to word something a certain way. When in truth, all of that could have been avoided if I'd exercised a little patience and gave it a good readthrough once again before I sent it out into the world. Not to mention all the other steps I didn't even consider, which meant my book could not launch properly. Writing is a skill. It takes time to do it efficiently and accurately. And you always want someone else to

look it over before you release it. What's that old saying? You can't see the forest through the trees. The same applies to books. When you're so close to the story, it's easy to miss things.

- **Maintenance**

Too many authors make a grave mistake toward the end of their projects. They publish the book, set up the marketing aspects, launch the book, watch it spread its wings, and they never look back. In many ways this is a smart decision, as it allows you to focus on your next project, without baggage from the last. This wouldn't be an issue if information and data were stagnant elements. But they're not. Information is always changing and shifting. We have things come to style, while others go out. So why would you allow your book to grow stagnant when the world around it is changing? Even if you've had a successful launch, and every aspect has gone according to plan, it will only last so long as it remains relevant. Once its relevancy diminishes, so does the income.

Keep it Relevant –

By doing a little maintenance every so often, your book will remain up to date, and therefore elongate its relevancy. Amazon refreshes every hour. That's part of why you get different results each time you check it. That means keywords are shifting. Some become popular. Others lose their potency. A description, or tag line can become dull. Your categories can become too crowded, or readers can lose interest in them. Hell, some authors change their cover every year for a completely fresh look.

Regardless of how much or little you choose to do, it's advised that you perform a routine maintenance from time to time. As for how often, that's completely up to you. Some authors do it as frequent as every quarter year. Others are six months. Some do it once a year. And many don't do it at all, which is why so many books drop off the radar. By keeping your information current, you're keeping your book relevant.

Don't Go Overboard –

Like so many aspects of this industry, nothing happens overnight. When making alterations, try to make it as small and subtle as you're comfortable with. There's no reason to make huge waves when what you had was working. And as we all know, something small can have a major impact. So don't reinvent the wheel, don't fix what isn't broken. Simply find what is and isn't working so you can replace the latter with the former. And that's how you become efficient. On the other hand, if you have a book that isn't performing, by all means, go big. Throw a new cover on it. There are several authors who were hearing nothing but crickets until they recovered their work. And that was when their careers really took off.

- **New Content**

The best way to grow your readership and push your older works is by coming out with new content. It can be books, blog posts, videos, social media, emails, or a number of other outlets. In fact, pretty much everything you do in the name of your work adds value to your brand. But it can be difficult to determine which of these outlets is actually helping you, and which one are simply wasting your time.

Adding Value –

In the end, the most valuable thing you can do is write another book. That will usually give you a boost to your previous books, bring return readers to the surface, while granting an opportunity to connect with new readers for both the new book and the old ones. It also opens another income stream, moving

you closer toward your goals. But remember, each new book will have to restart the marketing process. But I promise you, it will be easier the second time around.

And Don't... –

When you're a new author, you'll receive several pieces of advice. Some will make sense, but most of it won't. More importantly, you'll receive a laundry list of "Don'ts". But people rarely tell you why you shouldn't do certain things. I don't know if it's because they don't know themselves, and are simply repeating advice they were given. Or if they simply enjoy leaving out crucial details. Either way, I'm not that person. If I tell you not to do something, I'm going to explain why you shouldn't do it. That way, if you decide to go against my advice, you'll know what you're getting yourself into.

(Don't) Write a Series –

As a new author it might occur to you to write a series. Being inexperienced, we have this thought that the story in our head is massive. There's no way we can fit the full scope into a single book. For me, it was seven core books. And the first book alone took me three books to complete.

What few authors will tell you is, when you're writing a series, there are a ton of details you're going to have to remember about the story. A little detail near the start of book 1 can become a massive detail in book 3. Characters develop as you write. This means the person in book 1 may not be the same person later on. Which is good in some aspects. But it can prove problematic in others. One of the biggest issues I've struggled with is the title. I have a series title. I have individual titles, and the first set of books is a trilogy. So how do I label all of that, so people aren't confused?

All of this aside, there's one huge problem that new authors are going to experience. And this is going to happen whether you write a series or not. But, your career can survive it if you learn your craft with standalones. The same cannot be said if you start with a series.

There's a term I like to call, Learning Tax. It's the tax we each must pay to learn the rules of our craft. It also means we make mistakes. In fact, the average learning tax for a new author is about 80%. That means, of everything you do, only about 20% is worth a damn. As you continue to write, and improve your craft, that tax gets lower. It may be 60, or even 50% by the time you finish book two. In reality, it's not until around books 5-7 that the learning tax starts to let up. Hell, some authors don't flourish until book 10 or later.

And that's the point. If you begin your career with a series, especially if it's a big series, you're going to hurt your career. Regardless of how hard you try, your first few books aren't going to be very good. That's something we all go through. But, having a series, readers don't start a series on book 4, where your skill is starting to show. The start on book 1, where all those problems reside. And that means, they think you can't write, so they aren't going to make it to the later books. And in many cases, these people will refuse to read anything you write because they saw the problems of an inexperienced author trying to learn their way.

(Don't) Write an Existing World –

We love story. That's what pushed most of us to become authors in the first place. And for that reason, often times we get this bright idea to write a book in a setting we love. For me it was Warcraft. You're going to shoot yourself in the foot if you write this story.

Despite your love for an existing world, you don't own those characters. You don't own the names, and details of the world. And even though you have faith in your skill, and you know it's an amazing book, you're not going to get anywhere with it. So don't waste your time. Write an original piece. Learn with your own stuff.

When we're inexperienced, we don't recognize mistakes because we don't know they're mistakes. I've gone back and reread some of my own, early work. Work that I thought was amazing when I wrote it. It wasn't until I gained my experience, and learned what I was doing that I was finally able to see the error of my way. It's nothing personal. We all go through it. And I'll tell you, even though your writing is not as good as you think it is, that's not why I tell you to write your own story.

In the publishing world, there are copyrights everywhere. Hell, even recently, there was a big copyright scandal called, #Cockygate. When another company owns the copyright to the characters and world you want to write about, you limit yourself. This means, if you're good enough to be published. And as I've already said, you're not. But hypothetically, let's say you are. Since the copyrights are owned, you can only be published by the holder of those copyrights. Basically, what you're doing by pursuing this topic is playing a little street ball, winning a game of horse, and then asking Michael Jordan if he'll get you an audition to play professional basketball. It's not going to happen. Moreover, if you've attempted to send your finished manuscript, legally, the holder of the copyright cannot acknowledge your existence. That's why you haven't received a letter telling you yes or no. They cannot respond because that is an admission of acknowledgment, which would give you legal grounds to sue in the event any concept, idea, or scene from your story ever showed up in their official storyline. So do yourself a favor and write your own stories. Your career will grow faster, and you'll be much further ahead than if you wait for an answer that isn't going to come.

(Don't) Make Art -

One of the bigger mistakes new authors make is becoming sentimentally attached to their work. They fall in love with the story, and it kills them to cut certain parts, or change a specific scene, or to even receive negative feedback. But you have to remember something. This is a business. If you're doing this, hell, if you've made it this far on this exact page, you're obviously here to make money. A hobby writer isn't going to read through all of this. You're here because this is a business. And so is your writing. You cannot afford to become emotionally attached to it. Your job is to create a quality project for others to enjoy. And if you enjoy it too, that's great. It's an amazing perk of this profession. But you cannot think of your work as art. Art does not make money. A product does. If you need to cut a section to decrease the word count, find where you can do it, and do so without sacrificing story flow. If a certain character doesn't feel right, drop them. Do what you have to do to make the best possible product. That's how you're going to grow your career. If you need a passion piece every so often, by all means, do it. But keep it separate from your career. And even if you publish it, and it does well, that's great. Don't expect that outcome every time.

(Don't) Cross Genre -

Many authors consider, at one point or another, crossing genres. I've both considered, and done it myself. What I've learned from this experience is, it can be done, if done right. If done wrong, you're going to hurt your career.

Not everything in this industry is so cut and dry. Most of the time there isn't a single right way, and there isn't a single wrong way. In fact, in many cases, there's one to two right ways, and hundreds of wrong ways. When it comes to crossing genre, there's only way I can recommend doing it. And that's by using a different pseudonym. But let me explain why.

When you make a hard jump between genres, and I'm not talking about a subtle jump say from sword and sorcery (fantasy) to vampires and guns (urban fantasy). Those are close enough together that nobody is

going to question is. I'm more referring to a cross from say, fantasy to romance. Or, speaking from experience, fantasy to nonfiction (parenting).

When you make these jumps, your books on both sides are going to be affected. My readers followed me to the new genre, which cross contaminated my books. This left Amazon unsure where my work fell. My fantasy fiction was holding tags from nonfiction (parenting), and my parenting book was holding tags from my fiction. By crossing genre with the same name, I screwed my entire platform. So, if you're going to make a hard jump, use a different name. You may be creating a new platform. But things are always easier the second time around.

- **In Closing**

In conclusion, if you apply each of these tools, your book will have the best chance at success. I cannot guarantee it will happen easily, or even quickly. And you certainly won't be an overnight success. That simply doesn't happen. It takes most authors 6 to 7, sometimes 10 books just to learn the ropes. But if you learn as much as you can, and apply the methods I've discussed here, you'll be competing on the same level as all of the other successful authors. And that will give you the edge over those that are either unwilling, or unable to adapt and learn.