

**How to
Sell Your
Book
Today**

*Focus your book
marketing for the
new digital economy*

**Karen
Hodges Miller**



Open Door Publications

How to Sell Your Book Today
Book Marketing for the New Digital Economy

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All of the persons used as examples in this book are composites of clients the author has worked with. The names and identifying characteristics have been changed.

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How to Use This Book

I have stuffed a whole lot of information in this book. I know it can be intimidating, and while it is short, don't try to sit down and read it all in one sitting. It is meant to be used as a reference book you can return to over and over again.

I've used lists to give you easy-to-follow steps on many of the techniques in the book, and I also have exercises at the end of several chapters to make it easier to put these ideas into practice.

Good luck with marketing your book!

Introduction

Searching for That Magic Marketing Bullet

Every author I know is searching for it: That Magic Marketing Bullet that will guarantee our books will become runaway best sellers. That our book will be listed in the top 10 on *The New York Times* Best Sellers list. That we will be called for interviews on national news shows. The lines of people waiting for us to sign books will wrap around the bookstore. Since this is a magic bullet, let's make sure it costs no money and takes no time or effort, too.

Since I'm an author, you know I can spin a good fantasy. And that is just what That Magic Marketing Bullet is: a fantasy. I've been searching for a long time; let me tell you, it just does not exist. There is no way to guarantee that even the best book will sell well. I've seen books I thought should be best sellers die, and I've seen others that I wondered why they sold at all hit the top of the charts.

The best sellers all have one thing in common, however. Their authors spent a lot of time and energy, and money—sometimes a lot of money, sometimes not so much—to make sure their target readers hear about their book. The only magic marketing bullet I know about is hard work.

I hear many authors, including many who are top sellers on Amazon, complain about Amazon. And I agree. There is a lot wrong with the Amazon model. Amazon is focused on making as much money as possible for Amazon, not with sharing equitably with authors. But what else do we have? Yes, there are other book

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distributors out there, and we will discuss “going wide” and using a lot of distributors versus targeting your sales to only one distributor. But here’s the bottom line: Amazon is the best way to get your books in front of readers so you must deal with it.

Before your book even has a chance of becoming a best seller, there are certain things you must do. The list begins with writing the best, most professional book you can. I talk more about book writing in my book *Self-Publishing: You Can Do This!* I hope you’ll check it out, too. While some of the material is covered in both books, this book focuses on the marketing process, specifically marketing with e-marketing techniques. Why? Because in the age of the pandemic and the new emphasis on social distancing, this type of marketing is the fastest, least expensive way to let people beyond your local circle of friends and family know you have written a book that they want and need to read. It may not be a magic bullet, but right now it is the closest thing we, as authors, have.

Chapter 1

The Rules of E-Marketing

You are a small business owner.

Today's author is a small business owner. You must learn everything you can about accounting, distribution, royalty payments and percentages, networking, and marketing—all the details the owner of any other business must learn. You must decide what you can do for yourself and when you need to hire experts to help you. The stereotype of the solitary writer starving and slaving away in the garret is just that: a stereotype, and an outdated one at that. You need a team to publish and market a book.

Writing is the easy part; it's marketing that's difficult.

Most writers have little experience with marketing—and while they may have taken classes in creative writing, been to a dozen writing conferences, and belong to a monthly writers' group, they have never marketed anything. Marketing is a skill you can learn. Start now.

Start marketing your book when you start writing.

“When do I start marketing my book?” is the first question writers ask. My answer is always the same, no matter where they are in the process: “NOW!” It is never too early to start marketing your book. You need to think about your target market, build a platform, develop a website, and start using social media as soon as you decide to write your book.

You must do your own marketing to be successful.

Best-selling authors take an active role in marketing their own work. They make appearances at book signings, develop seminars, make appearances on podcasts, and are active on social media. You are the best person to market your book. Who else has a bigger interest in making sure it is a success?

Readers are found in many places besides bookstores.

Less than half of all book sales are actually made in bookstores. Books are sold in a wide variety of retail stores, from large chain drugstores to tiny boutiques. They can be found in museums, gift shops, craft stores, and sporting goods stores. They are sold on websites, at seminars, at workshops and conferences, and at tradeshow. They are sold on Facebook and Reddit, on podcasts, and by social media influencers. Where are your readers? These days they are probably not at the bookstore. Think about where you need to look to find them.

An e-book is a must.

There was a time when writers didn't feel as if they were "real authors" unless they had a paper book to sell. These days you may be able to get by without a paper version of your book, but you must have an e-book! At the start of the pandemic in March 2020, e-book sales quickly increased 18 percent over March 2019. Store closings and shipping delays obviously increased the demand for e-books. And once readers found out how convenient they were, they have stuck with them. E-book sales have continued to be about 25 percent higher than they were before the pandemic. Even as we go back to shopping in stores, and as postal delays improve, many people will continue to stick to e-books for the convenience.

Social media is one of the best ways to let people know you are out there.

It doesn't matter whether you love Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram or you hate them. It doesn't matter if you have never Zoomed. If you are an author with a book to

sell, you need to be using social networking sites. Today social media marketing is one of the best ways to spread the news about your book. The pandemic has increased the use of social media, and even when we are able to return to in-person events, we aren't going to quit using the social media sites we have come to enjoy.

If you aren't marketing, you aren't selling.

The new rules for publishing, printing, and marketing books mean there are hundreds of thousands more books available to readers each year. How will your readers find your book in such a crowded field? If you aren't telling people about your book, they aren't going to go looking for it on their own. There is no "write it, and they will come." You have to give your potential readers a roadmap to find your book.

You need to be out there meeting people—including online if you can't meet in person.

Remember that solitary writer in the garret I mentioned in the introduction? Well, the only part of the stereotype that is true is that writer is probably starving, and definitely solitary. Most writers I know are rather shy and don't really enjoy large crowds of people. The good news: With digital marketing you can often do it from your home. With podcasts, Meetup, Zoom events, and other online ways to connect, you can now often market your book from that garret. But if you want to sell your book—I mean, actually make some money on it—you must do something to get in front of your readers and tell them about your book. This book is chock-full of ideas to help you do just that.

Chapter 2

What Is an E-Book?

What is an e-book? That may seem like a pretty simplistic question, but ask ten people what an e-book is and you'll probably get ten answers. The best answer is deceptively simple: *An e-book is any book that can be transferred to, and read on, an electronic device.* The format can be a PDF, a .mobi file, or an .epub file—to name the most common formats currently in use for e-books.

When e-books first entered the popular market, Amazon dominated with the Kindle. The device was strictly an e-reader and used the .mobi format. Then Barnes & Noble brought out the Nook, which used the .epub format. The decision is in, and the winner is Kindle. About 75 percent of e-books are sold for this platform.

Pros and Cons of Various Formats

Does that mean you can ignore the .epub format? It can be read on a variety of e-readers including Nook, Sony, and others, and can be purchased on a number of websites. Smashwords also uses .epub and is another option that is particularly attractive to independent authors looking for a place to sell their books other than on Amazon. Once again, there is no one right answer. There are currently several distinct advantages to focusing your e-book sales on Amazon, particularly if you are a first-time author. There can also be advantages to marketing on several different sites. We'll take a look at some of your e-book sales and marketing options throughout this book.

Using Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) means it is possible to read books electronically on a wide variety of devices including dedicated Kindles, laptops, iPads, other tablet computers, and smartphones. The Kindle app can be downloaded to all of them with the exception of the Nook and a few other dedicated e-readers. The same is true for Nook. You can download Nook software to any device with the exception of a Kindle.

Formatting Your Book

Formatting your e-book means knowing a thing or two about how they work. E-books do not have traditional, set pages. Pages change depending on the size of the e-reader and the font size the reader chooses. As a person with poor eyesight, one of my favorite things about using an e-reader is I can increase the font to the size most comfortable for me.

E-readers also have a limited number of fonts, but some allow the reader to choose the font they prefer. The reader can also choose to increase or decrease the spacing between lines. This means readers have more choices in how a book will look than they did with traditional paper books, while the author or publisher has less choices. Most e-reader software has a nightlight setting, or the print can be changed from black-on-white to white-on-black for ease in reading under different lighting conditions.

It is essential to the creation of a professional-looking e-book to have an understanding of the e-book reading experience. The first step you should take before publishing your book as an e-book is to download the free software onto your computer, tablet, or mobile device and read a few e-books.

Next, decide if you will format the book yourself or hire a service. I know many writers prefer to do the formatting themselves, but if this is not something you want to do, you can hire an e-book formatting service to help you. Take the time to do it right, and read and check your work before you submit it. Just as with a paper book, nothing reduces your credibility and professionalism more quickly than a poorly formatted e-book.

If you have an older book that is only available to you as a paper document, you can quickly convert it to a text document using Optical Character Reader (OCR) software. Adobe Acrobat

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Professional is one program that has this option. Be careful if you are using OCR software, however, because while it is a great timesaver, it is also prone to specific errors, such as confusing the letters “m,” “n,” and “r.” I’ve read e-books in which certain letters always appear as capitals or in italics, or certain words are consistently misspelled. These are small but annoying errors to the reader and take some of the joy out of reading. Use the OCR software. It is excellent, but just make sure you proofread your work.

Kindle Direct Publishing makes it easy for the do-it-yourselfer. Once your paper book is formatted and proofread, with a few additional steps your Word document will be ready to upload to KDP.Amazon.com, and software on the site will convert it to an e-book.

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3. Start with the Contents page. Highlight the word “Contents,” click on the “Insert” tab, then click on “Bookmark.” In the dialogue box type “ref_TOC” and click “Add.” Go to each chapter page, highlight the chapter title, click on “Bookmark,” and type in the chapter. *You cannot use any spaces.* I suggest you use an abbreviation such as CH1, CH2, etc. Go through the entire book, and do this for all chapters and any other content you want the reader to easily locate.
4. Now you are ready to create your links. Go back to the Contents page and hyperlink it to each individual chapter page. To do this, highlight the chapter title on the Contents page. On the “Insert” tab, open the dialogue box marked “Link.” On the left, click on the “Place in This Document”

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5. Next, link the chapters back to the Contents page so that readers can click back and forth if they wish. Go back to each chapter page and hyperlink back to “ref_TOC.”
6. Always check a few of your links to make sure they are working.
7. Go through your document and make sure any references you have to websites or email addresses are also linked. This is easy. Just type the Uniform Resource Locator (URL), hit one space, and the link should be active.

Now you are ready to upload your book to Amazon. The steps for other e-reader sales sites, such as Nook and Smashwords, are similar. However, some sites, such as Smashwords, require that you have your book already formatted as an .epub document.

There is conversion software available that will convert a Word document or PDF to an .epub or .mobi file. I have tried several and prefer Calibre (www.calibre-ebook.com). Do some research before you decide which software you prefer. Many have a trial period so you can try them out before you buy.

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Pricing for e-books is as varied as it is for paper books. If you are writing a technical, medical, legal, or financial book, you can charge more than if you are writing a “trade” or mass market book.

For most fiction and nonfiction books from new authors, I suggest starting at \$3.99. It is easier to change the price of e-books, and later on I will explain free and reduced price e-book promotions. To launch a book, however, \$3.99 is the current “sweet spot.”

Make sure, no matter who your publisher is, that you have control of your e-book pricing and promotions.

Should All Books Be E-Books?

As e-readers become more popular, and technology improves, the list of books that should not be formatted as e-books is growing shorter. Readers are more likely to purchase fiction than nonfiction as an e-book, but some nonfiction does quite well electronically. Technology and computer books are obvious choices for e-books. Business books also do well.

Interestingly, while women were the first to adopt e-readers, today the largest demographic is men age 35 to 54 years. Now that color has come to e-readers, children's picture books are becoming more popular. Since the pandemic, many schools are distributing tablet computers for homework, research, and reading.

I have recently worked with books that require more complicated formatting and links to audio and video. They are beautiful, but only do well on iPads and certain higher end e-book readers. They do not work as well on cellphones or older, more simplified readers. Do not try to format these types of books yourself. You do need an expert to make everything work smoothly.

Reading books on tablets, computers, and smartphones allows for increasing interactivity. E-readers include search, bookmark, and note-taking features. Links allow the reader to jump to specific chapters. Plus the back-of-the-book author bio now routinely includes a direct link to the author's website and a request for reviews.

There are still, however, books that should not be published as e-books. If you are writing a workbook or journal, an e-book will only work if you do some rewriting and reformatting, taking out the original journaling pages or question-and-answer sections and changing the book to state something such as "on a separate sheet of paper write...."

An author I know recently uploaded a workbook to Amazon KDP. She spent a lot of money to get it formatted as an e-book because it included many charts, graphs, and workbook sections with lines where the reader was to write. After only a few months, Amazon insisted that she take the e-book down. In fact, Amazon made it clear that not removing it could result in penalties. Here is

a portion of their email to the author.

“If you wish to make this book available for sale on Amazon, please resubmit it with content that complies with our guidelines. Note that books meant to be filled in by the user (e.g., journals, coloring books) can be published through KDP as paperback books. As a reminder, since publishing books that require resources beyond a Kindle device or Kindle application (Phone/Mac/PC) is against our guidelines, we may suspend or terminate accounts that repeatedly try to do so.”

If Amazon threatens to suspend your account, take down the book. It is not worth the risk, especially if you have several books already selling on Amazon.

As you make your decision on paper book, e-book, or both, look again at your target reader and your marketing plan. The age of the reader, the type of book you are writing, and the type of marketing you plan to do should all be part of your decision.

Some Final Thoughts

E-books are covered under the exact same intellectual property laws as paper books. Make sure you always copyright your work, no matter what format you publish it in.

You want to be paid for the e-books you sell on the various websites where they are listed. Each site has slightly different registration rules. You will need to enter your banking information for Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT). Read the directions and rules carefully on each site, and follow them scrupulously, then keep track of your sales and your bank transfers.

Exercise 1

E-Book Exploration

Follow these steps to learn more about e-books.

1. Download both the free Nook and Kindle software to a mobile device.
2. Read at least one book on each device to get an idea of how books look and feel as an e-book.
3. Play with the settings on the e-reader. See how different settings will change the experience for the reader.